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The
OLD TESTAMENT LAW
for the LIFE of the CHURCH

*Reading the Torah in the
Light of Christ*



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COVENANTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT



AS DISCUSSED IN THE INTRODUCTION, the approach taken in this volume will be, first, to lay a solid foundation for understanding the Old Testament law itself and how God intended it to work in its Old Testament context (parts 1 and 2). This will lead to a better understanding of how that law applies to the life of the church and the follower of Jesus the Christ according to the New Testament (part 3). We need a whole-Bible approach to this subject. The divine author, the Holy Spirit, was involved in the inspiration of both the Old and New Testament. Moreover, the same Holy Spirit dwells within us to bring the word that he himself inspired to bear on us in our own personal lives, our redemptive communities, and our mission in the world. This includes the Old Testament law. The Mosaic law is still God's word to us and for us.

This chapter and the next set the Mosaic law in its narrative and covenantal context. There can be no good understanding of the law of Moses without seeing how it fits into the Bible overall, both in terms of the biblical story as a whole and the progression of the biblical covenants through the story. Moreover, as we shall see throughout this book, this is of key significance for understanding how the law,

which comes to us through the Mosaic covenant and fits most naturally within it, relates to the new covenant in the New Testament, church, and life of the believer. Of course, we cannot treat the covenants exhaustively here. That would require a major monograph, and there are already quite a number of them available.¹

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLICAL METANARRATIVE

The larger biblical context of the law, of course, is the overall metanarrative of Scripture from creation through Old Testament history to its center in the life and work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and from there to the consummation that we look forward to even in the present day.² A metanarrative is a story that explains and provides a context for understanding and explaining all our other stories, whether personal, familial, communal, urban, rural, national, international, or universal. There is an old saying that history is really “his story”—that is, God’s story. This story even extends beyond the pages of the Bible to include everything up to and beyond our present day. The Bible itself declares this. Our lives are trajectories from the Bible into today and forward into the future in one way or another.

The story that the Bible tells, therefore, is the story that we are all part of whether we know it or not and whether we like it or not. We have joined the story in progress, along the way, so to speak. The Bible tells the story in a way that focuses its primary attention on the main issues of the lives of all people of all time, ancient and modern. This is one way it connects directly to each of our personal stories.

The first eleven chapters of the Bible lay the primeval background for understanding our human predicament in this world. They level the ground of our human experience. These chapters tell us who God

¹See footnotes 4-6 below for just a few of them.

²For a helpful introduction to the metanarrative of Scripture overall see Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004). Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), focuses primarily on the Old Testament story.

is and who we are. They also describe the nature of the world we live in and why life is the way it is. God originally designed us in his own image and likeness to have dominion in the world (Gen 1–2), but through the first human couple’s violation of God’s original design we, and our world, became corrupt (Gen 3–11). This leaves us in the midst of terrible struggles not just for dominion but even for survival—personal, emotional, relational, vocational, economic, and physical survival. These are unfortunate and sometimes excruciating realities in our world. We groan, and the rest of God’s creation groans along with us. Paul reflects on this state of affairs in Romans 8:18–26.

The correspondence between the creation with corruption in Genesis 1–3 and the new creation without corruption in Revelation 21–22 provides the wider framework in which God’s historical program of redemption and restoration fits. The parallels between the created paradise in Genesis 1–2 and the new heaven and earth in Revelation 21–22 are particularly instructive in this regard. The flowing waters (Rev 22:1) and the tree of life (Rev 22:2, 19) among other things reappear, and once again we will live in paradise. Similarly, contrast the fall and curses of Genesis 3 with the new heaven and earth in which there will “no longer . . . be any curse” (Rev 22:3)—no more tears, pain, and death (Rev 21:4). Thus, there is an envelope around the Bible: Genesis 1–3 and Revelation 21–22.

The rest of the Bible fits into this envelope not only in literary and theological terms but also historically. Moreover, eventually we are heading back to where we came from—in fact, to somewhere even better. In the meantime, we are part of the story, God’s story, the history and the ongoing story that is above all “his story.” The covenants that God has made with his people along the way provide an important framework and guide for understanding how God is working out his plan for the creation and its redemption. These covenants are of key importance for understanding the metanarrative of Scripture and history.

THE NOAHIC COVENANT(S)

The original creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 (“be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it”) is renewed in Genesis 9:1-7 (“be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth”).³ This provides the background for the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9:8-17. The Lord promises in covenant terms that he is committed to maintaining his involvement with all flesh, including humankind, within a relatively stable world order: “Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen 9:11; cf. Gen 8:21-22). In fact, he is committed to renewing all of it, eventually, in the form of the new heaven and earth.

The word *covenant* (Hebrew *bərît*) actually first appears in the Bible in Genesis 6:17-18 *before* the flood.⁴ God declared to Noah, “I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens. . . . I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.” There have been several different interpretations of this first covenant passage. Some scholars are persuaded that the mention of “covenant” at Genesis 6:18 is “proleptic,” referring forward to the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9 after the flood.⁵

³See the helpful treatment of these connections in Genesis 1–9 in Andrew J. Schmutzter, *Be Fruitful and Multiply: A Crucial Thematic Repetition in Genesis 1–11* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

⁴Here the focus will be on the Mosaic covenant (see below). Richard E. Averbeck, “Israel, the Jewish People, and God’s Covenants,” in *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2018), 21-37 offers a briefer discussion of the biblical covenants, focusing primarily on the Abrahamic covenant. The literature on the biblical covenants is immense. A recent comprehensive treatment in book form is Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). Even more recently, see the very fine volume by Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Grand Plan and Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021).

⁵See, e.g., Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 40, 59; and Paul R. Williamson, “Covenant,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 139-41. The same view is taken in, e.g., Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 95-96.

