OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

I. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

A SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF VARIOUS APPROACHES

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Old Testament biblical theology is a very interesting and engrossing subject because it deals with the specifics of the biblical revelation stage by stage. The whole study will be presented in more than one book. This, the first book, deals systematically with a number of different approaches to the Old Testament. Representatives of each particular approach will be examined by setting forth that approach in general terms, and then, in each case, suggesting strengths of that particular approach, and, finally, suggesting some weaknesses. This method will involve discussing the various matters of *prologomena* or introduction to the study of Old Testament biblical theology

The first approach to be examined might be labeled descriptive theology. The label descriptive theology is chosen to describe that method by which the scholar or the student simply tries to describe what is in the Scripture. He does not seek or see any overarching, integrating pattern. Instead, he simply describes all the things that appear there and the many different lines of thought that he sees consecutively presented throughout the Old Testament.

The second approach is called dispensational theology. Many American evangelicals follow this approach to the Bible. It views the Old Testament in terms of various periods seen, more or less, as self-contained eras or periods. What this approach sets forth will be set forth first, and then its strengths, and, finally, its weaknesses. The study will focus on two different typical kinds of dispensationalism, old dispensationalism and new dispensationalism, as representative of the distinctives of this approach.

The third approach may be called kingdom theology. This, too, is an approach used by many evangelicals, at least in America. It seeks to analyze the Bible in terms of the theme the kingdom of God.

The next approach is termed promise theology. This is another approach many evangelicals employ as they strive to understand the Old Testament and the overall content of the Scripture. Promise theology views the Scripture in terms of the Old Testament revelation as essentially expressed in terms of promise and the New Testament as essentially the fulfillment of God's revelation to men.

The next approach is termed testament theology. This is the first in a number of approaches that come under the more general canopy of covenantal theology. Testament theology in particular sees the covenant in terms of last will and testament.

The final position is called treaty theology. This approach, a second representative of covenantal theology, views the overarching organizing principle of the Bible in terms of mid-second millennium Hittite law treaties.

Chapter 2. DESCRIPTIVE THEOLOGY:
A Presentation and Evaluation of the
Theology of Gustave Oehler

The representative of descriptive theology, whose work is examined here, is Gustave Oehler. Dr. Oehler was a scholar in the nineteenth century. Today, many believers in churches like the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church look to his work for an explanation of the Old Testament. He was a very prolific writer, so that if one goes to the Concordia Seminary library in St. Louis, Missouri he needs to know pecifically which of Oehler's books he seeks if he is to complete his quest expeditiously. The particular book used in this study is entitled, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Eerdman's, Grand Rapids, 1883).

Thus, the survey of Old Testament theologies opens with Gustave Oehler's work. His *Theology of the Old Testament* is one of the truly classic books in Old Testament studies in general and in Old Testament biblical theology in particular. Oehler was a German evangelical Lutheran who had no truck with the then raging negative critical views of the Old Testament.

Professor Oehler presents the Old Testament as an organic unity. It is all interrelated and represents one mind, namely, the mind of God. Other than that one mind unfolding itself to man, there is no unifying pattern in the Old Testament. Consequently, one should conceive the pattern of Old Testament theology as similar to the upper limbs of a tree consisting of many parallel branches or, to shift the image, parallel lines all developing historically and sequentially one upon the other throughout the Old Testament.

Although Oehler ostensibly defends the organic unity of the Bible holding that there is an organic unity to what it says, his book may, nonetheless, properly be called "descriptive theology." Contrary to what he states, he proposes no unifying pattern to what is recorded within each era of Old Testament revelation or within the Old Testament revelation as a whole, except that it is a preparation leading to the New Testament fulfillment. Each successive era of biblical revelation is treated as the precedent of what follows and as organically anticipating what was later given. In essence, Oehler simply describes what is in the Old Testament.

His book is a marvelous work, a virtual encyclopedia of information on the Old Testament. Almost every subject in the Bible is handled in detail in this book. It provides us with an extensive

bibliography of conservative and non-conservative sources. This book of 569 pages (in the English translation) is a compendium of Old Testament knowledge with special emphasis on the Mosaic Law. Forty-seven pages of preliminary statements introduce the major part of the work. These "statements" constituting Oehler's operating principles or the principles of his biblical theology, are the focus of what follows.

A. A Presentation of His Approach

As just noted, Oehler's work opens with a 47-page declaration, discussion, and defense of the principles underlying his treatment. He sets forth the definitions and limits of this science, its relationship to other departments of theology, the nature of biblical theology, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, the history of Old Testament theology, and the method of biblical theology.

1. The Definition and Limits of Biblical Theology

Oehler, with his customary succinctness, defines biblical theology as follows:

> The theology of the Old Testament ... is the historical exhibition of the development of the religion contained in the canonical books of the Old Testament. (p. 4)

This study presents the revelation recorded in the Bible by using two procedures: its "historical development" and the "variety of the forms in which it appears." It traces and follows the gradual unfolding of revelation until its completion in Jesus Christ. It exhibits the diversity and dimensions of God's communion with man in the course of the history.

This divine revelation is in the form of both words and deeds. All this effected and shaped "a peculiarly shaped religious life" (p. 4). The content or knowledge of revelation (portion one) is developed in connection with the facts of the history of salvation (portion two), i.e., the history of what God said and did and how man related to that divine revealing. God reveals Himself both in what He says and in what He does and His revelation is set forth in what man said and did with reference to that revealing. So, to know the revelation set forth in the Old Testament requires knowledge of the entirety of what is recorded there.

2. The Relationship of this Field of Study to Other Departments of Theology

Oehler is concerned to place Old Testament biblical theology in the context of Old Testament studies as a whole and of systematic (dogmatic)

theology. There are some fields whose relationship to biblical theology he does not discuss, viz., hermeneutics and exegesis.

The discussion of the relationship of other branches of Old Testament science to biblical theology opens with the science called introduction to the Old Testament. This field of study is preparatory to "Old Testament biblical theology." It treats the history of the Old Testament documents, who wrote them and under what circumstances, the history of how these documents have come to us, the history of what has happened to the text and its trustworthiness. Second, he views the field of archaeology. In Oehler's day there was relatively little was available in the way of excavation of ancient cites. On the other hand, there were available several extra-biblical documents dealing with the ancient peoples, their history, and culture, e.g., the work of Josephus. In addition, archaeologists gave much thought to primitive Near Eastern cultures, and especially the still existing Arabic desert nomads. They sought to reconstruct the physical circumstances of Israel and her neighbors during the various historical periods, e.g., what were the circumstances when Israel was in Egypt, or Babylon, what was the daily living like, etc. Archaeology provided some details and background for biblical theology that sometimes enriches the study.

Finally, Oehler relates biblical theology (what God wants us to believe) to the study of the history of Israel (what happened to Israel and other peoples). History of Israel study seeks to trace the history presented in the Bible without focusing specifically on its religious significance and also aims to place Israel's history in the context of contemporary history.

The study of Old Testament theology produces important results for Old Testament introduction:

> it will often be shown in the course of this work how the Old Testament, in reference to its didactic contents, presents not a uniform (completed) whole, but a regular progression of religious knowledge. Moreover, not only must the general view which we have of the gradual progress of Old Testament revelation influence our determination of the position which is due to any one book in the whole of the Old Testament, but the criticism of the Old Testament must pay regard to the course of development of the individual doctrines of the Old Testament. (p. 9)

This statement intones an important result of biblical theology as it impinges significantly on Old Testament introduction, viz., that the contents of the Old Testament as they appear in their traditional sequence

are interrelated so as to be mutually interdependent. The Pentateuchal material is the base upon which prophetic, wisdom, and poetical revelation sits. These three latter bodies of literature presuppose the former material in such a way that they are not sufficiently understood apart from it. So, if one wants to understand properly the theology and even the particular language of the prophetic, sapiential and poetic material it necessitates a prior knowledge of the Pentateuch.

Oehler is very concerned to relate Old Testament biblical theology to systematic theology because he sees confusion between the two. He maintains that prior to his day much of what was called biblical theology ignored the progressive nature of biblical revelation and treated all portions of the Bible as if they were revealed during the same era. Hence, the Old Testament was approached in a number of ways or in a combination of them. (1) It was interpreted as if it contained all New Testament doctrine. (2) Often it was approached as if a particular New Testament doctrine was present in a text in virtually its New Testament form. (3) What is in the Old Testament was presented as a mature theology so that the contents of the Old Testament were structured according to the divisions of systematic theology. (4) Old Testament passages were used primarily as proof texts for systematic theology.

Oehler rejects all of these traditional approaches. Furthermore, he sees that the results of biblical theology (arising from the principles he defends) are of great value to systematic theology.

> We claim for Old Testament Theology also no small importance for science, especially for Systematic Theology. This importance it possesses as a part of biblical Theology, since, in virtue of the Protestant principle of the authority of Scripture, every question for which the Protestant theologian seeks an answer leads back, directly or indirectly, to Scripture, and the historical investigation of the divine revelation it contains. (p. 1)

The sources of Old Testament theology should be consistent with the words identifying the science. That is, the study should focus on the Old Testament. This, in turn, is defined in terms of the canon accepted by the Jewish scribes of Palestine and the Protestant church (p. 10). This canon is set forth and defended by systematic and historical theology. There is great danger in deviating from the established canon:

> ... as soon as the theology of the Old Testament goes beyond the canonical books, there is no firm principle on which to fix its limits. (p. 10)

The Christian theological approach to Old Testament theology, therefore, must by virtue of its name "Christian deal" with this study as the study of the "divine revelation of the Old Testament". This material being "fundamentally different" presents a religion that is fundamentally different from all other religions. It "forms the preliminary stage to the revelation of the New Covenant, which is comprehended in one divine economy of salvation." (p. 10)

Oehler enunciates several foundational principles as to the biblical idea of revelation.

He begins by stating: "the biblical idea of revelation has its roots in the idea of creation (p. 14). The creation itself was a product of God working through His word and was animated by His Spirit. The goal of creation was man with whom God stands in a special relationship. The world was created as the home of man and man was created for fellowship with God. Therefore, from the beginning God established a relationship with man by which He fellowshipped and communicated with him.

> For revelation is, in general, God's witness and communication of Himself to the world for the realization of the end of creation, and for the re-establishment of the full communion of man with God. (p. 15)

Next, God reveals Himself in general revelation and special revelation. General revelation consists of that revelation in and through nature and within man. This form of divine revelation is adequate to bring man to an awareness of his separation from God but it is not sufficient as a means to recover "the personal communion of man with God" (p. 15). Restoration requires special revelation. Special revelation is what God has revealed directly to men in word and deed. Only that part of this special revelation that is recorded in the Bible can be known by men today. This special revelation,

> ...appears first in the form of a covenant between God and a chosen race, and the founding of a kingdom of God among the latter, culminates in the manifestation of God in the flesh, advances from this point to the gathering of a people of God in all nations, and is completed in the making of a new heaven and a new earth... (p. 15)

Oehler is especially concerned to specify the relationship between general and special revelation. To him, the former is the basis of the latter and the latter is the aim and completion of the former.

> ...as, according to the Old Testament view, the covenant in the theocracy is presupposed in the worldwide covenant with

Noah. (p. 15)

3. The Nature of Biblical Theology

Oehler does an excellent job of defining the nature of biblical theology. He states that this study seeks to set forth the organism of divine revelation in its historical unfolding. It recognizes that what is contained in the Bible forms a single organic whole that terminates on the New Testament and, specifically, on Jesus Christ. If this conclusion is ignored or not taken into account from the outset of the study, the whole study is weakened if not invalidated. Biblical theology also recognizes the progressive nature of God's revealing himself. That progression does not proceed smoothly and gently as if one is reading a systematic theology. Rather, it proceeds in steps or according to eras and according to the will of God. He reveals what He wants when He wants. Sometimes one theme is laid bare and sometimes another. It is the job of biblical theology to set forth this progress in its historical distinctiveness.

> What is unfolded in the Scriptures is one great economy of salvation—*unum continuum systema*, as Bengel puts it—an organism of divine acts and testimonies, which, beginning in Genesis with the creation, advances progressively to its completion in the person and work of Christ, and is to find its close in the new heaven and earth prediction in the Apocalypse; and it is only in connection with this whole that the details can be properly estimated. (p. 1)

4. The Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments

Divine revelation is an historical progression. Special revelation is supernatural and historically communicated in such a way that it "observes the laws of historical development which are grounded in the general divine system of the world" (p. 17). Thus what was communicated earlier should be seen as communicated in a less mature and less well defined, and is a less completed message as it relates to the completion and perfection declared in the New Testament. The student should not go beyond what is actually said in the text, unless, of course, it is demanded by the text. However, the student should be careful not to deprive the text of what it does say.

With Luther, Oehler recognizes the educational character of the forms of divine revelation. Each particular form and stage aims at Christ but teaches on a less mature level than some later form or stage. At every level, the revelation given to a man or men is a revelation of the

personality of God "as such." God meets man "not as an inexpressible *numen* or Divinity, but as God Himself."

> To mankind in its childhood [mankind in the Old Testament era] God's existence must be taught in theophany from without, and then from that point revelation advances toward the manifestation of the reality of this God in the spirit. (p. 16-17)

The organic nature of biblical revelation rests upon what the Bible as a whole teaches concerning itself. It is a single revelation of God to man. All that is in the Old Testament teaches Christ, as Christ Himself stated (Matt. 5:17, Luke 24:44). Indeed, to really understand the New Testament one must know and understand what is taught in the Old Testament.

> The relationship of the New Testament to the Old is such that both stand or fall together. The New Testament assumes the existence of the Old Testament law and prophecy as its positive presupposition. ... We cannot have the redeeming God of the New Covenant without the creator and covenant God preached in the Old Testament, but the genesis of all the ideas of the New Testament relating to salvation lies in the Old Testament. (p. 2)

Specifically, Oehler sees the relationship of the Old and New Testaments as one of preparation and fulfillment (p. 18). Furthermore, he says,

> ...the unity of the Old and New Testaments must not be understood as identity. The Old Testament itself, while it regards the decree of salvation revealed to it ...as eternal ...acknowledges that the manifestation of God's kingdom at that time was imperfect and temporary... (p. 19)

All in the Old Testament points forward to the New Testament which is "demanded by the law", "signified by its ordinances", and predicted by its prophecy.

The two Testaments are united and distinguished by the covenants they represent. The Old Testament is seen as one covenant that consists of the covenant of promise given to Abraham and the covenant of law given through Moses. Basically, the first introduces the second and together they form the basis of Old Testament religion. The New Testament sets forth the new covenant in Christ. Although there is great organic unity between the two Testaments there is also a great distinction.

> But still more distinctly does the New Testament

emphasize the difference from the Old which subsists within the unity of the two covenants. (p. 19)

The organic unity between the two Testaments is so pronounced that apart from the New Testament the Old Testament is "poor and beggarly."

> The Old Testament teachings and institutions, divested of their fulfillment (sic) in Christ, sink down into poor and beggarly rudiments. (p. 19)

5. The History of Old Testament Theology

Oehler gives an excellent, although brief, history and discussion of the church's treatment of the Old Testament including a presentation of the rise and development of negative critical views. In addition to the historical sketch, the footnotes throughout the book give excellent descriptions of various critical views and their refutation. This treatment is so good that if one wishes to know what the critics said before about 1880 and what a good orthodox response might be, he need only look to Oehler's book.

One significant conclusion defined in Oehler's work is that before the 18th century, orthodox criticism tended to see the New Testament fully revealed in the Old Testament, albeit somewhat veiled. This led to the practice of proof-texting Christian doctrines from the Old Testament,

> The contents of the Scriptures were set forth with strict regard to the systematic doctrines of the Church, and without respect to the historical manifoldness of the Scriptures themselves. The Old Testament was used in all its parts, just like the New Testament, for proofs of doctrine. (p. 27)

He summarizes the orthodox response to the Socinian heresy. Socinians professed being true believers. They affirmed the divine origin of Old Testament, but held it was not essential to establish Christian doctrine, i.e., for the Socinians the Old Testament was not really organically connected with the Christian religion. It was its historical antecedent but little more. Socinianism recognized there were some moral commands common to both Testaments, but there was a great difference between the perfect commands and promises of New Testament and the temporal and imperfect commands and rewards of the Old Testament.

Another interesting facet of Oehler's historical survey is his treatment of Cocceius. Cocceius was a Calvinist who first proposed, says Oehler, federal or covenantal theology (1654). For Cocceius there was a

twofold covenant between God and man. These were (1) the covenant of works and nature setting forth God related to man before the fall, and (2) the covenant of grace and faith which embraces the entire post-fall era. This latter covenant appears in three dispensations—before law, under law, under the gospel. Oehler writes that Cocceius taught:

> The literal meaning must be given as exactly as possible, though with careful attention to the immediate context; but since the Scripture is an organism, the whole of Scripture must always be kept in mind in the theological explanation of each passage. ... [Cocceius] held to the typical teaching of the Old Testament concerning the Atonement, as distinguished from the atonement actually made as taught in the New Covenant. (p. 28)

Oehler offers the following criticisms of Cocceius: he sees a typical rather than an actual forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament, he displays arbitrariness of exegesis, and his is an "artificial schematism".

The origin of biblical theology as an historical science is set before the reader correctly as the work of Gabler, *De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae*[1] (1787). Gabler was first to specify that biblical theology should deal with,

> the religious ideas of Scripture as an historical fact, so as to distinguish the different times and subjects, and so also the different stages in the development of these ideas. (p. 33)

According to his historical survey, Oehler's is the first work that in the sense of a true biblical theology seeks to set forth the unfolding of divine revelation in its historical development in divine word and acts. This claim is supported by George E. Day (the American translator of Oehler's book) who taught Old Testament at Yale Seminary. He reports how Dr. Schaff in his *Religious Encyclopedia* said this work of Oehler "stands ...at the head of this department of biblical study," and how German scholars of his day had designated this work of Oehler's as the best manual in its field and that it was the text upon which they based theology exams in Old Testament biblical theology. (.Oehler, v.)

6. The Method of Biblical Theology

In concluding his preliminary remarks, Oehler briefly declares the principles that should determine and guide the study of biblical theology.

First, proper method in biblical theology is historico-genetic. It

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[1] The Correct Distinction Between Biblical and Systematic Theology.

should be historical in the sense that it develops its subject matter according to the historical eras represented in the Old Testament. It should be genetic in the sense that it should treat all that is recorded in the Old Testament as expressive of a single organically interrelated divine revelation.

Second, proper biblical theology rests on the results of grammatical-historical exegesis. This exegesis operates according to the rules of the language under consideration. It is historical in that it shows proper attention to the historical environment and the particular circumstances of each biblical writer. It necessitates seeking the inner understanding of the writer. Moreover,

> ...in this psychological exposition we reach a point where success is necessarily proportional to the measure in which the Spirit, which rules in the sacred writers, witnesses of Himself to the interpreter ... (p. 41)

> [We]... must proceed to grasp the sense of individual passages, first in its internal connection with the fundamental idea of the book in general, and with the system of thought characteristic of the author, and then in its wider connection with the circle of ideas proper to the special region of the dispensation of revelation to which the book belongs... (p. 41)

Third, upon this basis and with this data, biblical theology seeks to "set forth revelation in its whole course and in the totality of its phenomena" comprehended as "an organic process of development." (p. 41)

> Fourth, this "organic process" must be viewed from its conclusion:
> > ...since every such process can only be comprehended from the points of its culmination, biblical Theology must view the Old Testament in the light of the completed revelation of God in Christ for which it formed the preparation, —must show how God's saving purpose, fulfilled in Christ, moved through the preliminary stages of this history of revelation. (p. 41)

Fifth, biblical theology must seek to reproduce the "living process of growth of the thing itself." It must

> aim to show how the fruit grew from the bud; it sketches the earlier stages in a way that makes it clear how the higher stages could, and necessarily did, spring from the former. (p. 41)

Sixth, it must acknowledge that everything recorded in the Bible is revelation and theologically significant. Properly seen, biblical theology

is viewed as a word-deed organism. The revelation as a whole aims at the full restoration of man's communion with God. It, therefore, gives "direction to the whole of man's life" (p. 17). It is not simply or even mainly, aimed to his intellect. Word and deed/fact are interrelated. The word explains deed, and the deed arises from the word,

> a constant relation exists between the revealing history of salvation and the revealing word. (17)

Seventh, biblical revelation is unique:

> in these operations revelation makes itself known as differing from the natural revelations of the human mind, not only by the continuity and the organic connection of the facts which constitute the history of salvation, but also in its special character (miracle), which points distinctively to a divine causality.

Thus, proper biblical theology must acknowledge the special influence of the Holy Spirit known as inspiration.

Eighth, it must follow a proper historical division and see those divisions as organically interrelated. There are three divisions of Old Testament revelation: the Mosaic, prophetic, and sapiential. The Mosaic is the foundation upon which the other two rest and from which they spring.

Oehler seeks to justify his three-fold division of the Old Testament revelation from the Old Testament itself. He concludes that, "the basis of the Old Testament religion is the covenant with the chosen people." (p. 15)

God's covenant with His people was executed in the patriarchal covenant of promise and the Mosaic covenant of law, but the Mosaic era entails all that is pre-mosaic as a preparation and not as a separate division(s):

> ... for the pre-Mosaic revelation is not only considered in the Pentateuch as forming the introduction to the establishment of the theocracy under Moses, but itself forms a component part of the religious belief of Mosaism. (p. 43)

The Mosaic covenant of law underlies the prophetic message and theology.

> On the basis of the covenant of law, the development of the Old Testament religion is carried on in two ways... (p. 43)

The two ways are prophetism and wisdom. The first, is said to be objective in the sense that it comes to man from without, from God. Prophetism:

...deals with those elements in the history of the people of Israel from their entrance into the promised land which are important for the development of God's kingdom, considering these as they appear in the light of prophecy... (p. 43)

Sapiential literature is the second way Old Testament religion is "carried on". It is subjective in the sense that it,

does not, like [prophetism], claim to be an objective word of God, but expresses itself in aphorisms as the result of meditation by (inspired) sages whose intellectual instincts are roused (presided over and guided) by revelation. (p. 43)

B. Positive Aspects of His Work

1. The Presentation of the Principles of Old Testament **B**iblical Theology

Much of Oehler's work, which has been discussed above, is excellent. Anyone interested in biblical theology would do well to study Oehler's principles. This is especially true, of course, for those committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The positive aspects of this work are manifold. He does an excellent job of defining and giving the limits of biblical theology. The sections that follow give the justification for this definition. He delineates the relationship of this field of study to several other departments of theology including Old Testament introduction, archaeology, Old Testament history and systematic theology. It is especially in treating the latter subject that he gives valuable information relating to biblical theology. His discussion of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments gives convincing argumentation for the necessity of Old Testament biblical theology, its nature as the presupposed preparation for the New Testament teaching, and the necessity of approaching the subject from its conclusion in the New Testament. There then follows an excellent and illuminating summary of the history of Old Testament theology. All of this comes to an extended application in the discussion of the method of biblical theology.

Among the many laudable aspects of his work which merit special mention are his emphases on the unity of Bible, the integrity of biblical revelation, historical-grammatical exegesis and a historical-genetic method, and the need to develop the subject according to its historical unfolding as set forth in the Bible.

2. The Detailed Study

Oehler's work offers a great deal of detail on the content and significance of the Old Testament. Although the pre-mosaic era is subsumed under the Mosaic, it is, nonetheless, treated with great thoroughness just as the Mosaic, prophetic and sapiential eras are. This is especially valuable for the serious student since such a detailed treatment of Mosaism, especially, is difficult to find. Oehler places special emphasis on the Mosaic law. This emphasis conforms well to the way much of the rest of the Old Testament looks at the Mosaic law. Specifically, the historical books, the book of psalms, and the prophets continually presuppose and build on the Mosaic law. They recall its blessings and curses. They summon obedience to its precepts. They castigate those who violate its ordinances. But more, they assume Israel stands in a covenantal relationship to God as defined in the Mosaic covenant, and by which they are obligated to obey and serve Him, and are privileged to receive His blessings. Their history conforms to the provisions of the covenant.

3. The Confrontation of Criticism

Oehler does an excellent job of cataloguing and presenting negative criticism. He directly and without apology rejects all those approaches as stemming from unbelief. As stated above the student would do well to study Oehler's presentation and the responses to criticism so often detailed in his footnotes. This scholar is unafraid to face the opposition. He does not rely on simple rejection but responds to his opponents from a vast pool of knowledge demonstrating how they simply do not handle the information honestly, adequately, and soundly.

C. Negative Aspects of His Work

1. Anemic Treatment of the Pre-fall Revelation

One of the most noticeable weaknesses of Oehler's work is his anemic treatment of the pre-patriarchal era. This anemia is evidenced in two ways: (1) he gives relatively little attention to this period, and (2) much of what he does say is theologically and exegetically inadequate.

Consistent with his stated principles that divine revelation is act and word and that the word is always to be seen against the background of the act, Oehler presents a survey of Israel's history viewed from a theological perspective. He divides the Mosaic revelation into four eras: (1) the primeval age from the creation to the flood, (2) the Noahic age from the

flood to Abraham (this era includes "the world-covenant in Noah's time"), (3) the era of the three great patriarchs (including the covenant of promise) which closes with the sojourn in Egypt, and (4) the time from the exodus to the time of the judges (this includes the "giving of the covenant of the law, and the establishment of the theocracy, with its regulations," p. 50).   The entire pre-Mosaic period is viewed as an introduction to the Mosaic era and, indeed, as part of the Mosaic revelation.   That is, all this revelation is presented as on the same revelation level as the Mosaic revelation. In what follows we will try to demonstrate what this means.

The pre-patriarchal period is treated most briefly both as to amount of material and significance. He rejects the idea of the covenant of works and hence sees limited theological, albeit important, significance in what is set forth in Genesis 1-2.

> The creation-Sabbath stands as a boundary between the creation and the history of the dealings between God and man, and through it we are at the same time pointed to the connection ordained to exist between the order of the world and the order of the theocratic covenant.... (p. 50)

His treatment of the significance of the fall wrongly understands the divine intent in the creation of man. As he says:

> Man is called to be a free being; therefore a command is given to him for self-decision, in order that he may pass from the condition of innocence to that of free obedience. (p. 52)

This, however, is hardly the case. Man was created as a free moral being and from the outset that freedom was expressed in free obedience (self-decision).

On the basis of his "false analysis" Oehler misunderstands the purpose of the probation concluding its purpose was that man "may pass from the condition of innocence to that of free obedience." We see several difficulties with his conclusion. First, it implies there was no choosing to obedience prior to the probation confrontation. Second, it implies that the angels in heaven did not exercise free obedience before the fall of Satan (they did not share in the probationary test) or that they do not even now exercise free obedience (if they did not all face the test Satan faced).   Third, it implies Jesus Christ did not exercise free obedience before He was faced with some kind of probation. Jesus, however, was truly man from the time of His conception. From the time He first exercised His human will He was free from sin, freely obedient, and not because He sustained some kind of probation. Christ's obedience

arose from His sinless nature. So Adam before the fall, having a nature that was free from sin, freely obeyed God, e.g., he exercised his dominion over the animals by naming them. God chose to set before him a particular probation by which this obedience would be put to the test (as Jesus was tested in the great temptations at the outset of His public ministry). The force of the probation was not to awaken man's free will as Oehler seems to suggest but it was to seal him in righteous living arising from his free obedience.

2. Anemic Treatment of the Post-fall Revelation

Of the results of the fall it is said,

> ...now man is in a sense independent, like God; but fear, resting in the feeling of guilt, dominates from this time forward his position toward God. (p. 52)

It is not man's independence on which the record focuses but his sinfulness. It is not the "feeling of guilt" that dominates his "position toward God" but his sinfulness (his sinful nature and the dominion of sin).

Oehler condemns older theologians for finding the Messiah directly promised in Genesis 3:15. However, while the promise of the Messiah is not as well defined as in later Old Testament passages, it is directly set forth in Genesis 3:15.

Oehler's work seems to err in several things. First, there are some exegetical problems: the significance of the postlapsarian renaming of Eve is not properly understood, nor is the significance of the covering provided by God, and perhaps the naming of Cain.[2] These passages, taken in order, teach that Adam believed life would come forth from the promise of Genesis 3:15, that God provided a covering for their sin which exceeded their self-provision both quantitatively and qualitatively, and show how Eve thought she had given birth to the promised "Messiah", i.e., Cain. Second, there is a biblical-theological problem arising from inadequate attention given to Romans 5:12 with its teaching of the two Adam's and their federal or covenantal headship, i.e., Romans 5:12 teaches that God views the promised seed of the woman as Christ, the second Adam. Third, there is the rejection of the covenant of works and the proper view of the origin and unity of the covenant of grace. The idea of a promised "seed" in the sense of a particular "son" (Gen. 3:15) is the central promise of the covenant of grace. It dominates the rest of the Bible informing both history and didactic, e.g., Eve's naming Cain, the

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[2] For more on the exegetical argument undergirding this matter see the chapter on dispensationalism, 44.

two lines after Adam and Eve, and the statement of Lamech (Noah's father). Interestingly, Oehler acknow-ledges that Lamech "announces the hope of a Saviour (sic) of man from the evil weighing upon him (v. 29)" (p. 54) but does not adequately relate this to the covenantal promise of Genesis 3:15.

3. Anemic Treatment of the Pre-flood Revelation

Oehler's lack of a covenantal approach to the Bible with its corres-ponding hermeneutical implications produces additional inadequacies in his work. He sees the first recorded offering (viz., that of Cain and Abel) as no more than a thank-offering rather than as a sin offering. He sees no connection between the blood of Abel's offering and the later theme that life is in the blood (Gen. 9:4). He does not interpret the passage in light of the fulfillment or fuller explanation of sacrifice given later. For Oehler, the reason for the difference in the two offerings lies in the occupations of the two men. The reason for the divine acceptance of the one and rejection of the other is "found in the different states of heart of the two offerers" (p. 54). Cain's offering came without careful selection and Abel's was carefully selected. Cain was self-centered and self-righteous while Abel was God-centered and humble before God—he was truly righteous. Oehler rightly does say that the Bible teaches that mere external service is inadequate, and that heart service is required to please God.

It seems far more preferable to understand this incident in terms of an assumption of the unity of the covenant of grace. This covenant and its terms, etc., is the assumed background of this incident and therefore is properly used to understand what happened. Moreover, this incident is immediately preceded by the incident of the coverings previously mentioned (p. 17). Man's self-created covering for his sin and shame is declared inadequate by God. This declaration is to be seen in the divine provision an adequate covering which was both more complete as to how much of the body (nakedness) was covered, i.e., how much sinfulness was covered, and was different in kind, i.e., it resulted from the spilling of blood and the taking of life. It stretches our credulity to believe this latter aspect is merely incidental. It conforms too well to later covenantal provisions and requirements to be such. Similarly, Oehler provides an insufficient understanding of Noah's clean/unclean animals, his bloody sacrifice (apparently by divine command), and the Noahic legislation regarding not shedding a human being's blood. These "understandings" are inconsistent with Oehler's biblical theology but consistent with a

proper covenantal theology.

4. Anemic Treatment of the Noahic Revelation

What Oehler calls the second age of the world, i.e., the period of the Noahic revelation, is also insufficiently understood. Again, the problem is the result of not viewing the period against the background of the covenant of grace.

Oehler sees the Noahic covenant as a new form of revelation, a divine covenant,

> The second stage of the world begins with the new form taken by revelation, in presenting itself as God's covenant with man, and, in the first instance, as a covenant with the world... (p. 56)

This analysis evidences a kind of exegetical historicism by which the exegete is bound to what the text says literally rather than to what the text teaches—Oehler does not introduce ''covenant'' until this point in the biblical revelation. So, his principle seems to be that unless the specific word "covenant" occurs, the idea is not present. However, the idea of covenant occurs before this era. It is the only adequate description of God's relationship to man both before and after the fall. Only Adam's representative headship adequately explains the results of the fall and only a covenantal structure adequately explains man's responsibility to obedience regarding the probation, etc.

Rejection of the covenant as the underlying and unifying structure of all biblical revelation and the framework to which all revelation must be related leads Oehler to say:

> Sacrifice, Genesis vi. 20, precedes the institution of the covenant, and is in the first place an expression of thanks for the deliverance experienced, while the same time man thereby approaches God, seeking grace in the future. (p. 56)

This analysis raises some problems. First, "sacrifice" is assumed to have started in Genesis 8:20. Reasons have already given why this is a false conclusion.

Second, if sacrifice "precedes the institution of the covenant" the origin of sacrifice is placed in a vacuum. If this really is a sacrifice then on what grounds and for what reason was it offered? Apart from the assumption of the unity of the covenant and that some of the covenantal stipulations were communicated and explained to pious persons and families before they were recorded for mankind, the student is left to conjecture as he answers these and similar questions.

Oehler states that the distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world begins with the blessing Noah gives to his sons,

> Here begins the distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world which runs through the whole Bible. (p. 56)

This is, at best, a loosely worded statement. First, the covenant of works before the fall is set against the background of the rule of God in the garden. This was truly the rule of the kingdom of God. Throughout the Scripture the Edenic relationship between God and man before the fall is employed to describe the ideal relationship between God and man. Ultimately, the perfected state is described in terms of the Garden of Eden. The symbols are numerically increased but visually and conceptually the same, cf., Revelation 21. Second, the fall marks the beginning of the history of the two seeds. These two seeds constitute two lines. One line, the seed of the woman, is ruled and blessed by God. The other line, the seed of the serpent, is in open rebellion against divine rule (i.e., kingdom rule) and outside divine redemptive blessing (kingdom blessing). Genesis 6:1-2 necessarily implies this understanding.

5. Anemic Treatment of the Post-Noahic Revelation

In the blessing upon the sons of Noah, Oehler sees the foundation of a people of God.

> In order to give an historical basis to the work of salvation, a people is to be chosen as the bearer of revelation, to which coming people..., God already has regard in the dividing of the nations. (p. 58)

Indeed, it is in this idea of a people of God that Oehler finds the key to the rest of the Old Testament,

> It is only in this *idea of the people of God* that the key is given to the Old Testament history, which would otherwise remain an insoluble riddle. (p. 58)

Significantly, he does not relate this material to Genesis 3:15 and the covenant of grace. The problem lies in the absence of emphasis on the importance of a redeemer or seed who would effect salvation in response to the fallen state of man. So, the line of Seth and, later, Israel that the chosen people are primarily vehicles through which the redeemer will come as well as vehicles of divine revelation through whom life under the rule of God is explained and exemplified.

6. Anemic Treatment of the Abrahamic Revelation

Oehler discusses the time and revelation of the patriarchal era with its promise of a posterity to Abraham without relating it to Genesis 3:15. The same inadequacy appears in his treatment of the sacrifice of Isaac. He does not relate this to the promise of Genesis 3:15 and the divine provision of a covering for Adam and Eve's sin. Moreover, he does not relate the promise of the land to the accomplishment in Christ, as Hebrews 4 and 11 do.

All of this is rooted in his incorrect starting place regarding the significance of the revelation to Abraham. His key statement on this era reveals a wrong conjunction of "special revelation" and the "covenant with a chosen people". Oehler affirms that special revelation,

> ...appears first in the form of a covenant between God and a chosen race (p. 15)

It is truly difficult to understand exactly what this key statement means but, taken at face value it is clearly not satisfactory. Revelation began in the Garden of Eden and was sustained thereafter. It is biblically and theologically necessary to conclude that this "revelation" was known thereafter. Man's recorded history and actions are only understandable on the basis that they knew what God had said to them or to some pious person previously. There is also reason to believe that this prior revelation (both in word and deed) was handed down in written form from long before Abraham, e.g., the vocabulary contains what appear to be Sumerian words and the style of Genesis 1-11 is significantly different than Genesis 12ff. Hence, we reject Oehler's analysis. Special revelation began long before this Abrahamic covenant was revealed.

Oehler's analysis contains several misunderstandings of the relationship between the Abrahamic covenant and the chosen race.

First, this covenant is but a re-publication, expansion, and application of prior covenants to the new situation. The Abrahamic covenant is robbed of its true significance when understood in isolation from the prior covenants and not viewed as being in organic succession with them. God promised His work of redemption immediately after the fall. Man was still responsible to keep these commands of God that were not obviated by the change in circumstances. Obviously, man was no longer responsible to sustain the probation and abstain from eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. On the other hand, what has been called the cultural mandate still stood before him. It is only against the background of these and many other covenantal stipulations that the full and true significance of the Abrahamic covenant emerges.

Second, the biblical relationship between the chosen people (Israel)

and the covenant makes the former historically and theologically secondary, i.e., there was a covenant before there was Israel. Only the covenant properly explains the strange promise that in Abraham (and his seed) there would be a universal blessing. The intent of the Abrahamic covenant is universal in its primary significance just as the Adamic covenant is.

Third, the election of the chosen people rests upon a prior promise of God. He promised to bring forth the seed of the woman, and a prior prophecy of God that the seed of the woman (conceived corporately) would be at war with the seed of the serpent until the serpent is finally and historically destroyed. In other words, God would preserve His elect and bring forth His redeemer. These ideas are central to understanding the Abrahamic revelation/covenant and history.

Therefore, when Oehler says "the basis of the Old Testament religion is the covenant with the chosen people" he states a partial truth. Actually, the basis of the Old Testament religion is the covenant of grace as it unfolds against the foil of the covenant of works. A sub-point to this all-important proposition is that "the basis of the Old Testament religion is the covenant with the chosen people." Making the chosen people the all-important focus of the covenant attenuates and minimizes both the centrality of Christ, and the dimensions of the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets in Christ. Christ is the focus of the covenant in each of its historical expressions.

7. Anemic Treatment of the Mosaic Revelation

In spite of the detailed treatment of the Mosaic revelation, Oehler's discussion is theologically thin. He does not discuss or even point out the theological relationship of Mosaic revelation to the idea of the covenant of grace and to the person and work of Christ. Therefore, although one is grateful for the detailed material and well-organized treatment, one constantly wonders just what the theological significance of the subject(s) being treated is.

Furthermore, Lutheranism's antipathy to the law and its tendency to view the law as antithetical to grace emerges at every turn in Oehler's work. The Bible presents law as anticipatory of grace and as providing the needed structure to holy living (Gal. 3:10-14, 1 Tim. 13-11, Rom. 7:7-12, 8:7). Christ taught that the Old Testament law applied to the new circumstances introduced by the coming of the new covenant defined the life of belief (Matt. 5-7; 15:1-9; 19:1-10). Thus, in contrast to Lutheranism, Paul freely cites and alludes to the Old Testament as he instructs the

church at Corinth concerning some specifics of Christian living.

8. Anemic Treatment of the Structure of biblical Revelation

Oehler's Lutheranism undergirds his theological conceptualization and, therefore, his concept of the structure of biblical revelation. When he deals with the strong Old Testament assertion of divine sovereignty in hardening the heart of Pharaoh, he safeguards his synergism (although the express words sound like biblical Calvinism). First, he lays down the principle that:

> This hardening is both a *divine act* and at the same time the *sinner's own act*, so that the two expressions are interchangeable....

Then he comments,

> in such passages the point is not (as understood by Calvin and the Calvinists) a dark and hidden degree of reprobation, but a divine decree of judgment, well-grounded and perfectly manifest. (p. 165)

Time after time this synergistic assumption emerges. It evidences a false understanding of the nature of God's decrees and the texts upon which it (this false understanding) is foisted. Since the covenant of grace rests squarely on the decrees of election and reprobation and since Oehler rejects the idea of a covenant of grace, it is clear that his understanding of the whole structure of biblical revelation errs.

His Lutheranism also emerges when he discusses Cocceius who is sometimes seen as the father of covenantal theology. Oehler offers the following criticisms of Cocceius: that he sees a typical rather than an actual forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament, that he displays arbitrariness of exegesis, and that his is an "artificial schematism." Could it be that "arbitrariness of exegesis" in facing and responding to problems of his day relate to the way Cocceius argued against Lutheranism? Could it be that his "artificial schematism" appears artificial to Oehler because that "schematism" produces a treatment of law/gospel antithetical to Lutheranism? This problem of law and grace not only lies at the heart of the debate between Calvinism and Lutheranism, but is also central to biblical theology.

D. Summary and Evaluation

Our presentation of Oehler's position has focused on his principles of biblical theology related to (1) the definitions and limits of biblical theology, (2) the relationship of this field of study to other departments of

theology, (3) the nature of biblical theology, (4) the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, (5) the history of Old Testament theology, and (6) the method of biblical theology. These demonstrate the necessity and method of biblical theology and are commended for the student's consideration.

Strong positive aspects to this work are seen in his presentation of the principles of Old Testament biblical theology, his detailed study of the Mosaic, prophetic, and sapiential literature, the theology of the Old Testament, and his constant confrontation of negative criticism. In each area, Oehler's work has rightfully earned the respect and appreciation of the orthodox Christian community. Few other works cover these topics with the same sagacity or detail.

In spite of the excellence of so much of this work and its approach, there are many negative aspects to it. Some of the weaknesses of Oehler's descriptive theology have been detailed and set in contrast to the responses offered by a covenantal theology. This has begun to present the biblical basis of the latter approach.

The specific weaknesses we have discussed are:
1. anemic treatment of the pre-fall revelation,
2. anemic treatment of the post-fall revelation,
3. anemic treatment of the ,
4. anemic treatment of the Noahic revelation,
5. anemic treatment of the post-Noahic revelation,
6. anemic treatment of the Abrahamic revelation,
7. anemic treatment of the Mosaic revelation,
8. anemic treatment of the structure of biblical revelation as it relates to Oehler's Lutheranism.

This study suggests the inadequacies of a merely descriptive approach insofar as Oehler's arguments for a biblical theology make such an approach untenable. Although Oehler's brand of descriptive theology views the Old Testament as a necessary preparation for the New Testament and as organically related to it, this approach has fails the test of the relevant biblical material.

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CHAPTER QUESTIONS:

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1.   Why may Oehler's approach to the Old Testament be called "descriptive theology"?

2. How does Oehler define biblical theology (what is its nature) and what two procedures does he apply in presenting a proper biblical theology?

3. What are the two forms of divine revelation?

4. What are the two portions of biblical revelation?

5. What does the study of Old Testament introduction include?

6. How does the study of Old Testament history differ from the study of biblical theology?

7. What important result for Old Testament introduction is produced by the study of biblical theology?

8. How does Oehler relate the four major sections of the Old Testament to one another?

9.   What are the differences and relationships between Old Testament theology and systematic theology?

10. What is meant by the "educational character of the forms of divine revelation"?

11. In what sense is biblical revelation "organic"?

12. What specific relationship does Oehler see between the Old and New Testaments?

13. Who is Cocceius and how does Oehler evaluate his work?

14. List and describe the methods of biblical theology?

15. What are three positive aspects of Oehler's work?

16. How is Oehler's treatment of the pre-fall revelation anemic?

17. How is Oehler's treatment of the post-fall revelation anemic?

18. How is Oehler's treatment of the pre-flood revelation anemic?

19. How is Oehler's treatment of the Noahic revelation anemic?

20. How is Oehler's treatment of the post-Noahic revelation anemic?

21. How is Oehler's treatment of the Abrahamic revelation anemic?

22. How is Oehler's treatment of the Mosaic revelation anemic?

23. How is Oehler's treatment of the Structure of biblical revelation anemic?

Chapter 3. DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY:
a Presentation, Comparison, and Evaluation
of Old and New Dispensationalism

This discussion of dispensationalism focuses on dispensationalism as a system of biblical theology. In order to evaluate the system one must first describe it. To that end the system will be investigated as presented in the *Old and New Scofield Reference Bibles*.[3]

Our investigation has three foci: to present the system as briefly as possible, to compare and contrast the two recensions of the system as found in the Reference Bibles, to evaluate the system as a comprehensive approach to the Bible.

A. The System Presented

The dispensational system may be defined under four headings: the system presents a structure of redemptive history against which all of the Bible is to be interpreted, it draws a distinction between Israel and the Church, it distinguishes between law and grace, and it purports to interpret the Bible literally.

1. The Structure of Redemptive History

Both the *Old* and *New Scofield Reference Bibles* define "dispensation" exactly the same: "a dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God" (*Old*, p. 5 and *New*, p. 3). Both systems teach that there are seven such dispensations distinguished in Scripture: the dispensations of innocence, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, and kingdom.

2. The Distinction Between Israel and the Church

One of the central emphases in dispensationalism is the distinction between Israel and the Church.

The emphasis is seen in the *Old Reference Bible* when it is said,

> therefore, in approaching the study of the Gospels the mind should be freed, so far as possible, from mere theological concepts and presuppositions. Especially is it necessary to exclude the notion—a legacy in Protestant thought from post-

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[3] C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1945).

apostolic and Roman Catholic theology—that the Church is the true Israel, and that the Old Testament foreview [sic] of the kingdom is fulfilled in the Church. (p. 989)

In almost exactly the same language the *New Reference Bible* teaches,

> therefore, in approaching the study of the Gospels, the mind should be freed, so far as possible, from presuppositions as that the Church is to be equated with the true Israel, and that the Old Testament promises to Israel and the foreview [sic] of the kingdom related only to the Church. (p. 987)

In keeping with this theme the notes in *Old Reference Bible* say,

> The Gospels do not unfold the doctrine of the Church. The word occurs in Matthew only. After His rejection as King and Saviour [sic] by the Jews, our Lord, announcing a mystery until that moment "hid in God" (Eph. 3:3-10), said, "I will build my church" (Mt. 16:16, 18). It was, therefore, yet future; but His personal ministry had gathered out the believers who were, on the day of Pentecost, by the baptism with the Spirit, made the first members of "the church which is his body" (1 Cor. 12:12, 13; Eph. 1:23). (p. 990)

These words appear almost word for word in the *New Reference Bible*.

3. The Distinction Between Law and Grace

Closely related to the central distinction between Israel and the church is the difference between law and grace which is said to be basic to properly understanding Scripture. This distinction is as important to the system as is the distinction between Israel and the Church. Law refers to the dispensation of law or the period from Moses to Pentecost. For dispensationalism, this distinction is very influential in understanding the message and mission of Jesus.

This principle is set forth in the introduction to the *New Reference Bible* in the following words:

> Although not all Bible students agree in every detail of the dispensational system presented in this reference Bible, it is generally recognized that the distinction between law and grace is basic to the understanding of Scriptures (p. v2.).

The *Old Reference Bible* states,

> the mission of Jesus was, *primarily*, to the Jews (Mt. 10:5, 6; 15:23-25; John 1:11). He was "made under the law" (Gal.

4:4), and was "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15:8), and to fulfill the law that grace might flow out.

Expect, therefore, a strong legal and Jewish colouring [sic] up to the cross (e.g., Mt. 5:27-29; 6:12; cf., Eph. 4:32; Mt. 10:5,6; 15:22-28; Mk. 1:44; Mt. 23:2; etc.). The Sermon on the Mount is law, not grace, for it demands as the condition of blessing (Mt. 5:3-9) that perfect character which grace, through divine power, creates (Ga. 5:22, 23).

The *doctrines* of grace are to be sought in the Epistles, not in the Gospels; but those doctrines rest back upon the death and resurrection of Christ, and upon the great germ-truths to which He gave utterance, and of which the Epistles are the unfolding. Furthermore, the only perfect example of perfect grace is the Christ of the Gospels. (p. 989)

These words are repeated almost verbatim in the newer recension, although important differences exist between the two versions:

2. The mission of Jesus was initially to the Jews (texts). He was "made under the law" (texts), and was "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (texts).

Therefore, a strong legal and Jewish coloring is to be expected up to the cross (texts). The Sermon on the Mount is closely related to law in the highest sense, for it demands as the condition of blessing (Matt. 5:3-9) that perfect character which only grace through divine power creates (Gal. 5:22-23).

2I. The doctrines of grace are developed in the Epistles, not in the Gospels; but they are implicit in the Gospels, because they rest upon the death and resurrection of Christ and upon the great germinal truths He taught, truths which the Epistles are the unfolding. The Christ of the Gospels is the perfect manifestation of grace.

IV. The Gospels do not develop the doctrine of the Church. The word "church" occurs in Matthew only. After His rejection as King and Savior by the Jews, our Lord announcing a mystery until that moment "hidden in God" (Eph. 3:3-10), said, "I will build my church" (Mt. 16: 18). It was, therefore, yet future; but His personal ministry had gathered out the believers who were, on the Day of Pentecost, made by the baptism with the Spirit the first members of "the church, which

is His body (texts).

> The Gospels present a group of Jewish disciples, associated on earth with a Messiah in humiliation. The Epistles present a Church which is the body of Christ, made up of the regenerate who are associated with Him "in the heavenlies," co-heirs with Him of the Father, co-rulers with Him of the coming kingdom; and, as to earth, although strangers and pilgrims, yet His witnesses and the instruments of His will among men (texts) (New, p. 987).

4. The Literal Interpretation of the Bible

One of the frequently emphasized distinctives of dispensationalism is the claim to interpret Scripture literally. Both recensions of the system share this distinctive. It simply means that those who follow dispensationalism say they interpret Scripture in its plainest and simplest sense. This is especially said with reference to biblical prophecy.