Others argue that Genesis 6:18 looks back to the earlier chapters of Genesis rather than forward to the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9. According to this view, Genesis 6:18 is not referring to the initial making of a covenant with Noah, and neither is Genesis 9:8-17. Instead, “my covenant” in Genesis 6:18 (see also Gen 9:9, 11, 15) refers either to a “covenant of grace” made earlier between God and Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, after the fall, or a “covenant with creation” that God made by the very act of creating, beginning in Genesis 1:1.⁶ The main argument for this approach is that the verb used in Genesis 6:18; 9:8-17 (Hebrew *hēqîm*) is not the verb commonly used for the initial making of a covenant (Hebrew *kārat*) in the expression *kārat bərît* (lit. “to cut a covenant”). The latter expression occurs about ninety times in the Old Testament. According to this view, therefore, Genesis 6 and Genesis 9 refer not to the making of a Noahic covenant but to confirming and upholding with Noah a previous covenant somehow established in Genesis 1–3.

In its immediate context, however, this verse most likely refers to the covenant commitment that God made with Noah to preserve him through the flood because of his righteousness amid that tragically corrupt generation (see Gen 6:5-8, 11-13).⁷ The covenant is about entering the ark and surviving the flood. As for the verb in Genesis 6:18, if it refers to the maintenance of an earlier covenant commitment rather than the initiation of a new one, the most obvious candidate would be Noah’s previous relationship with God before the flood, not a supposed covenant back in Genesis 1–3.⁸ See Genesis 6:8-9: “Noah

⁶See esp. W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1984), 11-43, esp. the summaries on pp. 25-33 and 41-43, followed by, e.g., Gordon J. McConville, “(b^crit), treaty, agreement, alliance, covenant,” in *NIDOTTE* 1.748-49; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 187-209 and the extensive literature cited there; and most recently, stated cautiously in Block, *Covenant*, 15-16, 45-46, but expanded in the remarks that follow there.

⁷See, e.g., the helpful remarks in Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 284-85; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 366-68; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, transl. John J. Scullion S. J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 422-23.

⁸See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 175, and the especially helpful explanation in John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1: *Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 173-75. See also the similar approach in Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 95-96.

found favor in the eyes of the LORD. . . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.”

Contrary to the argument of some scholars, however, the verb in Genesis 6:18 does sometimes occur for the initial making of a covenant.⁹ For example, in Exodus 6:3-4 the Lord said to Moses: “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also *established* [Hebrew *hēqīm*] my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens.” Here the Lord is not saying that back in the days of the patriarchs (centuries before Moses) he confirmed, fulfilled, or maintained a previous covenant with them to give them the land, which is what the corresponding argument would have to be if it would support the notion that Genesis 6 and Genesis 9 refer back to Genesis 1-3. No, he initiated this covenant with them back in those days. It is true that he also confirmed this covenant through the patriarchal generations, but Exodus 6:3-4 is referring to the fact that he “cut a covenant” back in the patriarchal days (Gen 15:18). In any case, extending the reference to a covenant in Genesis 6:18 back to Genesis 1-3 is a far stretch indeed. The term for covenant does not occur there and the exegetical and biblical-theological rationale for finding a covenant there has always been thin.

Exodus 6:5 goes on to say that now, in the days of Moses, “I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have *remembered* my covenant.” The link between God making a covenant and remembering it appears many times in the Old Testament. Consider, for example, Exodus 2:24-25, when Israel was in slavery in Egypt, “God heard their groaning and he *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God

⁹See also the remarks regarding the verb *hēqīm* with *bərīt* in M. Weinfeld, “*bʿrīt*,” in *TDOT* 2:260; and James Barr, “Some Semantic Notes on the Covenant,” *Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Donner et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 33, contra Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 187-95.

looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them” (see also Lev 26:42, 45; Ps 105:8-9, 42, etc.). Of course, *remember* here does not mean the opposite of *forget*—as if God had previously forgotten—but rather something like the way we “remember” a person’s birthday with gifts and a celebration.

The sequence of God establishing and then later remembering a covenant occurs back in Genesis 6–9 as well. The connection is especially clear in Genesis 9:8-16; the same verb (*hēqîm*) is used multiple times (Gen 9:9, 11, 17) for establishing the post-flood Noahic covenant (Gen 9:8-11). There he assigned the rainbow as the “sign” of the covenant so that, “Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will *remember* my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. . . . Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and *remember* the everlasting covenant” (Gen 9:14-16). This was clearly a covenant made after the flood because the rainbow appeared as the sign that such a flood would never happen again.

This brings us back to Genesis 6:18. Although the connection here is not as clear as in Genesis 9, the same sequence seems to occur again. God *established* the covenant in Genesis 6:18 to preserve them through the flood. Then we read in Genesis 8:1 that after all the flooding had occurred (Gen 7:17-24), “God *remembered* Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.”¹⁰ If this is the correct interpretation, we have two Noahic covenants in Genesis 6–9: one pre-flood covenant for getting them through the flood and then another post-flood covenant. The former was fulfilled in Noah’s day, while the latter is still in effect and will remain so “for all generations to come” (Gen 9:11-12, 16). This perpetual commitment was anticipated in

¹⁰See Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 382-83. Umberto Cassuto, for example, rejects this connection because Gen 8:1 does not explicitly refer to remembering “the covenant,” but this is an overly restrictive reading of the wording of the passage; *From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 100.

Genesis 8:21-22, right after Noah exited the ark and made his sacrifice. God said: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

The Noahic covenant *is* the “creation covenant” in the Bible—the only one. God committed to maintain the natural world order until the generations of human history and his redemptive program have run their course, issuing in the new heaven and earth (see, e.g., Is 66:22-24; Rev 21–22). Until then, the natural order will never again devolve into the condition that it had in Genesis 1:2—a deep, dark watery abyss that covers the entire surface of the earth at great depth (see Gen 1:9-10 with Ps 104:6, and cf. Gen 7–8). There was no previous divine covenant in place to prevent this before the flood.

In the meantime, God has still stepped in to judge and guide his program at certain points along the way, as he did at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), and in the “days of the Lord” described throughout biblical history. See, for example, Amos 5:18-27 for the exile of the northern kingdom into Assyria as a Day of the Lord and, similarly, Zephaniah 2:1-3 for the exile of the southern kingdom. The book of Revelation looks forward to the time when God will step in and set everything right for eternity.

Genesis 3–6 describes the corruption of God’s design and plan for creation, beginning with the serpent’s deception and the start of the cosmic battle in which we have found ourselves ever since (see, e.g., Rom 8:18-25; Eph 2:1-3; 6:10-20; Rev 12).¹¹ Since the time of the flood and the Noahic covenant, God has not brought another flood, as he promised, but has instead instituted a redemptive program, sometimes articulated through covenants that extend from Abraham through to the consummation in Revelation 19–20. This brings us to the background and meaning of the term *covenant* in the Old Testament.

¹¹For the cosmic battle, see Richard E. Averbeck, “The Three ‘Daughters’ of Baal and Transformations of Chaokampf in the Early Chapters of Genesis,” in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel’s Chaokampf Hypothesis*, ed. JoAnn Scurlock and Richard Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 237-56.

TREATY AND COVENANT

Basically, a covenant is a solemn and formal means of expressing and a method of establishing and defining a relationship. There are at least two parties to a covenant (either individuals or groups) and, in one way or another, the issue at hand is always the manner in which they will practice relationship with each other.¹² When the term is used for the relationship between God and people it is intended to help us understand how the holy God does relationship with us as fallen sinful people.¹³ Although it often goes unrecognized as such, it is essential to understand and keep in mind that covenant is a metaphor, a figure of speech, an analogy. The same terminology that God uses for his covenants with people in the Hebrew Bible also serves to designate a treaty, alliance, grant, loyalty oath, or something of that sort between people. It comes from that world and has analogs in the ancient Near Eastern world of the Old Testament.¹⁴

Much of biblical theology finds its expression through figures of speech. There are many of them that, like covenant, each carry a particular set of implications that are important to the context in which they appear and to biblical theology as a whole. Each takes a certain point of view on the relationship between God and people.

¹²Gary N. Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?" *JAOS* 116 (1996): 696 summarizes his analysis of the biblical and ancient Near Eastern material with this basic conclusion: "covenant is a formal agreement involving two or more parties."

¹³R. Davidson, "Covenant Ideology in Ancient Israel," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 324 puts it this way: "b^crit in the Old Testament cannot be separated from the concept of relationships or the acts that lead to such relationships, and relationships of very varied types." See also the discussion in Richard E. Averbeck, "Law," in *Cracking Old Testament Codes: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Patterson*, ed. D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese Jr. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 116-19 and the earlier literature cited there. For a most recent treatment of the etymology of b^crit see now Dominique Charpin, "*Tu es de mon sang*," *Les alliances dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (Paris: College de France les Belles Lettres, 2019), 257-64 and 319 and the bibliography cited there. I thank Alan Millard for calling my attention to this treatment of the subject.

¹⁴See now esp. Samuel Greengus, "Covenant and Treaty in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ancient Near East," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 91-126. This is an excellent, up-to-date, and well-documented review of the primary and secondary literature related to this subject.

Vern Poythress, a well-known covenant theologian, refers to covenant as a recurring pattern in the Bible based on the explicit covenants there—specifically the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants. He points out that “covenant theology” as a system expands the use of the term *covenant* wherever we find a “pattern of promise, command, human obedience or disobedience, and reward or punishment” in the Bible, so that it “sees all of God’s relations with human beings in terms of the perspective of covenant.”¹⁵ In my view, this is too monolithic and simplistic to describe how God’s revelation of himself and his purposes actually work.

As far as I am concerned, the treatment of these covenants here and below neither supports nor rejects, nor does it depend on, any of the main dogmatic theological systems. I intend no lack of respect in saying this. I have learned much from studying these systems, and I appreciate the good they have done and those committed to them. Moreover, I am fully aware that I do not stand outside of their influence, perhaps even in ways that I am not fully aware of. In any case, readers can and will make their own judgments about the equity of the discussion about the biblical material as it is presented here. The point is that the explanation of the covenants in the Bible that follows here depends on the explicit covenants in the Bible, not on any particular form of systematic theology.¹⁶

Some people think that when we speak of covenant as a metaphor, this makes it less real or relatively less important. This is a misunderstanding of what metaphor is and does, and how it works in Scripture.

¹⁵Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 31. It is helpful to observe the interchange over this extended use of the term *covenant* between John H. Stek, “‘Covenant’ Overload in Reformed Theology,” *CTJ* 29 (1994): 12-41, and Craig G. Bartholomew, “Covenant and Creation: Covenant Overload or Covenantal Deconstruction,” *CTJ* 30 (1995): 11-33. Both are covenant theologians. Stek’s critique provoked a negative reaction from Bartholomew, who raised some important objections. I would not agree with some of Stek’s points about the nature of covenants and related matters but, in spite of Bartholomew’s objections to the contrary, in my view, Stek has underlined a very real problem in covenant theology as a system.

¹⁶For brief remarks on covenant and dispensational theology in relation to this treatment of the biblical covenants, see Averbeck, “Israel, the Jewish People, and God’s Covenants,” 21-22.

Metaphor is a way of talking about a person, place, or thing that highlights a certain feature (or features) of it and thereby makes it more concrete, real, and comprehensible. Such figures of speech pervade the Bible and are of central importance in a truly biblical theology.¹⁷ For example, God is the father and we are his children. This has certain implications for how we should understand our relationship with the Lord, and certain passages of Scripture draw them out (e.g., Ps 103:13-14; Heb 12:4-13). Sometimes the Bible uses other kinds of familial language or images such as adoption (e.g., Rom 8:15-17, 31-39) or marriage (Jer 31:32, “though I was a husband to them”; cf. also, e.g., Hos 1–3 and Ezek 16:8-14). Similarly, he is the bridegroom and we are the bride (e.g., Rev 19:7-10; 21:2, 9).