B. The Two Recensions Compared and Contrasted

The two recensions of dispensationalism are aligned on almost all items but they are by no means identical. They share in the matters presented above and in many particular conclusions expressed in the notes. On the other hand, significant differences between them do exist. The major differences can be unearthed by recovering some of the ground just traversed but looking specifically at the differences more closely.

1. The Structure of Redemptive History

Although agreeing with respect to the dispensational structure and the specific number and identification of the dispensations the two recensions present significant differences. The older version presents a much sharper distinction between the dispensations.

Each recension of dispensationalism presents seven dispensations or ages of divine administration. Dispensation is defined as a "period of time, test, failure of man, and judgment." The older dispensationalism teaches that each dispensation ended with judgment. Although the newer recension agrees that each period culminated in judgment, it clearly and emphatically states that no strict limits to the terminations of the dispensations can be set, the periods overlap!

> …strict limits cannot be placed upon the terminations of the dispensations because (1) there is some overlapping, and (2) the divinely-given stewardship may continue after the

time-era of special testing has ended (p. v2.)

Furthermore, the newer recension adds that the deposit of truth throughout the dispensations is cumulative, with the exception of the "deposit" in the Law of Moses (in spite of some comments that may appear to add the Law of Moses to the compendium of divine instruction for Christians).

> Although the divine revelation unfolds progressively, the deposit of truth in the earlier time-periods is not discarded; rather it is cumulative. Thus conscience (moral responsibility) is an abiding truth in human life (Rom. 2:15; 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 4:2), although it does not continue as a dispensation. Similarly, the saved of this present dispensation are "not under law" as a specific test of obedience to divine revelation (Ga. 5:18; cf. Gal. 2:16; 3:11), yet the law remains an integral part of the Holy Scriptures which, to the redeemed, are profitable for "instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Rom. 15:4)." (*New*, p. 3.)

2. The Distinction Between Law and Grace

As to this basic law-grace distinction, the two recensions vary considerably. In the newer version there is much more emphasis on faith as the basis of salvation throughout the entire post-fall history of man. This emphasis constitutes a major difference.

First, we will look at what the older recension teaches:

> What, under law, was *condition*, is under grace, freely *given* every believer. The if' of v. 5 is the essence of law as a method of divine dealing, and the fundamental reason why "the law made nothing perfect" (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 7:18, 19). The Abrahamic and New covenants minister salvation and assurance because they impose but one condition faith. (Old, p. 93)

The implication that there are two different "ways" or plans of salvation is present in the above quote but not as clear as in the note on John 1:17. Moreover, where it is rather clearly taught there are two ways of salvation, it is implied that there are seven "ways." Each dispensation has a different "condition of salvation". On John 1:17:

> Grace. Summary: (1) Grace is `the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man ... not by works of righteousness which we have done' (Tit. 3:4, 5). It is therefore, constantly set in contrast to law, under which God demands righteousness

from man, as, under grace, He gives righteousness to man (Rom. 3:21, 22; 8:4; Phil. 3:9). Law is connected with Moses and works; grace with Christ and faith (texts). Law blesses the good; grace saves the bad (texts). Law demands that blessings be earned; grace is a free gift (texts).

(2) As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (texts). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but as a fruit of salvation (texts). (Old, p. 1115.)

The observation that under the dispensation of grace "the point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but as a fruit of salvation (texts)" demonstrates that to the older dispensation the "tests" of each dispensation were "conditions of salvation." Therefore, it appears that there are seven different ways or plans of salvation. The above citation makes it clear that, according to this older dispensationalism, the dispensation of law was a dispensation of salvation on the basis of works.

The position in the newer Reference Bible is in marked contrast to what immediately precedes. Here, it is emphasized that the different dispensations are not separate ways of salvation but that there is a single "way" of salvation and distinct ways the faith of the saved is to be expressed or lived out.

The different dispensations are not separate ways of salvation. During each of them man is reconciled to God in only one way, i.e., by God's grace through the work of Christ that was accomplished on the cross and vindicated in His resurrection. Before the cross man was saved in prospect of Christ's atoning sacrifice, through believing the revelation thus far given him. Since the cross man has been saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ in whom revelation and redemption are consummated. (New p. 3.)

The principal difference between the two recensions appears quite clear when one compares and contrasts the notes on John 1:17. *The New Reference Bible* comments:

Grace, Summary: (1) Grace is `the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man ... not by works of righteousness which we have done ... being justified by his grace' (Tit. 3:4, 5, 7). As a principle, therefore, grace is set in contrast with law (Rom. 11:6), under which God demands righteousness from men, as, under grace, He gives righteousness to men (Rom.

3:21-25; 8:3-4; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9). Law is connected with Moses and works; grace, with Christ and faith (Jn. 1:17; Rom. 10:4-10). Under law blessings accompany obedience (Deut. 28:1-6); grace bestows blessing as a free gift (Rom. 4:3-5; Eph. 2:8).

One should notice that the newer notes add, "being justified by his grace" to the Scripture citation. This is consistent with its distinct emphasis. Furthermore, the last two sentences of the first paragraph of these notes on John 1:17 are markedly different with the latter changing from *blessing under the law being the result of obedience* to *blessings being that which accompany obedience*. Most importantly, the older recension says, "grace saves the bad," a clause that is totally omitted in the newer recension. All this is consistent with the new concept of the relationship between salvation and "test" where salvation always is "available to him (man) by God's grace through faith" and where the tests are the way faith is worked out (although one should be aware of the citations noted under the heading "Arminianism").

The second and third paragraphs of the newer recension are completely new. These additions (or substitutions for the second paragraph of the older recension) further emphasize that throughout redemptive history there is but one way of salvation.

(2) In its fullness, grace began with the ministry of Christ involving His death and resurrection, for He came to save sinners (texts). Under the former dispensation, law was shown to be powerless to secure righteousness and life for a sinful race (Gal. 3:21-22). Prior to the cross man's salvation was through faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3), being grounded on Christ's atoning sacrifice, viewed anticipatively by God (Rom. 3:25; see Gen. 1:28, heading, note par. 3); now it is clearly revealed that salvation and righteousness are received by faith in the crucified and resurrected Savior (Jn. 1:12-13; 5:24; 1 Jn. 5:11-13), with holiness of life and good works following as the fruit of salvation (Jn. 15:16; Rom. 8:2-4; Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 2:11-14).

There was grace before Christ came, as witnessed by the provision of sacrifice for sinners (texts). The difference between the former age and the present age, therefore, is not a matter of no grace and some grace, but rather that today grace reigns (Rom. 5:21), in the sense that the only Being who has a right to judge sinners (Jn. 5:22) is now seated upon a throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16), not imputing unto the world their tres-

passes (2 Cor. 5:19)." (p. 1124.)

C. The Evaluation of the System

1. Dispensational Structure of History
   The theory of the dispensational structure of redemptive history has several shortcomings rendering it an unacceptable approach to the Bible.

a. Unclear Distinction Between Condition and Basis of Salvation
   While the new dispensationalism is clearer in emphasizing that the basis of salvation was always by grace through faith, it draws an unclear distinction between "condition" of salvation and "basis" of salvation. We have already seen how newer dispensationalism rejects the older version's equation of condition and test (which implied there were seven ways or plans of salvation). At the same time, the newer recension teaches that the basis of salvation is by grace through faith:

> Although not all Bible students agree in every detail of the dispensational system presented in this reference Bible, it is generally recognized that the distinction between law and grace is basic to the understanding of the Scriptures. As a further aid to comprehending the divine economy of the ages, a recognition of the dispensations is of highest value, so long as it is clearly understood that throughout all the Scriptures there is only one basis of salvation, i. e, by grace through faith... (p. v2.)

The newer recension is teaching that the only basis of salvation is by grace through faith and that salvation is received by faith. With this the newer system rejects the seven ways of salvation in favor of a single way of salvation. However, as we shall see under the heading "Arminianism" the newer recension simply substitutes the way formerly proposed under the dispensation of grace for all the other conditions. By doing this it undoes what it works hard to establish, viz., that salvation is solely by grace. In the statement that "the one basis of salvation is grace by faith" it is unclear whether (1) grace is the sole basis and faith the condition of reception or (2) salvation is granted by grace and once the recipient is born again he believes, i.e., faith is the result of salvation and the circumstance of reception. The issue is further complicated by the note on John 3:16 "the condition of the new birth is faith in Christ crucified" when compared to the note on Ephesians 1:11 which teaches election "is always limited to those specially chosen of God." The note on this latter passage rejects

bare foreknowledge as the basis for this election stating that the salvation of the elect is "divinely caused" and "if God foreknows all events, then they are just as certain as if they were predestined" (this speaks of foreknowledge as knowledge of certain actions and rejects bare foreknowledge as an impossibility apart from predestination).

b. Denigration and Subjectivization of the Significance of Christ's Teaching for Today

Both forms of dispensationalism especially emphasize the distinction between law and grace. They place Christ under the law and describe His preaching as fundamentally "law" preaching. Yet, there appears to be a slight difference between old and new dispensationalism in their evaluations of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, for example. In both recensions the various parts of Jesus' teaching are virtually subjected to the reader's own judgment as to whether they are intended for this age or not. The application of this hermeneutical rule greatly denigrates Jesus' teaching. Surely, His teaching should be central and determinative for the church.

While it is true that the distinction between law and grace should be considered and evaluated, dispensationalism over-emphasizes this difference. After all, Paul frequently cites the law as regulative for the church. In 1 Corinthians he repeatedly cites or alludes to the Mosaic Law and other passages of the Old Testament in settling the issues in the church (see below). It certainly was not typical of either Jesus or Paul that they rejected the Law of Moses as exclusively belonging to another age. They both cited from it repeatedly and at crucial points of their theoretical and practical theology. In the new age God still demands righteousness as an expression of godliness.

It seems much more consistent with what the New Testament teaches if one approaches the Mosaic law as still binding except where it is specifically set aside by some particular teaching/passage in the Bible or by the change in circumstances introduced by the life and ministry of Jesus. Because Jesus died and arose from the dead, Christians are not bound to practice the Old Testament sacrificial system. However, they are still bound to provide an offering for their sin. As the book of Hebrews assumes, the details of the levitical system provide great understanding of God's perfect holiness, the extent of man's sin and sinfulness, his obligations to God, the dimensions and adequacies of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, and the absolute grace of God displayed in Christ. The principles in that older system reveal God's will not only in the areas just

mentioned but they provide great instruction in the nature and structure of Christian worship (a fuller exposition of these matters will have to wait until later).

c. Unclear and Confusing Definition of Dispensation

The newer dispensationalism virtually removes what it affirms. It affirms that there were seven distinct dispensations and that this structure is the key to properly understanding the Scripture. (New, p. 3.) It would seem that this "key" to properly understanding Scripture would be clear and unconfusing so it could be used to clarify Scripture not confuse it, but this is not the case. Accompanying the affirmation just reported, these dispensations are called "a progressive and connected revelation of God's dealing with man" (p.3). The revelation delivered in the various dispensations is cumulative so that the respective teaching of each dispensation (after the fall) continues to bear upon mankind after the close of the dispensation. Men continue to be responsible to obey the teaching. "Although the divine revelation unfolds progressively, the deposit of truth in the earlier time-periods is not discarded; rather it is cumulative." The difference seems to be that within each dispensation there is a particular and distinct test. Failure to sustain that test brings a unique non-repeated judgment. This, however, does not substantially alter the responsibility of future men to meet the test. Hence, by the time of the dispensation of grace there is an accumulation of five tests: conscience, human government, promise, law, and grace, although the law is virtually set aside now.

This definition presents a very confusing picture for several additional reasons.

First, if the dispensations were closed by judgment then between the close of the dispensation of human government by the judgment of Babel and the opening of the dispensation of promise by the calling of Abraham there was a long period of time which is under no dispensation at all. This same problem emerges with respect to the dispensation of promise. This dispensation was brought to a close by the judgment of going into the "captivity in Egypt." It was over 400 years later that the Mosaic Law was given and the next dispensation opened. The problem emerges again in the consideration of the dispensation of law where the judgment brought upon the people in concluding the dispensation was separated by a long period (over 500 years) from the beginning of the dispensation of grace. Either the dispensation was closed by judgment or by the setting forth of a new dispensational revelation (covenant).

Hence, the newer dispensationalism at once affirms that the test of a dispensation pertains (1) until the beginning of the next dispensation and (2) until after the divine judgment was levied on the disobedient people. An attempt is made to alleviate this problem by saying that only the first closes the period, but the confusion remains uncorrected. This does not really help the situation because in the case of the dispensation of law, for example, the people were brought back to the Promised Land after the judgment (the exile). Does this mean they were again, after having experienced the judgment, placed under the sanction of the threat of captivity? Or, does it mean that from the time after the judgment there is no judgment in this dispensation? If this is the case, the definition of dispensation does not fit. Or, does it mean that the covenant of David rather than the covenant of Moses now informs the dispensation so that the dispensational test is changed? But if this is true it violates what the notes say as to the relationship between covenant and dispensation: (1) the two are different and should not be confused, (2) the terms of each dispensation are conditional and those of covenant unconditional, (3) the dispensation of law embraced three major covenants but its terms or test appear to be set forth in only two of them.

Second, the test of the dispensation of promise was that Abraham and his family remain in Palestine the land of promise. This certainly does seem to be contrary to Genesis 12, 15, and 17 where (1) God says He will take the people into the land of captivity (Egypt) (15), and (2) there is no apparent connection between staying in the land and being blessed by God (Abraham was blessed when he went into Egypt, and so were his descendants). To this one should add (1) Hebrews 4 teaches that the promised land was not Palestine in itself and (2) Hebrews 11 teaches that Abraham understood it was not, he looked not for an earthly heritage (city) but for a heavenly heritage (city).

Third, if the tests are cumulative then the believer today stands under all those tests, cf., "strict limits cannot be placed upon the terminations of the dispensations because (1) there is some overlapping, and (2) *the divinely-given stewardship may continue after the time-era of special testing has ended*". But dispensationalism will hardly hold believers responsible to remain in Palestine, to build a human government or to keep the system of law specified in the Mosaic Law. Certainly, advocates of dispensationalism hardly encourage Gentile believers to remain in Palestine, but they teach this is a duty incumbent on modern Israelites, the Jews. Also, the problem here is that all of the other "tests" which were set

forth in the Old Testament today apply to the church, e.g., the responsibility to follow the dictates of one's conscience. Moreover, the history of dispensationalism has been marked by the retreat of its advocates from the political scene, i.e., they do not seem to believe we are responsible to build a proper human government. Similarly, if one attempts to quote Moses as a basis for Christian action, dispensationalists (except in the case of abortion) quickly respond that we are under grace and not law. So, dispensationalists may say that "the divinely-given stewardship may continue…," but they appear arbitrarily to pick and choose what this means in practice.

d. Ridiculous, Contorted and Artificial Notations

The inadequacies of dispensationalism emerge further when one considers the many comments (notes) that appear to be ridiculous, contorted, and artificial (forced). We give but a few examples below:

(1) Regarding the Second Dispensation

The second or dispensation of conscience, is described by the newer Reference Bible as follows:

> The Second Dispensation: Conscience (*Moral Responsibility*). Man had now sinned (3:6-7), the first promise of redemption was to be given (3:15), and our first parents were to be expelled from Eden (3:22-24). Man's sin was a rebellion against a specific command of God (3:5-7:22). Man sinned by entering the realm of moral experience by the wrong door when he could have entered by doing right. So man became as God through a personal experience of the difference between good and evil, but also unlike God in gaining this experience by choosing the wrong instead of the right. Thus he was placed by God under the stewardship of moral responsibility whereby he was accountable to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through blood sacrifice here instituted in prospect of the finished work of Christ. The result is set forth in the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 3:14-21, see v. 15). Man failed the test presented to him in this dispensation (witness 6:5), as in others. Although, as the specific test, this time-era ended with the flood, man continued in his moral responsibility as God added further revelation concerning Himself and His will in succeeding ages (Acts 24:14-16; Rom. 2:15; 2 Cor. 4:2).

(New, p. 7.)

The difficulties with this statement may be brought forth by a series of questions and observations. We see two major difficulties here: (a) the difficulty of supporting the definition of this dispensation as defined by the notes in the Reference Bible and (b) the difficulty of specifying this as a separate dispensation at all. We will set forth the arguments supporting these two problems in order.

(a) The Definition of This Dispensation

First, if this is the age of conscience or moral responsibility, does this mean that before the fall man had no conscience or moral responsibility? When the notes of the two recensions are compared at this point, it appears that the later authors were aware of this question and sought to answer it. The first set of notes is completely rewritten in the second recension. Significantly, one no longer reads that man's conscience was awakened by the sinning of Adam and Eve. However, the problem is by no means removed. The confusion simply shifts.

What the older dispensationalism clearly states (and creates a difficult problem) the newer dispensationalism tries to soften. But the problem remains when it is remarked "man sinned by entering the realm of moral experience." Was there no obedience to God before the fall? Did not that obedience take place in the "realm of moral experience"?

This problem appears again in the words "so man became as God through a personal experience of the difference between good and evil...." Is the only way to enter the realm of moral experience through the door of wrong experience? Obviously not, since the notes report that God had entered that realm. But if the realm of moral experience is entered through the door of doing good, then how was man not already in that realm when before the fall he obeyed God? Surely, this obedience is shown in his naming the animals, receiving and naming Eve and acknowledging that she was his helper suited (meet) for him.

Furthermore, the notes report that after the fall "[Adam] was placed by God under the stewardship of moral responsibility whereby he was accountable to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through blood sacrifice here instituted in prospect of the finished work of Christ." However, was not man in exactly the same position before the fall—except for the requirement to offer sacrifices? It appears that the only difference between the first and second dispensation is the requirement to offer bloody sacrifices. If this is true then this dispensation is not marked by "conscience."

38

Finally, does "moral responsibility" mean man is no longer responsible for the commands given before the fall? Jesus binds man to have only one wife for life, as was the case before the fall (Matt. 19:1-6). Surely this and other pre-fall moral responsibilities are still binding on man. This seems to be exactly what Paul argues in Romans 2. The only change with regard to moral responsibilities relates to the prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

These observations reveal the difficulty of supporting the definition of this dispensation set forth by the notes in the Reference Bible.

(b) The Specification of This as a Separate Dispensation

It is certainly most difficult to see how this definition supports this as a separate dispensation at all. It seems much more reasonable and scriptural to view this as part of a continuum, which subsists under some larger over-arching entity. The only thing that distinguishes this era from others is what it lacks. Even then it is difficult to conclude, for example,

[1] that with the presence of sacrifice there was not, in principle, what is involved in the levitical law,

[2] that there was no human government during this period—it seems more likely that the multiplication of man, the establishment of cities, and the statement of Lamech (of the line of Cain) all imply the existence of some kind of human government,

[3] it is unimaginable to think that in view of the promise of Genesis 3:15 and the subsequent events, that Adam and Eve did not have genuine saving faith on the basis of the covenant whereby God promised to bring a redeemer who would by grace do what they could not do, viz., perfectly obey God and effect their salvation. Surely this saving faith was what prompted Adam to rename his wife ('ish-shah who was "like" him an 'ish) and call her Eve (in view of God's promise of life he called his wife "the life-giver" or the like). They named their first son Cain, "one acquired with God's help" (or, "one created with the help of God"–the second Adam?) and their second son "useless" (Abel). Surely this evidences their confidence (albeit false) that God had fulfilled His covenantal promise (Gen. 3:15)?

(2) Regarding the Third Dispensation

Equally confusing are the notes on the dispensation of human government.

> The Third Dispensation: Human Government. This dispensation began when Noah and his family left the ark. As Noah went

into a new situation, God (in the Noahic Covenant) subjected humanity to a new test. Heretofore no man had the right to take another man's life (Gen. 4:10-11, 14-15, and 23-24). In this new dispensation, although man's direct moral responsibility to God continued ("Render ... to God the things that are God's," Mt. 22:21), God delegated to him certain areas of His authority, in which he was to obey God through submission to his fellow man.... So God instituted a corporate relationship of man to man in human government.

... Whereas in the preceding dispensation restraint upon men was internal (Gen. 6:3), God's Spirit working through moral responsibility, now a new and external restraint was added, i. e., the power of civil government. (*New*. p. 13.)

(a) Continued Binding Responsibility for Human Government

One problem with this definition is that the requirement was not removed even till the present age—man is still responsible to have a proper human government. The notes of the newer recension of dispensationalism acknowledge this. The responsibility to build a proper civil government is a central theme in the Mosaic Law. Only there the specifications of the nature and working of that government are given in more detail. Were not the Jews responsible to build a civil government along the lines God had specified? Did not those laws express God's moral character? All this would, no doubt, be granted. But dispensationalism maintains that the difference between law (Mosaic) and grace must be maintained and that those laws are no longer binding. Yet, are not those principles and laws that are expressive of God's eternal moral character and able to be practiced under the present age, still binding (is there not a general equity dimension in the civil laws)? In other words, the Bible does not identify the age from Noah to Abraham as uniquely the age of civil government, only dispensationalism does.

(b) Probable Existence of Human Government Before This

Second, Noah was responsible for all that preceded him. This means, according to the definition given in the Scofield Bible, that the condition or test of the dispensation is defined by civil government only. However, as argued above, it is probable that civil government existed before this "dispensation" in both the godly and ungodly lines. Also, there is nothing in what was said to Noah to specify that God's statement

40

regarding the punishment of "murder" relates only to national and not to "tribal" government (which one would expect under preflood conditions).

(c) Future Divine Stipulations Already Existing

Third, some things that were specified much later in the history of revelation appear to have been known and practiced by Noah: weekly Sabbath observance (Gen. 2:3; Heb. 4), blood sacrifices (perhaps introduced by God after the fall and evidenced in Abel's sacrifice), the distinction between clean and unclean, the distinction between murder and manslaughter.

It is probably altogether proper to assume, for example, that the definition of murder maintained in the Mosaic law is implied in the Noahic covenant, namely, that there is a difference between murder and execution, between murder and killing in a war, and between murder and manslaughter. Certainly, the Noahic covenant recognizes the difference between execution of a murderer and murder itself—execution is not murder. Is not killing in a war a form of execution? This seems to be the reason there is no punishment on Israel for killing in war (cf., Abraham's attack on the invaders from the north, Gen. 14) and for killing in a war under the Mosaic Law. That difference arises not from human circumstances but from the divine nature insofar as the law is an expression of the divine nature. God Himself executed the enemies of Israel by leading Israel in warfare.

(3) Regarding the Fourth Dispensation

The dispensational assumption creates a forced understanding at significant points. For example, in commenting on the dispensation of promise the notes remark:

> In the previous dispensation, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as multitudes of other individuals, failed in the tests of faith and obedience which were made man's responsibility (e.g., Gen. 16:1-4; 26:6-10; 27:1-25). (New, p. 19.)

This comment does make the system logically fit together insofar as it retains the principle that in this dispensation the specific test of the dispensation (faith and obedience) was not met by men and the gracious work of God in providing salvation is not mitigated. However, it seems to require one to believe that Abraham and others were saved without faith and obedience (a teaching that is directly contrary to James 2:21-26) while at the same time they were saved by grace through faith.

Our point is established by what the notes themselves teach when they say:

> In the continuance through the centuries of this stewardship of truth, believers of the Church age are called upon to trust God as Abram did (Rom. 4:11, 16, 23-25; Gal. 3:6-9), and thus enter into the blessings of the covenant which inaugurated the dispensation of Promise. (New, p. 19.)

It is most difficult, if not impossible that, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as multitudes of other individuals, failed in the tests of faith and obedience which were made man's responsibility" and that "In the continuance through the centuries of this stewardship of truth, believers of the Church age are called upon to trust God as Abram did (Rom. 4:11, 16, 23-25; Gal. 3:6-9), and thus enter into the blessings of the covenant which inaugurated the dispensation of Promise." A comparison of these two statements shows that Abram failed in the tests of faith and obedience and that he trusted God—is not faith when God commands it, trust? However, someone might remark that the first statement relates to the gaining or earning of salvation and the second to the gaining or earning of blessings once one is saved. This is impossible, however, because the statement stipulates that the call to trust came before entering into the blessings of the covenant. Indeed, the Bible teaches that the chief blessing of that covenant was eternal life (Gal. 3:8), that that this is exactly what Abraham and the others understood (Heb 11:8-16). Finally, in Galatians Paul specifies that Abraham believed God; he exercised faith. So, how could he have failed the test of faith and obedience when that is precisely what he did do? This impossible "dispensational" position, it appears, arises out of a desire to preserve the dispensational system and not out of the Scripture itself.

According to the dispensational system, the blessing under this dispensation was the possession of the Promised Land and it was conditioned upon Abraham's (and his seed's) obedience. It is certain, however, that the descent into Egypt was also promised by God as was the length of that "captivity" (Gen. 15:13-16). Neither the prophecy of the "captivity" nor "return" are said (in the Bible) to have been conditioned upon any circumstance in Abraham. Both are sovereignly given. This certainly does not fit the dispensational interpretation. The promise was not given to or received by Abraham *because* of his obedience. It was given and received *because* of God's grace (Heb. 11:9, cf., Rom. 4). The obtaining or retaining of the blessing did not depend on any man. It depended on God; and at the time He predetermined and specified God brought His

people into the land. So, the faith and obedience of man might be a circumstance of reception, but it was not the effective cause. Hence, the writer of Joshua acknowledges that,

> the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers, and they possessed it, and dwelt in it. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he had swore unto their fathers; and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them. The Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed nothing of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass. (Josh. 21:43-45)

With these words the dispensational interpretation of the Abrahamic period falls. It is evident that enjoyment of the blessings of the "dispensation" rested not upon man's fulfilling the condition or test of faith and obedience but upon God. Furthermore, it is evident that all God's promised blessings were then enjoyed, "nothing of any good thing that the Lord had spoken" failed. Even more significantly, the core promise in this dispensation was not the promise of the land but the promise of eternal life. To the passage in Joshua, then, one should add Hebrews 4 that explains that Palestine as such was not what God promised the people of Israel. He promised them Palestine as the foretaste of the eternal rest. As the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 10:1, the law had a "shadow of good things to come and not the very image...." The writer is speaking of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, but the principle holds good for the Promised Land. This is established not only by Hebrews 4 but by Hebrews 11 that says Abraham understood he was not looking for a physical land —that the physical land was a shadow of the good things to come.

(4) Regarding the Definition of Atonement

The contorted and contradictory effects of the dispensational system in understanding the biblical system is seen in the way the notes treat the Old Testament sacrifices as "covering" that secured divine forgiveness but not atonement (removal of sin),

> Hebrew kaphar, to propitiate, to atone for sin. According to Scripture the sacrifice of the law only covered the offerer's sin and secured the divine forgiveness. The OT sacrifice never removed man's sin." (p. 110.)

The Levitical offerings "covered" the sins of Israel until

and in anticipation of the cross, but did not "take away" (Heb. 10:4) those sins. These were the sins done in OT times ("covered" meantime by the Levitical sacrifices), which God "passed over" (Rom. 3:25, lit.), for which passing over God's righteousness was never vindicated until, in the cross, Jesus Christ was "set forth a propitiation." ... It was the cross, not the Levitical sacrifices, which made full and complete redemption. The OT sacrifices enabled God to go on with a guilty people because those sacrifices typified the cross. To the offerer they were the "shadows" of good things that were to come, of which Christ was the reality (cf. Heb. 10:1). p. 148.

As before, these notes offer what is not only difficult to understand but impossible. First, how can sin be covered and divine forgiveness be extended but sin not removed? How can there be a covering and forgiveness of sin without its removal? Does this mean that the sin being covered was stored up until Christ died on the cross? This appears to be what is meant when later it is said: "The Levitical offerings "covered" the sins of Israel until and in anticipation of the cross, but did not "take away" (Heb. 10:4) those sins." It does seem that "in anticipation of the cross" suggests a kind of "bank" in which the sin was stored up until the cross, being covered until that time. This impression is reinforced by the words that follow: "These were the sins done in OT times "covered" meantime by the Levitical sacrifices, which God passed over" (Rom. 3:25, lit.), for which passing over and forgiven (but not done away) God's righteousness was never vindicated until, in the cross, Jesus Christ was 'set forth a propitiation'."

The authors of the notes make their intention clear when they say: "... It was the cross, not the Levitical sacrifices, which made full and complete redemption." Their problem is occasioned by their rigid dispensational assumption. They appear to be unable to view the sacrifices of the Old Testament as sacraments of one kind with the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper presents Christ really and spiritually but not physically—through it all that partake in faith are sealed in and share in Christ. In like manner, all who partook of the Old Testament sacrifices in faith were sealed in and shared in Christ too (1 Cor. 10:16-18).[4] The Old Testament sacrifices anticipated Christ and *through* them the efficacy of

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[4] These statements are not intended to set forth an *ex opere operato* understanding of the sacrament, but see the communing sacraments as signs and seals of God's work rather than mechanical means of conveying God's work.

Christ's atoning work was graciously applied to faithful participants. Similarly, the Lord's Supper rests on Christ's accomplished sacrifice and through it the sanctifying efficacy of Christ's atoning work is graciously applied to faithful participants.

> (5) Regarding the Interpretation of Acts 15:16f.

One of the clearest examples of the way the dispensational system forces an untenable understanding of Scripture is seen in the notes on Acts 15:16f.

> Acts 15:16: With the exception of the first five words, vv. 16-18 are quoted from Amos 9:11-12. James quoted from the LXX, which here preserved the original text (see Amos 9:12, note). Amos 9:11 begins with the words "in that day." James introduced his quotation in such a way as to show what day Amos is talking about, namely, the time after the present worldwide witness (Acts 1:8), when Christ will return. James showed that there will be Gentile believers at that time as well as Jewish believers; hence he concluded that Gentiles are not required to become Jewish proselytes by circumcision. (New, p. 1186.)

The context is the council in Jerusalem. The apostles and elders were gathered to decide the responsibility of Gentile converts to the Mosaic Law. James cited Amos 9:11f. to prove that the conversion of the Gentiles was prophesied in the Old Testament.

> Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things." Acts 15:14-17

The most obvious (literal) understanding of this citation is that James used it as proof that what had happened was according to God's will and prophecy. He had visited the nations (Gentiles) and made out of them a people for His name, according to the prophecy of Amos. The dispensational notes argue that James saw the fulfillment of Amos in the kingdom (millennial) age, i.e., in some age future to when James was speaking. Even if the interpretation of "after this" is correct, it should be obvious that the Amos passage does not teach that the Gentile converts

being referenced by James would be present at the time the new age is introduced. Indeed, Amos teaches the Jewish remnant would seek the Lord "in that day" (cf., 9:14). Besides this, the dispensational interpretation makes James' argument most circuitous. It makes much more sense to understand James as meaning that the prophet(s) prophesied that God is rebuilding the tabernacle (house) of David right there at that time, at the time of the council in Jerusalem; it was what Peter had reported. Understood in this way God's visitation and making a people for Himself of the nations/Gentiles is the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. Viewed in this way the "Lord's doing" of verse 17 embraces exactly what He is doing with the Gentiles. Moreover, while the notes give an exacting interpretation of "after this" the rest of the differences between James' citation and the Hebrew of Amos go unnoticed. Obviously, James is citing the passage and then applying its teaching to the immediate circumstances. He is not misquoting. He is merely doing what many preachers do when they cite Scripture—he is citing it in a translation then known (the Septuagint). The only difference is that James' interpretation is inspired. Perhaps the authors of the notes see no need to treat the rest of the citation from Amos because it does not relate to defending the dispensational system.

(6) Regarding the Understanding of "Seed"

Another problem with the dispensational system is that it does not clearly teach that "seed" is the same in Genesis 3:15, Genesis 17, and 2 Samuel 7. Biblically "seed" is central to every covenant (i.e., each specific republication of the covenant). Every covenant is, therefore, essentially the same covenant and contains the promise to the seed and the promise of the seed repeated, expanded, and augmented. When Christ the Seed came, He fulfilled every particular covenant. The New Testament points out that He was the second Adam who kept the pre-fall covenant for His people (Rom. 5:12). He was the "Seed" who defeated and destroyed the serpent. He was the true Seed who received the special blessings of the Lord (1 Pet. 3:20-21). He was the true Seed of Abraham and the true Seed of David (Matt. 1:1). So, covenant, not dispensations, structures redemptive history. Every promise was given to the Seed. The several promises are viewed as one promise, the promise of eternal life (Tit. 1:2). There is one covenant that is manifested and republished in several administrations. Because it is ultimately a single covenant, stipulations and promises previously given do not have to be repeated (and often are not repeated) to be binding provided they embody a general equity.

(7) Regarding the Significance of the Mosaic Law

The old dispensationalism taught that the law is not proposed as a means of life, but as a means by which Israel might become "a peculiar treasure" and a "kingdom of priests" (*Old*, p. 93). The newer recension wisely did not repeat this sentiment. Its authors did not so deprecate the sovereignty of God who brought Israel out of Egypt by His grace and according to the promise He gave Abraham. They were unwilling to go against what the Bible so clearly states, viz., that God did not choose Israel because of any quality in themselves but because He loved their fathers (Deut. 4:37) and because He loved them and had sworn to their fathers that He would bring them back out of bondage (7:7, 8). Therefore, Moses could state that they *were already* a special people to God (14:2). Indeed, they were God's chosen people. Israel was already a peculiar or special treasure and a kingdom of priests because God had called them and chosen them to be His own people. Because they were a kingdom of priests all the adult males at the first, and thereafter every male child, had to be presented for service before God in His sanctuary and left there unless he was redeemed from that service (Deut. 30:13ff.; Exod. 13:13-15). This privileged position would be exhibited publicly and enhanced through obedience to the stipulations of the covenant.

(8) Regarding the Reception of the Law

The older dispensation taught that the law was not *imposed* until it had been *proposed* and voluntarily accepted. The newer recension omits this comment altogether—probably because it so obviously mitigates God's sovereignty. Israel was placed under the law by divine omnipotence. (New, p. 94.)

(9) Regarding the Teaching of Jesus

The comments regarding the ministry of Jesus are also very confusing and bewildering. They leave the reader with a view of the teaching of Jesus that virtually removes that teaching as meaningful for the church today:

> 2. The mission of Jesus was initially to the Jews (texts). He was "made under the law" (texts). and was `a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers' (texts).
>
> Therefore, a strong legal and Jewish coloring is to be expected up to the cross (texts). The Sermon on the Mount is

closely related to law in the highest sense, for it demands as the condition of blessing (Matt. 5:3-9) that perfect character which only grace through divine power creates (Gal. 5:22-23).

3. The doctrines of grace are developed in the Epistles, not in the Gospels; but they are implicit in the Gospels, because they rest upon the death and resurrection of Christ and upon the great germinal truths He taught, truths which the Epistles are the unfolding. The Christ of the Gospels is the perfect manifestation of grace. (New, p. 987.)

There are three areas of difficulty in this citation: the relationship between confirmation and cross, law and grace, and grace and the Gospels.

(a) As to the Relationship Between Confirmation and Cross

First, the ministry of Jesus is viewed as initially (i.e., up to the cross) to the Jews and is carried out in completion of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. The confirmation of the Davidic covenant and the promise of establishing an earthly kingdom ruled by a king (Christ) here on earth is the purpose of this initial ministry of Jesus. Only after He is rejected by them does He turn His face to the cross.

The nature of the problem becomes clearer when one examines the note explaining that "at hand" "is never a positive affirmation that the person or thing said to be at hand will immediately appear, but that no known or predicted event will intervene." (New, p. 996.) This is said regarding Jesus' teaching that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand", Matthew 4:17. Does this mean that if the Jews had accepted their Messiah there would have been no cross? Or does it mean that the eternal earthly kingdom would have been established and then Christ would still have been crucified? What does this do to the clarity with which the passion of Christ is described in Isaiah 53 and with Christ's teaching that the law spoke of Him—Hebrews presents the law as a prophecy of Christ's passion when it describes the relationship between the sacrificial system and Christ's sacrifice, Hebrews 9:11-14. It seems much more consistent with Scripture to understand that Christ came to establish the promised kingdom through dying on the cross just as had been prophesied. This seems to be exactly what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 15. Christ was victorious in death. Through it He established the kingdom and will deliver that kingdom to God the Father when "He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power" (vs. 24). He is now reigning (vs. 15). These themes of Christ the Davidic king and Christ the present ruler appear together in Romans 1:3-4. It certainly seems evident here that the

resurrection was the means by which both were realized.

The cross and confirmation are separate themes but are immediately and intimately related. Christ came to establish the promised Davidic kingdom through the cross not to establish through being accepted by Israel.

(b) As to Law and Grace

Second, the overly sharp distinction between law and grace attenuates the relevancy of Christ's teaching ministry for today. We have already discussed this above and only note it at this point.

(c) As to Grace and the Gospels

Third, one almost cringes at the statements about absence of grace being taught in the Gospels. How can this be maintained in view of the Gospel of John, for example? The Gospel opens with a clear statement that *grace* and truth came in Jesus, and that man is not saved by his own abilities or efforts but solely by the "will of God" (1:12- 13). All that follows is an exposition of grace in Jesus. Chapter 2 reports how Jesus turned water into wine teaching this as an illustration of how He alone can regenerate sinners. The closing verses of the chapter report that many believed on Him but their belief was self-generated and not saving belief. Chapter 3 explains that regeneration is a product of the Holy Spirit and not of man. Each subsequent chapter illustrates the doctrines of grace with a miracle or act of Christ, and often explains the doctrine at length in Christ's own words. Christ's teaching in John is hardly in terms of "germinal truths." It is an extensive and clear explanation.

The Gospel of John belies the teaching that the ministry of Jesus was primarily or even initially a carrying out of the distinctives of the law in contrast to grace. Since that Gospel traces Jesus' teachings from the beginning, it establishes this emphasis on the doctrines of grace as a constant emphasis throughout Jesus' public ministry. Other Gospels do not emphasize these themes as much but that does not mean these themes were only germinal in Christ's teaching. Unless one thinks the themes of law and grace were two totally independent themes in Jesus' ministry, that the synoptic Gospels develop one theme and the Gospel of John the other, one must conclude that they were supplementary and interrelated. Hence, the Sermon on the Mount is not only "closely related to law in the highest sense" but it is equally and similarly related to grace. Therefore, the following analysis is to be rejected:

Much in the Gospels that belongs in strict interpretation to the Jews or the kingdom is yet such a revelation of the mind of God and is so based on eternal principles as to have a moral application to the people of God, whatever their dispensational position. *New*, p. 987.

The Scripture does not support this sharp distinction between law and its kingdom age in contrast to grace and its gospel age. Almost everything that is in the Gospels relates to the Jews or the kingdom and is based on the very principles and specific teaching that find continuation and fulfillment in the people of God today.

(10) Regarding the Difference Between Dispensation and Covenant

The dispensational system maintains a difference between dispensation and covenant that is very complex and confusing. A dispensation is "a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." (New, p. 3.) A covenant is "a sovereign pronouncement of God by which He establishes a relationship of responsibility" between Himself and some other party or parties. First, it certainly is difficult to tell the difference between these two definitions. Secondly, in general, the covenants (using the word as it is used in the Bible) may be described as having a temporal conditional dimension and an eternal unconditional dimension. Adapting this to dispensationalism, the first may be identified with the condition of the dispensation and the second with an eternal promise not limited by the dispensation (the content of the covenant). However, the biblical text (1) does not support this distinction in its posited dispensational application, but (2) uses the word covenant in an entirely different way, so the dispensational definitions appear to be utterly arbitrary.

Furthermore, when one traces the distinction proposed by dispensationalism throughout the Bible it is evident that it is always maintained by the reference notes. But several things argue this distinction to be wrong. It has already been noted that the end of the dispensation does not terminate the binding nature of the covenantal requirements (test). Nor is the dispensation terminated by the judgment but perhaps by the revelation of a new covenant. However, even this is not true because the revelation of a new covenant does not always terminate the dispensation (n.b., the relationship between the dispensation of law and the covenants that come during that period: the covenants of Moses and David).

Finally, this distinction really confuses the life and ministry of Jesus. What He accomplished ceases to be the goal and fulfillment of divine redemptive history. He did not complete and fulfill some of the former covenantal promises (as dispensationalism states them): the promise to Abraham of a perpetual possession of Palestine, a great multitude of descendants, and the promise to David of a descendant who would rule Palestine forever.

2. Distinction between Israel and the Church

a. The Thesis that the Church Starts at Pentecost

One of the most crucial emphases of dispensationalism is the distinction between Israel and the church. The teaching is seen in the following quotations:

> Therefore, in approaching the study of the Gospels, the mind should be freed, so far as possible, from presuppositions as that the Church is to be equated with the true Israel, and that the OT promises to Israel and the foreview of the kingdom related only to the Church.
>
> The OT prophet was perplexed by seeing in one horizon, so to speak, the suffering and the glory of Messiah (1 Pet. 1:10, 11). The NT shows that these are separated by the present church-age, and points forward to the Lord's return as the time when the Davidic Covenant of blessing through power will be fulfilled (Lk. 1:30-33; Acts 2:29-36; 15:14-17); just as the Abrahamic Covenant of blessing through suffering was fulfilled at His first coming (Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:6-14)." (*New*, p. 987; *Old*: p. 989.)

We have already noted the difficulty with the concept of a parenthetical age—it denigrates the OT prophecies of the church and minimizes, if not denigrates, Christ as the fulfillment of the OT, the climax and conclusion of redemptive history.

The first paragraph in the above citation sharply distinguishes the church and Israel. This raises several problems. The Bible does *not* teach that as a result of the work of Christ, Israel and the church are two parallel institutions. Rather, it teaches that Israel finds its continuation and fulfillment in the New Testament church and that the church is the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16).

(1) The Old Testament Prophesies the Baptism with the Holy

Spirit as the Fulfillment to Israel

The Old Testament not only prophesies the passion of Jesus (as pointed out above, cf., Isa. 53) but the rebirth of Israel in the establishment of the church after the resurrection of Christ. One specific line of prophecy that sets this forth relates to the baptism with the Holy Spirit by which the church members are redeemed (John 3) and enabled (Acts 2). First, in Genesis 17 Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and all his male children. Circumcision was thus established as the sign and seal of covenantal membership. The spiritual meaning of circumcision is set forth in Deuteronomy 10:16 where God commands Israel to circumcise their hearts. The context teaches that this command was equivalent to telling them to repent and believe the covenant (that preaches Christ, John 5:45-47). In Deuteronomy 30:6 God says He will circumcise their hearts (regenerate them) when He brings them back from the captivity. In Ezekiel 36:21-28 the Lord tells Israel through the prophet that He will bring them back from captivity and sprinkle clean water on them. He will give them a new heart and new spirit (regenerate them) when He brings them back. He promises to put His Spirit within them. In Joel 2 this "sprinkling" and "putting of the Spirit" becomes the "pouring out" of the Spirit. In Joel this promise is also preceded by a promise of the return and restoration. Significantly, Peter sees the promise of Joel fulfilled in Pentecost and Paul sees the promise of Ezekiel fulfilled in Christian baptism (Col. 2:11-12) and in the work of Christ in us (cf., 1 Thessa. 4:8). That New Testament baptism is Old Testament circumcision in its fulfilled form is seen in Colossians 2:11-14. Since circumcision marked Israel as God's people, baptism as the replacement and fulfillment of circumcision marks the church as Israel fulfilled. This is why in his trial before the authorities Paul said truthfully that he believed and taught everything written in the Old Testament,

> [I believe] all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. Acts 24:14

> "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." Acts 25:8

(2) The Old Testament Prophesies the Re-establishment of the Church as the fulfillment to Israel

The Old Testament promises the establishment of the church inasmuch as Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 promise the new covenant. Hebrews 8:7-13 and 10:11-17 both teach that Jeremiah was speaking of

the new covenant in Christ and, therefore, of the establishing of the Christian church. Indeed, in citing Jeremiah 31, Hebrews 8 teaches that the new covenant to be made with the house of Israel and the house of Jacob is the new covenant Christ fulfilled in His church. Hebrews 12:18-24 affirms that Christians have come to the very realities pursued by the Old Testament saints (cf., Heb. 11:8ff.). Therefore, the church is the re-establishing and fulfillment what was spoken of in the Old Testament as "Mount Zion," "the city of the living God," "Jerusalem," and "general" (i.e., great) "assembly."

       (3) The New Testament Church Continues the Old Testament "Church" Government

The New Testament continuation of Old Testament church government is seen in several particulars: Jesus' use of the word "church," His direction that Old Testament "church" procedures be followed with the corollary that Old Testament government be continued, and Jesus' interrelated use of "church" and "Kingdom of God" (the descriptions and conditions relating to the Kingdom preached by Jesus clearly apply equally to the church preached by the rest of the New Testament writers).

       (a) Jesus' Use of "Church"

Jesus' use of the word "church" in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 assumes His audience understands the meaning of the word. And they certainly did. The Greek word *ecclesia* appears over 70 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament which the Jews of Jesus' day used. The frequent use of this translation in the Jewish population of that day (the Septuagint) is demonstrated by the fact that New Testament writers so often quoted it. In the Septuagint the word church, *ecclesia*, is used of the people of Israel conceived as a worshiping and covenanting community (see the Septuagint at Deut. 4:10). Acts 15:16, for example, is clearly a citation of Amos 9:11 (although it is not word for word, it is noticeably the Septuagint verse). The force of this observation on Matthew 16:18, is by no means lessened if Jesus spoke in Aramaic and Matthew rendered His words into Greek. In this case, it is the Holy Spirit who inspired Matthew to use *ekklesia* to render Jesus' Aramaic word into Greek, the same word so often used in the Greek Old Testament. That Aramaic word was well known in Jewish circles. It rendered the Hebrew word representing the Old Testament community conceived as a worshiping community and describes the act by which they gathered before God. Regardless of the route, Jesus' intention was flawlessly reported by the Holy Spirit. He

spoke of the *ekklesia*.

Significantly, there are only two recorded uses of the word by Jesus. It is certainly clear that the Jews thought of themselves as the Kingdom of God (cf., Exod. 19:6). It is inconceivable to think that in His entire earthly ministry He spoke repeatedly about the Kingdom of God except for Matthew 16 and 18 where He suddenly and radically introduces the church without any preceding or subsequent mention of it. To view these two concepts as mutually exclusive is unreasonable. It is far more reasonable to see that Jesus used the ideas of the Kingdom of God and the church as interrelated matters. So, there is sufficient overlapping of these two concepts in His thinking and preaching that for Him to speak of the Kingdom was to speak of the church, and to speak of the church was to speak of the Kingdom.[5]

Peter "walking in the footsteps of Christ" repeats this "overlapping" idea in 2 Peter 1:11. Indeed, in 1 Peter 2:5, 9 he even more pointedly interweaves the concepts of kingdom and church reminiscent of Exodus 19:6. Here, quite pointedly the church-kingdom is the fulfilled church-kingdom, the kingdom of priests in direct fulfillment of the Old Testament type and prophecies (1 Pet. 2:6-8).

(b) Jesus' Direction that Old Testament "Church" Procedures be Followed

In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus commanded His followers to follow, i.e., to continue, the Old Testament legal procedures when faced with a problem. His command was given to Jews who were well acquainted with the Old Testament procedures and who, in the absence of any specific instruction, would have understood Him to be telling them to do what was done in the Old Testament times and in their own time, viz., ultimately to bring matters before the elders of the church. Thus in keeping with the biblical and Jewish practice, after the resurrection the apostles "ordained elders in every church" (Acts 14:23), commanded believers to submit to the elders (Heb. 13:17), and, when faced with a difficult situation, brought the matter before the elders of the church (Acts 15, cf., Deut. 17:8ff., 2 Chron. 19). This, against the background of what has just been said, again argues that the Old Testament church is continued in the New Testament as fulfilled and reconstituted.

(c) Jesus' Use of Church and Kingdom of God

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[5] This is not to deny that there is a difference between the Kingdom and the church, but this is not the place to deal with this matter more fully.

The word "church" occurs in the Old Testament (in the Septuagint) often to represent the people of Israel conceived as a worshiping community. It occurs alongside the use of the idea or word "kingdom." This latter word, and the phrase "Kingdom of God," designates the people of God conceived as a community serving God in every dimension of life except worship. When Jesus came He did not change the meaning of either of these words (phrases) but used them just as the people of His day understood them. They lived in a culture that now saw the two courts system of the Old Testament (cf., 2 Chron. 17) sitting as one court (cf., Mark 7:1-6). The Kingdom and the church functioned on one court.

Ministering while His death was imminent (Matt. 18), He laid the foundation for what was to follow His death by teaching concerning the Kingdom of God. His purpose was to teach the Jews of His day what it meant to be truly in the Kingdom of God conceived not just externally and politically but eternally (cf., Rom. 9). Many of them were in the external political kingdom but not in the eternal spiritual kingdom. He pled with them to "circumcise the foreskin of their hearts" (Duet. 10:16, cf., John 3). Before He died Jesus declared that the spiritual nature of the kingdom extended to and defined the "territory" of the kingdom (John 18:36). In Hebrews 4 this theme is developed to demonstrate that this was always the divine teaching and intention. Jesus also declared that the "church" of the fulfilled "kingdom" age was grounded upon the central theme of His entire ministry and life, viz., commitment to Christ as the anointed messianic king (Matt. 16:17-18). There is no sharp distinction here between the New Testament church and an earthly Israel as the Kingdom of heaven (cf., Heb. 12:22-28, Acts 20:25, 28:23, James 2:5).