Other metaphors include, for instance: The Lord is the shepherd and we are the sheep (e.g., Ps 23; Jn 10:1-18). He is the king and we are the people of his kingdom (e.g., Ps 2:8-9; Is 9:6-7; Mt 2; 4:17; 5:3, etc.; Rev 2:27; 12:5). He is the master and we are the servants/slaves (e.g., Lev 25:55; Is 52:13–53:12; 1 Pet 2:18-25). He is the head and we are the body (e.g., Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-31). He is the potter and we are the clay (e.g., Jer 18:1-12; Rom 9:21-23). The list goes on. That is the point.¹⁸ These kinds of images are pervasive in Scripture and carry a great deal of significance for us as believers. We should not use one metaphor as the lens through which we view all the others or Scripture as a whole. Instead, we should let each of them add their own dynamic to our biblical theology on their own terms.

The term *bərît* occurs 285 times in the Hebrew Bible in the two major categories introduced above: between different people(s) and between God and people or people groups. Of course, this is not the only term for a covenant in the Bible. Sometimes, for example, “oath” (*’ālâ*; Deut 29:12) and “swearing an oath” (*šāba’*; Gen 21:31-32) can

¹⁷See the helpful summary of the current discussion of metaphor in Ian Paul, “Metaphor,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 507-10.

¹⁸A good brief introduction to reading the Bible theologically in this way is Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*.

stand for making a treaty/covenant or the content of it. Moreover, the concept sometimes appears where the term itself is not used (e.g., the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam 7:8-16 does not use the term, but Ps 89:34 and 132:12 use it in reference to the Davidic covenant).

The cultural institutional background of covenant is self-evident from very early in the patriarchal narratives.¹⁹ The first instance is in Genesis 14:13, which reports that “Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram.” (This is the first occurrence of the term *covenant* after those referring to the Noahic covenants in Gen 6 and Gen 9 discussed above.) Rendered more literally, “They were the lords of the treaty [*bərît*] of Abram.” They had what would best be called a “treaty” or an “alliance” that, among other things, required going to war as allies with Abram if or when the occasion should arise. In this case, foreign kings had invaded the land and taken “all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; . . . They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom” (Gen 14:11-12). Abram’s allies fulfilled their treaty obligation when they marched with him to Dan to conquer the foreign kings and bring back Lot, all the other people, and their possessions (Gen 14:13-16, 24). This incident took place before the first time God articulated his relationship with Abram in covenant terms in Genesis 15:7-21 (note esp. Gen 15:18: “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram”). Before Genesis 15, God’s promises to Abram were all stated in terms of promise and obligation language (see Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-18; 15:1-6), not specifically treaty language.

There are also three other passages within the patriarchal narratives that show how they used covenant/treaty terminology on the human level: one for Abraham (Gen 21:27-32), one for Isaac (Gen 26:26-31),

¹⁹See Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 95-101 for such covenants in the ANE and the Bible. The application of the same terminology to the Noahic covenant (see above) before the patriarchal period only reflects the knowledge of the same ANE backgrounds by the writer, Moses; see Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 101-2.

and one for Jacob (Gen 31:44-54). Take the treaty with Isaac, for example. The people of Gerar had mistreated him (Gen 26:12-21), so he moved out of their territory (Gen 26:22-25). Afterward, Abimelech, the ruler of Gerar, and his officials came to make a treaty (*bərît*) with Isaac in order to overcome the ill feelings between them (Gen 26:26-27). The most pertinent elements of the scene are when Abimelech and his officials spoke to Isaac and Isaac responded accordingly, “There ought to be a *sworn agreement* [lit. “oath”] between us—between us and you. Let us *make a treaty* [lit. “cut a covenant”] with you that you will do us no harm.’ . . . Isaac then made a feast for them, and *they ate and drank*. Early the next morning the men *swore an oath* to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace” (Gen 26:28-31). This is characteristic of such an arrangement in the Genesis patriarchal passages. Note in particular the swearing of the oath and the eating of the covenant meal. The treaty/covenant between Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31:44-54 also includes both swearing oaths and eating a meal together. The one between Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21:27-32, however, focuses on swearing oaths (in an interesting play on words) with no specific mention of eating a meal together.

Alongside the statement of the stipulations, swearing an oath and eating a meal together were the two most common customs associated with treaty or covenant making.²⁰ There are instances where there is no meal, or at least there is no explicit indication of one, but often both of them appear together in a covenant-making ritual procedure. They are complementary and emphasize the two major foci of such a bond. The oath gave the covenant bond a *commitment* focus. The meal put the focus on the *relationship* established between the parties. In the ancient Near Eastern world, people did not

²⁰See the discussion of the ceremonial features of making covenants in Menahem Haran, “The *Bərît* ‘Covenant’: Its Nature and Ceremonial Background,” in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. Mordechai Cogan et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 203-19. See also Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 109-12.

normally eat together unless they had a committed relationship with one another. A covenant (or treaty) was first of all, and above all, a committed relational bond, whether between different individuals or groups of people (on the horizontal plane), or between God and people (on the vertical plane). In making his redemptive covenants, therefore, God used an available cultural institution as a metaphorical analogy that the people would have understood in that day. Then and now it lends a certain quality to his revelation of the way he does relationship with his people, fallen and corrupt though we all are.