(4) The New Testament Teaches the Church is the New Testament or "Fulfilled" Israel (Kingdom of God)

The New Testament teaches that the kingdom and Church Jesus spoke about and are what the Old Testament promised God would do, or give, to Israel. This point was addressed in the verses referenced in the concluding parenthesis of the previous paragraph.

Because the Kingdom of God is not several kingdoms, the kingdom Jesus spoke of and the kingdom believers now live in are not separate kingdoms. This is established by Romans 11. Romans 9 through 11 is the New Testament exposition and explanation of the relationship between Israel and the church. It is clearly stated that Israel after the flesh was not the true Israel (Rom. 2:26-29). The promises of God given to Israel are

not and never have been fulfilled according to natural generation but according to divine election (cf., Rom. 9:6ff.). To maintain the dispensational distinction between Israel and the church is to contradict the purposes of God and the explanation given in Romans 9-11. All Israel, the entire olive tree, will be saved. Note carefully, that Paul proposes no disruption or change of direction in God's purposes. He sees those purposes set forth in the Old Testament prophets and fulfilled in the New Testament church. He sees one kingdom or church—one olive tree. This olive tree depicts both the church external and the church spiritual. True believing Jews continue in it (Rom. 11:1-5). Unbelieving Jews will be cut out and cast away. True believing Gentiles are engrafted, and, if they are not truly believers, they will be cut out. Paul is emphatic that God had not cast away His people—after all, Paul the Jew is a believer (Rom. 11:1-6). Just as a remnant was preserved in Elijah's day, a remnant is now preserved. Israel is not now "cast away" or "cut off"—the true sons of Abraham after the flesh are preserved "according to election of grace" (vs. 6).

(5) The Old Testament Does Prophesy the "Church Age"

The second paragraph of the above citation sets forth a true proposition and a false conclusion. In one sense, it is true that the Old Testament prophets saw the suffering and glory of Christ in one horizon. However, only the dispensational scheme or something related to it denies that they did not see the "church-age." Jesus is the Davidic king who has established His kingdom and is now ruling over it and expanding it to be victorious over all His enemies (Acts 15:14-18, 1 Cor. 15). The prophets clearly saw all this as Paul, e.g., argues in Romans 9-11 (cf., 9:25-29, 33; 10:15-21; 11:8-9, 26-27).

(6) Dispensationalism Necessitates an Earthly Rule of Christ After His Second Coming

It is dispensationalism's distinction between the Israel and the church that leads them to insist on an earthly rule of Christ after His Second Coming:

> The kingdom of heaven is revealed in three aspects in Matthew: (1) As "at hand" (see 4:17 note 4), the kingdom is offered in the Person of the King, of whom John the Baptist is the forerunner (Mt. 3:1). (2) As fulfilled in the present age, the kingdom of heaven is present in seven "mysteries" (Mt. 13), revealing the character of the rule of heaven over the

earth between the first and Second Comings of the Lord. And (3) as fulfilled after the Second Coming of Christ, the kingdom of heaven will be realized in the future millennial kingdom as predicted by Daniel (Dan. 2:34-36, 44-45) and covenanted to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; see Zech. 12:8, note). This millennial form of the kingdom of heaven is wholly future and will be set up after the return of the King in glory (texts). (*New*, p. 994)

If the distinction between Israel and the church is in error this calls into question the necessity of the future millennial kingdom. A full exposition of Daniel, such as that offered by E. J. Young, establishes that Jesus has fulfilled what Daniel prophesied.[6] Young's interpretation of Daniel agrees with Luke's (cf., Luke 21:20-24 with Matt. 24:15-20). The dispensational interpretation takes away from the majesty of Christ's triumph and teaching to hold to a fulfillment of the Davidic covenant after His second return. Jesus knew of no such millennial kingdom. He taught His disciples to be ready for His return just as a home owner must always be ready for the coming of a thief (Matt. 24:42-44). The only place in the New Testament that seems to speak directly of a millennial reign of Christ is Revelation 20—and that appears at the end of a book filled with highly figurative language. This calls into question, and virtually negates the dispensational "literal" interpretation.[7]

b. The Distinction Between Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God

This distinction, clarified in new dispensationalism, is one of the keys to understanding the dispensational treatment of the preaching of Jesus. But it certainly fails the test of "Scripture as the best interpreter of Scripture." First, we note that the phrases "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God" are said to describe different, albeit related entities.

The expression "kingdom of heaven" (lit., "of the heavens"), one that is peculiar to Matthew, refers to the rule of the heavens, i.e., the rule of the God of heaven over the earth (cf. Dan. 2:44; 4:25, 32). The kingdom of heaven is similar in many respects to the kingdom of God and is often used synonymously with it, though emphasizing certain features of divine government. When contrasted with the universal kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven includes only men on

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[6] E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Eerdman's, Grand Rapids, 1964).
[7] See the remarks on J. B. Payne's treatment of dispensationalism, 166.

earth, excluding angels and other creatures. The kingdom of heaven is the earthly sphere of profession as shown by the inclusion of those designated as wheat and tares, the latter of which are cast out of the kingdom (Mt. 13:4), and is compared to a net containing both good and bad fish which are later separated (Mt. 13:47). (*New*, p. 994.)

A comparison of the use of the two phrases in Matthew and Mark-Luke demonstrates that they are closely related and are virtually synonymous. Both refer to the same thing. Although not all of the statements recorded in Matthew appear in Mark-Luke enough of them occur to demonstrate the Kingdom of God also includes "men on earth, excluding angels and other creatures", cf., the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:32-23 and Mark 4:30-32 and the parable of the tares in Matthew 13:3-23, Mark 4:3-25, Luke 8:5-18 with the interpretation in Matthew 13:26-43, and the parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20. It seems clear that the dispensational distinction is their distinction and not Scripture's.

In view of the scriptural treatment of the two phrases, it is much more reasonable to conclude that the difference is one of vocabulary rather than of substance. Matthew, writing primarily to Jews, who would be offended at the use of the word "God", ordinarily substitutes for that word the word they ordinarily substituted, viz., "heaven."

3. An Unclear, Erroneous Treatment of Grace

New dispensationalism certainly appears to make salvation depend solely on God's grace and to remove all conditions which man can fulfill. This is in contrast to the older dispensationalism that seems to propose several different "plans of salvation" in all of which salvation depends on some condition man must fulfill. Yet the attempt of the newer recension is in vain for it proposes an Arminianism (or Amyraldianism), albeit veiled, which inherently puts salvation, in the final analysis, into the hands of man. Rather than teaching that salvation is unconditionally granted by grace through faith, it is taught that salvation is received upon the "condition" (rather than circumstance) of faith.

First, the newer dispensationalism affirms that grace was present and operative both before and after Christ came:

There was grace before Christ came, as witnessed by the provision of sacrifice for sinners (texts). The difference be-tween the former age and the present age, therefore, is not a

matter of no grace and some grace, but rather that today grace reigns (Rom. 5:21), in the sense that the only Being who has a right to judge sinners (Jn. 5:22) is now seated upon a throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16), not imputing unto the world their trespasses (2 Cor. 5:19). (p. 1124.)

This citation when joined with what follows makes it appear that the concept of salvation set forth in the newer dispensationalism is Protestant and evangelical, i.e., salvation always rests on grace:

where salvation always is 'available to him (man) by God's grace through faith' and where the tests are the way faith is worked out. (*New*, p. 3.)

Nonetheless, it should be noted carefully that the citation speaks of "available" rather than "applied." Also, a fuller reading of the notes shows that this recension teaches that the reception of salvation depends on a person's faith.

…now it is clearly revealed that salvation and right-eousness are received by faith in the crucified and resurrected Savior (Jn. 1:12-13; 5:24; 1 Jn. 5:11-13)..." John 3:16 [teaches that] "The condition of the new birth is faith in Christ crucified ... (*New*, p. 1126.)

At very best the relationship between condition and the subsequent salvation is unclear and confusing even in the newer reference's notes. More careful theologians speak of faith as the instrument of justification and note that there is no condition in man for "the new birth." The confusion in dispensationalism is seen in the following statement where it clearly implied that [1] faith is the condition of the new birth (of salvation, the specific rule of conduct under the dispensation of grace) and that yet [2] it is not the condition of salvation. Perhaps it is intended to say that grace does not confer the new birth but makes it possible for man to lay hold of it. If this is the proper interpretation, then Arminianism (Amyraldianism) is set forth.

The purpose of each dispensation, then, is to place man under a specific rule of conduct, but [1] *such stewardship is not a condition of salvation*. In every past dispensation unregener-ate man has failed, and he has failed in this present dispensation and will in the future. [2] *But salvation has been and will continue to be available to him by God's grace through faith*. (Emphasis added, *New*, p. 3.)

It seems from the immediately preceding quote that the role of grace in every dispensation is to make salvation "available" so that man may

appropriate it through faith. This is confirmed by the following:

> Before the cross man was saved in prospect of Christ's atoning sacrifice, through believing the revelation thus far given him. Since the cross man has been saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ in whom revelation and redemption are consummated. (*New* p. 3.)

Biblically, the role of grace includes effecting the inner call of the Spirit, or regeneration (the new birth), so that a man being changed will believe in Christ his redeemer (1 Jn. 3:23-24, John 3:1-11). Grace does more than make salvation available. Through it God grants and applies the salvation Jesus has secured for His people, the elect (John 6:65, 37,39-40). Grace confers the new birth which includes salvation. Faith is the gift of God whereby man experientially or self-consciously lays hold of what has been applied to him.

It appears that dispensationalism is fundamentally Arminian, or at best Amyraldian, and fundamentally presents a salvation by works (we note that Jesus defines faith as a work, Jn. 6:29). One of the most central flaws in all of this is that it runs contrary to Paul's description of the human condition. In Romans 1-3 he teaches man is thoroughly unwilling and unable to gain, earn or receive by any choice on his part, the salvation God has provided in Christ. Man is unwilling to receive Christ, "there is none righteous, no not one." Man does not even understand his situation and what God has done for him, "there is none who understands." Man does not seek after God, "there is none that seeks after God." (Rom. 3:10-11) Paul teaches that men are saved not because they seek God, but because He seeks those who have not sought Him (Rom. 9:30; 10:20-21). The word of God, specifically, the promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament, are fulfilled. All God's elect (chosen) people of both New Testament and Old Testament eras are saved according to the election and calling of God (Rom. 9:6-24). The dispensational treatment of salvation does not square with Paul's view.

Thus the authors of the newer notes do not seem to have been able to divest themselves of the Arminianism upon which the entire system rests and which was so clearly set forth in the older version. In the older version human decision conditions each of the seven ways of salvation, in the newer version it conditions the one way of salvation.

4. The Literal Interpretation of Prophecy

Both old and new dispensationalism purport to interpret the Scripture "literally." This assertion implies a serious accusation against non-

dispensationalists. It charges that those who are not dispensational twist the Scripture contrary to its plain meaning. This is a false claim. Moreover, dispensationalism interprets Scripture literally only when it suits the dispensational system. Some very clear passages of Scripture are interpreted "clearly" contrary to their plain meaning. Several examples of this have already been presented above.

a. This Generation and Cosmological Signs.

Dispensationalism interprets Scripture literally when it suits their system. This means it is the system and not Scripture that elicits the interpretation.

An example of this forced "literal" interpretation will illustrate this point. The notes present a contorted understanding of Jesus "the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" and of other cosmological signs.

In Matthew 26:64-65, Jesus tells the high priest and the rest of the Sanhedrin that they would see the Son of Man sitting, etc.

> Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! (NKJV)

The high priest clearly saw in Jesus' words a claim to deity—no one questions this. But dispensationalism does question the literalness (what He said in plain words) of Jesus' statement. Dispensationalism denies that He prophesied that the members of the Sanhedrin would see Him coming on clouds of heaven, etc., and that they did see Jesus "sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven" because, the notes argue, these two phrases describe events that occur only at His Second Coming.

This dispensational interpretation of Matthew 26:64 is "forced" on its advocates by their explanation of Matthew 24:34,

> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. (NKJV)

This is another very clear prose language. There is nothing here that is difficult to understand. The words are straight forward and simple, but dispensationalists cannot take them literally because such an interpretation does not fit their system. This conclusion is evidenced in the notes, as follows:

The word `generation'..., though commonly used in Scripture of those living at one time, *could not mean those who were alive at the time of Christ* [emphasis added], as none of `these things'—i.e., the world-wide preaching of the kingdom, the tribulation, the return of the Lord in visible glory, and the regathering of the elect—occurred then. (*New*, p. 1035.)

Since the "literal" interpretation of the figurative language of Matthew 24:29-32 produces the conclusions listed between the dashes, one cannot interpret the non-figurative language of Matthew literally. The clear words (24:34) must be interpreted figuratively and the figurative words (24:29-31) must be interpreted "literally"—i.e., in accordance with dispensational conclusions.

This dispensational interpretation of Matthew 24 runs contrary to the teaching of the Lord Jesus in Luke 21:20-28 and of Peter in Acts 2. In Luke 21:20-24 Jesus speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The description is so clear that some have suggested the passage was written after the event actually occurred. The new dispensationalism does not question that He spoke of the destruction in AD 70 in Luke 21, but asserts that He spoke of the end of the age in Matthew 24. To the unbiased reader, it should be clear that Matthew 24:15ff. and Luke 21 are speaking of the same event. In Matthew Jesus speaks in the apocalyptic symbolism of Daniel and in Luke He addresses the same event in prose. If we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture it should be obvious that Daniel is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the events leading up to it. This understanding (rejected by dispensationalism) is so clear and undeniable that liberalism (unbelieving biblical scholarship) almost universally adopts it and uses it to date the origin of Daniel in the time of the Maccabees. They reason that such clear (apocalyptic) descriptions of the Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman conquests must have been written after the event. E. J. Young in his commentary on Daniel dispenses with the liberal and dispensational interpretations, and shows how clearly Daniel wrote of the entire period preceding Christ, of the coming of the Messiah, and of His victory over the kingdom(s) of man.

The dispensational bias forces the authors of the notes to see two destructions of Jerusalem prophesied by Jesus in the same words of the Olivet discourse: one in AD 70 and one at the end of the age. Furthermore, they are forced to make a sharp distinction between the time of Luke 21:20-24 and 25-28. Verses 20-24 seem to be a kind of interpolation that really does not fit well with verses 25-28. The former speak of AD 70 and the latter speak of the end of the age. Unless one is

biased by dispensationalism, it would appear that the two passages are intended to be read consecutively and as if they refer to events that happen consecutively. Such an interpretation is consistent with Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and with the Old Testament use of similar apocalyptic language.

In Acts 2 Peter cites Joel 2 (including the signs in the heavens) stating that what the Jews were seeing was "spoken through the prophet, Joel" (verse 16). This is the fulfillment of Matthew 26:64.

Furthermore, speaking of historical divine judgment and vindication in terms of various signs in the sky is consistent with the way these phrases were used in the Old Testament, cf., Isaiah 19:1; Psalm 97:2, 3; 104:3; Isaiah 34:4, 5; Ezekiel 32:7.

It can be said that, in general, dispensationalism interprets obviously symbolical and figurative (and apocalyptic) language "literally" and contrary to the intended purpose of the original author. This often forces the dispensationalists to interpret obviously prose passages figuratively (i.e., this generation shall see…).

b. Three Second Comings

Another strange result of dispensationalism's literal interpretation is that it proposes three Second Comings of Christ: one before the tribulation, one after the tribulation and before the millennium, and one after the millennium. Such an interpretation belies Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:36ff. According to Jesus, His return shall be as the coming of the flood in Noah's day. Men were warned that it was close and that they should prepare for it. Even so, in verses 42ff. Jesus taught His return would be unheralded by any signs that men could await, as if men could possibly wait to get prepared until the signs are evident. He states emphatically that men should always be prepared, from the time He departs to the time He returns. The parables in chapter 25 reinforce this teaching. Dispensationalism, however, teaches there are signs that people can see and, by implication, seeing should cause them to make preparations for the coming of Christ. Secondly, Jesus did not acknowledge there would be other "returns" between His departure and His return. The only return He acknowledged was His return at the final judgment (25:31-46).

c. The Millennial Temple

Certainly one of the saddest and most disturbing teachings of dispensationalism is that during the millennium here on earth the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem and the sacrificial system reinstituted.

Regarding Ezekiel 40-48 it is noted:

> ... the preferable interpretation is that Ezekiel gives a picture of the millennial Temple. Judging from the broad context (the time subsequent to Israel's regathering and conversion) and the testimony of other Scripture (Isa. 66; Ezek. 6; 14), this interpretation is in keeping with God's prophetic program for the millennium. The Church is not in view here, but rather it is a prophecy for the consummation of Israel's history on earth. (*New*, p. 884.)

This understanding of Scripture mitigates the once-for-all nature of Christ's atonement—its finality and sufficiency. Hebrews argues that because of Christ's sacrifice the Old Testament sacrificial system is completed and replaced, never again to be practiced on earth (Heb. 9:23-10:4).

D. Summary

Our discussion of dispensationalism has presented, compared, and evaluated old and new dispensationalism.

First, the dispensational system was surveyed as to its major tenets: the structure of redemptive history, the distinction between Israel and the Church, the distinction between law and grace, and the literal interpretation of the Bible.

Second, the two recessions of the system were compared and contrasted with respect to each tenet. We saw that although the two recessions are expressive of one system, and that there are significant differences in the first second and third tenets.

Finally, inadequacies of this system were presented in four areas when it is compared internally with itself and with the Scripture. It has problems as a structure of biblical history, in its distinction between Israel and the Church, in its view of grace, and in its "literal" hermeneutic.

As a structure of biblical history, it presents an unclear distinction between "condition" and "basis" of salvation; it denigrates and subjectivizes the significance of Christ's teaching for today; and it offers an unclear and confusing definition of "dispensation".

In addition to these general principial difficulties, this system as represented in the notes to the reference Bibles produces many ridiculous, contorted and artificial interpretations. We looked at only ten of these areas of difficulty: what the notes state concerning the second dispensation, the third dispensation, the fourth dispensation, the definition of atonement, the interpretation of Acts 15:16f., the understanding of "Seed,"

the significance of the Mosaic law, the reception of the law, the teaching of Jesus (as to the relationship between confirmation and cross, as to law and grace, as to grace and the Gospels), and the difference between dispensation and covenant.

The distinction between Israel and the church offered by dispensationalism fails the test of Scripture. It is said that the church started at Pentecost which means the church was a kind of substitute plan introduced by God when Israel (the nation) rejected their Messiah. It was demonstrated, however, that the Old Testament prophesies the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and the establishment of the church. The New Testament teaches that church government is to be an extension of Old Testament "church" government. This is established by Jesus' use of "church," His direction that Old Testament "church" procedures be followed, and His use of "church" and "Kingdom of God." It was also demonstrated that the New Testament teaches the church is the New Testament or "fulfilled" Israel, and that the Old Testament prophesies the "church age." The last point under this general division was that dispensationalism, and not what the New Testament says, necessitates an earthly rule of Christ after His Second Coming.

Similarly, the dispensatinalism distinction between "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God" does not conform to the way the synoptic Gospels use these terms. Whereas dispensationalism distinguishes between the two "Kingdoms," the Gospels use the terms synonymously.

The third major shortcoming of this system is that it arose from and has not divested itself of an unclear, erroneous treatment of grace. The newer recension attempts to ameliorate the stark Arminianism of the older version but the attempt is unsuccessful. It presents very confusing teaching regarding the relationship between faith and grace in the doctrine of soteriology.

The fourth major shortcoming of this system relates to its claim to interpret prophecy literally. Many examples could be offered from notes in the two references Bibles showing how a passage figuratively or literally contrary to what is said elsewhere in the Bible or even in the passage being considered. The following examples were given: "this generation" and cosmological signs, three Second Comings, and the millennial temple.

In conclusion, then, this examination of dispensationalism has demonstrated it is not an acceptable approach to the Bible. The Bible student must look elsewhere for a comprehensive Bible system with which to approach the Bible, i.e., a biblical theology.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS:

1. How does dispensationalism define "dispensation"?
2. How many dispensations do both old and new dispensationalism see in the Bible?
3. What is the first major distinction dispensationalism maintains?
4. From what legacy or presupposition of historic Protestant thought does dispensationalism want to "free" us?
5. According to dispensationalism, at what point in His ministry did Jesus begin to teach about the church?
6. What is the second major distinction dispensationalism maintains?
7. Define "law" and "grace".
8. To whom was the mission of Jesus primarily and how does this effect His teaching "up to the cross"?
9. What is meant by the "literal" interpretation of the Bible?
10. How do the two versions of dispensationalism differ as to the structure of biblical history?
11. How do the two versions of dispensationalism differ as to the basis of salvation in the Old Testament?
12. How many ways of salvation are there according to the old dispensationalism? According to the new dispensationalism?
13. In what way does new dispensationalism give an unclear distinction between the condition and basis of salvation?
14. In what way does dispensationalism denigrate and subjectivize the significance of Christ's teaching for today?
15. In what way does dispensationalism give an unclear and confusion definition of "dispensation"?
16. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the second dispensation?
17. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the third dispensation?
18. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the fourth dispensation?
19. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the definition of atonement?
20. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the interpretation of Acts 15:16f.?
21. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the under-

standing of "Seed"?

22. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the significance of the Mosaic law?

23. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the teaching of Jesus?

24. How are the dispensational notes confusing regarding the difference between dispensation and covenant?

25. What arguments may be offered against dispensationalism's teaching that the church began at Pentecost?

26. Why is the distinction between "the kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God" to be rejected?

27. In what way does dispensationalism give an unclear, erroneous treatment of grace?

28. Give some examples of how dispensationalism misuses the "literal interpretation" of Scripture?

Chapter 4. KINGDOM THEOLOGY:
a Presentation and Evaluation of the Biblical Theological Approach of John Bright.

Evangelicals who reject dispensationalism and covenantal theology sometimes seek to find the unity of the Scripture in the concept of the kingdom of God. Although, clearly not an evangelical, John Bright (a conservative neo-orthodox theologian) was one of the first to write about kingdom as the unifying theme of the Bible. Many evangelicals have followed him.

The evaluation of this approach to the Bible, or this biblical theology, first describes Bright's approach as set forth in his book *The Kingdom of God*[8], and then analyzes the approach.

A. The Contours of Bright's Biblical Theology
There are several distinctive points in Bright's book.

1. Kingdom is the Unifying Theme of the Bible
Bright and his generation of critical Old Testament scholars stand in contrast to previous scholars at two important points. He asserts the necessity of understanding the Bible as it presently exists and of understanding it as a unified whole.

For Bright the very existence of Christianity is at stake if the Bible is not regained as a document with meaning for today. It is to Bright's credit that he is unwilling to dismiss Christianity and is unwilling to say that Christianity has no, or little, relationship to what is in the Bible.

He notes that an important contributing factor to the virtual demise of the Bible as a meaningful book is the difficulty people have had in understanding it. This difficulty is then traced to the lack of any understandable unifying theme in the minds of those who read the Bible.

> ...many a reader will complain that the Bible is a most confusing book of unequal interest, so varied in content that he is unable to follow a line through it. Much of it is scarcely comprehensible, much is perplexing, and much plainly dull. (p. 8)

Against the background statement that unity is the key to seeing the Bible's value, he says,

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[8] *The Kingdom of God* (Abingdon: New York), 1953.

The question of the unity of Scripture must be taken seri-
ously if the Bible is to be saved from disuse and misuse.

After briefly examining several ways to gain meaning from the
Bible previously suggested by other scholars, he concludes that, for him,
the unifying theme of the Bible is the kingdom of God. Using this them
to understanding the Bible makes it comprehensible, non-perplexing and
interesting.

For the kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total
message of the Bible. (p. 7)

To grasp what the kingdom of God means is to come very
close to the heart of the Bible's gospel of salvation. (p. 7)

...there runs through it (the Bible) a unifying theme which
is not artificially imposed. It is the theme of redemption, of
salvation; and it is caught up particularly in those concepts
which revolve about the idea of a people of God, called to live
under his rule, and the concomitant hope of the coming
kingdom of God. This is a note, which is present in Israel's
faith from earliest times onward, and which is found, in one
way or another, in virtually every part of the Old Testament.
It also unbreakably links Old Testament to New. (p. 11)

Bright issues a significant caution a caution about the inadequacy of
his "unifying theme":

It is impossible to subsume all that the Bible has to say
under a single catchword... (p. 11)

2. This Theme is Rooted in the Mosaic Covenant

Bright develops this kingdom principle in the second chapter of his
book. In the course of his discussion he enunciates several subpoints
which lay bare significant elements of his thought.

He begins by noting how central this theme is to the preaching of
Jesus,

So paramount, in fact, was the notion of the kingdom of
God in the mind of Jesus that one can scarcely grasp his
meaning at all without some understanding of it. (p. 17)

If the teachings of Jesus are to be understood this concept must be
understood, but Jesus did not explicitly define it. He assumed his
audience understood the idea. Indeed, the idea permeates their holy book
(the Old Testament). So, it is there that Bright points us to gain a
definition of the concept.

As he begins his analysis of the idea in the Bible by offering several definitions and principles which resulted from his study.

First, the concept "the kingdom of God,"

> Involves the whole notion of the rule of God over his people and particularly the vindication of that rule of God over his people, and of that rule and people in glory at the end of history (p. 18)

Second, the messianic hope in Israel involved a,

> Redeemer, or messiah, who should establish the kingdom of God victoriously. (p. 18)

Third, the subject of the kingdom of God is as wide as the entire eschatological hope of Israel.

> For the hope of Israel was the hope of the coming kingdom of God. (p. 18)

3. This Theme is Traced Throughout the Bible

Having introduced the general conclusions of his work, Bright traces his thinking through the Bible, i.e., he works out his biblical theology. In doing this his neo-orthodox assumptions operate as his fundamental, ever present hermeneutic. Of course, an evangelical would attempt to separate the theology of the kingdom from neo-orthodoxy.

The first major division of "biblical history" is the Mosaic period. It is to this period that Bright traces the origin of Israel as a people. True to his neo-orthodox assumptions, he views the exodus in terms of the critical conclusions contemporary to his own day. Particularly, he offers H. H. Rowley's view of the exodus.

The significant thing about Bright's analysis, however, is his biblical-theological conclusions so the following presentation focuses there.

a. The Uniqueness of Israel's Religion: Monotheism, Election, and the kingdom of God

First, the origin and contours of Israel's religion itself are set forth for in this religion lies the source of the concept of the kingdom of God. Bright sees Israel's religion as truly unique,

> ... a religion the like of which had never been seen on earth before. Israel's faith was a drastic and, one might say a rationally inexplicable break with ancient paganism. (p. 24)

Bright sees two major themes in Israel's religion at this early time: it was monotheistic and historical. It was monotheistic in the sense that,

God both could and did control the events of history that in them he might reveal his righteous judgment and saving power. (p. 25)

It was historical in the sense that Israel was convinced that God controls all nature and history and,

in them reveals his righteous will and summons men to obey it. (p. 26)

Furthermore, Israel was

... convinced God has chosen her, entered into covenant with her, and made her his people. (p. 27)

This conviction permeated Israel's history from the beginning and the people were saturated with it throughout their history. Even the prophets of doom could not shake their conviction. Bright shows how this conviction influenced and molded their entire history.

Bright's summary of his thinking on this earliest period of biblical revelation is:

Covenant concluded at Sinai could, then, be understood in Hebrew theology as a response to grace: man's *hesed* for God's *hesed*. ... The notion of a people of God, called to live under the rule of God begins just here, and with it the notion of the kingdom [sic] of God. (p. 28)

b. The Dynamic of Israel's Religion: Morality and kingdom

Next, Bright focuses on the nature of the tremendously dynamic and creative ideas originating with the Mosaic covenant/bond. Especially important in this regard is that these ideas included a deeply moral note— Israel was called to obey God, and if she did not obey, she would be judged. So, Israel's status as God's chosen people was morally conditioned,

God would give Israel a destiny as his people, would defend and establish her, but only so long as she obeyed him. (p. 29)

All of this worked an undying dynamic in Israel. It gave her a tremendous sense of destiny and an undying confidence. Israel's (the popular) faith was eschatological in orientation, a "confidence that events are moving toward a destination" (p. 30).

c. The Crisis of the "kingdom of God": Moral-kingdom and State-kingdom

Bright sees a crisis of these ideas regarding the kingdom of God. In earliest Israel, the period of the exodus and of the judges, the kingdom of God was an amphictyony (a tribal confederacy bound together by a religious covenant). This tribal theocracy was tenacious but slowly gave way to the kingdom principle. Under the influence of kingdom principle there arose a new idea, a new social structure, in the principle of leadership. Now the principle by which leaders were chosen, was their charisma or ability to lead rather than their tribal birthright. Eventually and gradually, the threat imposed by the Philistines brought a change in the concept of the kingdom so that leadership now became attached to the state, and to a standing army. Consequently, leaders did not arise charismatically but by succession, i.e., by being born into a royal family. The first two kings, Saul and David were chosen on the basis of their charisma, but thereafter, for the most part, leaders were born into the leadership position. Unlike prior purely charismatic leaders, however, both of these men were strongly aided by a private army in gaining and maintaining their positions.

Soon Israel began to be transformed from a loosely organized tribal confederacy into a highly organized nation. Solomon furthered this process. All of this effected a change; the people of God became the kingdom of God, the citizens of the Davidic state (p. 39). As charisma gave way to dynasty Israel became a highly complex organized society, the state. Tension developed between the simplicity of tribalism and complexity of statism.

Under David and Solomon Israel experienced a golden age. Eventually, this golden age became an ideal. Thereafter, Israel looked back to the Davidic ideal and forward to its future rebirth. Hence, there arose the messianic ideal.

> But with the development of this ideal came a mortal danger viz., to make religion the servant of the state:
>
> Would Israel succumb to it wholly? Would her sense of destiny as the people of God be transferred lock, stock, and barrel to the state? ...would Israel mistake the Davidic state for God's, and imagine that in it God had established his kingdom? (p. 43)

Thus there existed two parallel and intertwined concepts of the kingdom of God: (1) the moral, spiritual idea, and (2) the earthly statist idea.

d. The Reinterpretation of the Hope: The Ideal of the Messianic

State

During the great degeneration of Amos' day, the state as kingdom and as moral kingdom became sharply contrasted. The Israelites were convinced they were the kingdom of God, the chosen people of God. The prophets' attempted to purge the state and make it conform to the moral ideal. Amos, however, dismissed the state as the kingdom and pronounced doom on it. Only Amos and a few others came to this conclusion at this time.

Later, the northern kingdom/state disappeared and then, the southern kingdom. During this same period, as it became widely accepted that the state would not fulfill the ideal, the prophets spoke more clearly and often about the idea of a remnant that would be saved. This was coupled with the idea of a Messiah prince of the line of David. Now the hope of the kingdom of God was more widely divorced from state and projected upon the ideal state of the Messiah. All of the prophets during this period were of this opinion.

The destruction and captivity of the state proved its total inability to be the kingdom. Judah was out of the picture as the possible kingdom of God. Hence, Israel's hope had to be reinterpreted. The prophets of the pre-exilic and early exilic period, therefore, spoke of a new covenant, a new/spiritual Israel, and a new start.

In Bright's words,

> (1)   The house of Judah fell never again to rise, and with it all hope that it could ever be the Kingdom [sic] of God ruled over and protected by God.

> (2)   The hope for the establishment of God's people under his rule had, therefore, either to be given up or reinterpreted in terms of something more spiritual and more enduring than the state. This last is, of course, precisely what generations of prophetic preaching—culminating in Jeremiah and Ezekiel—had been doing. True, the Exile was a withering blow to popular expectations. (p. 116)

e. The Reformulation of Israel's Religion: The Suffering Servant

The destruction of the idea of the state as the kingdom of God did not destroy Israel's hope. By now that faith was eschatological to its core. Their God would accomplish His purposes in history.

During the heart of the exilic period the prophet Bright identifies as the "Second Isaiah" (the author of Isaiah 40-65) extended the remnant idea and absolute monotheism. This Second Isaiah set forth two other major

ideas: God will rule over the whole world, and the Suffering Servant would bring victory through suffering.

The pre-exilic and exilic prophets saw the exile as God's righteous judgment on Israel. Their messages prepared for the day when externalities would be gone. They saw the essence of religion as being obedience and rectitude. This concept of the essence of true religion gave rise to an interest in the law. The Suffering Servant, the Servant of God, idea introduced by Second Isaiah included the worldwide rule of God achieved through the obedience of His people, the Jews were to spread this rule. As Bright says,

> We have also seen how the great prophet of the period, whom we know as Second Isaiah, transfigured that hope, laying before Israel the promise of a new beginning and challenging her with a great new mission. Israel is to be the Servant of God, by missionary labor and willing sacrifice to be the agent of establishing his rule to the ends of the earth; she is to bring people of all the nations of the earth into the Kingdom of God. p. 156

f. The Rise of Apocalyptic and Judaism

Israel, however, did not pick up on the idea that she was the suffering servant called by God to extend His kingdom over the entire world. This went against the age-old idea that she was God's chosen people. It would mean the total lose of her identity. It would plunge her into direct contact with the hated Gentiles and would mean she would have to seek to win them to the kingdom.

Rather, Israel's response to the idea of a moral kingdom gave rise to apocalyptic. This way of thinking saw the character of the kingdom as totally future, and its introduction as effected totally by supernatural means—the intervention of God into history. Judaism was a parallel development to apocalypticism. In Judaism human obedience to the law was seen as the means of introducing the kingdom and the vision of the people was turned inward upon themselves and their obedience rather then outward as Isaiah had preached.

g. The Realization of Israel's Hope: Christ the King

All of what precedes concerning the development of the kingdom of God comes to expression in Jesus Christ—this is the consistent message of the New Testament. As Bright says,

The New Testament announces with one voice and with unshakable assurance that all the hope of Israel has become present fact in Jesus Christ. It makes this assertion because it believed that in him the promised Messiah had come. (p. 215)

Bright sees the Old Testament as the building, the New Testament as the roof. He states that the two are organically locked together. He notes that what the Old Testament says in the future tense, i.e., "the kingdom will come", the New Testament says in the present tense, i.e., "the kingdom is come".

The message of the New Testament, therefore, both rests undeniably upon the Old Testament and upon Jesus' own preaching:

The position has been taken in the preceding chapter that the New Testament so asserts because Jesus himself so believed and so claimed; it has also been contended that if Jesus was not accepted as Messiah by the Jews—and it is obvious that he was not—it was because he came as a strange Messiah and not the expected one. (p. 215)

Jesus "strangeness" consisted primarily in His depicting His "messiahship" in terms not of the popular messianic patterns but that of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh.

He consciously and intentionally adopted that pattern as his own, and, suffusing the other messianic patterns with it, he announced the fulfillment of the prophetic hope of Israel in the form of a Redeemer who must suffer. (p. 215)

h.   The Significance of the Bible

Now Bright comes to the primary purpose of his study—to set forth a picture of the Bible that will enable ordinary members of churches to regain meaning from the Bible. His position is that the kingdom both came and was present in Jesus Christ, and that it has not yet come:

The New Testament church ... stood in a peculiar mid-position between what had been done and what was awaited, between the present age which was dying and the new age struggling to be born. (p. 244)

In Christ the kingdom was present not in signs and wonders but,

In the mighty works of Jesus the power of that Kingdom has broken into the world; Satan has met his match...; the cosmic end-struggle has begun. (p. 218)

The breaking-in or entrance of the kingdom into the world places a religious and moral responsibility upon all men. They are called to serve in that kingdom.

> For the Kingdom is no empty domain, so many square miles of territory with geographical frontiers—it is people. (p. 219)

Christ calls men to the kingdom. His call is:

> "a call to total and radical obedience, to an utterly impossible righteousness, to be perfect as God is perfect ...: in short, a call to the righteousness of the Kingdom of God to which no man can attain, yet to which he may give the answer of faith."

> For the true Israel—the true people of the Kingdom—are not those who are Israelites by race, nor yet those who are of that elite group in Israel who know and keep an external law, but those individual men, however lowly and weak, who have in heart and deed signified their obedience to the calling of God. (p. 220)

Service in the kingdom means that men must be obedient to God's commands, i.e., service involves a system of living, an ethic. In contrast to old liberal ethics that maintained Christian obedience was to be carried out within the state, Bright says Christian obedience is to be carried out within the church (yet he does not equate the visible church with the kingdom of God, p. 236). For Bright the content of this Christian ethic appears to be little more than old liberal ethics minus the old liberal program (statism). For Bright, Christian ethics aims not at a reformation of society but at the reformation of individual men. This is a reformation to be accomplished in the present time and not in some millennial age.

> For in New Testament theology the Kingdom of God is not only the goal of all history and the reward of all believers, not only the norm by which all human behavior is judged, it is a new order which even now bursts in upon the present one and summons men to be its people. It demands response, and that response is obedience and righteousness here and now. Christ intended his followers to live each day in the light of the Kingdom which is intruding into the world, to live each day as if the end were tomorrow. It is a call to "eschatological living….

> Therefore the church is the fulfillment of the remnant. (p. 225).

> It is Israel according to the spirit, the true heir of Israel's

hope," (p. 226), "the people of the covenant. (p. 228)

> Not only did/does the church stand between two worlds it, was confident that the victory over all the dark powers of the old aeon had been won in Christ, so much so that the Kingdom of God could be spoken of as a present thing. (p. 244)

The confidence of the church rested on an undying hope—the same hope that sustained the Old Testament people of God for centuries. The kingdom had to and would come in its power:

> Yet it was all too painfully aware that that Kingdom remained an unconsummated thing of the future which had yet to come in its power. In tension between the two the New Testament church lived and waited. It was a tension between victory won and the victory anything but won, between the Kingdom which is at hand and the Kingdom unseen and unrealized, between the power of God and the power of Caesar, between the church militant and suffering and the Church triumphant. (p. 244)

B.   The Positive Aspects of Bright's Biblical Theology

1. It Seeks to Unify the Bible

It is significant that Bright seeks to unify the Bible. The church he saw is loosing the Bible and, consequently, is in danger of loosing its very existence. By showing the unity of the Bible, he expresses his genuine concern to preserve Christianity in an age when it appears to be passing into history. The liberal theologians and churches had virtually given up any uniqueness in Christianity. Furthermore, in pursuing his goal of helping the church to regain its roots (as expressed in the Bible) and preserve its future, he rejects much of the past liberal biblical scholarship (which to him was, no doubt, the only "scholarship") which saw no unity and no real significance or meaning in the Bible.

One can heartily agree in general with Bright's analysis of the unity in the Bible:

(1) the Old Testament is the building; the New Testament is the roof,

(2) the Old Testament and the New Testament are organically locked together,

(3) the Old Testament speaks in the future tense—"the kingdom will come"; the New Testament speaks in the present tense—"the kingdom is come".

2. It Stipulates that God Approaches History Morally

Bright rightly affirms that God controls history to reveal His righteous judgment and saving power. With these and similar statements Bright demonstrates he believes God is a personal being. Yet, it is not very clear what he believes about the nature of God's other attributes. Similarly, although Bright says God controls history, the idea "control" is not clearly defined.

However, upon the background of his neo-orthodox position (which he clearly assumes throughout the book), the idea of "control" should be seen as thoroughly in the realm of the noumenal. God does not enter history to control it. Nor does He contravene the "laws of nature." So "control" has to do with the flow of man's religious experience and not with the flow of space-time reality. Hence, while one should commend Bright's teaching that God does control history, yet one should be careful to distinguish between an orthodox understanding of such a statement and the neo-orthodox position of Bright.

3. It Recognizes that God Holds Man Accountable to Obey His Righteous Will

Another positive and encouraging thing Bright espouses is that God summons men to obey His righteous will. Unfortunately, "His righteous will" is not defined very clearly in the book. Evangelicals would identify "His righteous will" with the propositional content of the Bible. It is not at all certain Bright would do so. (See C. 1. below) On the contrary, neo-orthodoxy defines revelation in terms of relationships other than in terms of propositional statements. The revelatory content lies behind the statements of the Bible rather than being expressed in and by the statements themselves.

4. It Recognizes the "Already-not-Yet" Nature of the Kingdom

Bright correctly sees the nature of the kingdom as it is presented in the New Testament as already present, but not yet present. He correctly points out that the church lives between two worlds.

5. It Accepts the Pervasiveness of the Edenic Theme

Bright points the reader to the edenic theme in the Bible. One might wonder about the definition of "theme"—just exactly what this means. But it appears that to Bright the teaching concerning edenic rest appears at a number of places throughout the Bible—he traces this theme at one point in his book. This theme appears, for example, in the Old Testament

creation story (unfortunately, Bright does not view this as a report of what happened but as a story created to explain what now appears) and exodus themes worked into Isaiah (p. 140). Along somewhat the same line, Bright correctly relates the Abrahamic and edenic peace (p. 142-143).

6. It Recognizes that God Will Bring the Kingdom Sovereignly

Bright states that God is sovereign and will bring His kingdom, "The kingdom is not man's creation" (p. 169). All too many Christians deny this obvious teaching of Scripture, and in some way or the other make the coming of the kingdom dependent on human effort. Certainly Bright makes a great break with the liberalism that preceded him insofar as they taught that the entrance of the kingdom was initiated and effected by human effort.

7. It Gives Proper Significance to the Miracles of Jesus

Bright states that miracles were not simply signs and wonders but the results of the presence of the kingdom in Christ, "In the mighty works of Jesus the power of that kingdom has broken into the world; Satan has met his match...; the cosmic end-struggle has begun" (p. 218). Of course, one should be aware that Bright's neo-orthodoxy does not allow him to see the miracles as events occurring within the space-time continuum. His philosophical-theological predisposition leads him to see the miracles as the *results* of the presence of the kingdom. He does not detail how his predisposition works itself out at this point, but were he pressed there is good reason to think even *results* would be defined in terms which would sound strange to the evangelical ear. Accepting his words at face value, however, gives one a good understanding of Christ's miracles. They were not simply signs and wonders (amazing acts to draw attention or prove something) but the results of the presence of the kingdom in Christ (where God is present the power of God is present).

8. It Acknowledges the New Testament Church is Israel

Bright's kingdom theology, in contras to dispensationalism, sees the unity of the Bible in its teaching not in its structure. Specifically, it sees the message of the New Testament as the direct fulfillment of what was set forth in the Old Testament. As pointed out above, Bright sees the church as the fulfillment of the remnant idea (p. 225). Israel according to the spirit is the true heir of Israel's hope (p. 226), the people of the covenant. (p. 228)

C.   The Negative Aspects of Bright's Biblical Theology

1. It is Based on Neo-Orthodoxy

Bright's fundamental theological assumptions and working principles are those of neo-orthodoxy. These assumptions and principles are seen in the way he speaks of biblical literature and faith. The uninformed and unsuspecting evangelical who reads Bright will be perplexed by the way he seems to jump from statements that appear to be agreeable to statements that are totally objectionable, from orthodoxy to heterodoxy.

First, he accepts the higher critical view of the Bible. Consequently, he sees the Pentateuch as neither the oldest biblical document (he sees it as a compiled document arising from several independent documents or sources) nor as uniformly and without contradiction reporting events and ideas of the oldest biblical period. (p. 26)

Secondly, he accepts the critical understanding of the Exodus. Evangelicals believe the biblical record accurately reports what happened. So, they believe the children of Israel, consisting of a very large number of individuals, left Egypt *en masse* and journeyed through the wilderness to Sinai, and then through the wilderness into Palestine. They entered as a large group crossing the Jordan just above the Dead Sea. They settled the interior of the land attacking, sometimes burning, and conquering certain cities named in the biblical record.

Bright, however, assumes in his work and states in a footnote that the position of H. H. Rowley is to be accepted. According to this position, the Exodus was an historical event but did not occur as the Bible reports it—the account in the Bible has only a kernel of truth. A very small group of people left Egypt where they had been slaves. They wandered through the desert and eventually entered Palestine. During the same general period many other small groups were entering Palestine from all directions. Eventually, many of these "invaders" united with the original group and became identified as a single people. According to Rowley and Bright, the original small group had some kind of experience before entering Palestine by which they had a genuinely religious experience with God. They interpreted this experience in terms of a covenant and Mt. Sinai. Eventually, those other "absorbed" peoples accepted Israel's religion and God. As Bright remarks,

> As Israel absorbed new blood into her tribal structure, the
> Exodus tradition extended itself and became normative for all,
> even for those whose ancestors had not participated in the

Exodus. (p. 28)

Again, in keeping with his neo-orthodox concepts of divine revelation, Bright assumes revelation is personal rather than propositional. Hence, he speaks of God as if He changes His word. There appears to be no unity in the "revelation" (what the Bible says) of the nature of the kingdom: (1) in the earliest period (the period of Moses) the kingdom was amphictyonic (a loose confederacy), its purpose was military/ defensive, its unity existed in a "covenant" (or religious bond) structure, and it chose its leaders according to their charisma or leadership ability. This appears to be "the word of God" at that time. (2) With the coming of the monarchy the kingdom structure became considerably more complex, the leadership was chosen by succession, and religion came to be the servant of the state. According to Bright, this was the "Word of God" for that time. (3) Eventually the idea of the kingdom was projected onto an eschatological grid.

Thus, a la Hegel, there is (1) a thesis and (2) an antithesis. Out of this dichotomy there grew (3) the synthesis anticipated by certain of the prophets and realized in Jesus Christ. Bright shows he has divested himself of some of the previous critical positions but has basically retained their Hegelian philosophy of history.

Consistent with his critical position, Bright sees no unity in the prophetic message. Some of the recorded prophetic messages form a consistent, albeit developing unity. However, Bright proposes that some of the early prophets still saw the state of Judah, once purified, as being the kingdom of God. Others held to a purely "moral" kingdom. Between these thoughts, some *prophets* wavered. Zechariah and others thought remnant theology was fulfilled in those who returned from the exile and that the kingdom was about to be set up (p. 166). To this, Bright contrasts still other prophets such as Daniel who viewed the kingdom apocalyptically.

Bright never really deals directly with how Christ relates to all this; but since he does see Jesus as the fulfillment, the crown of the Old Testament, he must see Jesus as related to all that precedes. His discussion of Jesus, on the other hand, does appear to say that in Jesus the state-kingdom concept is declared wrong and the moral-kingdom declared right.

Second, for Bright faith is relational and not propositional. Hence, it does not disturb "faith" that "revelation" is non-propositional. Although this is never stated, it is assumed on every page. The evangelical sees faith as both relational and as immersed directly in the space-time

continuum insofar as it is defined and set forth in propositional revelation whereas neo-orthodoxy sees faith totally as having to do with the supratemporal (in the sense of "noumenal" – the internal experiencing of man). To neo-orthodoxy, when faith becomes temporalized (words) it ceases to be true faith. Hence, for Bright the propositions of the Bible are propositions of men who had true faith. The fact that they do not all agree as to the propositional content of faith does not mean they disagree as to faith itself. That is, what is significant is that they agree as to faith itself.

So, for Bright, in Jesus Christ faith is only relational. One relates to the person Christ and not to the propositions about that person. The kingdom He introduced is a moral, or relational, kingdom. Hence, the kingdom finds its expression in ethics, or relationships, but theology (propositions) about sin and the atonement, about entering the kingdom by grace through faith in the resurrected Jesus, is not discussed by Bright.

So, Bright can say things like,

> …far more important than the actual events is the inter-pretation Israel laid upon them in the light of her faith. (p. 28)

> …revelation is always organic to the life of the people. (p. 19)

He also says that it is the flow of history and nature and one's personal experience thereof that,

> …reveals his (God's) righteous will and summons men to obey it. (p. 26)

2. It Starts History with Moses

Bright sees the "roots" of kingdom in the Mosaic idea of the "people of God" and their election. It is a Mosaic idea and not simply a revelation given by God to Moses and recorded faithfully. The evangelical wonders what happened to "all Scripture is inspired of God" (2 Tim. 3:16) and "holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), and to the Garden of Eden and the divine command that Adam rule it as God's vice-regent. What happened to the assertion of divine sovereignty with the implied conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman and with the assumption that the seed of the woman should submit to the sovereign rule of God, i.e., that they are God's kingdom, etc.? The Bible represents the "roots" of the kingdom of God (both as an idea and as a historical reality) as divinely revealed from heaven, as originating in the Garden of Eden, and views all that follows as a sequence to and divine working out of that kingdom-election idea.

3. It Offers no Content to Divine Will

Bright sounds correct when he says God summons men to obey His righteous will. However, one has a real problem in understanding just what that will is. It does not appear to be Old Testament law but Jesus' law. This law, moreover, appears to be totally separate not only from Old Testament law but from the biblical report of Jesus' teachings. It appears to be non-propositional insofar as the propositions of the Bible are concerned. The content of this law appears to be defined by man's experience with God. One hears the echoes of old liberal "law." It is of more than passing interest that much of what one hears in contemporary evangelical theology, especially among those who tend to use Bright's approach to biblical theology, not only divorces biblical law from the Old Testament but is sounding more and more like the "Christian socialism" of old liberalism.

4. It Misunderstands the Nature of the Covenant of Grace

According to Bright, the covenant/bond is seen as neither mechanical nor eternal but bilateral (p. 29). (1) Biblically, the covenant Israel lived under was not a covenant they made with each other. Bright, on the other hand, suggests it was a covenant among men when he discusses early Israel as an "amphictyony." (2) Biblically speaking, the covenant God makes with man is unilateral. It is not a co-operative venture between God and man. Rather, it is God unilaterally stating and accomplishing the foundational requirements and promises of the covenant, and God unilaterally imposing this covenant on man. It is a covenant of grace. This is not to deny that the covenant places requirements of obedience upon men and that man's obedience meets with God's approval and blessing. These elements, however, are not foundational but related to what might be conceived as the superstructure of the covenant.

5. It Misunderstands the Significance of the Monarchy

Bright's analysis of the significance of the pre-history, introduction, and nature of the monarchy certainly deserves considerable improvement.

First, the covenant Israel lived under was not a "covenant" resulting from a mutual agreement among men for their own self-interested purposes. Rather it was a covenant divinely imposed. God determined its origin, its structure and its recipients.

Second, during the period preceding the monarchy Israel was not an amphictyony. Amphictyony was (perhaps) the way the early Greeks (c. 600 BC) related to each other, but it is not the way the Israelites related to

each other in 1400 BC and thereafter. They were God's covenantal people divinely and covenantally united as a whole society. They were not a loose confederation, but a tightly knit group religiously decentralized politically. After they settled in Palestine, they became relatively decentralized politically. Differences grew and so did misunderstandings and disloyalty to the covenant they had all pledged to uphold.

Third, during the period from Moses to Saul, God was their King. He provided the "standing army" (the Angel of the Lord, and the hosts of heaven) so essential to their continued existence, but He did so on the condition of their obedience to His prestated law. The people wanted a human king because it meant they did not have to submit to divine rule in order to enjoy divine protection (blessings), cf., 1 Samuel 8. Later, David was received by God not because the people wanted a king but because it was in keeping with God's purpose and plan.

Fourth, leaders in the period of the judges were chosen by God, not by man—the Spirit of God rested upon them and made them leaders, they were not leaders because of their personal charisma. The Bible clearly states the Spirit of God was upon the leaders of that day.

Fifth, Jesus was the perfect king. He was not "king" because of His charisma but because He was the promised Messiah, the son of David, the Son of God. Deity, being the eternal King, and "succession," being the promised son of David, not charisma were the basis of His kingship. The Spirit of God rested on Him because He was the beloved Son well pleasing to the Father.

6. It Misunderstands the Origin and, Therefore, the Idea of Remnant

Bright concludes that the prophets introduced the remnant idea (i.e., election). A proper biblical theology sees this idea introduced in the protevangelium (Gen. 3:15) and developed thereafter throughout the Bible. Bright's position divests the biblical revelation of this basic concept dominating God's relationship with man from the time of the fall. Consequently, it separates election from sin, and remnant from election. Whatever Bright's view of sin it is not related to the fall of man in the space-time Eden. He relates election and the origin of the idea to the Messianic idea and to the Mosaic period.

7. It Misunderstands the Origin and Idea of the Suffering Servant

Bright affirms that "Second Isaiah" introduced the Suffering Servant idea. One immediately rejects the idea of a Second Isaiah (if he

understands what this is). Those who are aware of the work of Dr. E. J. Young will recall his strong arguments demonstrating how wrong this critical position is on the basis of reasonable arguments.[9] Although the true evangelical does not hinge his belief in the integrity of the Bible on such rational arguments, such arguments do provide supporting material for our presupposed position.

The Suffering Servant idea like the remnant idea was introduced in the protevangelium (Gen. 3:15). There the Seed of the woman would destroy the serpent but first the serpent would wound Him. Through this "wounding" He would obtain victory over the serpent and for His people (the seed of the woman).

8. It Misunderstands the Role of Apocalyptic

Bright sees the "Apocalyptic" idea of the kingdom (state religion) as a "common people's" or popular idea. More recent critical scholarship has concluded that apocalyptic was the special possession of the Pharisaical schools and not known by the general public of that day. The correct conclusion, no doubt, lies somewhere between the two extremes. In view of the fact that some of the Old Testament canon contains apocalyptic writing and was read by the common people, it seems evident that they knew apocalyptic thought. On the other hand, the Pharisees appear to have perpetuated a body of oral "secret" teaching that may have been apocalyptic in nature, but this is not the origin of the Old Testament apocalyptic materials. Hence, apocalyptic did not express the popular or pharisaical belief, but what God intended and He chose to put His message in apocalyptic terms.

9. It Minimizes Sin and Redemption

Bright's position minimizes sin and redemption from sin—some of the central concepts of biblical theology. There is very little said about sin in the entire book. There is little said about the Messiah who would redeem His people from their sin. Almost nothing is said about the rule of God verses the rule of sin/Satan.

10. It Does Not Give an Adequate Definition of Kingdom

Bright offers very little in the way of a concrete definition of the kingdom of God. The biblical idea specifies the nature and content of obedience under the rule of God. The reader of the Bible comes away

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[9] E.J. Young, *Who Wrote Isaiah?* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1958)

with a clear idea of the sovereignty of God with respect to one's personal living and a long list of do's and don'ts which relate to every aspect of one's personality and life-style. The reader of Bright comes away with a lot of generalities but little real practical directions.

11. It Does not Clearly Distinguish Between God's Rule and Reign

Bright offers no clear-cut distinction between the rule and reign of God. The rule of God has to do with the over-all sovereignty of God while "reign" has to do with the relationship He sustains toward His people. In not making this clear Bright does not deal with the relationship between God's sovereignty over the creation as a whole and His sovereignty over His people in particular. Furthermore, nowhere in his book does he integrate the reign of God in the absence of an earthly king and the reign of God in the presence of an earthly king. He presents the two as opposing ideas rather than seeing the second as a promised (Deut. 17) and necessary development of the first.

D. The Problems of Kingdom Biblical Theology in General

1. If Taken as the Theme of the Bible, it Minimizes the Priestly Theme

One of the clearest teachings of the Bible is the separation of the ideas of king and priest. These two ideas are often found in a single passage such as Genesis 14 (Melchizedek) but they remain two separate ideas. The king exercises the rule of God over His people. The priest brings the people before God in worship. The law revealed through Moses and the Old Testament writing prophets maintain this same distinction. Under the Mosaic Law and thereafter there is a strict distinction and separation of church (priesthood) and state (kingdom) in the Old Testament.

2. If Seen as the Unifying Theme of the Bible it Minimizes the Idea of King

The idea of King as a regent (reign rather than rule) is not to be defined by the idea of kingdom of God but that of King defines the idea of kingdom of God. The biblical idea of the kingdom of God relates first to the reign of God (the King) over His people. Wherever the idea of God the King appears, the idea of the kingdom of God appears. "Kingdom of

God" defines the circumstance wherein a people is in covenant with God—it appears wherever the idea of covenant appears. Second, the "kingdom of God" is not explicitly mentioned textually until the time of Moses. From Abraham to Moses God's people are not called a kingdom but a people. Third, from the time of Moses until the establishing of Israel and a kingdom, the idea kingdom consisted primarily of the divine King and His rule over a people directly, and through His law and various vice-regents. Fourth, the uniqueness of the Old Testament use of the phrase "kingdom of God" as it is used from the time of Saul onward, lies in three distinctives: the presence of an existing body of law by which the people corporately express their citizenship in the kingdom, the existence of a king who provides military protection in the form of a standing army, and the possession of a territory or kingdom in which the citizenry lives.

The universal reign of God was not realized on earth after the fall, but His localized reign over Israel began in Egypt as the prelude to the exodus. Hence, if kingdom is taken as the unifying theme of the Bible there is a long period of history reported in the Bible not covered by the idea, viz., the period before Moses and the period after the destruction of the Judah (the southern kingdom).

This minimizes the idea of king insofar as where there is no kingdom-reign, there is no king, or at least there is no sovereign King. If the kingdom of God is defined in biblical terms relating to the use of the word "kingdom" as it relates to God, then for a long time God was King without a kingdom. How sovereign is a king who has no kingdom?

This problem disappears if the kingdom is defined both (1) lexicographically and (2) theologically. (1) By "lexicographically" we mean "according to the express mention of the words or phrases 'kingdom', 'kingdom of Israel', and 'kingdom of God'." In these instances, the kingdom is the reign of God over His people. This implies the three things just listed above. (2) By "theologically" we mean "according to deduction from biblical teaching". Used this way, the concept relates to what the Sovereign is and does. Of course, it employs the earthly analogy of "king" as adjusted by what the biblical texts say God the Sovereign is and does. In this instance, the kingdom is the rule of God over all creation. Here there is no specific written law declared publicly in the presence of those over whom the Sovereign rules, no territory in which men are self-consciously pledged to submission to His rule, and no territory distinct from any other territory which God pledges to protect and preserve as the resting-place for His subjects.

If one defines kingdom both textually and theologically then the

biblical idea of the kingdom of God does not constitute the unifying theme of the Bible. Furthermore, the idea of kingdom of God must be defined in terms of God and not the other way around as Bright seems to do.

3. It Does not Account for Priestly Development

This is a corollary of point number one above. The book of Hebrews establishes this point (i.e., point number 3) because there is no attempt there to trace the idea of priesthood (and its development) to the idea of kingdom or even to the idea king. This is true even though (1) the idea of kingdom-rule is declared in chapter 1 and (2) the ideas of king and priest are united in the figure of Melchizedek (chapter 7). The idea of priesthood (in Hebrews) and the idea of king as it relates to kingdom and kingdom of God (in Matthew and the writings of Paul) are all traced to covenant (e.g., Luke 1:46-55, Eph. 2:11ff.).

4. As the Unifying Principle of the Bible, it Gives Only Superficial Unity to Scripture.

This is reflected in Bright's conclusion that hope and rule rather than redemption are the central themes of the Bible. The idea of the kingdom of God puts the idea of redemption in the background. This, of course, is related to points one and three above.

"Kingdom of God" gives only superficial unity to the Bible and its teaching of the foundation in the eternal decrees of God. Where does the unity really lie if the biblical message is viewed from eternity? Did God decree His rule to exhibit His glory or did He decree redemption to exhibit His glory? Perhaps another question will help to focus the issue: how central is Suffering Servant to the idea of rule? If the paradigm of rule-reign is God's rule in heaven it should be self-evident that rule-reign has nothing to do with suffering. Therefore, since the heavenly King does not suffer, the Suffering Servant idea is attached to redemption first—not to kingdom. It is a temporally triggered (its origin lies in God's eternal decree) addition to the idea of kingship (a pre-fall reality) which is necessitated by the entrance of sin. After the fall the message of the Bible is a message to sinners, a message whose contours suit time. The decrees of God relating to man are decrees relating both to redemption and to rule. The two ideas are corollaries. One does not include the other. Prior to the fall of man there was divine rule in the Garden of Eden, but not redemption. Kingship and Priesthood (together with the office of Prophet) imply and necessitate a broader category under which they are paralleled, integrated and properly related.

5. As the Unifying Principle of the Bible, Kingdom Inadequately Allows for the Grace of God.

Biblically speaking, the grace of God fundamentally defines His relationship to His people. Salvation or eternal redemption rests on grace not law. Law defines judgment and sanctification. It defines how people who are redeemed ought to live. Therefore, the covenant should be seen as a covenant of grace first, and, then as a covenant which structures living by setting forth law. This problem is seen most clearly in those positions that view Deuteronomy as a kingdom document rather than as a covenant (gracious) document. When so viewed, the emphasis is on law/rule rather than grace; it is on kingdom rather than redemption. It is far more in keeping with the development of the idea of covenant to view the covenant as primarily gracious and the law or rule (kingdom) idea as a sub-point under grace. This does not break the relationship between Abraham and Moses. This continuity between Abraham (a gracious covenant divinely dispensed) and Moses is strongly and repeatedly asserted by the Scripture itself. One's analysis of the unifying principle of Scripture, if correct, should make grace not rule/law the unifying principle.

6. It Inadequately Allows for a Unity of What is Divinely Revealed in Action and Word at all Periods of Biblical History.

While it may be true that kingdom, understood as the exercise of divine sovereignty (rule), underlies all history, it does not provide a structural unity for what God reveals at any given time. It may be said the kingdom (reign) defines the relationship man sustains to God—He is either living in God's kingdom or is an enemy of that kingdom. Whereas kingdom is not a literary-structural concept giving structure to what someone might say or write, covenant is. Covenant, therefore, provides a unifying structure for biblical revelation.

God's rule and reign are various ways His kingdom is expressed. God's explanation and record of what He is and does is His covenant. A covenant provides and records what God expects of man and explains the basis of God's actions toward man.

E. Summary

The presentation of "kingdom" theology has reviewed four points: the contours of John Bright's biblical theology, the positive aspects of his biblical theology, the negative aspects of his biblical theology, and

the problems of kingdom biblical theology in general.

It is important to remember that Bright's system is being considered because it has served as a paradigm for much of evangelical thinking in this area. Evangelicals, no doubt, would reject his neo-orthodox stance. They would begin their study with the assumption of the historical reliability of the biblical record and the space-time character of faith and belief. They would not deny that there is a super-temporal aspect to human existence, but would insist that this is integrated with the factual world. The Bible speaks of both realms accurately and simultaneously. Here the two are properly interrelated just as they are in man's experience even if his thoughts about them are inaccurate.

Bright is concerned to develop and defend the concept of the kingdom of God as the unifying theme of the Bible. Having asserted this concern, he argues that its roots are to be sought in the Mosaic period and the Mosaic idea of covenant. After this he traces the concept and its development through the entirety of the biblical material.

With his historical or diachronic presentation, he establishes the major points of the development of the theology of the Bible. According to Bright, the biblical treatment of the first stage, or the Mosaic stage, exhibits Israel's religion as truly unique in its monotheism, its idea of the election of Israel as God's people, and in the concept of the kingdom of God which arose from these and other foundational ideas originating in this stage. These ideas produced in Israel a religious dynamic that molded its entire national history. Basically, this dynamic involved (1) a morality, or the conviction that Israel was responsible to obey God, and (2) the idea that Israel was the kingdom of God.

The second stage in this development saw a crisis resulting from the origin of the state. This crisis emerged from the juxtaposition of the ideas that the kingdom was a moral sphere and the kingdom was the state. The danger was that morality would be nationalized so that what the state was and did would become identified with the kingdom of God. If this occurred, religion would become the instrument of the state and the state and its heads, the kings, would be seen as doing no wrong. The high morality of the Mosaic period would be replaced by state morality.

The destruction of Israel (both the northern and southern kingdoms) brought on the third stage. The possibility that the state was the kingdom was obviated by historical necessity and the hope of Israel was reinterpreted in terms of the ideal of the messianic state. This messianic state was declared by the Second Isaiah to be the worldwide dominion of God introduced by the work of Israel who through suffering was to be

used by God to extend the kingdom.

Israel rejected this role of the suffering servant-nation and replaced it with apocalyptic and Judaism. Apocalypticism projected the kingdom of God into the eschaton and Judaism turned Israel's vision upon herself instead of outward toward the Gentiles.

The conclusion and fulfillment of the kingdom of God is seen in Jesus Christ. In His life and ministry man's existence finds its justification and significance. The kingdom Jesus established is now here and mandates righteous living from all those who acknowledge it. In another sense, the kingdom is still to come.

There are many attractive aspects in Bright's proposed biblical theology. We mentioned eight "aspects" which seem particularly good: it seeks to unify the Bible, it stipulates that God approaches history morally, it recognizes that God holds man accountable to obey His righteous will, it recognizes the "already-not-yet" nature of the kingdom, it accepts the pervasiveness of the edenic theme, it recognizes that God will bring the kingdom sovereignly, it gives proper significance to the miracles of Jesus, and it acknowledges the New Testament church is Israel.

In spite of the attractive principles just enumerated one should reject kingdom theology. It entails significant shortcomings both in Bright's particular presentation and in the system considered in itself.

There are many negative aspects of Bright's biblical theology. The following criticisms of his work were offered: it is based on neo-orthodoxy, it starts history with Moses, it offers no content to the divine will, it misunderstands the nature of the covenant of grace, it misunderstands the significance of the monarchy, it misunderstands the origin and, therefore, the idea of remnant, it misunderstands the origin and idea of the suffering servant, it misunderstands the role of apocalyptic, it minimizes sin and redemption, it does not give an adequate definition of kingdom, it does not clearly distinguish between God's rule and reign.

In addition to the problems involved with Bright's presentation in particular, there are a number of problems of kingdom biblical theology in general. As a system of biblical theology it minimizes the priestly development, minimizes the idea of King, does not account for priestly development, provides only superficial unity for Scripture, inadequately allows for the grace of God, inadequately allows for a unity of what is divinely revealed in action and word at all periods of biblical history.

It should be clear that kingdom theology, like dispensational theology does not provide the student with an adequate unifying principle for what is recorded in the Bible.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS:

1. What is the unifying theme of the Bible according to this view?
2. What makes Israel's religion unique?
3. What is the distinguishing characteristic (the dynamic) of the Mosaic covenant?
4. What crisis was brought upon Israel's religion by the theocracy?
5. How did the messianic ideal arise?
6. How was Israel's religion reformulated?
7. What is apocalypticism and how did it arise?
8. How does Jesus relate to the Old Testament message?
9. What are the positive aspects of Bright's position?
10. In what ways does Bright accept negative (higher) criticism?
11. What is Bright's view of revelation?
12. How is it problematical that Bright starts history with Moses?
13. How does Bright misunderstand the nature of the covenant of grace?
14. How does Bright misunderstand the significance of the monarchy?
15. How does Bright misunderstand the origin and idea of remnant?
16. How does Bright misunderstand the origin and idea of suffering servant?
17. How does Bright misunderstand the role of apocalyptic?
18. What is wrong with Bright's definition of kingdom?
19. How does Bright confuse God's rule and reign?
20. How does using "kingdom of God" as the organizing principle of the Bible minimize the priestly development?
21. How does using "kingdom of God" as the organizing principle of the Bible minimize the idea of king?
22. How does using "kingdom of God" as the organizing principle of the Bible not account for priestly development?
23. How does using "kingdom of God" as the organizing principle of the Bible give only superficial unity to Scripture?
24. How does using "kingdom of God" as the organizing principle of the Bible inadequately allow for the grace of God?
25. How does using "kingdom of God" as the organizing principle of the Bible inadequately allow for a unity of what is revealed in the Bible?

Chapter 5. PROMISE THEOLOGY:
a Presentation and Evaluation of the Work of Willis Beecher and Walter Kaiser

This chapter shall examine promise as a possible unifying theme of all biblical revelation. Many evangelicals, following the lead of Dr. Willis Beecher have employed this approach to the Bible. Dr. Beecher authored *The Prophets and the Promise* in 1905. The book was reprinted in 1963 by Baker Book House (Grand Rapids) and has had a wide influence since then—especially through the works of Dr. Walter Kaiser. (See, Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, Zondervan Book House, Grand Rapids, 1978)

Perhaps the best way to introduce the attractiveness and the inadequacies of this approach as the all-embracing unifying theme of biblical revelation is to study Dr. Beecher's work and then to study Dr. Kaiser's book. It should be said, however, that Dr. Beecher did not intend his book to offer a biblical theology. He seeks only to trace through the Bible a particular theme. Dr. Kaiser, building on Beecher's work, does intend to offer a biblical theology but what he offers has problems.

Part 1. The Pioneering Work of Willis Beecher

A. Presentation of the Approach

1. Preliminary or Introductory remarks

One of the most commendable aspects of Beecher's work, from an evangelical perspective, is his insistence that the Scriptures be used as a direct and trustworthy source of all discussion. He correctly argues that it is our primary or major source with 95% of the information known about Israel's prophets and their teaching being in the Bible and only 5% outside the Bible. Therefore, one's conclusions and discussions should rest 95% on the Bible and only 5% on extra-biblical sources. His entire discussion reflects this balance.

He notes that so much discussion of these subjects has neglected this primary resource:

> Just this has been more neglected than anything else in dealing with the subject of the prophets of Israel. (p. 5)

> In Old Testament studies, the thing now more needed than anything else is a more correct knowledge of what the Old

Testament says. (p. 5)

Beecher advances a warning against eisegesis that should be taken seriously,

> We cannot be too jealously careful against the process of merely first putting our ideas into the Old Testament passages, and then dipping them out again." (p. 9)

Scholars face two dangers: first, reading into the Bible what is not there (eisegesis), and not reading from the Bible what is there (poor exegesis). Both should be avoided.

2. The Prophetic Persons

Nearly one-half the book deals with the people who were prophets. In the course of this discussion Beecher introduces a multitude of ideas necessary to a proper understanding of the prophets and their message. Many of these ideas are additional foundational principles of a biblical theology.

First, by means of a close study of the terms used to represent the prophets, Beecher establishes how at all periods of Israel's history (which he conceives as starting with Abraham) the prophets were men (unlike all other men) who claimed to have and were recognized as having: (1) a message of divine origin and (2) divine authority.

Second, Beecher presents a sketch of the history of the prophets. Although he says in passing that prophecy extends back to the Garden of Eden before the fall (p. 37), he actually starts his presentation with Abraham.   "Old Testament history, however, properly begins with Abraham." (p. 39)

In the course of surveying the history of the prophets, Beecher comes to the following conclusion,

> In these several passages a prophet is defined, as we have seen, as a spokesman of Deity, divinely inspired through visions, dreams, trances, divine appearings. (p. 44)

He defines the inspiration of the prophets in textual or exegetical terms as a unique inspiration, i.e., that which claims to result in divine authoritative speaking or writing.

Third, he demonstrates exegetically that the prophets as a class, were ordinary men with a divine message. They wore no distinctive clothing. They were not subject to any distinctive external methods, which produced or triggered their declarations. They did not "rave" but spoke in clear ordinary speech with ordinary mental-intellectual processes.

He consistently submits the opinions of critical scholarship (some of

which are still current today) to the test of the text and finds them lacking. They are products of eisegesis, not exegesis.

He also notes that there probably was a succession of prophets extending perhaps from the time of Abraham and certainly from the time of Samuel. These prophets were no sacerdotal order. The prophet was not a graduate of any "school." Instead, the Spirit of the Lord came upon whomever He chose. There was no human ordination or graduation into this status. These were "official" prophets. The word "prophet" is applied unofficially, also, to the followers of a prophet, to members of prophetic "schools." Thus, he acknowledges an "official" and "unofficial" use of the word prophet.

Fourth, he shows that although the prophet may have done any number of tasks (functions), "A prophet is a person who speaks the special message that God has given him." (p. 89)

Somewhat later in his discussion, he adds that this message is also "direct[ly]" from God (p. 93). The true prophet was supernaturally inspired so that his message was God's message. Finally,

> The one great function of the prophets was the transmitting of monotheism in its Israelitish form to Israel, to mankind, and to future ages. (p. 133)

Fifth, Beecher makes some very important observations in his discussion of how the message was given to a prophet and how he uttered it. He affirms that the prophets claimed their message came from the Spirit of God. In defending this point, he gives an excellent, but brief, treatment of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament as it relates to the reception of the prophetic message.

> In fine, this Spirit that inspires the prophets is presented to us as a unique being, having personal characteristics, effluent from Yahaweh [sic.] the supreme Spirit of the universe, at once identical with and different from Yahaweh [sic.]. (p. 115)

Perhaps the most significant point in this section (so far as biblical theological principles are concerned) is the way Beecher describes prophetic fulfillment. He views fulfillment as manifold. It is clear he avoids any idea of double meaning. The manifold fulfillment of the promise relates to its essence and is "an essential part of biblical prophecy". (p. 129) The various predictions and promises recorded in the Bible are to be understood as parts of an ever-growing continuum. They are all parts of the one whole plan of God.

Sixth, in a very interesting chapter Beecher demonstrates that the

entire prophetic message (the entire Old Testament) is Torah or law which "When written, becomes sacred scripture" (p. 133). Torah always means divine authoritative instruction. The prophets were the medium through whom this teaching was given. This teaching, this Torah, although given by many different messengers in many different ages, was a single unit and derived from a single promise. The priests were "the official custodians and administrators of Torah; and both as the expounders and interpreters of Torah." (p. 143).

The Old Testament prophets each regarded his predecessors to be teachers of Torah, and their messages as the Word of God. This high respect for the prophetic writings (the Torah, all that is written in the Old Testament), says Beecher, persisted until the time of Christ. Jewish authorities,

> ... regard all the books of the Old Testament as alike the prophetic word of God, and as having, in that sense, equal divine authority. (p. 171)

Summary: in the proceeding presentation Beecher's view of the prophets as persons has been outlined. Basically, he says they were ordinary men with a divinely granted and inspired message. They may have been politicians, farmers, or something else in addition to being prophets, but it was their "prophecy" that marked them as prophets. They were prophets by the Spirit of God. It was the work of the Spirit that made their message different from all other merely human messages. The prophets functioned throughout Israel's history (which Beecher says started with Abraham). On the other hand, the entire Bible is prophetic. Its message is inspired or from God. As authoritative, divine teaching it is called Torah or (divine) law.

3. The Prophetic Message

Beecher traces the development of the prophetic message. He begins his discussion with the New Testament because it is here that the message of the Old Testament is explained. This explanation is used as the foil against which the various stages of Old Testament revelation are understood. One of the central purposes (if not the central purpose) of his work emerges when he notes,

> …the thing which differentiates the monotheism of Yahaweh [sic.] from other religions is its doctrine of the Messiah. Other religions, it may be, have their Messiahs, but ours is different from the others, and this difference is the really distinctive element. (p. 175)

Beecher's presentation of the "promise-doctrine as taught in the New Testament" (p. x) is the first matter of focus. He demonstrates that in the New Testament passages there is one "promise" which is the message of God to mankind through His prophets. It is also shown that the one promise is declared in many particular publications or subordinate promises. This "promise" is both the core and theme of the Old Testament and saturates the entirety of the New Testament message.

> ... the men of the New Testament base everything on the one great promise which they found in the beginning of the old scriptures, and which they regarded as radiating thence all through those scriptures... (p. 185)

It is most significant that Beecher not only speaks of the one promise but also identifies it both as prediction and as doctrine. As prediction, it points ahead to a future fulfillment. As doctrine it represents a message with current experiential significance, i.e., "practical benefit for the men of their times." (p. 177)

The promise permeates the Old Testament. It is the heart of what God said to Abraham. It embraces not merely Abraham and his descendants but the whole of mankind. The "history of Israel is the unfolding of this promise". (p. 195). It was renewed to David and declared by all the prophets.

The fulfillment of the promise was progressive. It began to be fulfilled in the life of Abraham and its fulfillment continued to unfold throughout all subsequent history until it climaxed in Jesus Christ. Beecher outlines some of the major New Testament doctrines and shows how the promise-doctrine underlies all of them.

He sees the idea of the person of the promise as the nucleus of a doctrinal system.

> The promise-doctrine, and especially the idea of the Person of the promise, became a nucleus around which crystallized an ethical theology. (p. 349)

Furthermore, it was the promise that underpinned all the national institutions of Israel.

> ... the promise was so incorporated into the national institutions that these were a perpetual reminder of it to those who had the insight needed for understanding this lesson. (p. 357)

It is very noteworthy that Beecher not only says these institutions reminded "those who had the insight needed" but that there were such people in the Old Testament era.

> The generation to whom Jesus came were [sic.] looking for

some great manifestation from God in fulfillment of the ancient promise. [It] seems likely that we should find that different persons expected different things. (p. 368)

They looked confidently for a certain great thing, but concerning the nature of that thing they were at many points in doubt. (p. 371)

Beecher cites a multitude of specific New Testament passages, which prove his point.

B. Strengths of Beecher's Approach

1. It Emphasizes Dealing with the Bible

It is refreshing to read a work on the prophets and their work, that uses the Bible as its primary resource. It certainly is true that all too many discussions of the Old Testament evidence a very limited, if not erroneous, knowledge of the actual content of the Old Testament. What is true for the Old Testament stands for the Bible as a whole. In seeking to construct an over-all approach to the Bible, or a biblical theological approach, one should, above all, adhere to the actual content of the Bible.

In dealing with the Scripture, one should avoid eisegesis as much as this is possible. Eisegesis is found probably present in all positions but it plays a more prominent role in some positions than in others. This is evident to the evangelical when he reads the critical scholars. It is also evident when one reads some evangelical positions. Yet, it is our responsibility to seek to avoid eisegesis. Perhaps a good tool in exposing possible eisegesis is to read the criticism of our position offered by those who differ with us. Another tool is to seek to bind ourselves to what the Bible actually does say.

Beecher's analysis of the approach of negative criticism is incisive when he says,

There are scholars who reason on the assumption that certain propositions, inferred from the comparison of the various human religions, are to be regarded as ascertained scientific facts; so that biblical statements, if they conflict with these alleged facts, are thereby proved to be untrue. (p. 12)

2. It Accepts the Fact that Prophets-Prophecy Extends Throughout the History of Man from Before the Fall

This might be argued by some, but unsuccessfully. Using prophecy as the unifying theme of the Bible, therefore, has the advantage that it

appears at the earliest stage of human history. Although the words relating to prophets/prophecy do not appear before the fall, the idea does. Adam was instructed by God and as the head of his home was responsible to instruct his "family." Surely the idea that Eve was "deceived" and Adam's apparently unhesitating joining in the sin, suggest it was Adam's responsibility to instruct her more thoroughly and accurately than he had. Therefore, the primary responsibility for the sin rested not on Eve who was first to eat but on Adam (Rom. 5:12).

3. It Recognizes the Unity and Continuity of the Prophetic Message

One of the very attractive aspects of this approach as a possible unifying principle of the Bible is Beecher's affirmation of the unity and continuity of the prophetic message. He asserts and demonstrates that the biblical message is a single message.

4. It Recognizes that Promise is More Prominent in Biblical Revelation than Kingdom

Beecher does acknowledge that the preaching of the Kingdom and its anointed King is a major theme of the New Testament message. However, he asserts that the promise is even more prominent in the New Testament in the ever-present appeal to the Old Testament proof of Christian doctrine, and the declaration that the kingdom is based on the promise (p. 179). Therefore, he concludes, promise is more fundamental to the biblical message than kingdom is.

5. It Recognizes that Promise is Both Prediction and Doctrine

As already stated above, Beecher not only speaks of the one promise but also identifies it both as prediction and as doctrine. As prediction, it points ahead to a future fulfillment. As doctrine it represents a message with current experiential significance; it has "practical benefit for the men of their times." (p. 177)

This perspective makes the prophetic message relevant to the age in which it was declared. It avoids the danger of making the central theme of the Old Testament experientially irrelevant to the day of its delivery.

C. Weaknesses of the Approach

1. It Offers an Inadequate Inconsistent Apologetic Approach

In one sense, it is appropriate for a scholar to approach the Scrip-

ture neutrally. As much as possible, while studying passages one should seek to be neutral with respect to his own position. Thus, the scholar is seeking to read a position from the text rather than reading a position into the text.

The problem with "neutrality" is that true neutrality for a Christian would cause him to see that the Scripture is, without question, inspired and that, as such, it is to be accepted as trustworthy as it presents itself to the reader. To be neutral in the sense Beecher uses the idea is to start by questioning what Scripture says about itself and to submit it to the test of human reason, that is, to man's authority; this is a false neutrality. This false neutrality is at its foundation the neutrality of the unbeliever who begins by denying God and hides this denial under the garb of "neutrality," i.e., is starts by assuming the Bible is guilty until proven innocent rather than innocent until proven guilty.

> Both as a matter of correct method, and for the sake of convincing those with whom we differ, we should waive, at the outset, all questions of inspiration, and treat our sources merely as literature that has come down to us from a remote past. (p. 6)

How can one assume neutrality toward something that is obviously true? Philosophers puzzle and frustrate the layman by debating whether he (whoever is speaking) truly exists. The layman (and many philosophers) remarks that the entire argument is ridiculous. One cannot be neutral toward his own existence. Even so, with the one true God and His Word, the Bible. One cannot consistently speak unless this God has brought him into existence and sustains him in it. One cannot question the validity of the Bible which this God confirms personally to the one speaking (the believer) without denying the obvious any more than a child can question the existence of his father while that father is speaking to him. To the Christian the Bible and the truths recorded in it, constitute a reality to be investigated. Like a tree or a rock. These realities are not to be denied as to their existence. One might question his own perception but he should not question the reality that exists with its various parts, the trees and the rocks. These things are to be studied as to their significance. Just as the trees and rocks clearly and undeniably declare they are created by the one true God (Ps. 19:1), the God of the Bible, so the Bible declares it is the very Word of God.

Beecher's discussion demonstrates that although he states his "false neutrality" repeatedly, he is unable to maintain it consistently. Very often, if not continually, his argumentation shows a marked contrast to the sche-

matic he proposes as his approach (cf., the dates assigned to the writing prophets on p. 56f.).   In approach he states man's neutrality, but in argumentation, in practice, he assumes Christian commitment.

2. It Presents a Number of Historical Weaknesses

Although Beecher remarks that prophecy existed before Abraham, he says Israel's history begins with Abraham. This is only partially true because it ignores the obvious. Genesis 1-11 is more than an introduction to Israel's history, just as what follows is more than a history of Israel. The Old Testament builds on the theological principles and history set down in Genesis 1-11 (indeed, in Gen. 1), while what follows Genesis 11 is a history of God's redemptive work among mankind. This is not the place to defend this position but reading a book such as Geerhardus Vos' *Biblical Theology* will provide it.[10]

The source of Beecher's weakness at this point is his being so strongly tied to a kind of literalistic hermeneutic as he develops his study. Since the pre-Abrahamic period contains no explicit mention of the terms denoting prophecy or prophets, Beecher views this period as less important to his theme than later periods.

Beecher's weakness is endemic to any biblical theology using "prophets" and "prophecy" (promise) as its unifying theme. If his theme is taken as the unifying principle of the Scripture then that period is viewed as less important because prophecy as such was less prominent in the revelation preserved from or about that period. Two possible rejoinders may be made at this point.

First, the prominence of a concept should not be confused with its importance. This is a valid point, but does it answer the problem this "biblical theology" faces in Genesis 1-11? How does one explain that entire block of revelation on the basis of prophecy alone? For example, what role do the prominent matters play in understanding it, viz., the probation stipulation in the Garden of Eden, the flood, and the judgment at Babel? This writer can see no direct relationship at all to either prophecy or the redemptive promise in any of these matters.

Second, absence of the word(s) is not absence of the concept. This, too, is a valid position. Just because the specific word or word(s) denoting a particular concept is absent, the idea is not. In many passages, a particular concept is present in the absence of the word(s). But this does not solve the problem faced by "promise biblical theology."   The real

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[10] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids), 1948.

problem is that the idea/concept of promise and prophecy is absent in the prominent and key concepts of Genesis 1-11.

Most significantly, this historical weakness constitutes a serious biblical-theological weakness. The entire biblical revelation as a system rests on the events that occurred in the Garden of Eden: the contrast between the first and second Adam, the teaching that the second Adam did what the first Adam did not do (He fulfilled/kept the covenant of works), the effects of eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (that man became an autonomous and rebellious ethical creature), the effects of the fall (all men are sinful by nature), etc. These are neither incidental concepts in the Bible, nor part of a promise/prophecy.

3. It Narrows all of Biblical Revelation to Promise

Advancing promise as the primary or unifying concept in the Bible is contrary to the content of the Bible. Biblical revelation contains a number of elements not easily subsumed under the idea of promise. Some of these elements are curses and stipulations. Important aspects of biblical history have to do more with curse than promise, e.g., the flood and other judgments. Important sections of biblical revelation are hard to relate to the promise, e.g., the proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, etc.

In some of these and similar Old Testament data, the promise may relate to the data but it is not sufficient to explain the data completely. For example, the preservation of the people through the flood is related to the promise. The New Testament uses the flood as a type of the salvation brought about by Christ and notes that the gospel was preached before the flood. Yet the central aspect of the flood is left unexplained by the promise-doctrine. Indeed, it is the opposite of the promise-doctrine—it is curse. The flood is specifically related to divine judgment.

In regard to this criticism of this "system", we should recall that we have mentioned above how Beecher relates all the national institutions of Israel to the promise-doctrine.

D. Summary

This chapter has examined "promise," viz., the promise of a coming redeemer, as a basis for an Old Testament biblical theology. Beecher opens his work with some significant preliminary or introductory remarks. Specifically, he argues that the study of the Old Testament should be occupied primarily with the data recorded in the Old Testament and that it should operate inductively.

Working on the basis just presented he traces both the prophetic

persons and their message. He demonstrates from the Scripture that there were prophets throughout the history of Israel (which starts with Abraham). They were men whose message was of divine origin and which bore divine authority. They conceived of themselves and others conceived of them, as spokesman for the Lord. These ordinary men with a divine message did not constitute a sacerdotal order. He shows how the word "prophet" is used in a general and in a particular sense. In a general sense the word is applied to some who bore no special message from God and who seemed to have been followers of those who were prophets in the special sense. These latter "prophets" became such by divine calling not by any human ordination or graduation into their prophetic status. These prophets may have fulfilled many different tasks, occupations, and functions but were distinguished as prophets only by the fact that they all were divine spokesmen. They said, and the Old Testament teaches, their message was from God and that it came through the Holy Spirit. Each particular declaration is a part of an ever-growing continuum. They are all parts of the one whole message of God. The fulfillment of this message is manifold. Finally, these men view what the Old Testament says as the prophetic message. To them the message of the Old Testament as a whole, is Torah or authoritative divine speaking.

Focusing specifically on the prophetic message, Beecher begins with emphasizing that in contrast to other religions, the messianic is central in Christianity. He then demonstrates that the promise-doctrine as taught in the New Testament is one promise in manifold Old Testament declarations and is the core or theme of the Old Testament. It appears in the Old Testament both as prediction and as doctrine. As doctrine its fulfillment is progressive and gradual. Throughout the Old Testament, the messianic person is central to the promise-doctrine. This doctrine with its focus on a particular person underlies all Old Testament institutions, and these institutions declare the promise to the pious.

There are several strengths in Beecher's approach: it emphasizes dealing with the Bible; it accepts the fact that prophets-prophecy extends throughout the history of man from before the fall; it recognizes the unity and continuity of the prophetic message; it recognizes that the promise is more prominent in biblical revelation than kingdom; and it recognizes that the promise is both prediction and doctrine.

We advanced three major weaknesses of Beecher's approach to the Old Testament. First, it offers an inadequate inconsistent apologetic approach. Although asserting a neutrality Beecher actually submits the Bible to the court of human autonomy and, therefore, begins his reasoning

(presuppositionally) by denying what he is attempting to prove and what is absolutely necessary in order for him (or anyone else) to use. He is not neutral toward the Bible, but assumes a position of challenging it. This is tantamount to a child standing in his father's home and with his father clearly before him, saying to his father "before I can accept your word, let's start by questioning if you do exist, and, therefore might not really be my father and have not spoken to me." This neutrality is, in reality, no neutrality at all. Indeed, as Beecher pursues his discussion he repeatedly steps outside this conjectured neutrality and assumes the validity of the Bible simply on the grounds of its self-affirmations.

Second, Beecher's presentation exhibits a number of historical weaknesses. For Beecher, Israel's history begins with Abraham in spite of the repeated claims of the Bible that Israel's history is one with the history of all mankind and that human history begins at the creation of man. Isolating "promise" as *the* central element of Scripture arises from a kind of literal hermeneutic by which something that is not mentioned is assumed to be not present or insignificant. Hence, since "prophet/ prophecy" is not mentioned in Genesis 1-11 it is not present, or at least prophecy as such is less important before Abraham. We argued that this was more than a weakness of Beecher's system. It is a weakness endemic to any promise theology since this approach, at best, glosses over significant elements of the pre-Abrahamic revelation.

Third, there is a major problem with seeing "promise" as the theme unifying the revelation of the pre-Abrahamic period. It does not account for probation and curse. Also, the promise-idea is absent in large portions of Genesis 1-11. Most significantly, all of biblical theology rests on pre-fall period where promise, in the sense used by Beecher, is noticeably absent. What occurred there explains and provides the necessary context and background for all that follows.

Perhaps the most telling criticism of Beecher's approach is that it narrows all of biblical revelation to promise. It was pointed out that large portions of the Old Testament cannot reasonably be brought under the heading of "promise" or, at best, are only inadequately explained on the basis of this concept.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS:

1. According To Beecher, what two dangers face the biblical scholar?

2. What two attributes distinguish biblical prophets from all other men?

3. What is the difference between an "official" and "unofficial" prophet?

4. From where did the prophets' message come?

5. What does "Torah" mean and how does it relate to the prophetic message?

6. Where and why does Beecher begin his study of Old Testament prophecy?

7. How does the New Testament use "promise"?

8. How does "promise" relate to the Old Testament message?

9. What are the five strengths of Beecher's work?

10. In what way is Beecher's apologetic weak and what difference does this make?

11. What are some of the historical weaknesses of Beecher's work and what difference does this make?

12. Why is it wrong to use "promise" as the unifying theme of the Old Testament?

Part 2. The Presentation of Walter Kaiser's Theology

The particular book in which Dr. Kaiser presents his proposal for a biblical theology in his book entitled *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1978).

Kaiser says, "I am heavily indebted to Beecher for the outline and much that follows in the definition of the promise" (263 note 1). One who has read Beecher in conjunction with reading Kaiser sees in Kaiser much more of Beecher than the definition of promise. Kaiser's fundamental hermeneutical approach is quite similar to Beecher's as well as his biblical theological procedures (what Kaiser calls his diachronic method) and most of his conclusions. At many points Kaiser updates Beecher insofar as he brings the discussion into the light of the contemporary higher critical debates and relates the promise-principle to areas somewhat neglected by Beecher (e.g., wisdom literature). This certainly makes Kaiser's work very valuable to the student of the Old Testament.

This study of Kaiser's work proceeds as previous discussions have. It will deal respectively with a presentation of his system and then with the positive and negative aspects.

A. A Presentation of Kaiser's Promise Theology

Kaiser's book has three unequal parts: (1) definition and method, (2) materials for an Old Testament theology, and (3) the connection with New Testament theology. By far the longest section is the second. But the most important section is the first section where he sets forth the principles by which he understands the Bible. The sections that follow summarize the important principles molding Kaiser's proposed biblical theology.

1. The Importance of Definition and Methodology

Kaiser is concerned in the first part of his book to interact with critical scholarship. Unfortunately, there is little interaction with his fellow believers. Hence, the task and definitions he offers are set against the problematics (the arguments and reasoning) of critical unbelieving scholarship. He attempts to reject all approaches to the Old Testament that, in his opinion, read into the Old Testament any New Testament theology. This locks him into an approach proposed by Gerhard von Rad, viz., a "diachronic type of theology." On the other hand, Kaiser draws back from von Rad's radical rejection of all constant or normative concepts. As Kaiser concludes:

The greatest need ... was to carry out the exegesis of the individual text in light of a total theology of the canon. (p. 6)

Kaiser affirms that an outline of the total theology of the canon is seen in many individual texts.

...we insist that if the biblical record is allowed to speak its own intention first, it clearly indicates progress, growth, development, movement, irregular and sporadic revelations of meaning, and selections of events in the full flow of historical currents. (p. 8)

Second, not only is there progress, there is an organic interrelatedness and an occasional maturation of one or more aspects of this revelation. Third, the mass of biblical revelation is formed around a "fixed core that contributed life to the whole emerging mass." Fourth, each particular can and must be viewed in its relation to the central core. Finally, sometimes the "maturation" goes beyond the "experience and times" (p. 8f.). Thus, he sets forth the five characteristics of his approach.

Kaiser accepts and goes beyond Beecher's approach to the integrity of the Bible when he states,

For our part we believe all texts should be innocent of all charges of artificiality until they are proven guilty by clear external witnesses. The text should be dealt with on its own terms. (p. 7)

On the other hand, he accepts Beecher's approach by submitting the text to the test of human reason (something other than the clear witness of God, Heb. 4:12) while he goes beyond him in his open acceptance of the text.

To Kaiser the nature of Old Testament theology is what is described and contained in the Bible. This theology forms a whole so that all that precedes a given era serves as the base upon which that era is to be understood.

The heart of Old Testament theology is clearly stated:

There is an inner center or plan to which each writer con-sciously contributed. A principle of selectivity is already evident and divinely determined by the rudimentary disclosure of the divine blessing-promise theme to all men everywhere as the canon opens.... (p. 11)

Correct method for Kaiser is to draw the structure of his approach from the,

historic progression of the text and its theological selection and conclusions from those found in the canonical focus. (p.

12)

    This method, he argues, produces promise-blessing as the fixed core of the Old Testament message. This core consisted of both contemporary and future ramifications and applications. The promise to Abraham, for example, which undergirds all subsequent biblical revelation, is also a blessing: "I will be your God and you will be my people." This word brought immediate blessings on Abraham as well as future blessings.

> The immediate effects of this word were divine blessings (happenings or arrival of persons) usually accompanied by a promissory declaration of a future work or completion of a series –a divine promise. Accordingly, men received the promise and waited for the promise all in one plan. (p. 14)

    Significantly, Kaiser proposes that the authentication of a central theme or a material center of the Bible "should be realized in that it unites all of the supporting parts of the canon" (p. 15).

    Like Beecher, Kaiser argues that the only proper object of Old Testament theology is the Old Testament itself. All additional materials are irrelevant or supplementary - including the New Testament. Old Testament theology, therefore, should concern itself primarily with the Old Testament text.

> Thus, without standing aloof from either testament, it could be argued that the impact and usefulness of the theology would be greater if it were packaged separately. (17)

    For Kaiser the motivation for biblical theology should move in a new direction. It should no longer be pursued as a protest against the excesses and vagaries of systematic theology (liberal theology) but should be pursued to provide cohesiveness and context for exegetical theology.

> Rather than finding an overlap in the systematic or histori-cal areas, we believe biblical theology is a twin tool of the exegete. Its most immediate contribution is in the area of hermeneutics. ...
>
> Its role is so distinctive that without it the exegetical task like-wise falls into a historicism of a BC or first century AD description. (p. 17)

    Pursuing this motivation properly means the biblical theologian seeks to adhere closely to the text. Furthermore, his method must be dia-chronic, that is, each period of revelation is to be understood on the basis of the preceding period(s). This "Analogy of Antecedent Scripture" is to be contrasted with the systematician's "Analogy" or "Rule of Faith". Whereas the former seeks to understand a text on the basis of passages

preceding it historically the latter seeks to understand a text on the basis of all that is said throughout Scripture without giving attention to their time periods (cf., p. 18).

2. The Identification of a Canonical Theological Center

Kaiser develops the need for an organizing or unifying principle in the Old Testament. He asserts that the Bible itself sets forth "promise" as its central core. He points to a few passages as the key Old Testament passages demonstrating that the promise is the theological and canonical center: Genesis 12:1-3, 2 Samuel 7:11-16, and Jeremiah 31:31-34.   In addition, he points us to the seminal importance of Genesis 3:15, 9:25-27, and 12:1-3.

3. The Development of an Outline for Old Testament Theology

The "outline" of biblical theology is suggested and summarily repeated, says Kaiser, in the brief semi-confessional statements so frequently repeated in the Old Testament, e.g., Deuteronomy 26:5-9; Joshua 24:2-13; Psalm 136; 105; 78; Jeremiah 2; Ezekiel 16, 20, 23. On the basis of these passages, Kaiser concludes that it is the history of Israel that presents the material of biblical theology and to properly understand and develop that theology one must understand what is recorded in the Bible in its historical progressiveness.

> All of God's previous saving activity had to be acknowledged and confessed before one could see more steadily and more holistically the further revelation of God. Therefore, we must start where God began: in history—real history–with its attendant geography, men and events. (p. 43)

Consequently, Kaiser sets forth the content of the Old Testament according to its historical development and in outline form. He identifies and labels each period. In so doing he reveals a penchant for alliteration.

The key item(s) in each era or period is then set forth briefly. After that Kaiser discusses (again briefly) certain unique items occurring in the course of this over-all development: wisdom literature, the Mosaic Law, the constant narrowing and particularization of the ultimate fulfillment, and, finally, the expansion of prior themes or ideas.

> But each writer added to the theme. The writers of the OT were more than mere parrots. They were participants in a long line of revelation, true. But they were also recipients of addition-al revelation *par excellence*. (p. 52)

4.   The Connections Across Historical Epochs of Emerging Themes in Old Testament Theology

Kaiser proposes four key problems of "connection": prepatriarchal "blessing" and patriarchal "promise", patriarchal "promise" and Mosaic "law", premonarchical "deuteronomism" and Davidic "promise", and sapiential "creation theology" and prophetic "promises".

He deals with each problem. In each case, he sees the connection as the promise and necessarily concomitant motifs such as "fear of the Lord".

B. The Positive Elements of Kaiser's Position

Kaiser has done a commendable job in many areas of his work and we would do well to learn from him. The following are some of the areas especially helpful in developing a theology of the Old Testament.

1. Its Dependence on Beecher

Many of the positive elements of Beecher's work appear in Kaiser's work. It is especially commendable that Kaiser, like Beecher, sees the need for an organizing and unifying principle by which the Bible can be understood in its entirety and that proper understanding of each period requires understanding its antecedents.