THE MAKING OF REDEMPTIVE COVENANTS IN THE BIBLE

The Old Testament Mosaic law stands within the Mosaic covenant as the “words,” or one might say the “stipulations,” of the covenant (see, e.g., Ex 19:5; 24:7-8; Lev 26:9, 42-45; Deut 5:2-3; 29:1, 9). In turn, the Mosaic covenant provides the primary covenantal context for the Old Testament law. The legal regulations extend from Exodus 20 through Deuteronomy 26, and fit historically into the narrative of Israel’s forty-year wilderness experience from Egypt to Sinai to Moab in the days of Moses. In turn, the Mosaic covenant is part of a much larger group of interrelated covenants between God and his people running through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. We will pay special attention to four of them—the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants. The relationship between these covenants—especially the Mosaic and new covenants—is of special importance in the discussion of the Old Testament law in relation to the New Testament, the church, and the believer.

The discussion that follows will include some remarks on the ancient Near Eastern background of the treaties and covenants in the Bible, but a full treatment is beyond the scope of this book.²¹ It is important to recognize that originally the Hebrew Bible spoke into

²¹See now esp. Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” and all the primary and secondary literature cited there.

the ancient Near Eastern world. The ancient Israelites were ancient Near Eastern people. God approached them in their real-world context and communicated to them in ways that would have made sense to them in that time, place, and culture. The way the Mosaic covenant fits into and relates to the overall covenant program of God through history will provide an important underlying perspective for grasping the nature and makeup of the Old Testament law, how God intended it to work in ancient Israel, and how it relates to the new covenant in which we live today. We will focus our attention here on the making of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, and then develop the relationships between all four redemptive covenants in the next chapter.

MAKING THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God's call and commission of Abram in Genesis 12:1-3 is foundational to all that follows in the Abraham narratives, including the covenant enactment passages in Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 (recall that God did not change Abram's name to Abraham until Gen 17:5). The first of these focuses on the land promise, and the second on the seed promise (but does not exclude the land promise).²² Genesis 15:7-21 is especially important for our purposes here. The previous unit is famous for the well-known finale in Genesis 15:6, "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." The apostle Paul uses this passage in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 to argue for the basic gospel principle of salvation through justification by God's grace through faith, not by works—not even by the works called for in God's Old Testament law. God had not even revealed his law yet in the days of Abraham. In Genesis 15:6, Abram believed in God's promise of a multitude of descendants in the previous two verses, and God justified him based on that trust. Today we place our faith in the ultimate seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ our Lord. Similarly, circumcision does not bring salvific

²²For a discussion of the permanence of the land promise see Averbeck, "Israel, the Jewish People, and God's Covenants," 28-30.

justification, since Genesis 15 comes before the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17.

The next few verses focus specifically on the land promise: “He also said to him, ‘I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.’ But Abram said, ‘O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?’” This may sound to us like the opposite kind of response of that in Genesis 15:6, but God did not take offense. Abram was asking for a guarantee, and the making of the covenant that follows is just that. God had Abram divide animals into parts and set them across from each other (Gen 15:9-11). As sunset approached Abram fell into a deep, dark sleep (Gen 15:12), within which God spoke promises to him (Gen 15:13-16). This brings us to Genesis 15:17, “When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.”

The relationship between the deep, dark sleep in Genesis 15:12 and the sunset and darkness in Genesis 15:17 is not clear. Either he remained in the condition of Genesis 15:12, or he became conscious to witness God passing between the parts of the animals to confirm the promise of the land (Gen 15:18-21). There is no explicit explanation of the “smoking firepot” and “blazing torch” (Gen 15:17). The ancient Israelite readers to whom Moses was writing, however, would likely have associated it with God’s presence and guidance in their experience. They would recall the pillars of cloud by day and fire by night that led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness (e.g., Ex 13:21-22; 14:19, 24; 40:36-38; cf. Is 4:5), or the smoke, fire, and torch in his theophany at Mount Sinai, or perhaps both (Ex 19:18; 20:18; cf. Is 31:9).²³ God made the promises here, and he himself passed between the parts of the animals. Abram makes no commitments here; God does.²⁴

²³For the association with the Sinai theophany, see Seth D. Postell, “Abram as Israel, Israel as Abram: Literary analogy as Macro-Structural Strategy in the Torah,” *TynBul* 67 (2016): 171-73.

²⁴See, e.g., Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 117, 359n20; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. John J.

There is a helpful parallel in Jeremiah 34. In that day the Lord had made a covenant with the Israelites to free their Hebrew brothers from slavery in the land. They broke the covenant (Jer 34:12-16). So the Lord proclaimed sarcastically that he would give them their “freedom” all right; that is, “‘freedom’ to fall by the sword, plague and famine” (Jer 34:17). The next verses are clear and to the point, “The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat *like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces*. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land *who walked between the pieces of the calf*” (Jer 34:18-19). The end result would be that “Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth” (Jer 34:20).

It is significant that in Genesis 15:11, “birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.” In Jeremiah 34:20 the carcasses that would be eaten by the birds and beasts are those of the dead men who had violated the covenant. The parts of the animals in Genesis 15:11, therefore, represent the Lord, since he was the only one who passed between the parts. Abram, therefore, would not allow the scavenger birds to eat them. He knew exactly what the Lord was doing here. This was a self-curse. By passing between the (parts of the) animals the Lord was saying something like this: if I do not keep this covenant oath with Abram, let me be chopped into parts like these animals and my carcass eaten by the scavenger birds and the wild beasts. We have parallels to similar practices in treaty texts from elsewhere in the ancient Near East.²⁵ For example, in a Mari text (eighteenth century BC), we read in a treaty-making context that an official had brought about an agreement “to kill a donkey between [*birīt*] the Hana people and the Idamaraz.” In a later Neo-Assyrian text (eighth century BC) we read about a king making a treaty with a vassal by

Scullion S. J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 228; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 312-13.