2. Its Conclusions as to the Nature of Old Testament Theology

Kaiser takes the Bible seriously and most of what he says as to its nature is seen in Beecher—although not always specifically enunciated by him. Kaiser views what the Bible teaches as "progressive" although not so uniformly progressive that it sets before the reader a slow, gradual, and uniform development of teaching. He sees what it teaches "organically"— as interrelated in the sense of having a general plan of arrangement to which all the parts relate. This single plan, he says, is "epigenetically developed"—like a tree it has a single core to which attach related "branches". He also maintains that the meaning and significance of a given passage sometimes exceeded the time and experience of its human author.

3. Its Conclusions as to the Method of Old Testament Theology

With Beecher, Kaiser argues that the only proper method of Old Testament theology is inductive and diachronic. Although he takes the word "diachronic" from G. von Rad (the critical scholar), the thought is anticipated by Beecher and others (e.g., Geerhardus Vos). Whereas Beecher carefully develops the principle of "promise" from the New

Testament, Kaiser simply asserts that this is what the New Testament teaches and that it is what the Old Testament assumes and reflects. This importation from the New Testament shows that Kaiser, however, is not as consistent with the diachronic method as von Rad is.

4. Its Conclusions as to the Scope of Old Testament Theology

Like Beecher, Kaiser argues that Old Testament theology should deal primarily with biblical rather than with extra-biblical sources. Similarly, he does not intend this to deny the usefulness of extrabiblical materials.

5. Its View of the Motivation of Old Testament Theology

Kaiser seeks to redefine the motivation of biblical theology. He does this, of course, against the background of what critical scholars are saying rather than what Geerhardus Vos said. Were he to have considered Vos' statements he, no doubt, would have repeated those statements either in part or entirely. For Kaiser, as for Vos, biblical theology should not be a protest against systematic theology but a handmaiden of exegetical theology.

6. Its Starting Place for Old Testament Theology

Kaiser starts his treatment earlier than Beecher but at the same place Vos begins. Whereas Beecher programmatically started with Abraham, Kaiser starts with the creation. This produces a much more comprehensive treatment than that of Beecher. On the other hand, it was not Beecher's intention to produce a biblical theology.

7. Its Anti-dispensational Teaching

Dispensationalism was not as prominent when Beecher and Vos wrote as it is today. Kaiser demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the system and frequently notes how it does not conform to the content of the Bible.

Dispensationalism teaches that it was a sin for Israel to accept the law and that God rebuked them for it. Kaiser, however, notes that the Lord did not rebuke Israel for accepting the terms of the law but blessed them. Thus, he rejects dispensationalism's strong antithesis of law and grace and explains that promise does not oppose law (p. 62-63). He rejects dispensationalism's teaching that the idea of the state was not introduced until the post-deluvian time and asserts that man was located in society and the state in Genesis 4 and 6 (p. 71). He rejects

dispensationalism's strong disjunction between the eras of Abraham and Moses-David noting that these eras are linked together,

> …in these books the Abrahamic-Davidic covenant tradition will be linked with the Sinaitic-Mosaic covenant. For example, David and his successors recognized their obligation to obey the "law of Moses," to keep the statutes, commandments, and ordinances of God written there, that they might prosper in all that they did and be established (1 Kings 2:1-4; 9:4-5). In fact, Solomon freely appealed to God's ancient work in the Exodus and the promised gift of the land to that generation (1 Kings. 8:16,20,34,36,53). (p. 123)

The most wide-sweeping rejection of dispensationalism is seen in Kaiser's conclusion that the prophets presented a single program for Israel and all the Gentiles. This single program relates to the single promise set forth in the Old Testament and declared as accomplished in Christ by the New Testament.

> Therefore we conclude that the promise of God in the prophets was a single unified plan which was eternal in its scope and fulfillment even though there were climacteric plateaus reached along the way in the history of its development. In its build-up, it was cumulative. In scope it was both national and cosmopolitan as Israel and all tribes, peoples, and nations were linked by faith in a single program. (p. 185)

In addition to such specific statements, which seem to have been made pointedly against dispensationalism, Kaiser's work as a whole is clearly a rejection of dispensationalism. There is hardly a teaching of that latter approach that Kaiser does not reject.

8. Its Idea of Corporate Solidarity

One biblical idea often overlooked, is the idea of "corporate solidarity." Biblically, this idea finds expression in, or is closely related to, what has traditionally been called "federal" or "covenantal" headship.

We see this idea in Kaiser's discussion when he asks the question whether the Hebrew pronoun *hu'* in Genesis 3:15 ("He" will crush your head) should be singular or plural and asserts that the question is misdirected,

> especially if the divine intention deliberately wished to designate the collective notion which included a personal unity in a single person who was to obtain victory for the

whole group he represented. (p. 36)

This idea appears again when Kaiser says,

> More significant is the fact that what happened to the king happened to the people. Their lives were totally bound up with his. When he acted in faithfulness and righteousness, prosperity and blessing were the result (Ps. 18; 45:6-7; 101). But when the king was rejected, so were they. (p. 162)

9. Its Use of "Rest" as a Paradigm of True Blessedness

Kaiser points to rest as an important biblical theme and traces it from the Mosaic law through the Psalms (p. 127ff.). It is significant that he also mentions the prophetic teaching that Eden is the goal of God's work in history (p. 242). It would have greatly enhanced his work had he connected the two theological themes together as is done in Hebrews 4. In fact, the edenic rest lost and restored is a biblical teaching that supersedes the promise/blessing both as to historical and theological comprehensiveness.

10. Its Teaching as to the Relationship Between Blessing and Election

One biblical teaching mentioned but (again) not developed is the relationship between blessing and election. Kaiser mentions how the blessings of God fall on the elect. In the course of discussing the divine name El-Shaddai Kaiser says,

> God is omnipotent and a great Sovereign who can and will act on behalf of those whom He loves and who are called according to His purpose and plan.
>
> Thus the theology of this section was intertwined around that *word* on high, its *blessing* to a chosen seed, and the *assurance* of the divine presence that guaranteed the certainty of the promised heir, inheritance, and heritage or even the present success of the patriarchs. (p. 98).

Having thus joined election and blessing, he adds that those in proximity to the blessed elect were also sometimes blessed,

> So blessed were these men that their benefits overflowed to their neighbors. Hence, Laban claimed that he was blessed of Yahweh on account of his proximity to Jacob (Gen. 30:27,30). (p. 98)

It would be interesting to see how Kaiser would develop this principle as, and if, it relates to New Testament theology, and especially to

the New Testament teaching on the role of the church in bringing the blessings of God to the non-churched.

C. The Negative Elements of Kaiser's Position

In spite of the many laudable aspects of Kaiser's work, it fails to supply us with a principle, which will programmatically integrate all of biblical revelation. The reasons for this conclusion are set forth below.

1. The Way it Interacts with Critical Scholarship

This interaction with critical scholarship is at once positive and negative. As pointed out above, Kaiser from the outset of his book is concerned to interact with critical scholarship. Unfortunately, there is little interaction with his fellow believers. One finds a disappointing lack of reference to and interaction with most of the other evangelical approaches to biblical theology. The major contribution of Geerhardus Vos, for example, is hardly mentioned. One almost gets the impression that there are dispensationalists and there is Kaiser but there are few other serious options for evangelicals.

2. It Accepts the Problematics of Critical Scholarship

Even more significant is the way Kaiser approaches his task. The task and the definitions he offers are set against the problematics (the arguments and reasoning) of critical unbelieving scholarship. This involves him in a kind of historicism since by doing this he appears to reject the assumption that what is recorded in the Bible proceeds from a single mind. That is, he rejects the idea that there is a supra-temporal mind which views the totality of revelation as a single revelation while revealing it in ever-unfolding units. Perhaps he would argue that this (viz., that the Bible proceeds from a single mind) is a conclusion rather than an assumption of proper biblical exegesis. However, this is an assumption forced upon us by the text. It is the necessary starting point of proper biblical theology and exegesis and not simply its conclusion (2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:21).

This assumption appears to be the only explanation of some biblical passages (e.g., Gen. 7:2, 3) and a very helpful explanation of others (e.g., the Cain and Abel account, and the statement, "then men began to call on the name of the Lord, Gen. 4:26—see below).

3. Its Use of a Diachronic Method to the Exclusion of the Eternal Aspect of Scripture

It seems that Kaiser's diachronic method rejects all approaches to the Old Testament, which, in his opinion, read into the Old Testament any New Testament theology. Positively, the application of his principle is (in our opinion) a helpful approach to Scripture and leads to some important conclusions. Negatively, as Kaiser applies it, this is a most unfortunate methodological decision since it often leads him not to accept the New Testament exegesis of Old Testament passages. Also, in spite of his methodological decision, however, he sometimes imports New Testament theology into his discussion.

His stated method is to draw the structure of his approach from the,

> …historic progression of the text and its theological selection and conclusions from those found in the canonical focus. (p. 12)

The exegete is to,

> ... use the theology which preceded his text as they introduce analogous or identical topics, share key words, or raise similar theological interests. It is this theology which "informs" the text and supplies the background and available message against which this new revelation was given. (p. 19)

Thus,

> This `Analogy of Antecedent Scripture' is to be contrasted with the systematician's `Analogy' or `Rule of Faith'. (p. 18)

Several observations will help show the weakness of these principles as framed by Kaiser. First, does not later revelation clearly understand earlier revelation (sometimes more clearly than preceding revelation) and hence provide its proper understanding? We think it does. Indeed, this is the heart of the Christian position. The New Testament is the final and perfect interpreter of the Old Testament. In spite of what he says above, in practice Kaiser agrees with this proposition and even employs it when he uses the New Testament "promise" theme as the key to the Old Testament. His mentor, Beecher, derives this principle from the New Testament before tracing it throughout the Old Testament. Kaiser, it seems, builds on the work of Beecher without acknowledging the source of his "insight" from the outset.

Second, does the New Testament see the organizing principle of the Old Testament as promise? We do not think it does. Rather, while the New Testament presents the theme and all embracing subject of the Old Testament as the Messiah and the promise of the Messiah, it teaches that the *organizing structure* is covenant, cf., Luke 1:72ff., Romans 5:12ff., Galatians 3-4.

Third, in the Old Testament *covenant* is the only proper basis for comprehensive understanding, i.e., in the Old Testament itself the whole Old Testament is viewed often as a single unified revelation with covenant as its organizing structure, Exodus 6:1-8, Galatians 3:17f., 2 Samuel 7:8f., 23:5, cf., Luke 1:50, 72. What was established (both what was done and what was spoken by God to man) in the creation is a covenant and is still binding, Jeremiah 33:19-26, Hosea 6:7 (NASV), cf., Matthew 19:4-6. What was said to Adam is a covenant that is still binding on man, Hosea 6:7, cf., Romans 5:12.

Fourth, there is an assumed unity of what God says throughout the Old Testament. This is seen especially clearly in the ubiquitous use of the various elements involved in the covenant God made Abraham: e.g., the "passing through pieces" of Genesis 15:17 is later explained and seen as repeated in the ratification of Mosaic covenant as well, Jeremiah 34:18. The chasing off wild beasts of Genesis 15:11 is used throughout the Bible as a figure of divine protection and its opposite, viz., allowing wild birds of prey or beasts to consume the covenant breakers, is viewed as the judgment on those covenant breakers, Deuteronomy 26, 1 Kings 14:11; Jeremiah 7:33, etc. The phrase by which God pledges and summarizes his gracious involvement in the covenant, viz., "I will be your God and you will be my people", is constantly repeated, too, Genesis 17:17, Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 6:16.

Fifth, Kaiser does not avoid using later revelation. Specifically, he refers to the New Testament promise theme (p. 43) but does not use other New Testament passages, which offer important overviews and interpretations of the Old Testament, such as Hebrews 4. When Exodus 31:16,17 is compared it is evident that the sabbath is the sign and seal of the covenant. Hebrews 4 traces this "sabbath" from the creation to the perfection. Another example of later revelation best explaining earlier revelation is the use of the Mosaic revelation to explain the mention of clean and unclean animals in Genesis 7:2.

4. It Restricts the Purpose of Biblical Theology

Viewed from one perspective Kaiser's "restriction" is good. For him, the purpose or motivation of biblical theology should be restricted to help exegetical theology. Kaiser's conclusion rests, at least in part, upon the problematics and results of liberal scholarship in systematic theology and its result, viz., the irrelevance of the Old Testament to Christianity and the consequent loss of any uniqueness to Christianity. His proposal is to

reject this opposition between systematic and biblical theology and to turn the latter to a more positive use, viz., to help exegetical theology. However, surely it would be better to maintain that biblical theology should be viewed and pursued as an aid to systematic theology too. Biblical and systematic theology should not be seen as opponents but as interdependent. There should be an interaction between the two of them. Biblical theology, approached from the perspective of believing scholarship whose interest is to root systematics firmly in the biblical text, obviously can and should be a great help in realizing that interest.

5. It Asserts that the Core Constitutes Unity but Ignores the Lack of a Programmatic Plan Uniting the Scripture

Kaiser's position affirms that a core or central unifying principle to what is recorded in the Bible can and should be gained from an inductive study of the Old Testament. Much that he says in pursuing and developing this theme is commendable but the solution or core that he offers does not meet the requirements he sets for validating such a core. Just as significant is the fact that this principle presents confusion between the concepts "core" and "unifying plan."

a. The Core is Affirmed

Kaiser asserts that the mass of biblical revelation is formed around a "fixed core that contributed life to the whole emerging mass." He teaches that the core is the "blessing/promise." This core gives life to biblical revelation but, in our judgment, does not provide it comprehensive organization!

b. A Unifying Plan-Pattern is Needed

For Kaiser, the authentication of a central theme or a material center or a unified plan of the Bible "should be realized in that it unites all of the supporting parts of the canon" (p. 15). That is, the validation of suggested core is that is "unites all of the supporting parts of the canon."

Unfortunately, the difference between central theme and organizing pattern (unified plan) either is not seen or not important. The point might be clarified by noting how the organizing pattern of Psalm 119, the acrostic, is different than the theme, the excellency of the word of God. For us there are two different questions here: (1) a theme(s) which runs through the Bible and (2) the pattern or programmatic structure which integrates those and all other teachings both within the periods of revelation and across the several periods of revelation. There is an equi-

vocation in Kaiser's thought: viz., he identifies that which unites "organically" (thematically) with that which unites organizationally/structurally." He assumes the identification of a place or point of contact and an overlapping or all-embracing pattern. This deficiency is clear, for example, in the following quote:

> Nevertheless, neither the vocabulary nor the formulae and technical terms by themselves would make the case for a unified plan to the entirety of the OT progress of theology. The accent must ultimately fall where it fell for the writers themselves—on a network of interlocking moments in history made significant because of their content, free allusions to one another, and their organic unity. The focus of the record fell on the *content* and *recipients* of God numerous covenants. The content remained epigenetically constant... The content was a divine "blessing," a "given word," a "declaration," a "pledge," or "oath" that God Himself would freely do or be something for all men, nations, and nature, generally. (p. 34, 35)

c. A Lack of Comprehension is Evidenced

Kaiser's confusion of core and comprehension (organic unity), structural comprehension, and programmatic comprehension is seen throughout his work.

First, "promise" does not account for a good deal of the biblical record. This is evidenced in Kaiser's discussion of Genesis 1-11 where he acknowledges that a good deal of Genesis 1-11 is a "word of judgment and not of blessing"—he does not see this as a difficulty for his promise theme. How can a "word of judgment and not of blessing" be a part of the promise/blessing theme? Although he outlines this section with three parallel units of "man's failure" and "God's blessings," he does not see that this sets up two themes. The one does not include the other. He says this section of the Bible is a record not just of blessing but of a "triple rhythm of blessing and curse, hope and doom." The over-arching principle, says Kaiser, is divine blessing. However, this principle does not provide a "unifying plan" because how can blessing include "curse" and "doom"? The problem word here is "unifying." "Blessing" does not unify the account—it leaves out what is not blessing, viz., all that is curse and doom or the history of those who are cursed or doomed.

More significant than this "omission" is the failure to state that "man's failures" are not to be identified with the divine judgments. This

failure results from not viewing the results of man's failure in proper relationship to the divine nature and the divine curse upon human disobedience. In setting up this outline of this period, Kaiser makes an important language-logical error that significantly colors his discussion and misleads the student. He is right when under God's blessing he lists: promise of a seed, promise of God's dwelling in Shem's tents, and promise of worldwide blessing. In this instance, the heading and items under it are of the same kind. However, in the other column the heading and the items under it are not of the same kind (the sub-items are not blessings). Under "man's failures" he lists the fall, flood, and the scattering at Babel. These are divine judgments coming upon man because he has not been obedient to what God has stipulated. Although they result from man's failures in an immediate sense, ultimately they rest on God's covenantal sanction in Eden, "in the day you eat of it you shall surely die." That is, man's dis-obedience results in divine judgment according to what God has said to man or according to the covenant. The promise does not include the curse but the two are different outcomes of the one covenant in which they stand side by side as separate elements.

Second, this lack of comprehension is especially clear in what might be seen as a forced treatment of the problems of "connection." Kaiser points out four major problems of connection which face all biblical theologians and then offers a solution to each one: they are united around the core of the blessing/promise. In each case we see this "unity" as forced and his core as an inadequate principle to comprehensively explain and unite the periods.

The first problem is how can one harmonize the pre-patriarchal "blessing" with the patriarchal "promise"?

In solving this problem, Kaiser first seeks to establish that the prepatriarchal period is united and organized around the theme "blessing."

> There seems to be little doubt that the key motif of the creation narratives was the `blessing' of God on the creatures of the sea and air and on man and woman. (p. 56)

We, however, find this analysis of the period woefully inadequate for several reasons. It does not suit what is stated in either (1) Genesis 1 or (2) in Genesis 2 when they are conceived separately or (3) when the whole of Genesis 1-11 is in view.

(1) Even when applied to Genesis 1, Kaiser's analysis is called into question by the text, viz., that the key motif is "blessing." The text argues against his analysis in several particulars. First, does the account turn on this "blessing" or does this "blessing" combine with the "probation" to

present the key motif: viz., the responsibility of man to serve the living God? Does not the account have "blessing" as a preceding point and then turn on "probation?" This, it seems, is the key motif of the narrative. The state of blessing forms the background for the unfolding of the probation.

Second, blessing rests on and assumes God's sovereignty. Indeed, it has significance only upon the basis of sovereignty. Because of this, a solid argument can be advanced that "kingdom/kingship" in the sense of sovereignty has preeminence before the fall.

Third, how is this blessing involved in promise? It appears much more consistent with the text to view blessing and promise as separate elements. The blessing is the enjoyment of God's existing favor. It is present not future (promise). Part of Kaiser's argument is the thesis that blessing is the contemporary enjoyment of a promise. This, however, assumes the prior existence of a promise. Where in Genesis 1 is there a prior promise? Perhaps one could argue that it is implied in the text. However, it seems to that it is more in keeping with the text to view the state of blessing as the result of the creation and the promise (perhaps) because of this state of blessing. That is, there was an implied promise that this state would continue only if man sustained the probation.

Hence, blessing/promise as such is inadequate as a conceptual explanation embracing all of what is recorded in Genesis 1. The two ideas are related but clearly distinct. Moreover, "promise", unlike blessing, requires the balance of stipulations and sanctions in order to understand how it is introduced or brought upon man the recipient.

(2) If "narratives" includes Genesis 2 then Kaiser's statement hardly conforms to the text since the main theme in Genesis 2 clearly is probation. It expands and elucidates the probation implied in Genesis 1. The probation rests on the word of God not on a divine promise; and probation embraces both promise and curse/sanction. Also, assuming with Kaiser that blessing implies promise, how are curse/sanction included in blessing? Indeed, curse by definition is the opposite of blessing and sanction (the threat of the cessation of blessing) can hardly be viewed as blessing.

(3) If one envisions this entire period as Genesis 1-11 (as Kaiser does) then the fall of man and the results of the fall become central to the section. Indeed, a third motif is added to the major ideas presented: the promise of redemption. The entire period of history is explained *in part* by the promise in Genesis 3:15. We say *in part* because a prominent

aspect of this history is how the curse on Cain (the seed of the serpent) is worked out. How does this development relate to the promise?

How can one explain the stipulations either before or after the fall if one looks only at blessing or promise? Is not the whole set against a larger backdrop? A backdrop, which includes God's sovereign rights and claims as well as His provisions and promises? Such a backdrop must also provide for God's revealing Himself and His will to man in a form that is unchangeable. It must explain the historical reports both as to what is said and what is omitted. Promise hardly does this. How can promise explain the inclusion of the line of Cain and the curses upon that line? Are those curses somehow to be included in the blessings God gives to those who are chosen by Him? Surely not. Is not covenant a far more adequate category? It, rather than promise, is all-embracing.

Kaiser's problems continue to be evidenced when one examines his analysis of the relationship between the pre-patriarchal and Abrahamic periods.

Kaiser sees promise as "the obvious link between Genesis 1-11 and the patriarchal era". However, a "link" is not a programmatic-comprehensive connection. Much more than the mere idea of promise links the two eras. Indeed, the specifics of what God says to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 have little direct relationship with what precedes unless they are viewed against the background of covenant. The idea "promise" is there and it exists in Genesis 1-11 (see the above discussion) but the mere presence of this "idea" does not link the two eras unless the specifics of the two "promises" are the same or related. So, Kaiser says,

> ...we conclude that the generous word of God was realized in His "blessing" to man in both eras: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" ... and in His promise and the various portrayals of salvation ... in both eras, also: a seed, race, land, blessing to all nations, kings, etc. ... (p. 59).

The weaknesses in this "link" are the same weaknesses present when it is applied to the first section: (1) it does not programmatically present the stipulations of obedience, (2) it does not present the sanctions, (3) it sees no curse implicit or explicit, etc. What the concept blessing/promise does not or cannot reasonably include, the concept "covenant" does include. Furthermore, it is evident that the Abrahamic covenant assumes and builds upon past publications of the covenant. The situations established by and guaranteed in the covenant persist: man is responsible to serve God without sin, man is fallen in sin and his entire nature is corrupted, the provision of and stipulations on marriage persist, the

requirement to build a God honoring culture persists, the continuance of the created order in spite of human sinfulness persists, the promise of a seed who would deliver God's elect persists, etc.

The observations just made lead directly into the next weakness of Kaiser's view, viz., he focuses on promise as "link" and assumes it is the "programmatic structure" or idea *in spite of his frequent assertion of the covenantal principle*. It is true that Genesis 12:1-3 contains several promises, which the New Testament understands as a single promise. However, this promise rests on and is defined in terms of a covenant in key biblical passages (including the Genesis accounts themselves), e.g., Genesis 17:1-11. The promise is defined and guaranteed by the covenant God made.

Certainly promise is a key idea in both the pre-Abrahamic and the Abrahamic eras but it hardly serves to explain comprehensively or programmatically what is there. Again, promise looks forward to the idea of "kingdom of God" but it (promise) also rests on the sovereignty of God. Promise apart from sovereignty carries no certainty. The unique thing about the biblical "promise" is that it rests on divine sovereignty. It rests, furthermore, on the previous period with the centrality of "covenant" as the unifying structure. The "links" between the periods are more than "promise" because the periods are linked with "stipulation" and "sanctions" as well. The history of the periods is more than a history of redemption—it is a history of judgment as well. Indeed, it is a history of divine sovereignty keeping covenant and bringing redemption in triumph over human failure to keep the stipulations of the covenant and the concomitant judgment.

In key passages of the New Testament the Abrahamic revelation is called a covenant when conceived as a whole and one element isolated within that covenant is promise (Gal. 3:15-17). The promise of the new covenant rests on the inviolability and guarantee of the divine covenant (Heb. 8:7-13; 10:15-18).

Therefore, covenant with its stipulations, curse/sanctions, and promise does provide a programmatic relationship between the two eras. They are linked by promise but *comprehensively joined* by covenant. The centrality of the promise of a seed and His destruction of Satan and the resulting principle of election explain the choosing of Abraham. What is it that bound God to this promise? How is this blessing related to curse and stipulation? It should be evident that covenant supplies the needed answers.

The second major problem for biblical theology (according to

Kaiser) is the relationship between "Abraham promise" and the "Mosaic Law."

This problem is explained in terms that sound and are equivocal.

> What God did at the Exodus was directly related—to take the present canon's claim—to God's remembering His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... Thus the writer of Exodus saw fulfillment of parts of the ancient promise of blessing delivered to the patriarchs. The covenant had not been forgotten. (p. 61)

Again promise is offered as the link but this promise rests on and is carried out by God because He is remembering His covenant. Furthermore, the terms of the blessing in the Mosaic era (according to Kaiser) are the terms of the promise stipulated in the Abrahamic covenant. It is difficult to see promise as anything more than the result of the Abrahamic covenant and as defined by and in that covenant. So close is the identification between the covenant of Abraham and that of Moses that Jeremiah applies the ratification process of the former covenant to the origin of the latter covenant, the ratification of the Abrahamic covenant is the ratification of the Mosaic covenant (Jer. 34:18).

Aside from the rejoinder just registered, Kaiser's sounds like a good explanation. However, if promise is another biblical word for covenant, the "promise" in Deuteronomy 30 involves curse. Indeed, the new "promise" (covenant) is brought into being through curse (cf., Deut. 30:1-10 and Ezek. 36:16-27). Furthermore, the book of Deuteronomy seems to be in the form of a particular covenantal structure—the Hittite law treaty. This structure, unlike promise, programmatically includes an identification of the deity, an historical introduction, the recording of stipulations, curses and blessings, and a provision for succession. If promise is the unifying substance of the Mosaic Law and another biblical word for it is blessing, how is it that blessing is a subdivision? How can a thing simultaneously be both the universal and the particular, i.e., how can it be both itself and not itself? Indeed how is it that curse is a subdivision of promise/ blessing?

Similar weaknesses might be pointed out in Kaiser's discussion of the remaining two problems: the relationship between the premonarchical deuteronomism and Davidic promise, and the relationship between the sapiential creation theology and the prophetic promise. However, enough has been said to demonstrate the inadequacy of Kaiser's solution(s).

6. Its Equivocal Identification of Promise-blessing-covenant-

curse

This point, already stated above, deserves a more direct presentation. Kaiser appears to be guilty of a logical and linguistic equivocation when he identifies promise and blessing. Biblically speaking, all promise is not blessing, nor is all blessing promise. "I will be your God and you will be my people" is promise, but it involved the visitation of curses. Curse is not promise as Kaiser uses it since promise is a positive, ultimately messianic, idea.

This same problem disturbs Kaiser's identification of promise and covenant. As argued above, promise rests on covenant confirmed by an oath. The oath clearly is neither the promise nor the covenant, unlike Kaiser says (p. 35). Such an arbitrary use of language is confusing and perplexing.

7. Its False Exclusion of Other Organizing Principles

Kaiser remarks:

> No principle foisted as an "abstract divining rod" over the text could be expected to yield so great a theological payload" (covering the variegated interests expressed in the promise to Abraham). (p. 14)

It seems that the preceding discussion has demonstrated that it is Kaiser's "divining rod" that cannot "yield" the required "theological payload." Rather than seeing what his own argumentation points to (i.e., covenant is the unifying pattern and principle of Scripture) he equivocates by making a prominent theme (promise) the organizing pattern. This involves a host of identifications that cannot be sustained logically or textually, viz., blessing-promise, covenant-promise, etc.

8. Its Inability to Divest Itself from Covenant as the Unifying Pattern/Principle of Scripture

Kaiser seems to be unable to divest himself from the centrality of the covenant as the organizing pattern/principle of Old Testament theology. Although he constantly asserts promise is the unifying theme, he says:

> Nevertheless, neither the vocabulary nor the formulae and technical terms by themselves would make the case for a *unified plan to the entirety of the OT progress of theology*. The accent must ultimately fall where it fell for the writers themselves—on a network of interlocking moments in history made significant because of their content, free allusions to one

another, and their *organic unity. The focus of the record fell on the content and recipients of God's numerous covenants*. The content remained epigenetically constant ... The content was a divine "blessing," a "given word," a "declaration," a "pledge," or "oath"—that God Himself would freely do or be something for all men, nations, and nature, generally." (Emphasis added) (p. 35f.)

Kaiser points to a few passages as the key Old Testament passages establishing promise as providing the "unified plan": Genesis 12:1-3, 2 Samuel 7:11-16, and Jeremiah 31:31-34. In addition, he points us to the seminal importance of Genesis 3:15, 9:25-27, and 12:1-3 (p. 35). However, (1) all of these passages do not include all that conditions the future (i.e., although they include grace they do not include the curse element), and (2) the covenant is central to all these passages. Promise is present but only as the one prominent element of the "covenant."

9. Its Inadequate Principle of Selection

Kaiser's work presents a problem regarding the principle he says was used by the human authors to select and form incidents to be included in the canon.

> ... the OT did reflect on Israel's history according to a preannounced principle of selectivity. That principle by which historical incidents were included or rejected was the consistent prophetic statement: "Thus saith the Lord."

Does this mean that this statement was recorded in the record or does it refer to God's telling the human authors what to include and how to include it? If this was God's personal revelation to the authors, the statement violates Kaiser's textual standard, viz., that the Old Testament biblical theologian proceed inductively and diachronically. If it does conform to this textual standard then where in the text (e.g., in Gen. 1-11) does it occur? In other words, how is this "principle" justified in view of Kaiser's own rules?

The problem is clarified by the following quote,

> ... a single principle, a single understanding of all revelation, which sorted things out for writers. It was God's revealed "promise" in which He would be the hope of all men and effect divine work of universal implications. (p. 42)

Kaiser seems to understand the "thus saith the Lord" as the "promise."

But this latter statement (the above quote) raises some questions.

(1) What does "revelation" mean in this statement? Does it mean what God said? If so, (2) what does "sorted things out for the writers" mean? Does it mean that the selection came by the human writers' selecting what was to be in the Bible? Should not "revelation" cover that content of the word and acts of God and what was recorded? This latter idea includes not simply what was recorded but the form/dimensions of what was recorded. God not only set forth the content to be recorded but also saw that only what He intended or willed was organized and set it forth in the form He willed. (3) It is hardly the case that the promise so conceived was the selective principle used by the human authors because (a) Kaiser himself notes that promise means current application as well as and *future fulfillment* (how could the human authors know the future fulfillment?), (b) not all of biblical revelation can be subsumed under "promise"—as we have already seen there is much in the Bible that is not "promise."

10. It Offers an Insufficient Understanding of Israel's Task

Kaiser's limitation of the plan of the Bible to a central core leads him to a number of problematical exegetical-theological conclusions. One of these is his insufficient understanding of Israel's task. He states it thus:

> The distinctive nature and special status given to this nation, God's personal possession, was wrapped up in their universal priesthood. They were to be mediators of God's grace to the nations of the earth even as in Abraham 'all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.'
>
> Unfortunately for the people, they declined the privilege of being a national priesthood in preference to representation under Moses and Aaron (Exod. 19:16-25, 20:18- 21). Therefore, the original purpose of God was delayed (not scraped or defeated forever) until NT times when the priesthood of all believers was again proclaimed (1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Nevertheless, Israel's role of being the agents chosen by God to minister to the needs of the nations was not rescinded. (p. 109)

Kaiser's statement that Israel was "to be mediators of God's grace to the nations of the earth" "to minister to the needs of the nations" as the expression of their "universal priesthood" is the perceived problem.

The problems perceived with Kaiser's view are (1) it wrongly assumes Israel was charged with the great commission, (2) it misunderstands the function of the priesthood, and (3) it misunderstands the differences between the "priesthood of Israel" set forth in Exodus 19:6 and

the New Testament priesthood of believers.

Kaiser appears to assume Israel was charged with the great commission. He suggests that the "universal priesthood" was intended to minister the blessings of God to the nations. When this is paralleled to the New Testament priesthood, it means to carry the Gospel to the nations (although exactly what the Old Testament priesthood was to minister to the nations is not stated by Kaiser). But this "ministering the blessing to the nations" runs contrary to the function of the priesthood as described in the Mosaic Law. The people are priests before God insofar as they served before God in everything they did. The ministry of this priesthood was God oriented and not oriented toward those outside Israel. The ordained priests ministered before God bringing the people into His presence. Again, this ministry is God oriented and not man oriented. In this regard note that God mandated that the people come to His priests (Exod. 23:17, Deut. 12) and not that the priests go to the people offering their services/ministrations. Furthermore, in the Mosaic Law the "priesthood of the covenantal members" was, from the outset, mediated by a high priest. They were necessarily under that priesthood and could not approach God personally and immediately. In the New Testament, the universal priesthood of believers does not depend on any merely human priest to be a mediator between the people and the Lord God. The sole mediator is Christ himself and He is God (2 Tim. 3:5). When one comes to Him, one comes to God. In this way, all believers are priests before God. In our function as those who spread the Gospels and its blessing, are we not "prophets" rather than priests? In Acts 2 Peter explains that the promise of Joel 2:28-32 being fulfilled by Christ before their eyes, is that God would anoint all the elect enabling those thus anointed to carry out the Great Commission (cf., Acts 1:8). It is explicitly a prophetic task, according to Peter. The original purpose of God, therefore, was not delayed but was realized in Israel—although one should recognize that this realization was a foreshadowing of Christ's eternal priesthood, Hebrews 10:1. The present priesthood of believers has to do with the individual's relationship to God and not to His relationship to others outside the covenant.

The underlying difficulty producing all of these problems is Kaiser's rejection of covenantal theology. Because he rejects the thesis of this one covenant[11] underlying all of biblical revelation, he rejects or misunderstands the underlying concept of the priesthood and kingship. The king-

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[11] This one covenant embraces the pre-fall covenant of works and the post-fall covenant of grace.

ship of God is the source of many blessings that are communicated to His people through the ruling and "witnessing-prophetic" offices, i.e., these offices move primarily from God to man whereas the priesthood moves primarily from man to God. It is a divinely provided means through which man can commune with God. Redemption under the covenant is accomplished by Christ for His people and applied to them by the ascended and enthroned Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. In sanctification, Christ as priest prays for His people and as king He applies the blessings to them.

D. Summary and Conclusions

Our discussion of Kaiser's promise theology has set forth his basic working principles, and then looked at some of the positive things about his work. Finally, a series of criticisms were offered that seem to invalidate promise as the key to the plan of Scriptural revelation.

Our presentation of Kaiser's promise theology noted several foundational principles and their seminal development as presented by Kaiser. He discussed the importance of definition and methodology concluding that biblical theology must be truly biblical. It must present what is recorded in the Bible. Also, it must present it in its historical-diachronical unfolding. In any scientific study, these two preparatory aspects of the study are crucial for meaningful communication. Then, using certain Old Testament summary statements, he identifies the theological center of the Old Testament around which the whole develops. After this, he develops an outline for Old Testament biblical theology based on how that theological center or core develops historically within the various eras of Old Testament revelation. Finally, it was noted how Kaiser faces the key objections to any biblical theology and how he proposes his "core" as the solution to each problem.

Several positive elements were seen in Kaiser's position. One very strong element is his use of and dependence on Beecher. Although he does not always acknowledge this dependence as he develops his position, those who have read Beecher's work first see this dependence is virtually ubiquitous. In general, Kaiser's preparatory principles are commendable, viz., the principles as to the nature, method, scope, and the motivation of Old Testament theology. He improves upon Beecher regarding the starting place for Old Testament theology by starting with Genesis 1:1. Of course, in all fairness, it must be acknowledged that Beecher did not intend to write a biblical theology. Kaiser repeatedly makes significant comments, conclusions, and applications that indicate his rejection of and

the inadequacy of dispensationalism. There are a number of excellent theological and exegetical conclusions offered in his book. Specifically, the idea of corporate solidarity, the use of "rest" as a paradigm of true blessedness, and the teaching on the relationship between blessing and election were presented. Indeed, many other such conclusions might be pointed out.

The heart of our treatment is the discussion of the negative elements of Kaiser's position. There are several such elements. They suggest why one should reject Kaiser's approach as the key to unlocking the unity of Scripture. They also, show why Kaiser's approach is inadequate as a handmaid to exegesis and that it produces a biblical theology which does not conform adequately to what the Bible teaches about itself.

His interaction with critical scholarship almost ignores the prior work by evangelical scholars. But, more crucially, he accepts the problematics of critical scholarship. In constructing his work to respond to critical scholarship, he accepts some of the principles of critical scholarship. This is seen in the language he uses at times and, more significantly, in his use of the "diachronic method" almost to the exclusion of the eternal dimension of Scripture. This approach involves him in a kind of historicism that is reluctant to use later biblical revelation to explain what appears in earlier periods. This is a major weakness of the approach because the Bible itself often both necessitates using later revelation and in later revelation gives significant structural interpretations. Also, it appears that his interaction with criticism leads him to restrict the purpose of biblical theology to aiding exegesis. It would be well to add to this the additional purpose of aiding systematic theology. Finally, the outlook for critical scholarship may be seen in an erroneous submission of Scripture to the tests devised by human autonomy and, therefore, to human autonomy itself.

The shortcomings of Kaiser's approach may be seen in the proposed means to unify and programmatically explain biblical revelation. First, the core offered presents a unifying theme for Scripture but does not provide the *programmatic* plan needed to unify the whole of Scripture. Kaiser himself argues that of a unifying *plan-pattern* of Scripture is needed if its content is to be understood properly. Yet, when one examines how he develops his "core" it is seen that Kaiser's core does not supply the needed *comprehensive* plan-pattern. Second, Kaiser offers an equivocal identification of promise-blessing-covenant-curse that results in real confusion when applied to particular biblical passages. This identification simply ignores the biblical material and meaningful communication, e.g., how can

curse be equivalent to blessing/promise? Third, Kaiser's approach falsely excludes other organizing principles, and, in particular, "covenant" even though (1) Kaiser himself so often refers to "covenant" in a way that argues it underlies and, therefore, explains "blessing-promise", and (2) the references he cites to demonstrate that "blessing-promise" is the unifying principle of Scripture lead to the conclusion that "covenant" is that unifying structure. Fourth, therefore, the discussion pointed to Kaiser's inability to divest himself from covenant as the unifying pattern/principle of Scripture. Fifth, it was seen how Kaiser's "core" is an inadequate principle to explain why God led the biblical writers selected what material to record in Scripture, whereas "covenant" is an adequate principle. Sixth, Kaiser's approach leads him to an insufficient understanding of Israel's task.

Therefore, although Kaiser sets forth the reasons why a biblical theology can and should be pursued he does not offer an approach adequate to the need. He selects one biblical theme and stretches it to embrace all the other themes. In doing this he repeatedly refers to that which does provide an integrating plan/pattern for Scripture, viz., "covenant".

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the five characteristics of Kaiser's approach to biblical theology?

2. What is the fixed or central core of the Old Testament message?

3. What is the difference between the "analogy of antecedent Scripture" and the "rule of faith"?

4. What are the four main problems of "connection"?

5. What is the nature of Old Testament biblical theology?

6. What are some of Kaiser's criticism's of dispensationalism?

7. What is "corporate solidarity"?

8. How is Kaiser's use of the diachronic method a shortcoming of his work?

9. How does Kaiser restrict the purpose of biblical theology?

10. How does Kaiser's organizing principle evidence its inability to be a unifying plan?

11. In what way does Kaiser fail to properly relate pre-patriarchal blessing and patriarchal promise?

12. What problems are there in Kaiser's analysis of the relationship between the pre-patriarchal and Abrahamic periods?

13. What problems are there in Kaiser's analysis of the relationship between Abrahamic promise and the Mosaic law?

14. How does Kaiser equivocate as to promise, blessing, covenant, curse?

15. What is the weakness in Kaiser's "principle of selection"?

16. How does Kaiser offer an insufficient understanding of Israel's task?

Chapter 6. TESTAMENT THEOLOGY:
An Examination and Evaluation of the Biblical Theological Approach of J. Barton Payne

The last approach to Old Testament biblical theology treated in this book is known as covenantal theology. The focus will be on two representative schools or scholars using this approach. In order of treatment, they are: J. Barton Payne's testament theology, and Meredith Kline's treaty theology. John Murray's abrahamic-election theology, O. Palmer Robertson's synthesis theology, and Geerhardus Vos' biblical theology will be treated in another place.[12]

The reader should keep in mind that some of these positions are not represented by final and full expositions since the representative(s) is still working out his ideas. Furthermore, some of their more recent work may not be available. Nonetheless, an attempt will be made to interact with each position. Such interaction might be helpful in the current theological situation.

One of the most well known and widely accepted approaches to covenantal theology is what may be referred to as J. Barton Payne's testament theology. The label "testament theology" has been chosen for two reasons. First, each label is an attempt to identify the approach under consideration by its distinguishing characteristic and "testament" is appropriate for this approach.   Second, each label is intended to distinguish the position from all the others being discussed and "testament" accomplishes this goal.

Dr. Payne has set forth his view in his monumental work *The Theology of the Older Testament*.   This work rivals Oehler's in its comprehensive treatment of the Old Testament material. It is much more useful to the reformed pastor and layman, however, because it is more recent, covenantal in approach and reformed in theology.

Again, this position will be examined under three categories: (1) the presentation of the position, (2) its weaknesses, and (3) its strengths.

A. The Presentation of the Position

The main principles of Payne's approach are presented in the first two major divisions of his work entitled "the communication of God's will: special revelation" and "the relationship: the testament."   In the

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[12] Leonard J. Coppes, *From Adam to Adam: An Old Testament Biblical Theology, Part I* (Providence Presbyterian Press: Thornton, 2004).

interest of the purposes of this study, these two divisions will be retitled. These sections of Payne's work are of major interest and help to anyone interested in biblical theology.

1. The Principles of Biblical Theology

Payne takes virtually the same position as Oehler does regarding the nature of biblical theology. On the other hand, his work is decidedly reformed while Oehler's is Lutheran. In this section Payne and Oehler are compared because it is the only work reviewed to this point that covers that same ground as Payne's.

Both scholars agree that God directs all history. Payne, however, sees a different purpose for the divine creation of man. Man's created purpose was to glorify God by doing His will and to glorify Him forever. Oehler could agree with Payne's words but probably not with his meaning when he (Payne) says God, "continues to uphold and to govern all things by His providence."

Certainly, they agree that God has used special revelation from the beginning to communicate His will to men.

a. The Presuppositions of Biblical Theology

Payne lists a number of presuppositions of proper biblical theology. By "presupposition" he apparently means ideas that are the necessary undergirding for the work. He deals with these "presuppositions" so briefly that one has difficulty understanding exactly what he means and how the "presupposition" relates to biblical theology.

First, there is "the historical significance of religion." This statement points to the ubiquity of religion among men. Everywhere there are men there is religion. Religion is an inescapable datum of human experience. Presumably, Payne intends this to be one of the "facts" arguing for the exclusive validity of Christianity.

Second, he asserts "the normativeness, or personally binding quality of religion." By this he refers to the nature of religion as that which demands personal commitment from men. This second "fact" advances the argument an additional step.

The third principle is "the existence of deity as ultimate truth". This presupposition gets its necessity and validity from the normativeness or personally binding nature of religion: "It is their reference to the Supreme Being that makes standards compulsive."

The fourth presupposition is "the knowableness of divine truth." Consistent with most of reformation Protestant theologians, Payne asserts

that God is incomprehensible as to His being but His revealed truth is understandable. This presupposition, no doubt, arises from the fact that He is ultimate truth and that there do exist binding principles that are known and normative among men. Furthermore, the knowableness of divine truth and God's patent concern to communicate that truth man lead to the conclusion that this fourth presupposition includes God's making known propositional truths about Himself. This idea is expressly contrasted to neo-orthodoxy and their presuppositions that divine truth (if not all truth) cannot be set forth in propositions. This new orthodoxy, says Payne, is "a specialized form of agnosticism." Payne argues against neo-orthodoxy's non-propositional revelation by noting that God, who created, "should be able" to communicate. Man, since he is in God's image, is able to understand "even with his limited perception."

Fifth is "the fact of revelation." God is not only able and concerned to reveal His truth, but He does make Himself known to man. Man needs this "help" because he is finite and sinful.

Sixth is the presupposition that effective revelation is limited to Scripture. There is adequate revelation in nature, but man's sinfulness has blinded him to it.

Finally, Payne notes that one must identify "the whole of Scripture with revelation." It is God's words.

b. The Nature of Biblical Theology

Having declared the presuppositions of biblical theology, he turns to the nature of biblical theology. He states that biblical theology is historical, divine, and redemptive. His discussion shows considerable influence from Oehler and Vos, two scholars to whom he explicitly gives credit.

By "historical" he means that biblical theology deals with objective events. Hence, for him, chronology is "the organizing factor." Moreover, it is very important to view an event or statement from the perspective of when it occurs. He pointedly and correctly reminds the reader that the interpretation or significance of an event may rest with the time of its writing rather than with the time of its occurrence.

By "divine" he means that biblical theology (1) deals with and comes from God: "the reality of God, actively communicating His will in history." God is the central interest of a proper biblical theology. The focus is not simply on doctrine, or the didactic of Scripture, but also on the (2) acts of God. Divine revelation is (3) relational, i.e., it declares how God relates to man. (4) It (both as it occurred in history and as it is

recorded in the Bible) is an "internally consistent unity." What is in the Bible comprehends all that God deems significant for man to know. (5) It is accurate or "inspired." It occurs in great variety but without being contradictory. (6) So, Payne describes the content of the Bible as the "cumulative knowledge of the many facets of the living God." He says the unity of knowledge in the Bible is related by way of "variety, supplementation, and clarification." In this body of material, there is never theological replacement, correction or self-contradiction. (p. 17-18)

Payne says biblical theology is "redemptive"—God's concern is "to bring man back to Himself." "God's revelation appeared only in conjunction with God's redemption."

There is only one plan of salvation—Christ is and always has been the only way of salvation (Jn. 14:6). God's redemptive acts were progressive and so is the revelation explaining those acts. All of God's revelation was and is "according to man's capacities to receive" that revelation. The variety appears against a larger background of organic unity. There is a growing specificity in the redemptive plan. The entire plan is climaxed in Christ, the focal point of all revelation (Acts 10:13). Biblical theology is a practical guide "to a God-blessed life of faith and practice."

c. The Content of Biblical Theology

Biblical theology derives all its content from the Bible. It culminates in Christ both as to act and word.

d. The Relationship to Other "Theological" Disciplines

Payne places biblical theology in the context of other "theological" disciplines. He does an excellent job. First, the whole field of theology is taken in its broadest sense, then exegetical theology, and then theology in general. His treatment is far more extensive and contemporary than Oehler's.

The four divisions of exegetical theology deal with biblical background, content, publication, and truth. "Background" entails geography, the ancient Near Eastern materials, archaeology, and the religions of the ancient Near East. "Content" embraces appreciation of the biblical text and includes biblical and related languages, hermeneutics, and exegesis. "Publication" entails general and special introduction. "Truth" identifies apologetics and biblical theology.

The general over-all relationship of all these other "divisions" is stated as follows:

Each of the other exegetical subdivisions provides pre-requi-sites that are necessary for the construction of a valid Biblical theology. (p. 20)

The treatment of biblical "content" is related to biblical theology as follows:

…it is clear that a careful exegesis of the text of Scripture, in its original languages and by sound hermeneutical principles, must precede the reformulation of its ideas in biblical theology.

Biblical theology assumes sound textual criticism. Precise understanding of the biblical message rests on dealing with the original text of the Bible. Hence, textual criticism which seeks to determine that original text is a very important discipline. Proper biblical theology also presupposes determination of the canon.

Biblical theology is said to be the "crown of exegetical theology." So, all exegetical theology finds its apex and goal in biblical theology.

Payne relates biblical theology to history of religion studies and systematic theology. All three disciplines "deal with the nature of religion" (p. 21). Biblical theology arranges truths in "the order of their revelation." Systematics arranges them in a "topical synthesis" (p. 22). They deal with the same data but from different perspectives. Biblical theology is the handmaiden of systematic theology insofar as it provides the fundamental data with which the former deals. Biblical theology, by treating a particular teaching as it is presented in the various historical periods, safeguards against reading too much into a particular text. Systematic theology, by providing an overview of the entire Bible, helps biblical theology to be aware of the goal and background of the various biblical teachings.

e. The History of Biblical Theology

Payne offers a brief but excellent summary of the history of Old Testament biblical theology. He gives a somewhat inadequate bibliography regarding the development of negative critical views, but this is probably due to his concern to focus only on an English speaking and reading audience.

(1) Preparations

Under the section he entitles "preparations" he gives an interesting but short summary of how the Old Testament was viewed as a source of theology from the period of the Old Testament psalmist(s) and later

prophets to the time the authority of the church replaced the authority of the Bible (p. 25-26). He designates Irenaeus the first biblical theologian since he "emphasized the unity that is found within God's progressive revelation." A little later, Augustine spoke of five historical periods in the Old Testament.

(2) Reformation Period

The reformation era heralded the re-establishing of two key principles of biblical theology: the analogy of Scripture, and the literal sense of Scripture (as opposed to the allegorical sense). The battle in which the reformers engaged led them to emphasize the "final results of theology" rather than "its historically earlier stages." Thus, they and those who followed in their footsteps "tended" to read the New Testament into the Old (p. 26).