²⁵Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 94-95, 110-11.

cutting up a lamb piece by piece and proclaiming sanctions like, “This head is not the head of a spring lamb. It is the head of Mat’ilu, it is the head of his sons, his magnates, the people of his land,” if he does not keep the stipulations of the treaty.²⁶

Thus, the procedure in Genesis 15 was a way of answering Abram’s original question in Genesis 15:7 (“how can I know that I will gain possession of this land?”). It was a particular kind of covenant oath enactment meant to convince Abram that this was an irrevocable promise from God to him. When I was a child, we would sometimes make oaths with the expression, “cross my heart and hope to die.” God was guaranteeing this covenant promise to Abram with an enactment that said essentially the same thing, but he was not playing around like we were as children.

For various reasons some have questioned this interpretation, as obvious as it is.²⁷ Among other things, they have thought that the notion of God taking part in a rite that would enact such a self-curse is sacrilegious. However, this is essentially what Jesus went through on the cross for us. He became a curse for us (Gal 3:13). Our God is a radical God. He goes to great lengths to have a relationship with us as fallen people. There is no covenant meal here in Genesis 15 because the whole point of the exercise was to guarantee the land promise to Abram by oath. The oath was the sole purpose of this covenant enactment. Both Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34 refer to walking between the parts of cut up animals as a self-curse. There is no sacrificial procedure for the making of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17. There the focus is on the covenant seed and land promises of God (Gen 17:2, 6-8) and Abraham’s covenant obligations of obedience (Gen 17:1) and circumcision (Gen 17:9-14).

²⁶See Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 110-11, and the more extensive literature cited there.

²⁷I do not find Wenham’s alternative explanation convincing. He argues that the parts of the animals were representative of the nation of Israel; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 332-33. Richard Hess, “The Slaughter of the Animals in Genesis 15: Genesis 15:8-21 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” in *He Swore an Oath*, edited by R. S. Hess et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 55-65, follows Wenham here.

As noted earlier, the most common terminology for making a covenant in the Old Testament is literally “to cut [*kārat*] a covenant [*bərīt*]” (about 90 occurrences). The first occurrence of this expression in the Bible is Genesis 15:18, “On that day the LORD made [*kārat*, lit. ‘cut’] a covenant [*bərīt*] with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.’” Some think the “cutting” originally comes from the ritual procedure of cutting up the animals that Abram cut up in the ritual procedure (Gen 15:9-11, 17). The parallel passage in Jeremiah 34:18-20 is especially significant in this regard. Both *kārat* and *bərīt* occur twice in Jeremiah 34:18, once in the combination *kārat bərīt*, and then *kārat* as the verb for cutting up the calf. “Those who have violated my covenant [*bərīt*] and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant [*bərīt*] they made [*kārat*] before me, I will treat like the calf they cut [*kārat*] in two and then walked between its pieces.”

Others take *bərīt* to derive from the Akkadian noun “*biritu*” clasp, fetter” (or *birit* “between” or *biritu* “space between”) and *kārat bərīt* as related to the Aramaic expression *gəzar adē* “to cut (i.e., ‘determine’) stipulations (for a treaty)” (cf. also Akkadian *adū/adē* “treaty, oath,” which is related to the Hebrew ‘*ēd*/‘*ēdūt*/‘*ēdôt* “testimony,” and in the plural, “covenant or contractual obligations”).²⁸ In this case, the idiom “to cut a covenant” would mean “to establish (or determine) the obligations (or stipulations)” of a relationship between two persons or groups of persons. The verb meaning “to cut” in Semitic languages, and in other unrelated languages as well, can often mean to “determine” or “establish” boundaries or limitations. Consider even in English our

²⁸See Weinfeld, “*b’rit*,” *TDOT* 2:257 and *HALOT* 790-91. For a very good discussion of all the biblical and ANE terminology for treaty/covenant and covenant making, see Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, eds., *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2012), 2:233-44. For the expression *gəzar adē* in Aramaic, see the Sefire treaties; John C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 2: *Aramaic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 28 line 7. See also W. F. Albright, “The Expression for ‘Making a Covenant’ in Pre-Israelite Documents,” *BASOR* 121 (February 1951): 21-22, and also the remarks in Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 81, esp. n. 8. For the Akkadian terminology, see *CAD* vol. A part 1, 131-35 for *adū*; vol. B, 249-55 for *birit(u)*; and vol. R, 347-55, esp. 353-54, for *riksu*, “bond.”

expression “to cut a deal” or “to cut a contract.” The Hebrew idiom “to cut a covenant,” therefore, may derive from the concept of cutting in the sense of “determining”—in this case determining the stipulations of a covenant bond.

Perhaps at one stage the expression *kārat bərit* reflected the actual cutting up of the ritual animal for making a covenant, but then the derivation was lost and the expression came to mean “to cut (i.e., ‘make’) a covenant” (i.e., determine covenant obligations).²⁹ Of course, we cannot really determine the meanings that words or expressions had for their users through etymologies. We need to look at their usage in context, according to the way they contribute to the meanings of the passages in which they actually occur.

MAKING THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The ritual for the ratification of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 24:1-11 is similar in some respects to that in Genesis 15, but very different in others. Here we have both a covenant oath (Ex 24:3-8) and a covenant meal (Ex 24:1-2, 9-11). Initially, God called Moses with “Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel” up on the mountain to worship him there together (Ex 24:1-2). In anticipation of that, Moses enacted a covenant oath ceremony with all Israel at the foot of the mountain (Ex 24:3-8). He told the people all the Lord’s words and the laws of the covenant. The people responded, “Everything the LORD has said we will do” (Ex 24:3). So Moses wrote down what is referred to later in the passage as “the book of the covenant” (Ex 24:4, 7; essentially Ex 21–23). Then early the next morning he built an altar “and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel” and offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings there.

Then we come to the actual oath ceremony. Moses took half the blood of the offerings and sacrifices and splashed it on the altar. The altar represented the Lord in the ritual procedure since what

²⁹Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 94.

goes on the altar by nature goes to the Lord. Then, Moses read the book of the covenant to the people and they responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey” (Ex 24:7). This, of course, is the covenant oath statement. After that Moses took the (other half of the) blood, splashed it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Ex 24:8). Thus, blood from the same animals that he splashed on the altar he also splashed on the people, thereby binding the Lord and the people together in a blood covenant. The book of the covenant that Moses read in between the two blood manipulations constituted the terms (i.e., the stipulations) of the covenant commitment. There are differences, but this sounds quite similar to the Abba-El(AN) and Zimrilim treaty ritual and formula from the second millennium BC at Alalakh: “Abba-AN is under oath to Yarimlim, and also he cut the neck of a lamb. (He swore:) ‘I shall never take back what I gave thee.’ If in the days to come Yarimlim sins against Abba-AN . . . he [shall forfe]it his cities and territories. Further, if a successor of Yarimlim sins against Abba-AN . . .”³⁰

Thus, they made a blood oath covenant with the Lord. It was only after the ceremony at the bottom of the mountain that Moses complied with the Lord’s earlier command: “Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel” (Ex 24:9-10). Then at the very end we read, “they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Ex 24:11). This, of course, is the covenant ratification meal. The text does not actually say this, but the people would have been celebrating a covenant enactment banquet at the base of the mountain. This is what they would do with the meat from “fellowship (peace offering) sacrifices,” as opposed to “burnt offerings,”

³⁰Dennis J. McCarthy, S. J., *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 307. No one would argue that the oath here is unconnected to the ritual cutting of the throat of the lamb. To split the oath off from the ritual is just as unlikely in Ex 24:6-8. See also other texts sighted in relation to this passage in Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 109-10.

which the altar fire would have completely consumed. Moses, Aaron and his two sons, and the seventy elders would have eaten some of the peace offering meat along with the accompanying drink and bread offering on the top of the mountain in the very presence of the Lord (cf. Num 15:1-16).

Covenant renewals appear several times in the Old Testament. The first of these comes as a result of the golden calf debacle referred to above (Ex 32–34; note esp. Ex 34:10, 27–29). The next is the renewal of the original Mosaic covenant with a new generation of Israelites in Moab after forty years in the wilderness, as recounted in the book of Deuteronomy. There is some dispute over whether Deuteronomy ratifies a new covenant with Israel in Moab, forty years after the one made at Sinai, or renews that earlier covenant.³¹ In my view, it renews the covenant at Sinai in anticipation of entering into the land. Deuteronomy 26:18–19 clearly echoes Exodus 19:5–6, the latter at the very beginning of the law at Sinai and the former at the very end of the law in Moab (i.e., the legal regulations end with Deut 26):

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be *my treasured possession*. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and *a holy nation*.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. (Ex 19:5–6)

And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, *his treasured possession as he promised*, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be *a people holy* to the LORD your God, *as he promised*. (Deut 26:18–19)

The use of common expressions between them (“treasured possession” and “holy nation/people”) suggests that Deuteronomy 26:18–19 echoes Exodus 19:5–6, and the twofold note “as he promised” supports this understanding. In other words, the end of the law echoes its

³¹Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 112–18, argues that it is a new divine covenant with the next generation of Israel.

beginning, thus creating the larger canonical framework for the law as a whole in the Pentateuch.³²

The differences between the law as given at Sinai in Exodus and Leviticus as opposed to the law in Deuteronomy are due to three major factors. First, the giving of the law at Sinai still had to anticipate the travel from Sinai to the Promised Land, although at that point this was not expected to be more than a month or two. In Deuteronomy they had already arrived in Moab, just across the Jordan River, anticipating their entry into the Promised Land, but this was forty years later. This required certain adjustments to the regulations. For example, Leviticus 17:1-7 requires that, while they travel through the wilderness and dwell together around the tabernacle, they must be sure to slaughter domesticated animals for food only at the tabernacle so that they could offer their blood and fat on the altar to the Lord. This would avoid illegitimate sacrifice in the wilderness. Deuteronomy 12, however, allows for “profane” slaughter of domesticated animals as long as they poured out the blood on the ground as they did with wild game. Since they would be spread out in the land, God did not require them to take a long trip to where the tabernacle was located whenever they wanted to have meat for dinner (Deut 12:16-25).³³

Second, on the one hand, the Lord gave the law through Moses as the mediator at Sinai. On the other hand, Moses was “preaching” the law to the second generation of the Israelite nation in Moab, urging them to obey God’s law after they entered into the Promised Land: “East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab, Moses began to *expound* this law” (Deut 1:5). In Exodus and Leviticus, he was functioning as

³²For a much more detailed explanation, see Richard E. Averbeck, “The Egyptian Sojourn and Deliverance from Slavery in the Framing and Shaping of the Mosaic Law,” in “*Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?*” *Biblical, Archaeological, and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives*, BBRSup, ed. James Hoffmeier, Alan Millard, and Gary Rendsburg (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 144-50.

³³See Richard E. Averbeck, “The Cult in Deuteronomy and Its Relationship to the Book of the Covenant and the Holiness Code,” in *Sepher Torath Mosheh: Studies in the Composition and Interpretation of Deuteronomy*, ed. Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Schultz (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 232-60, for a full discussion.

the priest. He served as a priest, for example, when he performed the ritual procedures for ordaining the Aaronic priesthood (Lev 8; cf. also Ex 24:3-8). In Deuteronomy, he functioned as a prophet, preaching obedience to the law given at Sinai. The word *expound* means to explain and elucidate. This is why the book consists largely of first-person speeches by Moses. For example, Deuteronomy 1:5 introduces the speech that runs through the first part of the historical prologue to Deuteronomy 3:29 (see also Deut 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 8:1; 11:26; 27:1; 29:2; 30:1, 11; 31:1, 30; 33:1-2). He was not “legislating” the law a second time but preaching the revelation that he had previously mediated at Sinai, expanding and emphasizing elements of it as he went, as good preachers do. If one wants to know how to preach the law, Moses provides us with a good pattern to follow.