One of the very significant figures in the history of biblical theology is Cocceius. It is interesting to see the difference in Payne's and Oehler's evaluations of Cocceius. For Payne, this early theologian accomplished the,

> …first serious advance since Augustine in relating theology to God's historical activity. ... he successively grasped Scripture's own key to the progress of divine revelation. (p. 27)

Cocceius is often designated as the father of federal or covenantal theology and Payne reiterates that opinion. He stands out in contrast to his contemporaries as one who was concerned for biblical theology. He,

> …sought to develop a Biblical (sic) approach to doctrine, as opposed to the then prevailing dogmatic approach. ... organized his thought around God's successively revealed covenants... (p. 27)

He stressed two major covenants: the covenant of works with Adam in his innocence and the covenant of grace or "God's redemptive activity with fallen man." He divided the covenant of grace into three dispensations: before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel. In agreement with Oehler, Payne notes that the,

> ... actual exegesis of Cocceius was often arbitrary and was characterized by an excessive use of typology. (p. 26)

(3) Nineteenth Century

Payne notes that little more than what Cocceius had accomplished was done before the 19th century, the second major historical period of

Old Testament biblical theology. The German scholar Gabler made a major contribution (as Oehler also says). Payne has a high evaluation of the Lutheran scholar Hengstenburg. He says he "first demonstrated the value of Old Testament theology...." Although Payne joins Oehler in criticizing Hengstenburg for reading the New Testament into the Old Testament, he, unlike Oehler, praises Hengstenburg when he says his exegesis "is careful and represents the revelations that God actually made" (p. 27).

Payne gives greater value than Oehler does to Havernick's work (as represented in the revision by Hermann Schultz) saying it is

> ...a thorough study that traces the thought of the Old Testament, first chronologically and then topically.

Payne credits Oehler's work as "one of the two most adequate, complete treatments of the subject" (p. 28). He criticizes Oehler for having some weaknesses in particular aspects of the biblical revelation. Specifically such weaknesses are seen in Oehler's theory of sacrifice, and of life after death. Payne does not mention the more serious weaknesses of Oehler's work as discussed above.

Interestingly, Payne points to A. B. Davidson's book *The Theology of the Old Testament,* as a work equal in value with Oehler's. Its author, Davidson, claimed to accept higher criticism, but most of the material in this book was written at a stage of his scholarly development antedating any intensive influence on his presentation of the content of the Bible. Therefore, the negative critical views of Davidson appear as superimposed on the work rather than being actually being integral to it.

Next, he summarizes the movement described as "historicism." This approach to the Old Testament assumes a closed universe and consequently rejects the validity of supernatural revelation. Payne also discusses the Heilsgechichte, or history of salvation, approach which views the Bible as later Israel's interpretation of their history in terms of what they deemed God had done among them to effect salvation.

Payne offers an excellent treatment of dispensationalism (p. 31f.) including a brief but adequate presentation of its distinctives and an extended detailed exegetical refutation. These latter two aspects appear scattered throughout the opening chapters of Payne's book, but they are clear, accurate and convincing.

(4) Twentieth Century

Neo-orthodoxy is masterfully summarized and criticized (cf., 32-38).

Payne's excellent work on neo-orthodoxy is matched by his review of twentieth century conservatism. Among the scholars mentioned is Geerhardus Vos whom Payne says produced "... the finest single work presently available on Old Testament theology..." (p. 39). Presumably, Payne has written his book because of the inadequacies he saw in Vos'. He clearly states his dependence on Vos' work which he says displays "masterful exegesis and theological insight..." (p. 40). The influence and works of other prominent American covenantal theologians such as E. J. Young and John Murray are discussed briefly but sufficiently.

Finally, there is an interesting survey of the rise and pollution (with neo-orthodoxy) of Roman Catholic biblical scholarship.

3. The Mode of Divine Communication

a. Revelation

In this division, Payne surveys the mode of divine communication as presented by the Bible. God's revelation is divided into ten periods that are based on and determined by the historical unfolding of God's revelation. Only the first three periods are mentioned here to demonstrate the character of Payne's survey.

The first or primeval period is the era from creation to Abraham. Very significantly, Payne notes that Vos and Oehler recognize only two periods (Mosaic and prophetic) and remarks that this minimizes both what precedes and what follows Moses. The pre-fall and the immediately post-fall edenic revelations are labeled respectively the covenant of works and the testament of Eden.

> The former may be said to have set the stage for redemption, while the latter possess a redemptive significance that has continued without abatement to the present. (p. 44)

These are said to be "the basis for all subsequent revelations of Himself" (p. 44). The object of all God's revelation is redemption and not primarily knowledge about God.

> Knowledge about God is thus not an end in itself. It becomes effective only as it produces an active response on the part of its hearers. (p. 44)

Additionally, God's acts are both preceded by and explained by word revelation (p. 45).

The patriarchal period records the history of redemption from Abraham up to the birth of Moses. The mode of divine revelation is not so casual as before. Now God appears to men. These appearances are called

theophanies. Men respond, at least in part, by building altars and making sacrifices upon them. Now for the first time in recorded biblical history it is specifically God's Word that comes. Also, there are now visions (direct or symbolical) and dreams (while asleep). Finally, the prophet, the priest, and the "wise" all appear for the first time.

The historical and revelational material of the next period, the Mosaic period, is reported on by the rest of Pentateuch and Psalm 90. Notably, Payne takes all the narratives or explanatory material of Genesis as Mosaic. Hence, Genesis 1-2 is said to be Mosaic and unknown by patriarchs and others before them.

During this period, God's providential acts were more significant for knowledge of God than was the speaking of God in the creation.

> ...the greatest single manifestation (act) of God was His spectacular appearance upon Mt. Sinai in the spring of 1446 BC for the adoption of Israel as His people...
>
> The heart of the Old Testament faith was this: `Yahweh came from Sinai, and rose from Seir unto them' (Deut. 33:2). (p. 46)

b. Inspiration

Inspiration deals with the character or nature of the Bible, i.e., of what is written down.

Payne states that inspired writing begins with Moses. The first recorded divine command to write something down is found in Exodus 17:14. This passage refers to an historical record already composed or being kept; the new material is to be recorded "in the book." It is not said what this prior record was. In addition to this passage,

> …the historical narratives of Genesis ... present themselves as an authoritative standard for divinely-approved conduct. (Gen. 39:9.) (p. 63)

At points, Moses makes it clear that what he is writing down are God's words just as they were spoken to him. Indeed, the Bible reports that Moses' written words are on the same level of authority as God's words. They have the "same canonically binding authority as" God's words. Therefore, the entire Pentateuch was to be placed beside the ark (Deut. 31:26). Payne concludes:

> Though the process of inspiration is not yet described, the end product consists of a book that is the equivalent of God's own composition. (p. 64)
>
> This conclusion is established by several Scriptural facts

among which is that Joshua is charged to be subject to the Law of Moses (Josh. 1:8).

Payne details how the canon grew. Specifically, he shows how godly men and prophets are said to have written down God's actions and words and how the product was added to what had already been written "as rapidly as" it was written down.

He demonstrates his thesis as follows:

> During this same exilic period, an unnamed prophet produced the final compilation of 1 and 2 Kings. His parallel use of "law" and "prophecy" in 2 Kings 17:13 demonstrates the identical authoritativeness of these two major divisions of Old Testament literature. Degrees of biblical inspiration are of course impossible; for guaranteed truthfulness, which is the ultimate characteristic of God's books, either exists or it does not. (p. 69)

The result of this process was that "the Book" dominated Old Testament religion as it dominates New Testament religion (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

3. The Nature of the Covenant

a. The Content of Biblical Theology

In this second major section, Payne discusses the content of special revelation which he presents as the organizing principle of biblical revelation. Payne says the Old Testament gives two "basic answers to the question of the content of special revelation" (p. 72).

(1) Redemption

One of the two basic constitutive elements of special revelation is redemption. This refers to the restoration of harmony with God. The Old Testament offerings, for example, offered the benefits of Christ's death. They

> …signified Israel's redemption, a redemption made possible by means of a life sacrificed to God for the propitiation of His wrath against the people. (p. 72)

When the elders ate the covenant instituting meal on Mt. Sinai, they "had come into a state of reconciliation with God." However,

> The ultimate accomplishment of this redemption took place when Jesus Christ shed His divine blood on Calvary's cross.

Christ's death,

> ... is the `scarlet cord' that binds together the Biblical reve-
> lation and constitutes its very heart: God and sinners rec-
> onciled! He is theirs and they are His. It was true for
> Abraham (Gen. 17:7); it was true for Moses (Ex. 20:1); and it
> continues so, right on through to the end (Rev. 21:3) (p. 72-
> 73)

(2) Truth

The second basic constitutive element of special revelation is truth.
Truth as such is a rather vague concept and Payne quickly defines it as
revelation. Then he defines revelation by saying,

> Revelation is not only a form of communication, it is also
> the propositional content communicated. (p. 73)

This propositional content stipulates the terms of the divine arrangement,

> …by which He mediates His redemption—"Mine ordin-
> ances which, if a man do, he shall live in them (Lev. 18:5; cf.,
> 1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

These terms, moreover, are summed up in the 'testament'. The
testament is,

> …the legal instrument established by God, through which
> men may be brought into reconciliation with Himself. (Gen.
> 17:7)

This legal instrument gives man an "objective source" for religious hope.
This legal instrument, moreover, is the structure defining the content of
the Old Testament. It is more than just one of many possible organizing
principles, it is the one and only organizing structure. Thus he says, it is

> ... not one of many possible organizing principles for Bib-
> lical revelation; the communication of its features constitutes
> the historical event of God's saving encounter with men. ... all
> other facets of Biblical theology are corollaries.
> "The very incompleteness of Scripture in respect to certain
> doctrines appears to be due to their incidental relationship to
> the testament. (p. 73)

Having specified the content of special revelation, Payne sets forth
the unity of the testament. He cogently argues that the testament is that
which unifies the entire Scriptural content. God's treatment is concise,
clear and biblical.

Payne argues that salvation comes only through God's gracious
activity. It rests upon His mercy toward men (Jer. 31:21; Eph. 2:8, 9). All

men after the fall have stood under the curse and are unable to effect their own redemption (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:8, 18). Their only hope is in the Lord's grace (Jer. 31:18). Objectively, they gain salvation only when identified with Christ's righteous life, substitutionary death, and resurrection (Col. 1:27; Matt. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:24; Phil. 3:21; Jn. 14:6). This is true of every one who ever was or will be saved, whether they lived before or after Christ (Heb. 11:40). Israel stood under the blood but only as that blood anticipated the offering of the body of Christ once for all (Exod. 24:8; Heb. 9:19; 10:4, 12). (p. 74)

Therefore, at all periods after the fall salvation is appropriated by faith alone (Gen. 15:6; Deut. 6:4, 5; Col. 2:5; Heb. 11:6ff.). Man's faith always is to be demonstrated by his works (Gen. 17:1; Deut. 6:6; Col. 2:6, 7). "...there is basically only one testament." This testamental (covenantal) relationship is the status of all the Old Testament and New Testament faithful (2 Kings 13:23; 1 Chron. 16:16, 17; Lev. 26:42, 45; 2 Chron. 15:12; Ps. 74:20; 2 Kings 23:2; Matt. 26:28). (p. 74)

In a section entitled the development of the testamental relationship, Payne traces a "real historical development" within the "basic unity of the testamental relationship." He points first to the primary gradation or the distinction between the Old and New Testaments as seen in the well-known division of the Bible. The two adjectives "old" and "new",

> correspond to the organization and even to the terminology the Scripture imposes upon itself. (p. 74)

Jeremiah confessed he lived under the ancient covenant (Jer. 31:32) and looked forward to the new covenant. In Deuteronomy 30:6 Moses prophesies the new covenant (cf., Ezek. 36:16-32). Jeremiah 3:16 foresees the removal of the ark of the covenant and that it would not be missed or remembered. Hebrews 9:15-18 says the pre-Christians lived under the first testament and according to 2 Corinthians 3:14 they read the Old Testament. Believers inherit the promises of the Old Testament (Gal. 3:29). Christ is the mediator of the second and better testament (Heb. 8:6, 7). Both the old covenant and the new covenant members looked to the salvation accomplished by Christ (Heb. 8:5; 9:12, 10:10) (p. 75). Hence, the development and dividing the Bible into these two basic divisions is thoroughly consistent with what the Bible teaches concerning itself.

> But there is still a factor of distinction that marks these eras as two major dispensations or administrations within redemptive history—the older, mediated salvation by anticipatory faith in redemption yet to come (Heb. 8:5); and the newer, by commemorative faith in redemption once for all

accomplished (Heb. 9:12; 10:10). (p. 75)

b. The Definition of the Covenant/Testament

Now comes the heart of Payne's unique contribution to the history of biblical theology: his definition of covenant, or (as he says) "testament." The difference between covenant and testament is more than verbal. It is essential. The difference leads one to look at the Bible quite differently. Covenant is variously defined by other covenantal theologians, as shall be seen later, but they are united against Payne in maintaining that basically the covenant of grace is distinctly a covenant and not a testament (as those words are used in the contemporary debate).

(1) Covenant

In the introduction to his definition of covenant, Payne looks at three lines of argument. First, he examines the suggested etymological and historical roots of the word. He sets forth two prominent current etymological derivations of the Hebrew word rendered covenant. Both of these, he notes, "favor" the idea that covenant is a "mutually binding agreement." One of the most popular evangelical and reformed historical explanations is associated with Dr. Meredith Kline, Sr. (his theology will be presented below) who suggests that the biblical covenant is formally parallel to and reflective of the mid-second millennium "suzerainty covenant." After a brief presentation of these suggestions, Payne concludes,

> Basically, however, the solution to the meaning of the word
> *berith* is to be sought, not in its original derivation, or even in
> its significance as found in pagan cultures that surrounded
> Israel. It is only in the transformed usage of the term as it
> appears in God's own historical revelation that its ultimate
> import is disclosed. (p. 79)

Second, Payne reviews the Old Testament usage of the word covenant. This is an excellent brief review of the relevant material. He describes three uses in the Old Testament. "Covenant" is applied to agreements between two or more persons. This is a "dipleuric" or bilateral covenant. The parties mutually agree to certain conditions, responsibilities, etc. This is "an agreement voluntarily accepted by both parties" (p. 80). This form of covenant is different than those covenants representing a "disposition, imposed by a superior party..." This is a "monopleuric" or unilateral covenant. The superior party imposes and disposes his will upon the lesser party. This sense is often used when the term covenant is applied to God's relationship to His people.

It is...a sovereignly imposed, monopleuric injunction. Obligation, without review by the human party, characterized God's relation with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the "Thus saith the Lord" of Mt. Sinai, and the acts of God in Dan. 4:35 who `doeth all things according to His will...among the inhabitants of the earth.' (p. 81)

The last usage is:

When the parties concerned are God in His grace and man in his sin, on whose behalf God acts, the *berith* becomes God's self-imposed obligation for the deliverance of sinners. (p. 81)

According to John Murray (who is cited by Payne), a leading exponent of the idea of covenant, covenant is:

... a sovereign administration of grace and promise. It is not a `compact' or `contract' or `agreement' that provides the constitutive or governing idea but that of `dispensation' in the sense of disposition.

The reconciliation between God and man was "effectuated" by God alone, but "God's holiness demanded a removal of sin." The instrument by which this removal was accomplished was the atonement. This, in turn, required a bloody sacrifice in the form of a "substitutionary surrender of life" which, Jesus alone (the God-man) could make.

(2) Testament

Payne rejects the idea of covenant (all three of the above) in favor of the idea of testament because although the essential ingredients of testament are too sophisticated for the Old Testament, this does not deny the presence of the idea,

…for actually all of its essential elements are present. The Old Testament simply assigns to God's legally binding, monergistic declaration of redemption the title *berith*; but for the elucidation of the precise, divinely-intended meaning of *berith*, one must then turn to the New Testament. (p. 82)

Having thus cleared the field of the other theological definitions of covenant, Payne turns to the New Testament seeking a more "biblical" definition. The lexicographical word used to render *berith*, viz., *diatheke* (in the Greek Old Testament), and the translation "covenant" in the New Testament are not determinative,

On the basis, therefore, of lexicography, one cannot decide either for `testament' or for `covenant', though the former is

indeed the more normal meaning. Again, it is the Biblical con-text that must be determinative. (p. 83)

Payne "asserts" what is perhaps the key statement in his entire book:

> Within the context of the New Testament the most crucial passage is Hebrews 9:15-22 and especially verses 16 and 17. (p. 83)

He clearly and correctly exegetes these last two verses demonstrating that they use the word ordinarily rendered "covenant" in the sense "testament". Testament, in distinction from the three suggested Old Testament senses of covenant, denotes a last will and testament. He asserts that the same meaning persists in the surrounding verses, and in all of Hebrews 9. Then he extends this sense to the rest of the New Testament:

> Preceding further, one finds that in the rest of the New Testament the *diatheke* passages fall into two groups: those referring to God's Old Testament *berith*, and those referring to the new *diatheke* of Jesus Christ. The latter passages include such verses as Matthew 26:28 .... Among the passages that refer to the Old Testament *berith*, the following are significant.

He then discusses Luke 1:72 and Ephesians 2:12.

Having established the fundamental idea of the testament of grace, he sets forth the features of the testament. Its basic definition is a "legal disposition by which qualified heirs are bequeathed an inheritance through the death of the testator" (p. 87). There are five major aspects to the testament: the testator, the heirs, the method of effectuation, the conditions, and the inheritance. These five aspects constitute the major divisions of the rest of Payne's book.

Payne presents five features of the objective side of the testament. They are: (1) monergism or the fact that God alone effects the covenant, (2) the death of the testator, (3) the promise which was made, (4) the eternality of the inheritance, consisting of a promise of eternal life which consists both of a present living in reconciliation with God and an eternal life with God after death, and (5) the confirmatory signs.

Subjectively, or with reference to human responsibility, there are the following conditions: faith, moral obedience, and ceremonial obedience. Payne notes that the ceremonial particulars:

> ... whether by augmentation, transmutation, or abrogation ... do exhibit a number of changes from one stage of God's dealings with men to the next. (p. 91)

Significantly, he draws a sharp contrast between the covenant of

works and the testament of grace.

> ... these features of the testament stand in marked contrast with those of the covenant of works, which preceded it and which is still operative for all who are not under the blood of the testament. (p. 92)

These differences appear in a chart on p. 92-93.

B. The Strengths of the Work

1. General Strengths

There is no doubt that Payne has made a major contribution to the study of biblical theology. He is an outstanding reformed scholar whose work is carefully carried out. It exhibits brilliant insight at many points. This certainly is a volume that ministers and serious students should have on their shelves and to which they will find themselves constantly turning. It is full of helpful charts, lists of supplementary reading, meaningful appendices, excellent footnotes, and abundant scriptural references showing exactly how he roots many of his ideas in the Scripture. This is not to say all reformed thinkers will agree with him. Indeed, certain criticisms will be registered that appear to be significant. Nonetheless, Payne's work truly deserves the status it enjoys as a reference work in Old Testament studies.

One of the difficulties faced in summarizing Payne's work for the survey given above is its thoroughgoing succinctness and clarity. This certainly is one of the many positive features of the book. On the other hand, the reader often wishes there were fuller statements on many items–especially in the introductory sections.

2. Concise Statement of Presuppositions

Payne gives a concise statement of the presuppositions and principles of biblical theology. Unfortunately, several of the presuppositions were unclear to this reader. Moreover, it was difficult to see how they interrelated. In the following section, these weaknesses will be detailed more fully.

3. Treatment of Other Theological Positions

One of the most valuable aspects of his work is that Payne consistently demonstrates accurate knowledge of both unorthodox and orthodox positions. He both presents and faces each with telling but brief evaluations and criticisms.

Old liberalism is briefly described at several points. When relevant, he cogently criticizes this view. It is interesting that in today's theological climate it is sufficient to register such succinct criticisms. Payne offers fewer pointed criticisms of critical positions on the text and development of the theology of the Bible than Oehler does—i.e., insofar as old liberalism is concerned. The more modern neo-orthodox biblical theological views are capably and cogently criticized. In all of this, Payne gives no patent ground to unbelief.

The most telling criticisms against neo-orthodoxy are given. Basically, he points out how it denies the knowableness of divine truth. It,

> …limits God's contacts with men to `existential' encounters of personalities and…denies the possibility of the communication of factual knowledge. (p. 16)

More extensive and more pointed criticisms also appear. He traces the positions of each of the major neo-orthodox Old Testament biblical theologians demonstrating why they are unacceptable. It is important to note that in dealing with these scholars the test of truth, for Payne, is the Bible.

Payne certainly demonstrates a thorough understanding of dispensationalism. His major argument against that position is:

> Herein lies the failure of dispensationalism. For by its stress upon dispensational distinctions it surrenders the unity of redemption as the organizing principle of revelation. A leading dispensationalist makes a significant admission when ... he criticizes an opponent for maintaining that 'the kingdom of God is the unfolding of the plan of redemption rather than the sovereignty of God.' (p. 73)

Many references to dispensationalism appear in the opening chapters of Payne's work. At crucial points, he patiently and irenically lays bare its inadequacies. He offers one text as a clear repudiation of dispensationalism's surrender of the unity of redemption, viz., Hebrews 8:6-10:22. He points out how the force of this text is denied by dispensationalism. Payne notes that this passage is an exegesis of Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Testament and its application to the Church. It is,

> ... one of Scripture's clearest presentations on the organic, testamental development of Israel into the Church. (p. 76)

The two main points of dispensationalism's exegesis of this passage are presented and shown to be thoroughly wrong (p. 76- 77).

First, dispensationalism erroneously that asserts the church cannot

be the fulfillment of "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" and therefore the new covenant made with the latter party cannot be fulfilled in the church. Abundant Scripture is given in refuting this error.

Second, dispensationalism says Jeremiah's new covenant describes God's future relationship with Israel. It argues that one must see two covenants in the Hebrews passage: the second or new covenant with Israel (Heb. 8:7) and the better covenant with the Church (8:6). (p. 77) It says

> Jeremiah's quotation is introduced in Hebrews 8, not, as might be expected, to prove that the superseding of the older testament is predicted by the prophet and that it is now accomplished in the new testament of the Church. They contend that Jeremiah's statement is quoted to prove that since, in the millennium, there will be a superseding of the older testament by the new testament which will then be made with Israel, so now, by analogy, it is not impossible to think of a superseding of the old by the better testament of the Church. (p. 77)

Dispensationalism's exegesis, says Payne, produces an "unelaborated subtlety of thought" a "weakened argument for the epistle". It argues that the original readers of Hebrews were tempted to lapse back into ceremonialism. In an attempt to help them repulse this temptation, the writer argues Jeremiah predicted that in the millennium ceremonialism would be replaced by a more spiritual form of worship. One can readily see how much weaker this understanding of the argument in Hebrews is than if the writer were saying Jeremiah predicted such a replacement now. Payne then presents three major contextual objections to dispensationalism's interpretation. Payne's reasoning and exegesis is compelling and dispensationalism is seen to be a contradiction to the clear teaching of the Bible.

4. Treatment of the Closing of the Canon

Payne gives a good, but somewhat problematic, statement on the closing of the canon. He ties revelation to redemption and redemption to Christ's acts.

> Redemption, moreover, is fully accomplished in Christ (Col. 2:10), the One who constitutes the ultimate exhibition of God (John 1:14). As a consequence, special revelation is completed for the present ...

The growth and closing of the canon is traced and defended extensively

with many Scriptural references (p. 63-70). Payne's treatment is well worth reading.

The problem with his treatment is rooted in the very principle upon which he builds his argument. It appears he does not seem to understand his own principle. First, the problem emerges in the following words in the above quote: "for the present." These words when taken in conjunction with (a) his principle that act and word revelation are tied together (as God's redemptive working in history), and (b) the present age is not the final age of world history (according to Payne, God has not finished His redemptive work in history because there is still a millennium after Christ's Second Coming; see p. 534-536), imply that there might be additional revelation just prior to Christ's Second Coming. Second, for the sake of argument this Scriptural principle may be granted: revelation is tied to redemption and redemption to Christ's acts. The problem raised then is that while Payne affirms the once for all completedness of Christ's work of redemption, he (a) allows for that redemptive work to continue in and by the millennium, and, therefore, (b) equally denies the completed-ness of the revelation of Christ.

5. Relationship to Other Theological Studies

Payne gives an excellent statement of how biblical theology relates to other theological and textual studies—the interested student might compare his chart on p. 20. In this, as in other areas, Payne gives a more up to date and fuller treatment than Oehler does.

6. Survey of Definitions of Covenant

There is also a good survey of and arguments against other contemporary definitions of covenant. See above for the presentation of the Old Testament uses of "covenant"—this, too, is well done. Payne demonstrates from the Old Testament that there are bilateral (between two contracting parties) and unilateral (in which a superior disposes an arrangement on a lesser) kinds of covenant. He clearly sets forth the distinction between the disposition of law and the disposition of grace. These are not, however, integrated by Payne. No doubt, he does not treat this at this point because he discusses the relationship when he deals with the testament as it relates to the covenant of works. This problem will be discussed below.

Payne offers a brief description of the work of Meredith Kline. The "historical explanation" of covenant associated with Dr. Meredith Kline, Sr. (his theology elsewhere will be discussed below) explains how he

maintains that the biblical covenant is formally parallel to and reflective of the mid-second millennium "suzerainty covenant." After a brief presentation of Kline's position. Payne incisively concludes,

> Basically, however, the solution to the meaning of the word *berith* is to be sought, not in its original derivation, or even in its significance as found in pagan cultures that surrounded Israel. It is only in the transformed usage of the term as it appears in God's own historical revelation that its ultimate import is disclosed. (p. 79)

In spite of the protestations of defenders of Kline's view, Payne has put his finger on the telling arguments against it. First, not pagan culture but biblical revelation should determine what "covenant" means. Second, one should reason from the Scriptural passage that describes the "covenant" theologically rather than from a passage that presents it incidentally.

7. Theological Principles Contributing to the Proper Definition of Covenant

First, Payne asserts that some of the constitutive ideas covenant theologians (cf., the quote from Murray cited above) assign to the "covenant" are too sophisticated for the Old Testament.

Second, he seeks to define the idea "covenant" on the basis of the New Testament theological explanation. Since there are only examples and applications of "covenant" in the Old Testament and no "theological definition," Payne's method is to use the theological statements of the New Testament to define "covenant." Having done this he then analyzes the Old Testament in terms of this concept of "covenant."

Third, he acknowledges that the entire period of human history after the fall is a major redemptive unity. The differences within this "unity" appear in a chart on p. 92-93. A corollary of this principle is that the covenant of works, "... is still operative for all who are not under the blood of the testament." (p. 92) Although he does not, in our opinion, deal with this latter principle sufficiently, nonetheless, he does state it.

C. The Weaknesses of the Position

1. An Inadequate Apologetic Foundation

This writer was struck by the weak apologetic foundation upon which Payne basis his work. Thankfully, the theological structure does not consistently arise from the foundation. It seems to us that having set forth the results of his apologetic, Payne abandons it and erects his

theological edifice on a more scriptural foundation.

This weakness is stated explicitly when Payne says, "Biblical apologetics...demonstrates the plausibility of the assertions of Scripture..." (p. 21) If all that biblical apologetics does is to demonstrate the "plausibility of the assertions of Scripture" it contradicts the claims of Scripture. Scripture does not claim to be only plausible, it claims to be unquestionable. The difference is seen when one considers the use of the ideas "plausible" and "unquestionable" in another context.

If one asks his child, "Did you tell the truth?" and the child replies "possibly" (i.e., "it is plausible/believable that I did") this seems to be sidestepping the question. Most parents would not be satisfied with the answer. One would seek a yes or no answer.

As Payne's argument unfolds one observes that he moves immediately from the plausibility (the argumentation) to the absolute definiteness (the conclusion) of the truth of biblical religion. The conclusion hardly follows necessarily from the argumentation. Indeed, the two propositions stand in contradiction.

Another major problem with Payne's argumentation is that he works on an assumption that contradicts what the Bible teaches (Gen. 1:1; Rom. 1:20-21). He assumes that his conclusion is not obvious from the outset. The Bible teaches it is. In order to prove that the Bible's truth is plausible one must begin with the assumption that it is also possibly not true. However, there is no possibility of the latter. How can one reasonably construct an argument proving that he plausibly exists (and may not really exist) without having to exist in order to make the argument? That is, one's existence is a necessary presupposition of asking if one does exist. One cannot, therefore, argue for his own existence without contradicting that existence. Similarly, one cannot argue God might not exist without contradicting that he and all men know God does exist, indeed, that He is the starting point of all their thinking, and he must also deny He exists in the sense Scripture teaches (Rom. 1:20-21).

The effects of this weakness are seen in Payne's formulation of the presuppositions of biblical theology. In this entire line of reasoning, Payne must hold that perhaps God does not exist before he arrives at his conclusion that He might exist.

First, it appears to us that Payne offers a false understanding of the nature of "religion". The existence of false religion does not argue for the existence of true religion. All that "ubiquity" of religion proves is the ubiquity of religion. It does not undergird the truthfulness of biblical religion. Indeed, it places biblical religion on a par with all other reli-

gions. It seems that the only proper reasoning goes the other way, i.e., the truthfulness of the biblical religion is the presupposition of the falsity of all other religions. Furthermore, although the belief in some kind of religion is widespread among human cultures, anthropologists do not all agree that all cultures are religious. Even if that agreement were forthcoming, it may only prove that this belief has spread from some common source or sources other than the created nature of man. It could have spread, for example, as has the heliocentric understanding of the universe is now spreading among existing cultures.

The same weakness appears in the presupposition regarding "the normativeness, or personally binding quality of religion." This is not a presupposition of the truth of biblical religion. The normativeness of religion arises from the truth of the biblical religion. The personally binding quality of religion should be understood as arising from the presupposition of man's being created in the image of God. Viewed from the other side of the equation, the personally binding character of religion might be a learned response rather than an inherent response. On the farm pigs come to eat at the call of the farmer. The normativeness of that summons, or its "personally binding character," does not establish or argue for the inherent validity of the summons. Perhaps the personally binding character of religion argues that men learn religion well. It may, therefore, establish the evolutionary thesis. Once man developed to the point that he could conceptualize and abstract from his environment then he was able to abstract "man," project that abstraction onto reality, and then mistakenly think that "superman (God)" arose from without himself rather than from within.

The next presupposition also reflects these weaknesses. Payne states the following is an assumption of biblical theology:

> …[the] existence of deity as ultimate truth. … It is their reference to the Supreme Being that makes standards compulsive.

First, notice the shift between the two statements. They are not the same presupposition. He moves from "existence of deity" which conceives of a general concept of "deity" or theism in general to "the Supreme Being" which conceives a particular concept of "deity" as well as defining that being as "supreme." There are many concepts of "deity" in which the "deity" is not the Supreme Being. Polytheism is full of such deities. Furthermore, "deity" is not necessarily even monotheistic. Even "the Supreme Being" concept may be polytheistic.

Second, both the ideas of "the existence of deity as ultimate truth"

and "the Supreme Being" must be greatly augmented and significantly changed to conclude with the God of the Bible as the ultimate standard. Indeed, the ideas stated as the "presupposition" and the idea of the God of the Bible are contradictory. The former do not necessarily lead to the latter and, therefore, are not the presuppositions (or necessary assumptions) of the latter.

Third, the idea of the biblical God is the only presupposition that allows for any concept of deity in the thinking of man. Payne's reasoning is backwards. The general idea of deity or deities arises from the revelation of God declared in every man's heart and in the creation around him.

Each of Payne's presuppositions could be analyzed like those just reviewed. They all evidence similar weaknesses. These "presuppositions" arise from Payne's apologetic approach and demonstrate the weakness and inadequacy of that approach.

One should keep in mind that once he sets forth these "presuppositions" this kind of thinking hardly effects his work.

2. An Inadequate Evaluation of the Eternal Origins of the Covenant

Now come those weaknesses of Payne's work which significantly effect his biblical theology. First, there is his inadequate application and, therefore, evaluation of the eternal origins of the covenant. Payne is unwavering in his defense of the divine authority of the covenant. He rests this authority on the eternal origin of the covenant. With reference to the structure of the covenant, however, he is satisfied to find its origin in a temporal institution, viz., a last will and testament. Indeed, Payne argues that the testament idea appearing in Hebrews 9:17 and Galatians 3:16 was clearly distinguished from the idea of covenant.

> A 'testament' always carries the implication of the prospective death of the person who makes it. How could such a thought have been applied to God, who is throughout the maker of the religious *diatheke* [Greek word for covenant]? ... It ought also to be noticed how in both these New Testament instances the writers do not content themselves with implying the testamental character of the *diatheke*, but take particular pains to call our attention to it so that the import of the word in the context cannot possibly be misunderstood. By accentuating this and using the technical terms of jurisprudence the writers reveal that they are

conscious of using the religious *diatheke* in a meaning not normally associated with it.[13]

Significantly, among the characteristics of biblical theology discussed by Payne there is no mention of what one might call the "eternal aspect." According to Hebrews 7:20-8:1-6, as seems evident, the earthly truth/revelation reflects (is a copy and shadow of) the eternal truth. Each of the particular aspects of the Old Testament religion is depicted as a copy and shadow of the eternal pattern or prototype: the priesthoods of Melchizedek and Aaron, the temple and its rituals, and the law or covenant. The passage teaches that Christ's eternal priesthood (Heb. 6:20, cf., 7:3, 8) gives rise to the priesthood of Melchizedek which, in turn, gives rise to Christ's temporally everlasting priesthood (7:3). Indeed, the validity of that latter priesthood is established by its relationship to the former priesthood. Even so, goes the argument, Christ has become a surety of the better covenant (7:22). The eternal covenant of God underlies the priesthood of Melchizedek and, therefore, it is that eternal covenant which is reflected in the temporal covenant. This relationship parallels the relationship between the temporal covenant or law of the Old Testament and the eternal covenant (7:12, 18-19).

One should acknowledge that Payne touches on this aspect but he does not advance it as a foundational principle nor does the principle influence his thinking sufficiently. He points out, for example, that some of God's revelation surpassed the understanding of the recipients (it was epistomologically eternal), when he says that,

> …although some of Israel's leaders were truly taught of God, even the best of them failed to grasp all that God had revealed... (p. 21)

The principle is also seen in the following statement,

> Biblical theology consists of the sum total of God's ideas that had been revealed up to any given point. (p. 21)

Several statements demonstrate how Payne gives insufficient consideration to this eternal dimension and origin of the covenant.

First, consider his statement,

> The heart of the Old Testament faith was this: `Yahweh came from Sinai, and rose from Seir unto them' (Deut. 33:2). (p. 46)

Perhaps the inadequacy is due to our own inadequate understanding of

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[13] Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, R.B. Gaffin, ed. (Presbyterian and Reformed: Phillipsburg, 1980}. "Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke", p. 171.

Payne's meaning. To us "heart" means the "central-most" essence of something. It seems to us that the heart of the Old Testament faith was the eternal promise of redemption in the redeemer. This heart influences and is clearly determinative of all that is written in the Old Testament.

Another example of this weakness is Payne's statement that inspired writing begins with Moses without discussing the nature and preservation of prior revelation. Specifically, there was much God spoke directly to the saints prior to Moses and that spoken revelation was handed down orally and faithfully, and sometimes written, but always faithfully preserved from generation to generation. This explains many details of the Cain and Abel account and the Noahic account as argued above. So, too, it explains why Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, why he built altars and how he knew what to sacrifice to God.

Third, this weakness is seen in Payne's analysis of the historical location of the narrative portions of Genesis. It may be correct to conclude that the narrative portions were written in the time of Moses, but this is different than concluding that the theological content of those portions originated with or should be consigned only to the Mosaic period. It seems to us that Genesis 1-3, for example, must have been known by Cain and Abel in order for what they did to make sense. Similarly, it must have been known by all the men from Seth to the flood in order for that history to make sense. Therefore, Payne's conclusion forces the Bible into a rigid schema that does not correspond to the biblical record. This difficulty would have been avoided if he had allowed the assumption that the entire truth is eternal to mold his statements.

This assumption introduces a problem for biblical theology because one is unable to determine precisely what truths were understood at earlier periods. However, it may be suggested that whatever is needed to understand the acts, conversations, and divine statements was part of the revelation known at that period (implicitly revealed in the record and perhaps explicitly revealed to the men of that day). Since everything redemptively significant to the men of that period may not have been recorded, one cannot know if what is explicit (divine statements or acts recorded in the Bible) or implicit-to-us (necessary for understanding what is written) exhausts the divine revelation at that period. One can conclude that this is the material from which one might construct biblical theology.

3. An Inadequate Treatment of the Progressiveness of the Covenant

The second major weakness of Payne's biblical theology is his

156

inadequate application of the principle of the progressiveness of the covenant.

Payne does not specifically list progressiveness as a characteristic of biblical theology. He does, however, view the content of the Bible as progressive and even specifically describes what the term "progressive" means. Therefore, the problem is not that Payne is unaware of this principle, nor even that he works without it. Rather, the problem is that the principle does not find adequate expression in his work.

This inadequacy appears at two places. First, it is evidenced in his historical survey of the history of biblical revelation and its division into ten periods. It is unclear why he presents this survey. Does he intend this to be the structure used to understand what is contained in the Bible? That is, does this survey supply the reader with a brief outline of the structure of Payne's work before he wrote this book? If it is, Payne did not use it in the structure of the book itself. Was this the structure of his preparation for the book. Did he proceed stage by stage analyzing the material within each particular period and comparing and contrasting it with what preceded? If he did this then, it does seem to reflect an improper method because it ignores the division presented in the Bible and because it ignores the eternal dimension of biblical revelation.

What would be better than the method just described? Payne suggests a proper approach when he describes the biblical divisions as the Old and New Testaments. This approach should be extended to the entire study. Geerhardus Vos does this when he presents his work in terms of the pre-fall covenant, the edenic covenant, the Noahic covenant, the prophets, and the new covenant in Christ. Oehler seeks to follow this pattern, too, although he is not as successful as Vos is.

The second place Payne's inadequate approach to the structure of biblical revelation occurs is that the main part of the presentation is set forth systematically rather than diachronically (as Kaiser would put it). Payne organizes all of the content of the Old Testament in terms of his analysis of the necessary or constitutive parts of a last will and testament. His analysis sounds plausible but that is because it conforms to our ideas of a last will and testament. One should question if such a projection of a modern "form" into an ancient culture is proper methodology. Furthermore, having made the projection it would have been better to proceed diachronically rather than systematically.

In view of Vos' work in comparison to what Payne does, it is strange to hear the former criticized for recognizing only two periods (Mosaic and prophetic) and that he minimizes both what preceded and what followed

Moses.

4. A Wrong Definition of Covenant

The third major criticism registered about Payne's work is that he has offered a wrong definition of covenant. Ultimately, his wrong definition results from his inadequate application of the principle of the eternal origin of the covenant. Payne properly believes (he recognizes that this is the teaching of Scripture) that both the covenant idea and the covenant structure has its origins in eternity. Secondly, his wrong definition reflects an absurdity that ought not to be overlooked. He affirms that Old Testament times lacked the sophistication to grasp the fundamental testamental-covenantal concept. Hence, before Christ the faithful did not understand the relationship between death and blessing/inheritance under the testament, and between grace and works/faith. This appears patently contradicted by the New Testament in passages such as Romans 4, 9, and the entire book of Hebrews, and of Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus in John 3:10 (rulers in Israel should have understood the relationship between the messianic hope, and the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration). So, if the essential concepts of the testament or the essential idea of testament itself was too sophisticated for the Old Testament period why does the Bible use those concepts in explaining what the Old Testament saints (like Nicodemus) understood or were responsible to understand? It seems clear that Payne offers a different idea of Old Testament sophistication than the New Testament does.

It is important understand the difference between covenant and testament if one is to see the problem with Payne's analysis of the whole structure of biblical revelation. This difference might best be seen if one considers the relationship between the covenant-death and the testament-death.

According to Genesis 15:17-18, the certainty that the covenant will be kept is the fact that God lives. It is correct to understand this covenant ratification ceremony in terms of a pledge to death on the part of the one making the covenant. By passing through the dead and dismembered beasts, God pledged Himself to death if He (God) did not keep the covenant. Because He alone passed through those beasts, He alone is responsible to see that the covenant is kept and that the promise accrues to the one(s) with whom He made the covenant. Hence, in the Old Testament one often reads the oath "as the Lord lives." This statement is covenantal insofar as it guarantees the truth of a statement or covenant. It

affirms that as certainly as the Lord lives, the thing affirmed would come to pass, is true, etc. Therefore, the covenant as it appears in the Abrahamic "copy and shadow" (Heb. 8:1-6, to be explained below) is a covenant of grace—it rests wholly upon God, the one who guarantees it will be kept and that its benefits will be given. It is true because God cannot and will not die. His life guarantees the blessings of the covenant will be conferred upon those to whom they are promised.

So, death occurs when the covenant is broken. Subsequently, death came upon those men who, not being untied with God through faith in the coming Christ, broke the covenant. Although Abraham (and his descendants) had not taken upon himself the curse of death by passing through the beasts, God had been placed them under the responsibility of keeping the covenant (Gal. 3:10, Ezek. 34:18). Indeed, all Abraham's descendants were placed under the covenant by divine action. Within that covenantal community are some that are eternally elect and some that are reprobate (cf., Rom. 9). If a covenant member is "in Christ", he will keep the covenant by perfectly obeying God "in Christ" (this is known as the imputed righteousness/obedience of Christ). If not "in Christ" he breaks the covenant and suffers death—the curse of the covenant. Men outside the covenant are under the curse of spiritual death by virtue of their non-covenantal (non-Christological) relationship with God. Men under the covenant (in the church) inherit life on the basis of God's guarantee to Christ (Abraham's seed, Gal. 3)

In this Abrahamic model then, death (the death of the "testator"), therefore, does not bring the benefits of the covenant but cuts one off from the benefits. This is depicted in Genesis 15, and lies at the root of the covenant of grace.

On the other hand, the concept of testament relates death and the benefits of the "covenant" differently. Here, the one making the "covenant" must die before the benefits accrue to the heir. On the basis of his analysis of Hebrews 9:16-17, Payne says testament is a,

> …legal disposition by which qualified heirs are bequeathed an inheritance through the death of the testator. (p. 87)

Payne rejects this idea (i.e., the "Abrahamic") of covenant in favor of the idea of testament although the essential ingredients of testament are too sophisticated for the Old Testament. This weakness in Payne's work has already been addressed. Furthermore, Payne maintains that the Old Testament does not deny or ignore the idea of "testament",

> …for actually all of its essential elements are present. The Old Testament simply assigns to God's legally binding,

monergistic declaration of redemption the title *berith*; but for the elucidation of the precise, divinely-intended meaning of *berith*, one must then turn to the New Testament. (p. 82)

Payne "asserts" what is perhaps the key statement in his entire book:

Within the context of the New Testament the most crucial passage is Hebrews 9:15-22 and especially verses 16 and 17. (p. 83)

To us the most crucial passage is Hebrews 8:1-6.   Whereas, in our judgment, this passage offers an excellent explanation of all that is in the Old Testament, the passage Payne uses appears to say something quite different than the foundational idea in the Old Testament.

As pointed out above he correctly seeks to define the idea "covenant" on the basis of the New Testament theological explanation. This appears to be a valid hermeneutical decision since, to him, there is no explanation of covenant in the Old Testament—only examples and applications.

The insufficiency of Payne's definition of covenant is seen clearly, it seems, in statements such as:

Proceeding further, one finds that in the rest of the New Testament the *diatheke* passages fall into two groups: those referring to God's Old Testament *berith*, and those referring to the new *diatheke* of Jesus Christ. The latter passages include such verses as Matthew 26:28. .... Among the passages that refer to the Old Testament *berith*, the following are significant.

5. His Inconsistent Application of Hermeneutical Principles

Another major problem in Payne's work is his equivocation in applying his progressive principle.

He correctly states that the unity of knowledge in the Bible is related by way of "variety, supplementation, and clarification." In this body of material, there is never theological replacement, correction or self-contradiction (p. 17-18).

This principle seems to be contradictory to what he says in his discussion of the ceremonial particulars of the old "testament." He notes that the ceremonial particulars:

...whether by augmentation, transmutation, or abrogation ... do exhibit a number of changes from one stage of God's dealings with men to the next." (p. 91)

At the very least, these statements require further explanation. At

this point all that will be said is the interrelationship between these two statements provide an important hermeneutical key to properly understanding the unity of the Scripture.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS:

1.   What are the five expressions of covenant theology to be discussed in this and the next work on biblical theology?

2. Why have we called Payne's contribution "testament theology"?

3. What are the differences between Oehler's and Payne's work?

4.   What seven presuppositions does Payne say underlie a proper biblical theology?

5.   What are the three characteristics of the nature of biblical theology?

6.   What six elements describe the "divine" nature of biblical theology?

7.   How is the knowledge of the Bible related to the principle of unity?

8. How does Payne describe "plan of salvation"?

9.   What are the two key principles of biblical theology re-established at the reformation?

10. What is "historicism"?

11. What is "Heilsgeschichte"?

12. How does redemption relate to special revelation?

13. What is "testament"?

14. How did the Old Testament **saints** relate to salvation?

15. How do the Old and New Testaments relate?

16. In what three ways does the Old Testament use the word covenant?

17. Why does Payne reject all three of these ideas of the covenant?

18. Where does Payne turn for his definition of "covenant"?

19. What are the five major aspects of the objective side of the "testament"?

20. What are the weaknesses of neo-orthodoxy**?**

21. What are the weaknesses of dispensationalism?

22. In what way is Payne's apologetic position weak and what difference does it make?

23. In what way does Payne offer an inadequate evaluation of the eternal origin of the covenant and what difference does it make?

24. In what way does Payne offer an inadequate treatment of the progressiveness of the covenant and what difference does it make?

25. How is Payne's definition of covenant wrong and what difference does it make?

Chapter 7. TREATY THEOLOGY:
a Presentation and Evaluation of the Work of Meredith Kline, Sr.

The next expression of covenantal theology is the theology developed by Dr. Meredith Kline. It may be called "treaty theology" because it sees the structure of ancient mid-second millennium Hittite law treaties repeated in the Bible. Kline uses this structure (together with kingship ideology[14]) to interpret and understand what is revealed in the Bible.

Dr. Kline certainly is a brilliant theologian whose orthodoxy is fully recognized. He assumes the reality of divine revelation and the divine authority of all that is recorded in the Bible. He works on the assumption of the infallibility and inerrancy of the biblical material.

His work is presented in the series of books listed here as follows, together with the subjects they address:

     (1) definition of the covenant - *Treaty of the Great King*;
     (2) doctrine of the sacraments - *By Oath Consigned*;
     (3) doctrine of the Word - *Structure of Biblical Authority*;
     (4) pre-Mosaic biblical theology - *Kingdom Prologue*.

The first, third, and fourth subjects are addressed here seeking to outline the position and demonstrate how it is worked out.

A. The Presentation of he Position

Kline's work serves an apologetic function. He demonstrates how the structure of Deuteronomy repeats the structure of Hittite law treaties. This, in turn, establishes the antiquity and unity of Deuteronomy. It establishes its antiquity because of the date of the law treaties with the particular patterned reflected in Deuteronomy. All the constitutive parts of Deuteronomy find a formal parallel in those law-treaties. If each of these treaties present a cohesive unit and their mid-fourteenth century BC origin is undoubted, and they are, then there is no reason to doubt the date and content of the similar unit preserved as the Deuteronomic "treaty."

The structure of Kline's thought as presented here will be drawn respectively from the first book (sections one and two, and the first two chapters of Kline's *Treaty of the Great King*), and from the third book

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[14] The working assumption appears to be that the ancient Mesopotamian concepts of kingship find repetition in the Bible not simply as working comparisons and contrasts but as the basic conceptual structures for biblical ideas.

(first and second parts of his book: *The Structure of Biblical Authority*).

1. Covenantal Structure

Dr. Kline points out the structural or formal parallels between the mid-fourteenth century Hittite law treaties and the book of Deuteronomy. His research demonstrates how the understanding and study of Deuteronomy has been revolutionized.

Moreover, Kline finds the pattern of the ancient treaties reproduced in the Ten Commandments. He maintains that the two tablets contained duplicate copies of the "treaty" and are equivalent to the two copies of the ancient treaties. What was written on the two tablets was not a law code as appeared on ancient steles but a treaty/covenant.

He points out many structural parallels between the decalogue and ancient law-treaties (some of them are discussed below). Some of these formal elements being peculiar to the ancient law-treaties are not found in the extant non-treaty literature of the ancient world outside the Bible.

a. Like the ancient treaties the decalogue opens with a historical prologue or preamble: "I am the Lord your God."

b. Both employ an I-thou style in their historical prologue. That prologue surveys the great king's previous relations with the recipient(s) of the treaty. There is special emphasis in both the Hittite treaties and Deuteronomy on the king's benefactions to the vassal. In the decalogue this element appears in the words: "which brought you out of the house of bondage..."

c. They both list treaty obligations. Among these stipulations there are the following literary and formal distinctives. First, there is the requirement of complete commitment to the great king (suzerain). The vassal is to make alliances with no one else. Second, they both contain apodictic laws—laws in the form of assertions ("you shall...", or "you shall not..."). This apodictic stylistic form is found outside the Bible only in the Hittite law-treaties.

d. Both invoke the gods of the suzerain and the gods of the vassal as witnesses to the treaty. Kline points out that there is no third party in the decalogue, but that this structural element is found in the fact that the decalogue is sanctioned by God's own oath. God is the witness and suzerain and He is the God of the vassal. Kline argues that this element of treaty making is found in several places:

(1) the covenant ratification ceremony at Sinai—the covenant ratification meal,

(2) the covenant ratification after entering Palestine—especially,

the promise of blessings and curses are "tantamount to an oath" (-taking),

(3) God calling heaven and earth as witnesses (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28).

e. Both contain curses and blessings (as found in Exod. 20). This element of the treaty form appears in the Hittite treaties in an invocative form and appears in the Bible as the so-called motive clauses (clauses expressing a motive for obedience, e.g., do this and live). Kline argues, therefore, that the motive clauses are adaptations of the Hittite form of the curses and blessings.

He draws some significant conclusions from his presentation concerning the treaty structure or form of the decalogue. What is found in the decalogue and, indeed, in the book of Deuteronomy as a whole, is not law (stele) but treaty-covenant. Indeed,

> There is probably no clearer direction afforded the biblical theologian for defining with biblical emphasis the type of covenant God adopted to formalize his relationship to his people than that given in the covenant he gave Israel to perform, even 'the ten commandments'. Such a covenant is a declaration of God's lordship, consecrating a people to himself in a sovereignly dictated order of life. (p. 17)

f. The sixth element of the treaty form is the directions for depositing two copies of the treaty—one in the suzerain's temple, and the other in the vassal's temple. Thus the gods would sanction the treaty; they watched between the parties of the covenant. If either party violated it, the gods would punish him. In the case of the decalogue, the two tablets were to be deposited in the ark of the covenant (p. 19). Since the suzerain was God, His copy of the treaty was deposited both before Himself as Suzerain and before Himself as God. The vassal's (Israel's) copy was deposited before her God. God would, therefore, discipline the treaty.

Hittite treaties had another element that was part of these directions for the disposition of the copies of the treaty. A periodic public reading of Hittite treaties was mandated in the treaties. So, in the Bible there is a mandatory public reading of the treaty at its inception (Ex. 24:7), and a periodic reading mandated in Deuteronomy 31:9-11 (once every seven years at the feast of Tabernacles).

In the instance of the Hittite treaties, treaty renewals included an updating of the treaty. So, in Deuteronomy (the updating of the divine treaty with Israel) there is an updating of the treaty's stipulations, e.g., the decalogue and the Passover.

There is the concept of family solidarity in both the Hittite and biblical treaties. The Hittite "we, our sons, and our grandsons" is to be compared with the 3rd commandment's "visiting the iniquity of the father's upon the sons unto the third and fourth generation...."

Kline carefully expounds the purpose of the two copies of the biblical treaty.

Israel's copy served as a documentary witness. It attests that they know and are responsible for its contents and that they anticipate its blessings. When Israel breaks the treaty the tablet witnesses against Israel. Yet, the "testimony" or "accusations" against them never ascended but through the mercy seat.

The purpose of God's copy was to "remind" Him of His promise to curse the violators and of His responsibility to keep its promises. The biblical treaty shows a,

> ...remarkable shift of emphasis arising from the fact that God's suzerainty covenant with Israel was an administration of salvation. (p. 22)

This "shift of emphasis" is manifested in a comparison of the curses and blessings in the two types of treaty. In Hittite law treaties there is a balance between curses and blessings but not in the Bible. Here curses come upon the third and fourth generations but the blessings accrue unto thousands.

This shift of emphasis also appears in the fact that, unlike what usually happened in the case of the Hittite suzerains, God took an oath of fidelity.

> The divine Suzerain's condescension in his redemptive covenant at the time of its Abrahamic administration extended to the humiliation of swearing himself to covenant fidelity as Lord of the covenant and Fulfiller of the promises (Gen. 15). (p. 22)

Kline argues that: (1) the kind of allegiance required of Abraham (Gen. 12:1; 17:10) is the same as that required in the Hittite treaties, and (2) a suzerain oath is sometimes found in the Hittite treaties. This element, however, which is rare in the Hittite treaties, became prominent in many biblical treaties. Yet, it is not to be viewed as being of the essence of the biblical treaty:

> These (biblical) covenants are sovereign administrations not of blessing exclusively but of curse and blessing according to the vassal's deserts. Since, however, the specifically soteric covenants are informed by the principle of God's sovereign

grace, which infallibly effects his redemptive purposes in Christ, they are accompanied by divine guarantees assuring a realization of the blessing sanctions of the covenant. Now it would obviously be unsound methodology to give this special feature which belongs to the specifically redemptive covenant administrations a constitutive place when defining the covenant generically. (p. 23-24)

So, the divine guarantees of blessing (cf., Abraham) are not inconsistent with the nature of suzerainty covenants,

> …as here defined in terms of divine lordship, enforced in a revelation of law consisting of stipulations and sanctions, both promissory and penal. (p. 24)

God's copy of the tablet fulfilled the same function as the rainbow divinely associated with the Noahic treaty:

> Considered in relation to the divine oath and promise, Yahweh's duplicate table of the covenant served a purpose analogous to that of the rainbow in his covenant with Noah. (p. 24)

What is the relevance of this divine guarantee of blessing for the understanding of the law content of the decalogue? First, the

> ...covenantal context of the law underscores the essential continuity in the function of law in the Old and New Testaments. (p. 24)

Second, because law is but part of the treaty (a sovereign disposition of divine will), it is

> ...not offered fallen man as a genuine soteric option [a plan of salvation] but is presented as a guide to citizenship within the covenant by the Saviour-Lord...

Third, although the emphasis is on,

> ...the personal-religious character of biblical ethics at the same time ... (the) covenantal religion and its ethics are susceptible of communication in the form of structured truth. (p. 24)

Therefore, understanding the decalogue as a "treaty" provides a corrective for contrasting the "first" and the "second" tablets, as if they contained differing content, with the accompanying priority of the religious (the first four commandments) over the ethical (the last six commandments).

Next Kline applies his analysis of the decalogue as a treaty to the whole of Deuteronomy . He demonstrates how Deuteronomy is a

treaty/covenant renewal document "which in its total structure exhibits the classic legal form of the suzerainty treaties of the Mosaic age" (p. 28). Using this as his working assumption, he presents the following outline of Deuteronomy:

1. Preamble (1:1-5)
2. Historical prologue (1:6-4:49)
3. Stipulations (5-26)
4. Curses and blessings of covenant ratification (26-30)
5. Succession arrangements for covenant continuity, including the invocation of witnesses and directions for the disposition and public reading of the treaty.

He states that Deuteronomy is "...the libretto of the covenant ceremony...".

When, therefore, we identify Deuteronomy as a treaty text we are also recognizing it as the ceremonial words of Moses. The customary conception of these Mosaic addresses as a freely ordered farewell must be so far modified as to recognize that their formal structure closely followed fixed ceremonial-legal traditions, though they are certainly no stereotyped liturgical recital nor the dispassionate product of an imperial foreign office. (p. 29)

With these words, Kline turns to a detailed exposition of the various sections of the Deuteronomic treaty.

1. Preamble:

Kline states,

Deuteronomy begins precisely as the ancient treaties began.... Yahweh is, therefore, the Suzerain who gives the covenant and Moses is his viceregent and the covenant mediator. (p. 30)

2. Historical prologue:

This section is explained as follows,

...an historical prologue regularly follows the preamble and precedes the stipulations in the suzerainty treaties and Deuteronomy 1:5-4:49 qualifies admirably as such an historical prologue". (p. 31)

3. Stipulations: Kline sees several parallels to treaty documents in the biblical stipulations.

How does this treaty structure explain what appears to be an historical prologue in chapters 5-11 but that Kline says is part of the stipulations section? These chapters expound the covenant way of life in general/principial terms, while 12-26 expound it in specific terms.

> Of particular interest is the fact that this sequence from the fundamental to the auxiliary commandments corresponds to the arrangement of the stipulations observable in the extra-biblical treaties. (p. 32)

> The biblical treaty's programmatic mandate for conquest parallels the military clauses in the extra-biblical treaties. (p. 32)

The hortatory (apodictic or command) character of many of the particular statements in the body of stipulations (in the Bible) has no parallel in ancient Near Eastern law codes but they are paralleled in the treaty stipulations.

Finally, Kline notes once more that the ancient treaties often consisted of a renewal of a prior treaty. In such renewal treaties, previous legislation was updated.

> For it is this authentic treaty motif which clearly provides the rationale of the re-formulation of the earlier law of the central altar in Deuteronomy 12 and constitutes the underlying unity of all the precepts, permissions, and prohibitions in that chapter. (p. 32)

4. Curses and blessings of covenant ratification (26-30)

In the process of treaty disposition the vassal heard stipulations, the sanctions of curses and blessings, and took an oath of fealty. These elements are set down as part of the covenant renewal ceremony in Moab as recorded at the end of the Deuteronomic stipulations (26:17-19) as well as within 27-30.

Also note, the following statement:

> Worthy of parenthetical comment is the fact that the Mosaic curses and blessings provided the outline for the eschatological message of the prophets.

5. Succession arrangements or covenant continuity included an invocation of witnesses and directions for the disposition and public reading of the treaty.

Kline argues that the treaty structure explains the closing chapters of Deuteronomy as a necessary element in the "form" Moses employed,

whereas many negative critics have maintained that these chapters are "miscellaneous appendixes,"

> The closing chapters have been generally dismissed as miscellaneous appendixes. (p. 34)

Contrary to what has been maintained, these closing chapters find a formal parallel to the part of the treaty dealing with dynastic succession. They are not "miscellaneous appendixes" but necessary elements of a treaty document.

Furthermore, "included here are the final two standard elements in the classic treaty structure": (1) listing the witnesses to the covenant: here, heaven and earth, and (2) provision for subsequent handling of the treaty —instruction to deposit the copies of the treaty and its periodic public rereading (31:9-13).

An additional element of the classic treaty structure is a concern for dynastic succession. There is such a concern in the Deuteronomic treaty. The concern for dynastic succession is the "mark of profound unity between the Deuteronomic and Davidic covenants" (p. 38). Sometimes the Deuteronomic and Davidic covenants are seen as essentially different kinds of covenants: the first focusing on human responsibility and the second on divine election. Commenting on the view of another scholar, Kline remarks,

> For what he interprets as a conflict between covenants is in the last analysis simply the fundamental theological paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility which confronts us in all divine-human relationships. (p. 38)

The Davidic covenant embraces both promise with its guarantee of divine favor and responsibility or judgment, 2 Samuel 7:14. (p. 39)

The new covenant, says Kline, is anticipated in the old:

> ...elsewhere in this treaty Moses proclaims the certainty of the covenant renewing grace of God by which his oath-sealed promise to the fathers would be fulfilled to the elect in spite of Israel's covenant-breaking and the visitation of the full vengeance of the covenant upon the guilty (Deut. 4:29-31; 30:1-10; cf. Lev. 26:40-45). (p. 39)

Indeed, it is this covenant renewing grace which is focused on the ministry of the "divine-human Mediator" of the new treaty/covenant:

> ... in the divine-human Mediator of this New Covenant there is a manifestation of the unity of the Deuteronomic and Davidic covenants, for it is in him that the promise inherent in the royal commission given the Moses-Joshua dynasty to lead

the people of God into their rest is fully fulfilled... (p. 39)
The eternal reign of the son of David is realized in Christ. So, the two treaties (Mosaic and Davidic) are in reality one and the fundamental principle of each finds its fulfillment in Christ.

Also, Deuteronomy 33-34, which record the death of Moses and "his testamentary blessings on the tribes", are not stylistically unique to Deuteronomy; they find a parallel in the Hittite treaties. In the Hittite treaties, the "dynastic succession stipulation" became effective at the death of the king (the covenant author). So after Moses died, an official attached the record of his death, etc., "notarizing the covenant" (p. 40). Kline sees in this a "...coalescence of the covenantal and testamentary forms." This testamentary element is part of the Hittite treaties so that appended to the treaty there may be a provision for the succession of the dynasty. This also was a provision for the succession of the treaty. Thus Hebrews 9:16, 17 is not a deviation from treaty structure, but merely focuses on the testamentary element.

Kline sees in the Deuteronomic treaty a specific relation to God's dealings with man before the fall:

> ... the establishment of Israel as a royal priesthood over Canaan was in a figure a reinstatement of man as vice-regent of God over Paradise. (p. 40)

Ancient Hittite treaties were sealed documents.

> They were sealed legal contracts. Indeed, as has already been observed, it was standard practice to deposit such treaties in sanctuaries under the eye of the oath deities.

One very important conclusion of this literary/treaty nature of Deuteronomy is that this fact argues for the unity and antiquity of Deuteronomy.

These sealed treaty documents often included sanctions against anyone tampering with the contents. So, in Deuteronomy, there is the command not to tamper with the contents (Deut. 4:2a), and that command is immersed in a context of sanctions. (p. 44)

2. Biblical Structure

Kline sees the treaty structure not only in the decalogue and the book of Deuteronomy, he sees it as the structure of the Pentateuch, the Old Testament as a whole, and of the New Testament. This is the thesis of his book entitled *The Structure of Biblical Authority*. There he discusses the formal origins of the biblical canon, the covenant Bible, the canon and the covenantal community, and canonical polities, old and new.

First, he asserts his commitment to the traditional formulation of canonical origins and authority:

> The formation of the canon, rather than being a matter of conciliar decision or a series of such decisions with respect to a preexisting literature, was a divine work by which the authorit-ative words of God were through the mystery of inspiration inscripturated in document after document, the canon being formed by the very appearance of these God-breathed scriptures. (p. 23)

Then he briefly presents the focus and accomplishments of orthodox canonical studies. Positively, orthodox scholars have done a good job of disproving and discrediting negative criticism. Negatively, however, they have focused almost exclusively on the theological basis of the canon. They have done almost nothing with the historical roots or origins of the canon.

He also deals with the critical reconstruction of the Old Testament which, he says, rests on a "thoroughly distorted" view of the history of the Old Testament canon. Their hypothesis of a threefold development of the canon is contradictory to the dates they assign to the origin of the various Old Testament books. Also, says Kline, they ignore, or minimize, most of the evidence relating to the development of the canon—especially the studies in ancient Near Eastern Hittite law treaties.

Kline asserts that the critics have posited the late date of the origin of the canon primarily on the presupposition of an evolutionary schema. This is clearly contrary to the "pre-Israelite" evidence demonstrating that the idea of "canon" existed outside and before Moses. This same material also demonstrates that "canon" is a correlate of "covenant" (treaty), so that where "covenant" (treaty) exists, "canon" exists.

a. The formal origins of the biblical canon

In this section of his book, Kline reviews the evidence that the idea and institution of "canon" existed outside of Israel long before the traditional dating of Moses and his work. In fact, he shows that this was a widespread societal institution. There were many kinds of legal documents whose contents were sealed so as to avoid tampering and whose contents, consequently, were preserved exactly as originally written. Also, as legal documents their contents bore the authority invested in them by their authors (at least that was the intent), i.e., they were "canonical."

Kline reviews the major elements of Hittite suzerain treaties that relate to the subject of "canon." The words of ancient treaties were held

by their authors to be inviolable, and they enunciated curses upon anyone who would dare break the conditions of the treaty. The gods called to witness the treaty also would carry out the curses. Thus, these treaties were established as binding, authoritative, written documents - or, canon.

In addition to these treaties, Kline mentions the following as bearing this "canonical" authority: professional prescriptions (Egyptian medical papyri, magical incantations and cultic formulae), "letter(s) of gods" (communications addressed to Assyrian kings), documents originating from royal courts (edicts and laws), and royal land grants (recorded on boundary stones).

He focuses especially on the boundary stones (kudurru-stones) pointing out their parallels to the treaties. These stones existed in two copies—one copy was deposited on the boundary (or within the boundaries) of the land granted and the other served as a permanent private record. Both recorded the property claims and were sanctioned by divine curses. The rights of the owner were placed, therefore, under divine protection. Both set "the legal claim to that territory within the sacral sphere for its enforcement" (p. 32). Both comprised a royal charter ensuring the privileges stipulated in the document. Kline argues that the Mosaic treaty/covenant copies "are very much concerned with a royal (here, divine) land grant and guarantee" (p. 33). Both the kudurru-forms and the treaties included an historical prologue detailing the prior relationship between the vassal and suzerain.

Kline points out that God adopted this canonical treaty form as the literary form to communicate His covenant to His people.

> One of these, the international treaty, proves to have special relevance for our understanding of the canonicity of the Bible inasmuch as it influenced to a remarkable extent the formal shaping of the Scriptures. Indeed, the very oldest Scripture, the Decalogue given at Sinai, was in treaty form, as was the Deuteronomic document, which summed up and sealed the earliest, Mosaic stratum of Scripture. (p. 35)

b. The treaty/covenant Bible

In this section, Kline argues that the entire Bible repeats the treaty structure.

First, he seeks to demonstrate that the entire Old Testament is in this treaty form. He notes that the New Testament refers to the old covenant, i.e., as a single unit which it calls "covenant." He points to the way the Old Testament deals with itself as consisting in all its parts as authoritative

pronouncements of God (p. 46). Of course, its formal or structural earthly origins as a treaty document also argue for its unity. It is on this last thesis that he then focuses.

Everything in the Old Testament reflects or rests on the treaty structure.

> Our thesis is then that whatever the individual names of the several major literary genres of the Old Testament, as adopted in the Old Testament, their common surname is Covenant. (p. 47)

This statement is followed by a survey of each literary "genre" (e.g., law, prophecy, history, and wisdom) showing how it relates to the treaty structure.

He addresses the question as to why law is found in the midst of a faith document such as Deuteronomy. He answers that this is consistent with what is seen in the extra-biblical treaties and inconsistent with extra-biblical law codes.

The biblical treaty subsumes all of life under divine sovereignty. This is a unique feature of the biblical treaty but not an unexplainable feature.

> If the recognition that the Old Testament is a covenantal body of literature accounts for the presence of laws in it, the comprehensive scope of Yahweh's covenantal interest and claims will explain the wide variety of those laws, regulating as they do Israel's life in all its spheres and dimensions.
>
> The distinctly covenantal orientation of the sizeable segment of laws dealing with the cultus becomes evident when it is observed that in Israel the cultus absorbed various vital features of covenantal administration which elsewhere are not cultic but matters of state. (p. 49)

This unique theocratic orientation of biblical law explains why there are political laws in the cultic sequence (Leviticus).

> The uniquely religious nature of the Yahweh-Israel covenant naturally and necessarily transformed the political into the cultic.

In the biblical treaty, the sanctuary of their God is the same as the palace of the king—God was the Great King. Also, covenant ratification now is uniquely involved in cultic sacrifice so that it is part of the worship of Israel that they appear three times a year before God to reaffirm the covenant. At one of those feasts (the feast of Tabernacles), the covenant was to be publicly read once every seven years.

174

Israel's theocratic configuration also explains the religious nature of their military activity. All war is holy war and all military service is sacred. Kline points out that this obligation is noncultic outside Israel.

> Another example of an elsewhere noncultic area of vassal obligation that became cultic in Israel is the requirement to render military assistance to the suzerain. (p. 50)

Another unique element in Israel's treaty is the provision for placating the suzerain (God) by means of sacrifices (cultic activity).

In Israel's treaty ceremonial or cultic infractions resulted in political effects, e.g., excommunication or annihilation.

The theocratic context of treaty law includes a more intensive treatment of the life of its objects:

> Stipulations regulating the conduct of one vassal in relation
> to another are not common in political treaties. (p. 51)

Although political treaties do not address the relationships of individuals embraced by a particular treaty, they often stipulate the vassal is responsible to be friends to the king's friends. Kline suggests the biblical stipulations regulating interpersonal relationships find their formal parallel here.

This theocratic dimension is what produces the comprehensiveness of the biblical treaty. This element, says Kline, finds a formal parallel in extra-biblical treaties that also deal with corporate aspects of the vassal state's life under the treaty. The biblical treaty "prescribes for the Israelite community a system of government with priests and judges, kings and prophets," a territory, and "for a national program assigns the conquest of that land" (p. 52).

One of the most startling discoveries from the Hittite law treaties was the discovery of extra-biblical apodictic law. Casuistic, or case (e.g., "If a man does so and so, then ...") laws are common in ancient law codes but apodictic (e.g., "you shall do so and so") laws are not found. In the Hittite treaties, casuistic and apodictic laws appear interspersed just as they do in the Bible. The antecedent of the so-called hortatory (motivation) statements, says Kline, is also found in the Hittite treaties but not elsewhere outside the Bible (p. 53).

History is related to treaty as prologue appearing either as a large corpus or as a prologue to a smaller section of law within a larger legal corpus. The entire Pentateuch is structured like a treaty/covenant, the materials recorded in it are:

> ...a formal indication of the covenantal nature of the Penta-
> teuchal narratives and legislation alike. (p. 53)

History following the making of the biblical treaty (Deuteronomy) is the:

> ...historical demonstration of the theological principles spelled out in the Book of Deuteronomy. (p. 56)

The covenantal orientation of all Old Testament history controls the selection and arrangement of what is recorded. The prophets figure prominently as recorders of history. History relates to the prophets insofar as it gives the history of some prophets, the context of prophecy in general, the basic content of predictive prophecy, and the evidence the prophets used in validating their denunciations of Israel.

Prophecy is related to the biblical treaty in that all the later (or writing) prophets were Yahweh's messengers, His inspired agents, who fulfilled the "covenantal" diplomatic task of administering the "covenant",

> The prophets were the representatives of Yahweh in the administration of his covenant over Israel to declare his claims and enforce his will through effective proclamation. (p. 58)

The prophetic office is described and set forth in the biblical treaty (Deut. 18:15ff.). Specific language and structural elements of the treaty are found in the prophetic writings. The prophets of Israel functionally parallel the emissaries suzerains sent to administer their treaties. During the 8th and 9th centuries these treaty emissaries shifted from addressing only the vassal kings to addressing the vassal peoples. This shift parallels a similar shift in the audiences addressed by biblical prophets.

The covenant-treaty provides the context for Old Testament worship and the documents related to it. All worship occurred in the presence of God, i.e., in His temple-palace. Worship was the theocratic parallel to bringing tribute to a treaty king. The worship documents of the Old Testament "... were a continual resounding of Israel's `Amen' of covenant ratification" (p. 63). Consequently, they are replete with covenantal-treaty terminology and structure.

Wisdom themes and wisdom literature provide the "...way of the covenant" (p. 64). Kline ties all wisdom themes into treaty themes.

Having traced the pervasive influence of treaty-covenant throughout the Old Testament, Kline turns to the New Testament. Here, too, he posits a dominance of treaty structure. This influence rests primarily on the literary influence of the Old Testament.

c. The canon and the covenantal community

The thesis of this chapter is that "treaty" rests upon a king-vassal relationship and appears only in the context of a kingdom. Ancient Near

Eastern kingdom mythology/theology, in turn, necessitates the erection of a permanent dwelling place, or house, for the god after the god has accomplished victory for his subject(s).

In the opening paragraphs of the chapter Kline points out that all this necessitates the origin of the biblical treaty and kingdom exactly when they appeared historically. As in ancient Near Eastern kingdom mythology/ ideology the emergence of the kingdom must be preceded by the defeat of the god's enemies.

> Only when the Lord God had accomplished this soteric triumph would the way be prepared for him to promulgate his kingdom-treaty, setting his commandments among his elect people and ordering their kingdom existence under the dominion of his sovereign will. (p. 77)

So he concludes,

> ... Scripture from the outset bears the character of a word of triumphal fulfillment. (p. 78)

Then he adds that the canonical Scripture structures the life of God's people under His suzerainty. To this treaty theme Kline adds the ancient Near Eastern kingdom theology.

> In the epic ideology of the ancient Near East it is the god who by virtue of signal victory has demonstrated himself to be king among the gods who then proceeds to build himself a royal residence. (p. 79)

Thus there is the cycle: defeat of the forces of chaos (the god's enemies), installation of the king and establishing the kingdom, and building the god's house. Kline finds in this ideology as expressed in the "mythical literary tradition" the explanation of the structuring of much in the biblical accounts. It,

> ...quite clearly lies behind the mode of representation of Israel's redemptive history as recorded in the Book of Exodus. (p. 79)

Exodus is the prose account of how this motif becomes history. In the poets and prophets this theme is expressed in the mythological language of Israel's pagan neighbors. This same pattern is repeated in the history of David. In this regard, Kline demonstrates how this mythological pattern finds literary expression in 2 Samuel 7 (the enunciation of the covenant with David). The Egyptian hymns of victory, and especially the victory hymn of Thutmosis II, are shown to have the same literary pattern as this biblical passage.

To all this Kline adds that this kingdom ideology cycle finds some

parallels in Hittite treaties in "formal similarities in ideology and concept" (p. 84). Thus, the treaty ideology and the kingdom ideology are supplementary. So, this is especially true in the Bible.

> When we consider that this covenant with David was to be consummated in the divine scion, Christ the Lord, we can appreciate the appropriateness of this fusion of treaty tradition with a *literary form* [emphasis added] which gave expression to an ideology of divine kingship. (p. 84)

It is important to note that Kline represents the fulfillment of this house-building or architectural theme, in two ways. First, there is the actual physical house of God (the tabernacle and temple) and, second, there are the people of God.

In a section entitled "Community Correlative to Biblical Canon" Kline points out how his theses necessitate a treaty community structured by the treaty stipulations. The existence of the community structured as stipulated in the treaty bears with it the necessity of the canonical authority and existence of the treaty as canon. This means that the treaty stands as the community's witness that they accept and live under it. The treaty forms the community and not the other way around.

    d. Canonical polities, old and new

In this section Kline sketches the interrelationship between the Old and New Testaments (treaties). Significantly, he maintains that the two Testaments representing two treaties address their own ages in a unique way. Each treaty sets forth the constitution for God's people so long as they are under that treaty. The new treaty in Christ serves to restructure God's people. The Lord-vassal relationship and those elements of faith, which constitute it, is the same under both treaties, but the patterns of life change.

The elements of unity or continuity are: "the common eternal goal in the city of God", the same basis for blessings (Christ's mediatorial work), the same cause of spiritual life (the work of the Spirit of Christ), the continuity of the provisional-prophetic-anticipatory as it relates to the fulfilled, the continuity of the type in relationship to antitype, and the elements of continuity seen in "their distinctively formal polities." (p. 98)

These latter elements relate to the invisible dimensions of the two orders,

> For when we reckon with the invisible dimension of the New Testament order, specifically with the heavenly kingship of the glorified Christ over the church, we perceive that the

govern-mental structure of the New Testament order like that of the old Israel is a theocratic monarchy. ...the heavenly throne which Christ occupies is the throne of David in its archetypal pattern and its antitypical perfection. (p. 98)

The discontinuities are seen

...at the level of the visible structure in the cultural-cultic aspects of the kingdom of Israel and the church of Christ.

The New Testament, says Kline, is strictly cultic (i.e., it has to do with religious practices). Each treaty presents a different "architectural model" or different "polities."

Kline then discusses what he terms the "intracanonical polity phases" or the principle of various stages/administrations under the two treaties/canons. He sees three stages in the Old Testament canonical relationship between God and His people: the preparatory period during the wandering through the desert and after the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, the transitional period of the occupation of the land preceding the enthronement of David, and the permanent monarchical period following that enthronement. Similarly, he envisions three stages or administrations under the new treaty: the preparatory stage during the lifetime of Jesus (the Gospels), the transitional stage (Acts), and the permanent stage. Each stage is part of the entire treaty administration and, therefore, contains elements found in the other stages. On the other hand, each stage contains elements unique to, and confined to, itself. These unique elements are abrogated by later stages. (p. 109)

3. Biblical Ethics

Kline argues that Old Testament ethics are intrusion ethics. Much of what is there reflects the state of matters as they will be in heaven (the age of consummation). Much reflects what the vassals should do during the present age when the common grace of God forestalls judgment. All elements recorded in the older treaty are types and find their antitype in Christ. Some of these elements, however, await the Second Coming of Christ (the consummation) to find their antitype. Among these are such things as the imprecation of one's enemies (as seen in the imprecatory Psalms), the slaughter of all God's enemies (as in the conquest of Canaan), and the penal sanctions of the Old Testament law. On the other hand, some elements find their antitype or fulfillment in the present era while common grace forestalls judgment. Among these are the last five laws of the decalogue. Now believers are to love our neighbor as ourselves, then (after Christ's Second Coming) the imprecations will be in order. Now it

is not a function of civil government to promote a "particular religious establishment," then (as in ancient Israel), it will be.

B. The Strengths of the Position

The work of Dr. Kline is brilliant and revolutionary. It is well worth the time spent in studying it. Although more will be said in the area of criticism than commendation, this should not be taken as a deprecation of the work as a whole. There are some extremely valuable assets here that should not be ignored by serious students of the Bible. Stated briefly, his work is extremely valuable in the area of apologetics, higher criticism, exegesis, and biblical theology.

1. Apologetic Value

Certainly among the very valuable assets of Kline's work is its apologetic value. He has demonstrated that the origin and content of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch are securely rooted in the time-period traditionally assigned to them. Although one should not believe the validity of the Bible because of this kind of argumentation, it does greatly support the belief that the Bible is of divine origin by confirming the expectation of what ought to be because the Bible is inspired. It is possible for a negative critic to accept the mid-second millennium origin of the structure and contents of Deuteronomy and the structure of the Pentateuch as a whole and still deny its inspiration. Nonetheless, Kline's work has put the reigning critical understanding of the Bible on the defensive-—whether or not its adherents acknowledge it.

Kline suggests this when he notes that the first treaty studies that appeared were produced by the negative critic Gerhard von Rad but "apparently the evidence would lead him farther than he is prepared to go." This, says Kline, was because those studies demonstrate a documentary basis for the structure of Deuteronomy and ties its date to mid-second millennium (p. 11).

Even more than this results from Kline's study, for it demonstrates that the idea of canon was widespread in the ancient world long before Moses. This suggests that it would be strange if there were no Israelite canon by Moses' day. Moreover, the treaty structure of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch as a whole establishes their origin as canon in the Mosaic period.

This entire argumentation works to support the traditional conservative dating of Moses and to destroy the reigning critical dating. It also decimates the critical theories concerning the origin of Deuteronomy

and the Pentateuch. Apologetically, this means the traditional view gains the support of concrete documentation. Again we note that believers should not believe the inspiration of the Bible because of the facts but they should believe that were the facts all known they would (and do) confirm the divine origin of the Scripture.

2. Higher Critical Value

Higher criticism has struggled, almost since the reformation, to discredit the Bible. Today higher criticism reigns. It is most refreshing to see how the Bible conforms to extra-biblical patterns contemporary with the traditional date assigned to the origin of the biblical passages being considered. Kline's work seems to explain all of those thorny problems raised by the negative critics and to explain them with ease. For example, in his discussion of Deuteronomy, he says,

> The usual scholarly conclusion that chapter 28 belongs with chapters 12-26 while chapters 27, 29, and 30 are unoriginal appendixes of unknown but late date betrays a lack of apprecia-tion for the relevant form-critical data. The fact that the curse-blessing motif in Deuteronomy 27 takes the form of directions for a subsequent ceremony to be conducted by Joshua at Shechem has lent itself to the dissociation of this chapter from its context. But, as will be shown below, if Deuteronomy's own account of its historical origins is respected and the significance of the theme of dynastic succession is properly appraised, the integrity of Deuteronomy 27 becomes apparent. (p. 34)

Kline does not disappoint the expectant reader. He demonstrates what he has promised. Indeed, his discussion of Deuteronomy is replete with such demonstrations: e.g., the significance of the historical prologue, the significance of Deuteronomy 6-11 as part of the stipulation section, the interspersing of casuistic, apodictic, and motive laws/clauses, the explanation of the record of Moses' death, etc. It is especially interesting to this writer that the Hittite law treaties and (so far) only the Hittite law treaties contain the apodictic form of laws. Kline even gives a somewhat credible explanation for the origin of the so-called motive clauses of Deuteronomy.

3. The Exegetical-theological Value

There are many passages whose exegesis now becomes clearer as does the biblical context in which they appear. For example, the thesis

that the two tablets were two copies of the treaty and the reason why these copies were deposited in the ark of the covenant is now much better understood. Kline's explanation does not challenge the perspicuity of Scripture (at this point) since this explanation merely enhances what was already understood: viz., that there were two tablets and that they were both deposited in the ark.

He helps one understand that when Moses broke the two copies of the treaty he was doing symbolically what he saw the people doing in reality. They had already broken the treaty (covenant). Breaking the tablets was the symbolical action declaring the treaty (covenant) was broken.

Theologically, Kline's exegesis and explanation of the content of the two tablets certainly brings one back to what good theologians have said for a long time, viz., that the moral (so-called first table) underlies the interpersonal-societal stipulations (so-called second table) of the decalogue. It removes the speculation as to where the "division" occurs. Also, his work helps one better understand the interrelationship between law and grace—or, at least, provides one with additional support for the traditional reformed perspective as illustrated in the Westminster Larger Catechism and the commentaries of John Calvin.

C. Weaknesses of the Position

Limitations of space prohibit any further listing of the valuable aspects of Kline's work. What has been pointed out is brief but of extreme importance. There is so much good in Kline's work that one hesitates to offer any negative criticism lest the reader decide totally to ignore the relevance of the structure of the Hittite treaties for the study of Deuteronomy and, therefore, of the Pentateuch. On the other hand, several things will be said by way of correctives.

Now comes a more critical evaluation of the work. It seems that Kline (a) understands much of the biblical material against the background of the treaty structure and that the material easily conforms to that pattern in general but not as to many specifics, (b) forces the biblical material into the kingship-ideology structure, (c) at significant places forces a form - critical hermeneutic upon the biblical material, (d) sets forth a confusion of structure and content, (e) wrongly views the covenant as law (treaty) instead of grace (covenant), (f) wrongly proposes an interim ethics, and (e) wrongly states that in the progress of biblical revelation later revelation completely abrogates earlier revelation.

1. The Biblical Material is Forced into the Treaty Structure

If Payne errs in rigidly fitting the entire biblical revelation into the mold of a Greek last will and testament, Kline errs in rigidly fitting the material outside of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch into the mould of ancient Hittite law treaties.

On the other hand, while Kline seems to be correct in saying that God employed the treaty structure in Deuteronomy, his fitting the biblical material into the treaty structure is evidenced continually. It seems that because he concludes Deuteronomy is a treaty he is determined to see all the constitutive parts of the treaty in Deuteronomy. This problem would be alleviated, if not obviated, were one to view the treaty as a structure-form employed by God to communicate His covenant—as a paradigm and not as the structure. That is, God used this form but did not bind Himself to it.

a. God As Witness to the Covenant

As an illustration of this problem one might point to Kline's discussion of the role of the gods as witnesses to the treaty. He argues that since there is no other God, the Lord God must serve as His own "witness." Significantly, however, God never refers to Himself as a witness. Rather, He tells Israel that He calls heaven and earth to witness. Hence, Kline is in the awkward position of having to explain how God is His own witness and yet He summons heaven and earth, and not Himself, as witnesses. This difficulty is removed when one rejects the necessity of fitting the text into the treaty structure.

It seems that it would be more consistent with the biblical material to relate this idea of witness to the account of the creation and the fall. This means that God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1) and that He created it for a particular purpose. This purpose was not destroyed by the fall of man, rather it was established. Hence, the promise of the destruction of Satan (Gen. 3:15) mandated the continuation of the creation (heavens and earth) until God's purposes in the seed of the woman were fully accomplished. Consequently, God states to Noah (and through him to all mankind) in Genesis 8:22 that He would never again bring a worldwide destruction by water so long as the creation persists. Consequently, it is the continuation of "heaven and earth" that attests to the persistence of the covenant. The rainbow attests that God will never again destroy man until the covenant is fully realized and its promise completed. Just as certainly as heaven and earth will not pass away, the Word of God (the covenant) will not pass away "till all is fulfilled." (Matt. 5:18)

This exegesis does not deny that God used the treaty structure. It merely assumes that prior revelation, which was not in the treaty structure, was employed in the treaty structure as one of the constitutive and adjusting elements. Thus, just where one expects God to cite Himself as the "witness," He inserts "heaven and earth." Moreover, such an insertion is inconsistent with the ideology of the treaty because impersonal entities cannot discipline the covenant as treaty witnesses are envisioned as doing. Yet taken within the context of the course of biblical theology, heaven and earth do stand as witnesses to the inviolability of God's covenant.

b. The Oath of the God

Another illustration of this forced exegesis is Kline's explanation of the oath taking.

First, he notes that Hittite treaties involved oath taking by both the suzerain and the vassal. It was not usual for the suzerain to take an oath but it did occur. The illustration Kline offers, however, does not fit the suzerain-vassal treaty insofar as it does not occur in the context of conquest but rather in the context of mutual agreement (cf., p. 23 in *Treaty of the Great King*). So if the comparison between this "treaty" of the vizier Abban and Iarimlim is to be pressed consistently one would have to conclude that this is a treaty in which the suzerain and vassal mutually agree to a certain arrangement. In other words, this is no suzerain treaty at all; it is a mutual agreement. When his illustration is applied to the Abrahamic-Mosaic covenant, therefore, the fact that God took an oath means that He has agreed with the other party of the treaty to certain conditions and obligations. This, however, is exactly what Kline is attempting to disprove.

Second, is it not much preferable to view the oath taking of God as incidental to the treaty form but central to the covenant as is suggested by Kline's own research? Unlike Hittite law treaties oath assumes a major role in the "treaty" structure of Deuteronomy and a major role in the structure of the Abrahamic covenant. What view (covenant or treaty) best explains how the declaratory-gracious character (the distinguishing feature) of the covenant can be consistently retained? In a very real sense God's dealings with man rest on His nature and character. So, in Genesis 12:1-3 (cf., 22:16) God swears (takes an oath) but there is no explicit mention of an oath. It appears instead that Abraham understood God to be taking an oath insofar as His promise rested on His own nature and word. His understanding was more than an implication because God said He would surely bless him—this is the force of the Hebrew when an infinitive

absolute is used in conjunction with the finite verb. This is the interpretation of that event, it seems, in Hebrews 6:13-18. For the same reason, God's promise to Adam in Genesis 3:15 rested on His own nature and word (implied His oath). Thus from the beginning, the covenant rested on God's eternal nature and the inviolability of His own word. So, the divine oath is central to the covenant from the beginning. The divine transactions in Genesis 3 and 12 are covenants (by Kline's definition) because they are primarily soteric according to the New Testament interpretation of them. Again, it seems that this understanding of God's oath is more consistent with the biblical idea of covenant than is Kline's, because it retains the declaratory-gracious nature of the covenant.

Third, even if a genuine suzerain treaty, which included the taking of an oath supporting the promise by the suzerain, could be found this would not alter the above evaluation of the significance of the divine oath. This is because of the relationship of the nature of the divine covenant to the nature and word of God. In the treaty context, the oath would be necessitated by the questionable and changing nature of the suzerain's person and word. In the covenant context oath is not necessary because of the doubtful nature of the sovereign (God) but is volunteered by Him because of the doubting nature of the one with whom the covenant is made.

Fourth, "oath" plays different roles in "treaty" and "covenant." In "treaty" oath is an essential part of the treaty because the oath works to enforce the treaty. In the covenant context the oath is not integral to the covenant at all but is added to the essential content of the covenant. Also, in "treaty" the oath is a pledge to punish, while in "covenant" the oath is a pledge to bless. In "treaty" the oath is a pledge to do something if the treaty is broken; in "covenant" the oath is a pledge that the covenant will be kept/fulfilled.

Fifth, another problem emerges when the biblical material is compared to the treaty structure and process. In the Bible, it is clear that the Mosaic covenant rests on the Abrahamic covenant (e.g., cf., Deut. 1:8, Josh. 21:43-35). Therefore, the Mosaic covenant comes into existence because of the oath God swore in the Abrahamic covenant. This suggests that former oath is the original paradigm (one should understand the mosaic use of "oath" in terms of Gen. 15 rather than moving from Moses to Abraham). In Genesis the oath involved an oath-taking ceremony (Gen. 15:7-21). The problem with Kline's analysis is deepened because the ceremony recorded in Genesis 15 may well find an extra-biblical parallel in the Mari "covenant" ratification process. This means that the origin of

the paradigm (the "form" and practice employed) was several centuries before the Hittite vassal treaties. However, whatever its origin it is clear that in Genesis 15 the ratification ceremony was central to the entire covenant making process so far as Abraham was concerned. God had sworn to him verbally and Abraham requests and gets more assurance. This was an element "added on" and not an element made necessary by the "covenant form." Remember that in Genesis 15 the oath served to confirm God's prior promise that the covenant would be kept while in "treaty" the oath served as a threat to make certain that others would keep the treaty. In that original biblical oath-taking there was no accompanying oath taking on the part of the "vassal" (as there was in the case of the ratification of the Mosaic covenant-treaty). In Genesis God guaranteed the vassal would keep the covenant (Gen. 15:27, cf. Ezek. 34:18). Yet in the suzerainty treaties the vassal's oath was always present (as a promise and not as a certainty of fulfillment) and the suzerain's oath was rarely, if ever, present. Kline argues that the reason for the centrality of the divine oath in the biblical "treaty" is that these treaties were soteric—but this introduces a problem in treaty theology that will be handled below and does not satisfy the requirements of the biblical text.

c. The Sabbath as a Seal

Another illustration of forced exegesis is the role Kline suggests for the Sabbath institution. His explanation involves an equivocation on the meaning of the word "seal." Because the Sabbath is a seal and because ancient treaties were sealed with the royal seal he says:

> ... it is tempting to see in the Sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of the obverse of the international treaty documents. (p. 18)

Does this suggest, therefore, that since circumcision was a seal of the covenant it was administered in the center of a man? It seems that the obvious answer is no. Also, the 4th commandment is not the central commandment of the biblical commandments—of the decalogue. Furthermore, how can Kline's suggestion be defended in view of the fact that the day chosen to be the Sabbath was not the middle but the final day of the week? Clearly the central location of the royal seals in treaties does not have a formative influence on the location of the fourth commandment.

Kline remarks,

> The Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the Sabbath as his seal of ownership and authority. (p. 19)

186

How is the Sabbath the seal of divine ownership on world history? Is it a seal in the same sense as a Hittite royal seal? Kline's language appears to involve an equivocation in that it focuses on only part of the significance of the royal seal. A king's seal was a visible sign of ownership and authority *and* is especially a means of preserving inviolably the contents of a treaty. But, the Sabbath marks God's history and people without preserving the unchangeableness of the covenant (it was changed at the fall) or of the creation (according to what God said in the Noahic covenant, it was changed at the flood). Secondly, unlike a treaty seal, the Sabbath bears a final rather than a central significance (cf., the prior discussion of the location of the fourth commandment in the Decalogue). It was appointed at the end of the creating, and it was to be observed at the end of the week (notably, its observance was changed to the beginning of the week!). In the Old Testament it is God's guarantee that He will bring all history and creation to its redemptive end and it is His guarantee to all those under the covenant of grace that they will participate in this redemptive reality. Applied to creation that does not observe the Sabbath, therefore, the Sabbath institution assures the destruction (or, at least, purification and reformation) of creation, whereas when it is applied to the elect, it assures their salvation. In contrast, if Kline's reasoning be extended consistently (a) the royal seal guarantees that the contents of the thing sealed will not be tampered with, i.e., nature will not be destroyed, and (b) the divine witnesses guarantee the treaty will be kept and treaty breakers (fallen nature) judged, i.e., nature will be destroyed. Moreover, Hebrews 4 explains that a central theological significance of the Sabbath of God is that it is the last stage of redemptive history (note: in Christ it signifies the new beginnings in the resurrection). The Sabbath of God is entered whenever one by grace ceases his laboring for the Sabbath rest (redemption). Here, is it not the Sabbath the final, rather than the middle fact of creation, redemption and history? Do not these reflections recommend less free association in seeking the symbolical meanings of the Sabbath (and other matters)?

It certainly seems evident that the idea of seal has little to do with the physical location of the royal seal and its possible parallel to the creation Sabbath other than it was the most pragmatic location. It also seems evident that one should be most cautious and more consistent in drawing parallels between treaty and biblical phenomena. It does seem that only Kline's forced form-critical exegesis makes his suggestion regarding the location and significance of the Sabbath as a sign "tempting" to him.

d. The Exegesis of Hebrews 9:16-17

Kline exegetes Hebrews 9:16, 17 in terms of the treaty structure. He views the analysis of the death of the testator as a reflection of the provision for suzerain succession at the end of some of the treaty renewal documents. He explains that when the treaties were renewed they were often rewritten. The terms of the former treaty were updated and the death of the former suzerain and a provision for allegiance to his successor was set forth in the renewal document.

On the surface applying this to Hebrews makes good sense. But it raises major problems.

First, there is nothing in Hebrews that would lead one to see a parallel to the succession provisions of Hittite law treaties or even of the Deuteronomic equivalent. That is, if the Hittite law treaty structure were not suggested first, one would not see any succession provision in Hebrews. Kline's exegesis, then, violates the perspicuity of Scripture. Indeed, the point of the Scripture is that Christ is the administrator of the covenant under both dispensations. Under the former dispensation, Moses served as the head over the house, but Christ was then and continues to be both the son-heir and the one who built the house. He is the chief administrator and Moses was His servant. So, Moses' death did not remove the treaty-giver or sovereign suzerain but only its second in command (Christ, cf., Heb. 3:3-6).

Second, in the treaties the full blessings of the treaty were guar-anteed and dispensed *before* the death of the king. In Hebrews 9:16-17, however, it is explicitly stated that the blessings devolve upon the heirs only *after* the death of the testator. On the other hand, in the case of Deuteronomy the full blessings of the treaty devolve upon the "vassals" neither while Moses lives (as in the case of the "covenant" God made with Abraham and his seed) or immediately after his death (as in the case of the Greek last will and testament). Indeed, Moses' death plays an altogether different role with reference to the divine covenant than does the death of Christ. The death of Christ consummates the covenant and brings the blessings of the covenant while the death of Moses is incidental to those ultimate blessings. It was not Moses' death that brought the blessings (if conceived as the entry into the promised land) but Joshua led them into the land (Heb. 4).

Third, in the Hittite treaties as Kline represents them, more occurred at the death of the king than a mere succession of the treaty. There was the succession of the kingship. That is, the provision at the end of the

treaty renewal document was the assertion of royal rights and authority by the new king. He asserted that he was in the same relationship to the vassals as the previous king and claimed his royal rights. If the previous king was the dispenser of the law and bore the authority of the gods so, says the succeeding king, do I. In the Bible there is no succession of lawgivers. Certainly, Hebrews 9:16-17 envisions neither a succession of lawgivers nor a succession of administrators.

Fourth, the idea of last will and testament does suit Hebrews 9:16-17. It has long been noted that the writer uses technical legal terms from the Greek legal system which are peculiar to their ways of dealing with a last will and testament (the ways of the Greek last will and testament were different). Furthermore, the writer is clear in saying that the blessings (promises) devolved upon the heirs only due to and upon the death of the one who made the testament. To apply this consistently is to imply that God as the party who made the covenant, died. What really happened is that Jesus, as the one who was the recipient of the covenant (the federal head of the elect) died. What the Bible teaches is that the true heir of all things is Jesus and that one enjoys that heritage not because of his own virtues but because he has been made one with Him. The Hittite provision is to see to the succession of the treaty—to see that its administration would go unchanged except for the new suzerain; on the other hand, the biblical statement in Hebrews 9:16-17 states that the death of Christ significantly changed the covenant. So, its administration is now changed (cf., Heb. 8-10)—the former administration is annulled (Heb. 7:18, 8:13!

e. The Abrahamic Covenant as a Suzerain Treaty

As noted above, Kline argues that the reason for the centrality of the divine oath in the biblical "treaty" is that these treaties were soteric—but this introduces a problem in treaty theology and does not satisfy the requirements of the biblical text.

Kline states:

> The divine Suzerain's condescension in his redemptive covenant at the time of its Abrahamic administration extended to the humiliation of swearing himself to covenant fidelity as Lord of the covenant and Fulfiller of the promises (Gen. 15).

He argues that in this Abrahamic treaty (1) the kind of allegiance (Gen. 12:1; 17:10) required of Abraham is the same as that required of vassals in the Hittite treaties, and (2) God's (as suzerain) oath finds real parallels in the Hittite treaties. It has already pointed out the problem with the second proposition. This, although it is not the primary problem with

the treaty thesis, does introduce what appears to be the primary problem: the suggested relationship between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants.