Third, although the book of Deuteronomy consists largely of expository first-person speeches by Moses at the end of his life, many have argued it also follows quite closely the pattern of a second-millennium BC Hittite suzerain vassal treaty. Exodus 19–24 does not. The latter is a covenant-making narrative with documents inserted into it (i.e., the Ten Commandments in Ex 20:1-17 and the book of the covenant in Ex 21–23; cf. Ex 24:4, 7). There has been a good deal of scholarly discussion about the structure of Deuteronomy, its relationship to the vassal treaties, and its implications for dating and interpreting the book.³⁴

It seems to me that we should take this comparative background seriously, though it is not a hard and fast comparison. Deuteronomy also has its own special features. In any case, as a covenant document similar in form to the extant second-millennium Hittite suzerain

³⁴For a brief summary see K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 283-312; and for a more detailed treatment, citing all the documents available, see Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3:93-214. See now also the careful analysis in Neal A. Huddleston, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Traditions and Their Implications for Interpreting Deuteronomy,” and K. Lawson Younger Jr. and Neal A. Huddleston, “Challenges to the Use of Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Forms for Dating and Interpreting Deuteronomy,” both in Block and Schultz, *Sepher Torah Mosheh*, 30-77 and 78-109 respectively. See also Greengus, “Covenant and Treaty,” 112-18.

vassal treaties, Deuteronomy falls into six major sections, with variations in how scholars see the details: title/preamble (Deut 1:1-5), historical prologue (Deut 1:6-3:29), stipulations (Deut 4:1-26:19), depositing and reading the text (Deut 31:9-26), witnesses (Deut 31:19-32:47), and blessings and curses (Deut 28). Exodus 19-24 does not display this pattern to any significant degree. Some extend the view to reach from Exodus 20 to Leviticus 26:46, "These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD established at Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses."³⁵ This would enable a stronger comparison.

The main point here, however, is that Moses apparently enacted the covenant with the second generation through some kind of ritual process similar to Exodus 24:1-11. Deuteronomy 26:16-17 seems to suggest this: "You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in obedience to him. . . . And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession." Deuteronomy 29:1, 12 are even more to the point when they refer to "a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath" (cf. also Deut 29:15 "making this covenant, with its oath").³⁶ The text simply says that God was making a covenant with the people but, as argued above, it was actually a renewal of the one made earlier, soon after they arrived at Sinai forty years earlier. The same terminology appears, for example, near the end of Joshua's life when he warned the people against violating the Mosaic covenant (Josh 23:16), leading directly into a renewal of the same covenant (Josh 24; see esp. Josh 24:25). Similarly, even though the term *covenant* does not appear, when Samuel drew the people together at Gilgal in 1 Samuel 12 to "renew the kingship" (1 Sam 11:14), it was a renewal of their commitment to covenant faithfulness (cf. also 2 Chron 15:10-15; 29:10, etc.).³⁷

³⁵See, e.g., Kitchen, *Reliability of the Old Testament*, 284.

³⁶Averbeck, "The Egyptian Sojourn and Deliverance from Slavery," 144-47.

³⁷J. Robert Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal: A Study of 1 Samuel 11:14-12:25* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1978). See Greengus, "Covenant and Treaty," 118-25, for a more complete review of covenant renewals in the Hebrew Bible.

CONCLUSION

There is a fascinating connection between the ratification of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 24 and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. We can see this especially in Luke 22:14-20 (cf. the parallels in Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-26; 1 Cor 11:23-26). As is clear from the context, the Lord's Supper took place as part of Jesus' last celebration of the Passover (Lk 22:7-13). Near the end of the Passover meal Jesus did what we call "ritualization." He created a new ritual from the Passover ritual—namely, what we now call the Lord's Supper, or the Last Supper, or the Eucharist, depending on which term one prefers or the church traditions associated with it. He begins by taking some bread, giving thanks, breaking it, and handing it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). After they were finished eating the bread, he took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Lk 22:20).

For our purposes, what is especially striking is the correspondence of the new covenant ritual in Luke 22 to the ritual for the ratification of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 24. It would have been hard for a first-century Jew to miss the connection. The bread corresponds to the eating of the covenant meal on the mountain (Ex 24:9-11). Perhaps it is even significant that in Luke 22 they were in an "upper room" (Lk 22:12). The cup of wine corresponds to the blood ritual in Exodus 24:6-8. In fact, the statement that Jesus made echoes that of Moses: "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you" (Ex 24:8). As Jesus said it: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20). Of course, there are differences too. Jesus, for example, was using wine to represent his blood, anticipating his death on the cross as the new covenant sacrifice. The sacrifices in Exodus 24 were real blood sacrifices, like Jesus' own bloody sacrifice would be on the cross, which is what he was anticipating. In Exodus 24 they were also eating the meat of actual animals, not just bread. The point is that Moses offered sacrifices that ratified the Mosaic covenant, and

Jesus was about to offer himself as the sacrifice of the new covenant, a better sacrifice (see, e.g., Heb 9:23).

The Lord's Supper, therefore, is essentially a covenant oath (the wine as blood; cf. Ex 24:6-8) and a covenant meal (the bread; cf. Ex 24:9-11). Jesus meant us to practice it regularly as a means of covenant renewal and recommitment to the Lord and to one another in the Lord. This is the main reason Paul was so concerned about how they were practicing the Lord's Supper at Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-34). It is no small matter. There are two sides to the practice of the Lord's Supper. On the one hand, it is about looking back in remembrance of what Jesus did for us on the cross. At the same time, we look forward and commit our life to fulfilling our new covenant obligations to God and one another. It is a covenant renewal ritual.

Our God is an extreme God. He went to great lengths to redeem us through the blood sacrifice of his own eternal Son. The sacrifice of Jesus the Christ ratified the new covenant in which we have eternal life and an ongoing personal relationship with God. We practice the Lord's Supper as a regular renewal of our commitment to live faithfully before the Lord in this world here and now.

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