This problem is reflected in the following citation:

> These [biblical] covenants are sovereign administrations not of blessing exclusively but of curse and blessing according to the vassal's deserts. Since, however, the specifically soteric covenants are informed by the principle of God's sovereign grace, which infallibly effects his redemptive purposes in Christ, they are accompanied by divine guarantees assuring a realization of the blessing sanctions of the covenant. Now it would obviously be unsound methodology to give this special feature which belongs to the specifically redemptive covenant administrations a constitutive place when defining the [divine] covenant generically. (p. 23-24)

Here Kline says several things that appear to be inconsistent with the biblical material. In order to show this more clearly, it would be useful to point out specifically what is said:

a. Biblical covenants are sovereign administrations of blessings and curses that come upon the vassal according to his deserts. This is Kline's definition of covenant. The covenant is sovereignly set upon the recipient but its blessings and curses (promises) are conditional.

b. Second, the covenants guaranteeing blessings irrespective of the deserts of the recipient (soteric covenants) are essentially different as to the principle that informs them. These covenants are informed by sovereign grace that "infallibly effects His (God's) redemptive purposes in Christ."

c. It is wrong to define covenant generically in terms of this gracious element.

This third proposition is inconsistent with the New Testament explanation of God's dealings with man, i.e., with the operations of the covenant(s) of God. First, the New Testament consistently points to the Abrahamic, and not the Mosaic, covenant as the fundamental paradigm for what Christ has done. The very element Kline says should not define biblical covenant is the element used by New Testament speakers and writers to define it, viz., God's sovereign grace (e.g., Matt. 1:21, Luke 1:32-33, Rom. 9-11, Eph. 1:11 etc.). Second, if grace must be used to define biblical covenant generically then Kline's definition of covenant is in error (proposition #1). This means also that his second proposition is wrong insofar as it subsumes the soteric "treaty" under the "treaty" rather than subsuming the treaty structure under the covenant (i.e., as a special

190

form of covenant).

2. Forces the Biblical Material into the Kingship-Ideology Structure

A major problem exists in the Kline's use of kingship mythological themes. He argues that the pagan-mythological ideological cycle (structure) is repeated in the Bible and, in combination with the treaty structure, is the structure(s) employed by biblical writers in setting forth their material: e.g., Exodus, 2 Samuel 7, etc.

In pagan mythological ideology the following cycle, says Kline, is observed: the victory of the god(s) over forces of chaos, the enthronement of a human king over the people and territory about which the battle raged, and the erection of a permanent building (temple) in the capital city.

One should take note that this pagan cycle does not find a parallel in biblical prose accounts. In the Pentateuchal account, for example, note the promise of kingdom (Abraham), the four hundred year exile/captivity, the victory over Egypt, no enthronement of an Israelite king in Egypt, no permanent building, the exodus, the eventual erection of a temporary building (dwelling place), the kingdom established without a human king, the erection of the temple by the third king over Israel. It should be obvious that the biblical account is, at best, a distant parallel to the pagan cycle.

Is should be obvious that there are major differences between what the Bible records and the structure of pagan mythological records, although there are similarities. The biblical poets used these similarities in deprecating their enemies and exalting their own God. The pagan cycle originated as a means of explaining the existence of their temples. Close examination of this "cycle" demonstrates it represents a general pattern that is adjusted to meet particular conditions. That is, among pagans the general pattern was adjusted to include the various mythological-religious stories of the particular pagan culture employing the general pattern. The pagans needed to explain the orderliness of the creation as reflected in the rule (orderliness) of the existing kingdom. Their pagan minds rejected the divine truth declared all around and within them—that the orderliness was due to the Lord God and that their law-order should reflect His law (Rom. 1). They rebelliously rejected the truth and created their follies. Their explanations are similar because of their physical and cultural proximity to one another.

The biblical poets often used these pagan cycles by way of illustrating redemptive truth. They were just as aware of the uniqueness of

Israel's history as believers are today.

Therefore, there are the following problems with Kline's procedure:

a. Literary-structural problems. This enthronement ideology does not persist throughout ancient Near East in a consistent form. Rather, it appears there was a general form that was used by pagan cultures to explain the existence of their temples and the authority extending from the god(s) of those temples—i.e., the form and ideas were aetiological (explanatory of origins). The biblical accounts are not aetiological but are historical. The comparison of the biblical accounts (prose and poetic) and the pagan cycles establishes this.

b. Chronological problems. Kline's specific examples from paganism are separated from the revelation to David by centuries, viz., the closest parallel to 2 Samuel 7 (David's revelation, c. 1000 BC) is the mythology of Thutmoses II (c.1490-c.1436 BC). Why are the mythologies that are closer to the Davidic period not used by Kline? Did the writer of 2 Samuel consciously use the mythological story of the "revelation" to Thutmoses II as the structure to report David's revelation? And why would he do that when there were other, more recent literary patterns to employ?

c. Mechanical difficulties. There simply is not the exact parallel between the origin of the temple and the pagan cycles. The temple origins are rooted in the Sinai revelation which, in turn, is embedded in the entire exodus history. The pattern of this history is presented quite different than the presentation of the pagan ideologies (as already shown).

d. Theological-methodological difficulties. Kline uses this pagan ideology to explain the biblical material in a rather thoroughgoing sense. Since the pagan mythology communicates paganism, does the use of this mythology -ideology by biblical writers assume their acceptance of pagan ideology? This problem is very pressing. In the case of the treaties, Kline argues that the treaty structure bears with it the treaty ideology. He exegetes the biblical material with the assumption of that treaty ideology, i.e., form and content-meaning are closely tied. On what consistent grounds does one now reject that pagan mythological ideology, i.e., separate form and content? Furthermore, it does seem that the poets of the Bible do accept some of that pagan mythology in a demythological form and teach that some of what the pagans said about their non-existent gods is true of the Lord God, i.e., they separate form and content but not radically. They clearly separate the revealed and pagan ideologies because they self-consciously build on the previous revelation that is assumed to be clearly distinct from pagan thought-ideology.

A second significant theological problem is that Kline's application of the kingship-ideology challenges the perspicuity of Scripture. There are certain insights to be gained from understanding pagan mythology but the radical re-interpretation of Scripture suggested by Kline mitigates (at the very least) the perspicuity of Scripture. On the other hand, Kline's biblical-theological conclusions are attractive because Scripture does employ the "building-temple" paradigm often.

      3. Forces a Form Critical Hermeneutic onto the Biblical Material

Kline recognizes and openly admits that he has employed form criticism:

> "... there seems to be a general unwillingness at present to face up to the obvious implications of the treaty identification of Deuteronomy to which form criticism has now led." (p. 10)

Of course, as he uses this hermeneutical approach he is self-consciously working to reject its presuppositions and anti-biblical assumptions. But does he succeed?

Kline's work is truly impressive but it suffers the weaknesses of too much form criticism. In spite of its surface appeal, it tends to ignore those elements of the text that do not fit the form and forces the material into the pre-conceived form. His work also presents the confusion of structure and content typical of form criticism (this will be dealt with below).

The first problem is seen, for example, when Kline asserts that the Mosaic was the first biblical canonical revelation. Could it be that because Deuteronomy is a treaty form, and because treaty is the first canon (or at least the first covenantal form and the form on which Kline focuses), he feels compelled to deny the possible existence of canon before the origin of the Pentateuch as a whole (note: he also argues that the idea of canon long preceded Moses)?

It certainly appears that if "canonical" means only the combination of "written" material in treaty form and with an inviolable authority, that the Mosaic may have been the first canonical revelation. However, then what does one do with the revelations given before Moses? There certainly seems to have been a clearly known and practiced body of revelation long before Moses. It seems that what was revealed to Adam in Eden was known by their successors. Certainly, the post-fall revelation to Adam shaped the actions and thoughts of Cain and Abel when they brought their offerings to God. Similarly, when Abraham offered Isaac he believed God not only could but would raise his son from the dead (Heb. 11:17-19). Why was that? Also, Noah's father knew of the curse on the ground and on work, and named his son in terms of the promised seed of

the woman who would give relief from that curse (Gen. 5:29). It seems most likely that Abraham at the time he "offered" up Isaac understood the promise of the seed who would destroy Satan and restore man (Gen. 22). Since Isaac was the "promised son," he must survive if God were to be believed (Heb. 11:17-19). Thus, just as Abraham looked beyond Palestine to the city whose builder and maker was God, he looked beyond Isaac and rejoiced to see Jesus' day (Heb. 11:8-10; John 8:56). So, there was a canonical revelational content although that content may not have been inscripturated. Therefore, if "canonical" means revelation with inviolable authority there was a canon before Moses. Indeed, even if the Hittite law treaties may not have existed prior to the Mosaic era, other "canonical" forms did exist—as Kline demonstrates. So, "canon" is not attached only to the treaty form. This is exactly what is being argued at this point. Canon existed orally and in writing long before Moses and in a form or forms other than the Hittite law treaty.

Also, it seems highly unlikely that Moses was the first to write down the revelation he received. It has long been pointed out that the structure of Genesis argues for a written record (cf., R. K. Harrison's discussion in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*[15]). Certainly writing was wide-spread in the ancient world of Abraham's day. As a wealthy merchant-man, he would have had to give bills of sale, etc., as was the common practice in that day. Also, those bills of sale often were "canonical" in Kline's sense of canonical. The original copy on the tablet was wrapped with a thin layer of clay that was inscribed with the text and then sealed.

Another example of this "form critical" hermeneutic/exegesis is seen in Kline's treatment of the corporate aspects of the biblical and extra-biblical treaties. He points out how the theocratic dimension of the biblical treaty produces its comprehensiveness. This element finds a formal parallel in extra-biblical treaties that also deal with corporate aspects of the vassal state's life under the treaty. The biblical treaty "prescribes for the Israelite community a system of government with priests and judges, kings and prophets," a territory, and "for a national program assigns the conquest of that land" (p. 52). It does seem patent, however, that the biblical "treaty" is unique insofar as it does more than deal with corporate aspects of Israel's life. Unlike vassal treaties, it completely structures all of Israel's corporate life *as well as* the personal, individual living of each individual under the covenant. It certainly seems that the Mosaic covenant

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[15] R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1969), 544ff. Harrison's argument is summarized in the author's *What Say the Stones?* (Providence Presbyterian Press: Thornton, 2004), 136ff.

produced a new society, while treaties administered existing societies. Only the form-critical hermeneutical assumption produces the parallel Kline suggests. Surely, there should be more emphasis on the uniqueness and the distinctions between the Hittite treaty and the biblical covenant (Mosaic).

A final example of this problem in his hermeneutic is the way he reads this treaty structure into the New Testament.

> For the historical relationship sustained by the new covenant to the old covenant and the place occupied by the New Testament as the divine documentation of the new covenant compel us to understand the New Testament as a resumption of that documentary mode of covenant administration represented in the Old Testament. (p. 68)

Thus, in spite of the large amount of foundational and definitional didactic material in the Gospels they are relegated to prologue material (the Gospel material is more than prologue in nature, it is core material). Kline says the Gospels are "... chiefly concerned with the establishment of the covenant order." They are "... primarily testimonies to the ratification of God's covenant," and provide a framework for the rest of the New Testament (p. 72).

Kline recognizes the problem when he says,

> As was the case in the Old Testament, the New Testament adaptation of the treaty structure is highly creative. Being far less directly related than was the Old Testament to that world of ancient diplomacy, the New Testament writings reflect here and there rather than reproduce en bloc its peculiar literary formularies. (p. 74)

Whereas the New Testament writings only "reflect here and there rather than reproduce en bloc" the "peculiar literary formularies" of the treaty, it seems better to affirm that it reproduces en bloc the essence of the Old Testament. Book after book is preoccupied with establishing how the Old Testament promises, indeed, it entire content (covenant), are fulfilled in and not replaced by Christ.

4. It Confuses Structure and Content

It seems that because he concludes Deuteronomy is a treaty, Kline is forced to see all the constitutive parts of treaty in Deuteronomy. This problem would be alleviated, if not obviated, were he to have viewed the treaty as a structure-form employed by God to communicate His covenant rather than a pre-existing form to which God conformed His revelation.

God did use contemporary structures to communicant His truth, e.g., it is acknowledged here that He used (a) various aspects of Nuzu law and culture, (b) treaty procedures and structures of both Nuzu and Mari, and of the Hittites-Egyptians, (c) Greek last will and testament, etc. He did not, however, bind Himself to, or strictly follow, the ideology or form of those structures. Kline seems to understand biblical content in terms of its structure rather than in terms of itself. Several examples of how biblical content is fitted into a structure somewhat foreign to itself have already mentioned: e.g., divine oath taking, the use of the kingship-enthronement. It does seem that Kline's exegesis often calls into question the perspicuity of Scripture. Scripture is sufficient in itself as an interpreting tool. A biblical theologian should not have to have a working knowledge of Hittite law treaties, kingship-enthronement cycles, or any other extra-biblical material in order to accurately understand the Bible. Such studies enhance and elucidate one's understanding of the Bible but they do not supply the key to unlock its true meaning as it seems "treaty" does in Kline's studies.

Kline's form-content problem is seen in his treatment of the military obligations of the biblical treaty that he argues are uniquely framed in the Bible.

> Another example of an elsewhere noncultic area of vassal obligation that became cultic in Israel is the requirement to render military assistance to the suzerain. (p. 50)

If resting military obligations, etc., on the cultus (religion) is unique to Israel, and if this obligation reflects a formal treaty as its necessary literary background, then did all Palestinian cultures (indeed, all ancient Near Eastern cultures) have such a treaty arrangement with their deities? Why did the Philistines seize the ark of the covenant and deposit it before their deity? Surely, this was recognizing they had fought under the sanction of their god Dagon and he had made it possible for them to win the battle. Or, why did the king of Moab, Mesha, offer his son to Molech on top of the city walls? Was he not seeking the help of his god in a holy war? It seems obvious he was. It seems that this cultic aspect of military matters argues that Moses used, but greatly adjusted, the treaty form, i.e., that the treaty form was used but only as a guide—much less rigidly than a form-critical approach (e.g., Kline) seems to allow in its theoretical or hermeneutical stance.

5. It Views Covenant as Fundamentally Law Instead of Grace

Kline seems to offer a definition of the covenant as fundamentally law rather than as fundamentally grace. However, in his discussion of the

relationship between the Mosaic treaty and the soteric treaties there appears to be an equivocation between Hittite law treaty and an underlying grace theme. It seems Kline maintains that although grace is always present and important in biblical treaties, grace is not to be viewed as being of the essence of biblical treaty:

> These [biblical] covenants are sovereign administrations not of blessing exclusively but of curse and blessing according to the vassal's deserts. Since, however, the specifically soteric covenants are informed by the principle of God's sovereign grace, which infallibly effects his redemptive purposes in Christ, they are accompanied by divine guarantees assuring a realization of the blessing sanctions of the covenant. Now it would obviously be unsound methodology to give this special feature which belongs to the specifically redemptive covenant administrations a constitutive place when defining the covenant generically. (p. 23- 24)

It has already been argued that this is a confusing statement and appears to be contrary to the Scripture. Moreover, it offers a definition of God's covenants (with man) generically conceived that appears to deny the fundamental gracious nature of such covenants. That gracious character is the major and fundamental emphasis (lays in the foreground) in the post-fall Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant, Abrahamic covenant, and the new covenant in Christ. These covenants, as recorded in the Bible, appear to be constituted by the very element Kline says ought not to not be seen as a constitutive element of covenant. If "covenant generically" signifies covenant as it appears most fundamentally in the Bible, then it is the "specifically soteric element". Indeed, it is not just frequency of occurrence that makes grace generic to the covenant, it is the Bible's own explanation of covenant (cf., Gen. 4, Gal. 4). Therefore, when Kline moves to the Abrahamic covenant or the new covenant, etc., should not this generic idea be found as definitional, i.e., should not "generic" be more basic and more evidenced than the non-generic treaty concept? The answer is "yes." Indeed, the evidence is clear, grace is found as definitional. But when Kline treats other sections of the Bible, he always sees law as the defining aspect.

6. It Sees Old Testament Law as an Interim Ethic

Kline's argument that Old Testament ethics and certain elements of Christ's ethics are interim ethics and relevant only to the eschaton is difficult to follow. It sounds good on the surface, but leaves many

unanswered questions.

As stated above, Kline argues that Old Testament ethics are intrusion ethics. This seems to be a global statement. Most of what is there reflects the state of things as it will be in heaven (the age of consummation). Some things reflect what the vassals should do during the present age when the common grace of God forestalls judgment. All elements recorded in the older treaty are types and find their antitype in Christ. Some of these elements, however, await the Second Coming of Christ (the consummation) to find their antitype. Among these are such things as the imprecation of one's enemies (as seen in the imprecatory Psalms), the slaughter of all God's enemies (as in the conquest of Canaan), and the penal sanctions of the Old Testament law. On the other hand, some elements find their antitype or fulfillment in the present era while common grace forestalls judgment. Among these are the last five laws of the Decalogue. Now believers are to love their enemies, then (after Christ's Second Coming) the imprecations will be in order. Now it is not a function of civil government to promote a "particular religious establishment", then (as in ancient Israel) it will be.

There are some problems in this approach. Regarding the imprecatory psalms—do not believers still pray "thy kingdom come" and is not vengeance still in God's hands? The believer's prayer is the same as that of the imprecatory psalms because that prayer is for the realization of God's kingdom. This kingdom envisions the gradual destruction of all Christ's enemies (1 Cor. 15:25). Furthermore, our prayer surely should be joined by our actions so that believers work for the destruction of Christ's enemies (in terms to Christ's heavenly kingdom rather than in terms of the Old Testament earthly kingdom). On the other hand, the specific Old Testament form of some censures has changed, e.g., death for apostates. The problem with Kline's position is its global nature.

Kline notes that the marriage of Hosea and the way God dealt with David's adultery and murder were examples of the intrusion principle. He surely does not mean that under the new covenant believers are allowed to marry harlots or to commit adultery and murder their spouses. To be certain, Kline's examples are examples of a kind of "intrusion", viz., God can lay aside certain aspects of His law under particular conditions. This produces the principle that while the eternal nature of God and the eternal principles of His law reflecting that nature never change, the expression of that nature with the specific application of the eternal principle envisioned may change when the circumstances change. This is no situational ethics because that ethical system proposes that man may determine on the

grounds of changed circumstances that a change in principial law is warranted. Such a system replaces the sovereignty of God with the sovereignty of man. What is being suggested here is that God identifies when the circumstances are changed either by His own action or by His revealed Word. Men today as men of every other era are bound by what God says until and unless He tells them otherwise. Moreover, Kline correctly argues that the canon is closed—God has given man His final Word until Jesus returns. Thus, the ethics do not change, while the application of those divine ethics may change.

Kline sees another example of intrusion ethics in the account of the sacrifice of Isaac. How can God approve and even require Abraham to kill Isaac in sacrifice? This is contrary, says Kline, to the biblical injunction against human sacrifice. It is better to say, however, that this commanded sacrifice is no intrusion ethical practice or principle at all but is commanded by God for a didactic purpose. First, if Abraham knew and understood prior divine revelation (and he did), then his faith in God convinced him God would raise Isaac from the dead (as noted above). Second, and most significantly, this act was of the essence of the divine covenant. God the Father would sacrifice His only Son (the Promised Seed) in order to fulfill His promise and pledge. He would lay the guilt and penalty of covenantal violation on His Son. So, God would make certain that the covenant was most certainly fulfilled and that the Abraham's, the violators, would pay the penalty, albeit vicariously. Is this what Christ meant when He said Abraham rejoiced to see His day? The sacrifice of Christ is integral to redemption, and therefore, to the divine covenant. How can this principle of man's responsibility to pay the penalty (the penalty of the Law) possibly be an intrusion into New Testament ethics?

There is a similar problem with Kline's evaluation of the penal Old Testament sanctions. The death penalties are rooted in God's nature, and this is the principle stated in Genesis 8:6. Has that changed? Does the death penalty now apply only in the case of murder? Has the degree of evil involved in rape, for example, changed? If the state still is God's minister, does it not operate under God's law? This is not to say that all of the death penalties necessarily are in force today, but that the principle underlying them is still in force and that they must be considered separately. Most certainly, the death penalty sanctioning the state religion has now been set aside because the special earthly and holy state of the Old Testament has been terminated with the resurrection of Christ. As Jesus said, His kingdom is not of this world in origin or in nature.

In the course of his discussion it seems Kline offers another equivocation when he seeks to distinguish between personal and communal regulations because just where does the distinction lie? The Bible itself does not seem to define such a clear distinction, although it does assume there is such a difference. Do the Old Testament marriage laws address personal or communal relationships? Why does the apostle Paul use those Old Testament principles and laws in redressing problems in the Corinthian church? Surely, he feels the marriage laws are still binding. This brings one to the wider issue of Old Testament sexual laws—to which sphere do they belong, communal or personal? It seems, too, that murder is a rather personal matter for the victim and his family. The same is true for stealing, welfare, sanitation, prison system, economic system, etc. Therefore, although a distinction between communal and personal law is implied in the Bible, that distinction is not used to teach the continuation of one class of law and the discontinuation of the other(s).

On the other hand, Kline is struggling with the obvious problem of continuity and discontinuity between the two Testaments. What principle should one use in deciding what is still binding today? Kline rightly argues for the discontinuity of the theocratic support of religion and conquest of a holy land. However, he does not make a strong argument with reference to other matters. Would not a more consistent principle be that all elements and specifics should be assumed to continue except those elements and specifics that do not apply to the new divinely initiated and defined conditions? The removal from Eden did not change God's requirements on man. Believers are still to be as holy as God is. Yet this requirement no longer focuses on the mandate to abstain from eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—man's probatory state, and the tree and garden are gone. On the other hand, man is still to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. There is no global replacing of the Edenic ethics.

7. It Entails An Abrogation of Previous Legislation

A thesis related to what was just discussed, is Kline's envisioning three stages or administrations under each of the two treaties. In the case of the New Testament, he proposes the following stages: the preparatory stage during the lifetime of Jesus (the Gospels), the transitional stage (Acts), and the permanent stage. Each stage is part of the entire treaty administration and, therefore, contains elements found in the other stages. On the other hand, each stage contains elements unique to, and confined to, itself. These unique elements are abrogated by later stages (p. 109).

The problematic aspect of this suggestion is the statement that the unique elements are abrogated by later stages. It seems evident that Jesus specifically denies the principle of abrogation in Matthew 5:17. Whatever He means by "fulfill," He does not mean "abrogate" or "destroy." To fulfill the prophecies, so it seems, is to do what they promise. Although denied by a large part of conservative Christianity, it seems better to understand Jesus' words in terms of His claim that He came to do what the Old Testament prophets promised and the New Testament teaches that He did what He said He came to do (cf., Lk. 1:32-33, 54-55, 68-74, Rom. 15:8-9). In like manner, to fulfill the law certainly does not mean to destroy it or set it aside. He came to do what it taught. The New Testament teaches He kept the law perfectly during His lifetime and that He expects His disciples to do so too (Rom. 6:22, 7:6, 7-19, cf. Acts 24:14, 25:8). Especially instructive in this regard are the words recorded in Matthew 5:18-20,

> Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them,* he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (NKJV)

Therefore, the believer is taught to return to the principle of continuity and changing of conditions/circumstances. Former specific stipulations are not abrogated, they are fulfilled in Christ. As the reigning King over the entire world and the ruling King in His church, He mandates believers follow divine law just as He did. In many specifics (as with Edenic law), the form has changed while the substance (the ethics) remains the same.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS:

1. Why have we called Kline's theology "treaty theology"?
2. How does Kline's work function apologetically?
3. What are the structural parallels between the decalogue and the Hittite law treaties?
4. What stylistic forms are both peculiar and common to the Bible and the Hittite law treaties?
5. What is Kline's unique contribution to the study of the Old Testament canon?
6. What is apodictic law and what does Kline tell us about it?
7. What are the motive clauses and what does Kline tell us about them?
8. What is kingdom mythology/theology and how does Kline use this to explain the Bible?
9. What are "intrusion" and "interim ethics"?
10. How does "God as witness" differ in the Bible and the Suzerain treaties"?
11. How does "the oath" differ in the Bible and the Suzerain treaties?
12. How does "the Sabbath as seal" differ in the Bible and the Suzerain treaties?
13. What are the problems with Kline's exegesis of Hebrews 9:16-17?
14. What are the problems with Kline's exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant?
15. What criticisms may be offered against Kline's application of ancient kingship ideology to the biblical material?
16. What criticisms may be offered against Kline's use of the form-critical hermeneutic?
17. In what way may it be said Kline confuses structure (form) and content?
18. What is wrong with the analysis of biblical covenant as fundamentally law rather than fundamentally grace?
19. What is the criticism of "interim ethics"?
20. What is wrong with Kline's concept of the abrogation of previous legislation?

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This book seeks to give a general introduction to the whole subject of biblical theology by reviewing various approaches to it and evaluating them in terms of their internal consistency and of what is in the Scripture. There were many good things in several of the works presented and some of those things will be reviewed here. We saw that none of those suggested structures of biblical revelation, those approaches to biblical theology, satisfies the biblical material. Still other systems could be examined to additionally argue that the only satisfactory biblical theology is one that more closely represents the traditional position of the Reformed Church as set forth in the Bible and accurately reflected in *the Westminster Confession of Faith*.[16]

It is important to note that biblical theology is but a branch of exegetical theology. There are four branches of divine (as over against non-revealed) theology: exegetical, systematic, historical, and practical theology. Exegetical theology embraces the content of the Bible, systematic theology seeks to correlate the whole of that teaching and relate the results to the various issues which have developed in the history of the Christian church. Historical theology studies the history of doctrine as it has unfolded and developed since New Testament times. Practical theology entails the study of the application of divine theology. Biblical theology is a branch of exegetical theology. It stands alongside exegesis proper (the detailed study of the content of the Bible), introduction (the study of the matters such as the identity of the human authors, the times and occasions of the writing of the various parts of the Bible, the history and reliability of the original language texts, etc.), and canonics (the study of the nature, growth, and determination of the canon). Biblical theology treats the flow and growth of divine revelation recorded in the Bible as it groups itself into larger sections—as well shall see below.

A. Summary

1. The Relation of Biblical Theology to Other Disciplines

Certainly one of the most instructive results of the above survey is the various discussions of how biblical theology relates to the other disciples, viz., Old Testament introduction, archaeology, history of Israel,

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[16] Also, see L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1989), 262.

systematic theology, etc.[17] Several of the scholars have treated this same material and, for the most part, their work in this area went unnoticed in the interests of abbreviating this presentation. On the other hand, the work of Oehler and Payne was briefly reviewed.[18] It is very useful, if not necessary in developing biblical theology to keep in mind the results of these other studies as well as a clear idea of how those studies relate to biblical theology.

2. The Characteristics of a Proper Biblical Theology

It is useful for one to orient oneself to the issues introduced in this book with reference to a proper biblical theology and its presuppositions by carefully reading and studying what precedes. Also, it would be extremely helpful to carefully read Geerhardus Vos' *Biblical Theology.*[19]

a. The Presuppositions of Proper Biblical Theology

Both Dr. J. Barton Payne and Dr. Meredith Kline Sr. rightly say that the triune God of the Bible is the one and only true God and the Bible is His self-revelation and that this should be the self-conscious presupposition upon which biblical theology builds. This divine self-revelation and all ultimately true knowledge is "from above," or from eternity, and not "from below," or from this creation. Hence, biblical revelation (the whole of Scripture as it is found in the Old and New Testaments) should determine what we know and believe religiously speaking, and should be the test of truth for all other knowledge. This does not deny the fact that other knowledge may exceed the bounds of what is set forth in the Bible, but it should not violate the Bible's foundational principles. Hence, what we know and believe should not determine or set the limits of biblical knowledge. Indeed, the origin of all true knowledge and of the creation determines the nature of that true knowledge. Also, the divine self-revelation has been set forth in propositions and is knowable by man. Thus, although this knowledge is "from above" it is delivered to us in terms of what is "from below" (Deut. 30:14, Isa. 55:8-11). Finally, that effective revelation is limited to the Scripture insofar as our ability to know it in terms of propositions (Jn. 17:17, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Eph. 2:20, Jude 1:3).

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[17] For a fuller list cf., p. 142.

[18] For Oehler's discussion cf., p. 5ff., above, and for Payne 141ff. above. Payne's treatment is much more complete.

[19] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*. In addition, O. Palmer Robertson's, *Christ of the Covenant* (Presbyterian and Reformed: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1980), is very instructive. It is especially commended because it is readable.

Now these are not all of the presuppositions of a proper study of biblical theology but these certainly are the main ones undergirding the study.

b. The Nature of a Proper Biblical Theology

As Dr. Payne says, biblical theology is historical in nature. It was delivered in conjunction with and deals with objective events. Chronology is its extenuating and conditioning factor. Hence, its events and statements should be viewed insofar as possible from the perspective of the time period in which those things occurred. However, as shown above, we should also remember that the interpretation or significance of an event might rest either with the time of its writing or the time of its fuller explanation (e.g., Heb. 11:10-16).

The material of a proper biblical theology is divine insofar as it comes from God. Also, it is divine insofar as God is its central interest. It deals both with divine acts or deeds, and divine teaching or words. Sometimes these two concepts are labeled deed-revelation and word-revelation. Biblical theology declares how God relates to man. It presents the Bible, the revelation God has given, as an internally consistent unit that comprehends what God wants man to know and believe. The Bible, in its original form, is inspired and accurate in all it reports and teaches.[20] In its present form, this accuracy is *virtually* unimpaired. This is with reference to the biblical content itself. Although occurring in great variety, the content of biblical revelation is not contradictory. Dr. Payne describes the content of the Bible as the "cumulative knowledge of the many facets of the living God." The unity of biblical revelation is related by way of "variety, supplementation, and clarification." It never truly evidences replacement, correction or self-contradiction. It is redemptive; that is, biblical theology and the content and message of the Bible is

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[20] Some have stumbled at this concept of the Bible being inspired and accurate in its original form. The problem with this is, they maintain, that we do not have the original. A very insightful illustration has been offered to answer this difficulty. In the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC there are platinum rods which serve as the official standard for the various measurements used in the USA, e.g., yard. No one hesitates to build a skyscraper or is so bold as to challenge the trustworthiness of such a building on the basis that the carpenters and other workers did not have the platinum original when they were constructing the building. What they had is sufficient. Moreover, nor does anyone maintain that since the original yard does not exist for us, it does not exist at all. The same thing may be said of the measurements of rocket ships and our most sophisticated machines. They are sufficient for the job. Even so the Bible is sufficient for the job intended by God, even though we lack the original texts.

salvific or redemptive insofar as its primary purpose is to set forth God's concern to bring man back to himself.[21]

Finally, biblical theology is covenantal, i.e., all that is presented in the Bible is selected and organized according to the divine covenant. Every period of that presentation builds on what has gone before and points to what is to come after.

c. The Content of a Proper Biblical Theology

The subject matter for study is the material of the Bible. It is to be studied and examined primarily in itself. Other sources may be of help in understanding that biblical material, but the primary material for biblical theology is Scripture. Other sources may include Ancient Near Eastern documents, archaeology, linguistic studies, comparative religion studies, philosophical studies, etc.

d. The Method of a Proper Biblical Theology

Geerhardus Vos[22] and Gustave Oehler[23] present several principles that should guide and determine the study of biblical theology.

First, proper method is *historico-genetic*. While biblical theology develops its subject matter in accordance with the historical eras represented in the Old Testament, it should be genetic insofar as it treats everything recorded in the Bible as expressive of a single organically interrelated divine revelation. This is necessarily implied because since God is one, the plan of God must be one (unified), cf., Eph. 1:11, Tit. 1:2.

Second, it should employ the results of *historical-grammatical exegesis*. Today such a hermeneutical approach is derided by some as a narrow-minded lack of scholarly objectivity. It is the belief of this writer that deviating from a proper historical-grammatical exegesis as one's foundation sets the scholar, and the church he seeks to serve, adrift on a sea of interpretive relativity similar to that which strangled the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. This historical-grammatical exegesis:

(a) operates according to the rules of the language being considered,

(b) gives due regard to the environment and particular circumstances

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[21] J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1962), 17-18.

[22] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*. Dr. Vos was a pioneer in proper Biblical theological study. His work is replete with profound and insightful material. It will be briefly evaluated in the next book in this series, *From Adam to Adam*

[23] Gustave Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Eerdman's: Grand Rapids, 1883).

of the material,

- (c) seeks to grasp the inner psychological state of the writer (as it is reflected in the biblical material) in the sense of seeking to understand how the writer understood, and/or should have understood, what he was presenting,
- (d) places particular statements in their context within the document in which the statements occur, within the thought system of their writer, and within "the special region of the dispensation of revelation to which the book belongs," (p. 41)
- (e) seeks to set forth the direct meaning of a text, and
- (f) and places limits on other hermeneutic approaches (some of which are fatally flawed) such as those employed by the medieval Roman Catholic view. Catholics argued for a fourfold sense of Scripture: literal, tropological (seeing in a text a moral meaning or significance apart from its direct meaning), allegorical, and analogical.[24]

Third, biblical theology refines this historical-grammatical work by seeking to set forth the totality of biblical revelation in its historical *unfolding* and as an "organic *process of development*" (p. 41). This is sometimes termed *historical-redemptive* exegesis. One should be cautious, however, in being carried away by this approach to such a degree that the historical-grammatical basis is seriously overshadowed, if not replaced.

Fourth, as implied above, this organic process should be influenced and focused by its conclusion—at least in part, since the final and perfect revelation is Jesus Christ and the New Testament. It assumes that God is ultimately the author of everything in the Bible and that His explanation is the perfect, final and sufficient explanation. This divine monergism means that there is ultimately one meaning to any given passage of Scripture and that it is the task of the exegete-theologian to garner that meaning from the biblical text. This *Christological* exegesis also needs to be balanced by proper historical-grammatical work to guard against excesses and exaggerations.[25]

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[24] Louis Berkhof, *Pinciples of Biblical Interpretation* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1994), 24f.

[25] This author once experienced a case of such excessive application of the Christological perspective worked out in typological interpretation. There were some who interpreted Jephthah as a type of Christ insofar as he led Israel into obedience to God. Yet, the focus of the account of Jephthah is ostensibly on obedience to divine Law. Also, Jephthah was the son of a harlot, an exile driven away by his people. He was joined by political malcontents (worthless men). He gained his victories by the use of the sword. He dedicated his unmarried daughter to the Lord with the probable result that she remained a virgin. There is

Fifth, biblical theology should seek to show how this process of God's communications with man unfolded and developed throughout the Scripture. It should, generally speaking, view everything in the Bible as revelation and as *theologically significant*.

Sixth, in addition to these principles mentioned by Drs. Oehler and Vos, one should employ the reformation principle that *the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself*. Consequently, a divine interpretation from a later period of revelation may be used in discerning the significance of a particular passage appearing in an earlier period.[26]

Seventh, a proper biblical theology addresses the content of the Bible in terms of its *covenantal units*. In doing this its seeks to set forth the teachings which are characteristic of the period in view. This sets it off from exegetical theology, which addresses the content of the Bible in smaller units. It also sets it off from systematic theology that seeks to address the Bible viewed as a whole.

Eighth, a proper biblical theology views the content of each particular unit of biblical revelation as expressive of the *covenant of God as a whole* and as well as being expressive of the particular covenant of God which characterizes and defines the period of revelation in view.

3. The Definition of Covenant Discussed

The Bible teaches that all of God's dealings with man may be subsumed under the concept covenant (to be defended later and assumed in this work). This is a very important concept as we sought to argue above.

The discussion in this book built on the hypothesis that covenant should not be defined exclusively in terms of any particular historical publication of the covenant nor in terms of any particular historical form presented in the Bible. Since the various historical publications often employ differing covenant forms (structures) and use a word or concept in various ways depending upon the covenant form employed, to set forth any one of these forms as *the* form (and definition) of covenant involves one in a false historicism. When this fallacious methodology is employed,

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no record of clear preaching of the Gospel, no itinerate ministry, no working of miracles, no divine nature, no death in behalf of those he represented, no kingship over Israel, no building of a temple, etc.

[26] The inadequate use of this principle greatly weakens Vos' work, e.g., he does not see covenant before the Noahic era. Consequently, much of what is necessary and beautiful in Gen. 1-5 does not appear in his work.

the content of the Bible is often forced into a pattern and meaning that does not retain the distinctives of the text, or texts, being considered.

The various covenant forms employed in the Bible set forth varying ideas as to the role of similar or identical elements.[27] For example, in the Abrahamic covenant death, represented in the animals through which God passed in Gen. 15, is the curse and penalty for breaking the covenant. Moreover, the deathlessness of the eternal God is the guarantee or seal that the covenant will be kept. Hence, the penalty will never be exacted upon the covenant maker or the covenant receptor—God the Maker or the elect unto eternal life, the receptors (cf., Heb. 6:13-18). On the other hand, in the Mosaic covenant (as pointed out by Dr. Meredith Kline's work on the Mosaic covenant as patterned on the Hittite law treaties[28]) death is the penalty upon man for his breaking the covenant. Indeed, man must die because he is fallen and a covenant breaker by virtue of the bondage adhering to his inherited nature. Death, however, also serves to guarantee or seal the covenant. The blessings of the covenant will come through death, i.e., the covenant will be kept because of the future sacrificial and substitutionary death of the covenant maker/receptor, viz., Christ (cf., Rom. 6:1-6, Gal. 3).

In Heb. 9:15-18 the covenant is explained in terms of a Roman last will and testament under which concept the benefits of the testament do not accrue to the heirs until and unless the testator dies. Death is necessary; it is not the guarantee or seal of covenant blessings yet to be realized, but is the necessary and prior condition of the covenant's blessings. Of course, using this form as the only and controlling form of the covenant leads us to query how the Old Testament saints could have been born again (the chief benefit of the covenant). So, according to Heb. 9 the covenant-maker (Christ) must die before the testament can go into force and the inheritance distributed and enjoyed. This is a different idea of death than what is presented in Genesis 15. There, God's passing through the parts of the slain beasts guarantees the benefits of the covenant—the benefits of the covenant accrue as long as the covenant maker lives. Thus, death is not the gate to blessing but the penalty for violating the covenant.

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[27] The idea that there are differing conceptual forms presenting a major theological teaching, that each form presents supplementary and interrelated aspects of that teaching, and that the Biblical definition thereof lies in properly setting forth all those aspects while properly balancing them as to the ultimate teaching, is not a new idea. It is what is seen in a proper development of other Biblical teachings such as the Trinity and the atonement, cf., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology,* 384ff.

[28] Kline, Meredith**.,** *Treaty of the Great King* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan**,** 1963).

The form of testament employed in Heb. 9 is that seen in Roman law. It is a form that allows the testament to be changed prior to the death of the testator. On the other hand, the form of testament used in Gal. 3:15 is that found in Greek law whereby the testament could not be changed once it was made by the testator—before his death even he could not change it.[29]

Surely, it is evident from this brief survey that (1) no one of these forms (with the accompanying roles exercised by death, life, oath-taking, etc.) explains all the others, and (2) these various forms variously depict or employ the elements involved in each. We conclude, therefore, that covenant must be defined in terms of what the Bible teaches about covenant rather than in terms of the forms it employs to present, explain, or illustrate it.

Now we come to the brief excursus by which we will address the positions of Prof. John Murray[30], and Dr. O. Palmer Robertson[31]. Because of the conclusion just expressed, we are somewhat attracted to Prof. John Murray who defines covenant as a sovereign administration of blessing and promise. It is sovereign insofar as God alone sets its terms and dispenses it. It is "administration" insofar as covenant identifies the way God initiates, communicates, and governs His blessing and promise in decree, revelation, and providence. Prof. Murray argues that administration rather than contract best defines the essence of covenant because administration does not imply a two sided or bilateral agreement. It clearly sets forth the unilateral and sovereign character of God's granting His covenant to those with whom He makes it. We hesitate, however, to adopt Prof. Murray's definition because it does not satisfy the diversity the Bible employs in using the word and concept covenant. Significantly, it also lacks the *formalizing* and *formality* of the contexts where divine covenants (and other covenants) are described. It does not seem to satisfy the more abstract idea employed when the Bible speaks of the eternal covenant of God made before the foundation of the world (cf., e.g., Tit. 1:2, Heb. 6:16-17) which implies a divine agreement as to what is to be done.

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[29] R. Gaffin, ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, the Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, "Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke" (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg, 1930), 177-181.

[30] Prof. Murray lectured on Biblical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and the author was a student in that class. Thus, the information on his position comes from the author's and another student's notes.

[31] Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants.*

Dr. Robertson goes beyond Prof. Murray when he argues that something more specific than administration is required in defining covenant. Dr. Robertson, however, seems to offer at least two different, somewhat interrelated definitions of covenant, viz., covenant is a bond sealed in blood and covenant is a bond with life and death consequences. Neither of these definitions taken separately or together satisfies the Scriptural material. Covenant is more than a bond because, for example, the reason why David and Jonathan make a covenant with one another is that there already existed a strong bond between them (compare, 1 Sam. 20:3, 8, and 16). The word bond is used in English to refer to any strong relationship between two or more people, e.g., a mother has a bond with her child—the mother-child relationship is not a covenant. Therefore, we maintain that the word bond is insufficient to describe the unique essence of a covenant. Just in passing we note that a covenant sealed in blood is not the same as a covenant with life and death consequences. Also, the pre-fall covenant, the covenant consummated immediately after the fall, and the Noahic were not sealed in blood in the sense that they were sacramentally sealed as was, for example, the covenant God made with Abraham and his seed. Nor do the covenant between David and Jonathan and the Noahic covenant have life and death consequences.

The foundational definition of covenant is crystallized in the words, "covenant is an agreement between two or more persons." This definition must be refined by noting that a covenant is an agreement either in terms of a mutual agreement or in terms of something imposed by a superior authority and either passively or actively entered by the receiving party (in this sense one might hesitate to call covenant an agreement). In addition, covenant usually involves a formalizing element. Even when considering the eternal inter-trinitarian covenant one must keep in mind that the use of this word covenant implies a formalizing of the "agreement" or promise (cf., Tit. 1:2). Moreover, when used in defining biblical covenants the term "formalizing" often comes to mean a formalizing of the agreement in some kind of rite. This latter aspect is not always present. But it is nearly always present when considering the divine covenants with man after the covenant God made with Adam. So that in the New Testament, although other usages occur, the ubiquitous underlying concept of that entire revelatory period is that God's covenant with man is to find expression in man's formalizing this covenant by a covenant making ceremony in keeping with the redemptive-historical precedents from the time of Abraham on.

There are two areas where seemingly exclusive biblical teachings, or at least teachings that are hard to interweave, need to be held in proper balance and to be related properly. For example, Robertson' definition focuses of the initiation of the covenant and Murray's on the administration or on-going working. Both offer extensive biblical and theological support for their positions, and both are persuasive. It seems that the truth lies in a proper balancing of these two concepts. One's definition of covenant must face both arrays of biblical teaching. Since the Bible uses covenant of both concepts, one's definition of covenant must allow for both the initiation and the continuation of "covenant." A second "balance" is needed: the balance of a bilateral (two-sided) and a unilateral (one-sided) covenantal initiation process.

The idea that allows for other needed concepts as set forth above and for a proper balance of the two areas just mentioned is that covenant, considered in its broadest sense, is a formalized "agreement" (or pact— this may not involve an agreement) between two or more persons. Similarly, the concept "agreement," understood as presented above, lends itself well to the biblical representation of the divine covenants as eternal and temporal, as spiritual and external, as foundational and secondary, and as conditional and unconditional.[32]

4. The Position Taken in This Work

The position taken in this book we believe to be that of historic Calvinism and, with that in mind, it is essentially the same position defended by Prof. John Murray and Dr. Robertson. For an exposition of this position see *The Westminster Confession of Faith* chapter 7 and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms associated with that Confession.[33]

Another position that may be of interest is that which has come to be known as reconstructionism. This view has been defined by five "planks."

a) Presuppositional apologetics as evidenced in the work of Dr. Cornelius Van Til.

b) Theonomic ethics: that the Old Testament (including the Mosaic Law) is binding on the church in all its moral teachings. Every command of God rests on His moral character and to that extent every command is moral in its fundamental essence. From another perspective, many of the commands are particularizations of the moral principle(s)

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[32] For the definition of covenant, also see 16f., and 34 in the author's book, *From Adam to Adam*.

[33] Also see Carl Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards and the Covenant of Grace*, and Leonard Coppes, *The Ten Points of Calvinism, Are Five Points Enough*?

underlying them. As particular commands they may or may not apply today, but the moral principle(s) they express does apply. The Old Testament forms are generally seen as shadows and the New Testament as the substance (cf., Col. 2:17).

c) A popularization of the view of covenantal structure found in the work of Meredith Kline, Sr.

d) Postmillennialist eschatology: that Christ's visible bodily coming will occur after an extended time during which He reigns visibly on earth through His people.

e) Preterism: that all or most of the New Testament prophecies of Christ's second coming were fulfilled when Israel was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

This writer is not what might be called a reconstuctionist as Dr. Joseph Morecraft may appear to be (this is not to say that he agrees with all those who call themselves "theonomic," nor with all of the five points just presented). Thus, if one is using Dr. Morecraft's outline of Biblical theology, differences will be noticed between the present work and his.[34]

This presentation of Biblical theology, considered abstractly, embraces:

(a) the pre-Adamic covenant—sometimes called the covenant of works,
(b) the post-fall covenant—usually simply called the Adamic covenant,
(c) the covenant God made with Noah or the Noahic covenant,
(d) the Abrahamic covenant,
(e) the Mosaic covenant,
(f) the Davidic covenant, and
(g) the new covenant.

B. CONCLUSION

The above discussion sets forth the various characteristics of the study of Biblical theology. The grounds for such a study are not set forth in this discussion. Rather, it is assumed that the propriety of the study is rather evident given the nature of Biblical revelation, viz., that it is progressively revealed through history and that there is a progressive unfolding ending with the completion in Jesus Christ—the New Testament. This means that all that is recorded in the Old Testament necessarily requires an understanding of the New Testament insofar as it all speaks

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[34] *"Covenants of Promise" (Studies in the Covenant of Promise)* (Chalcedon Presbyterian Church, Cumming, GA, n.d.). The writer is heavily indebted to Dr. Morecraft's *Studies*.

of Christ. It speaks, however, not with the clear light of the New Testament but by suggestion, pointing ahead, and laying down theological principles that find their conclusion in Christ. As Oehler correctly states the Old Testament is the preparation and the New Testament is the fulfillment. Indeed, one must always keep his eyes on the goal to understand the significance and meaning of the pathway.[35] Moreover, one cannot properly understand the New Testament without a proper understanding of the Old Testament because the genesis of all that is taught in the former relating to salvation lies in the latter. Therefore, a proper biblical theology must "aim to show how the fruit grew from the bud."[36]

The individual sections are abbreviated on the grounds that these matters are discussed more thoroughly in the other works cited in the footnotes, especially the works of Oehler, Payne, and Vos. One should not, however, doubt the importance of these preliminary discussions.

We note the importance of granting the foundational influence of the theology set forth in Reformed Standards. Although serious students should be willing to set aside the conclusions of these Standards if they are found to be out of conformity with Scripture, on the other hand, one should not quickly turn to such deviating from the historic Standards. Rather, that historically accepted theology should be assumed as the correct teaching of what the Bible records unless the Biblical material simply teaches otherwise. Indeed, we shall discover in next book that the Reformed tradition does reflect what the Bible presents.[37]

It is especially significant to emphasize that a proper method of Biblical theology includes evaluating the importance of later Biblical material in understanding the earliest eras of divine revelation, i.e., the pre-fall and post-fall Adamic periods. Yet, neither should one treat the earlier sections of Biblical revelation as setting forth God's revelation to man in the completed fullness and clarity of what is recorded in the New Testament or represented by systematic theology.

One of the theological themes uniting the Reformed Standards is that the Bible teaches a covenantal theology. This means that the central structural theme of all Biblical revelation is the covenant. In this regard, the reader is pointed to the definition of covenant proposed above. As noted there, much of the preliminary defense of this centrality and definition is contained in the author's next book on Old Testament

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[35] See the summary of Oehler's discussion above for a more complete outline of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, 9ff., 14.

[36] Oehler as cited above, 14.

[37] *From Adam to Adam.*

theology. Two matters are noteworthy regarding the proposed definition of covenant. First, there is no one picture or analogy of covenant presented in the Bible. Indeed, there are several pictures, e.g., the covenants between equals, the Hurrian covenant making process (Abraham), the Hittite law treaty (Deuteronomy), the Biblically revealed marriage relationship, the Roman last will and testament, and the Greek last will and testament. These diverse forms may be classified as unilateral (one-sided) or bilateral covenants (two-sided). The above discussion argued that the Biblical presentation of covenant should be conceived as similar to the presentations of other Biblical doctrines. In other cases, the Bible offers differing pictures of the doctrine to teach its complexity. One may compare the way the Bible speaks about the Trinity, the personhood of Christ, inspiration, and the atonement. Secondly, God's covenants with man are unilaterally and sovereignly deposed. They are formally concluded—often with a rite of conclusion involving a sacrificial ceremony. They often involve an outward and inward aspect so that all of the human recipients receive certain defined outward and temporal bene-fits, while some of those recipients also receive particular spiritual and eternal benefits. Moreover, all of the recipients are summoned to actively embrace the covenantal relationship with God—to be born again and to live in obedience to the Lord. Briefly stated, a divine covenant is an agreement or bond sovereignly deposed and formally enacted.

NAMES INDEX

SUBJECT INDEX

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