



PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY JOURNAL[®]

A Herald of New Covenant Theology

In Loving Memory of Jackson & Barbara Boyett, and Charles Sild

– 1 Corinthians 15:58 –

“...be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (NASB).

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Welcome to the PTSJ

“...since the prophetic Scriptures have their fulfilment in the person and work of Christ, biblical theology must take as its starting point a Christ-centered interpretation of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. It must be based upon the way in which the New Testament interprets the Old....How we go about developing this pattern of biblical theology is where the difficulty arises and remains the challenge now and for the future. “Why PTSJ?” The mission for PTSJ is to faithfully work to help meet this challenge by an unwavering stance based upon “Back to the Bible” by “sola Scriptura” all to the glory of God.”

– Gary D. Long, PTS Faculty President –

Welcome to Providence Theological Seminary Journal (PTSJ)! The PTSJ is an official publication of Providence Theological Seminary (PTS). This journal is published on a quarterly basis and is unapologetically devoted to the biblical Gospel and New Covenant Theology. PTS has established this periodical with a fourfold purpose: (1) to serve as a herald of the Doctrines of Grace, New Covenant Theology, and Baptist ecclesiology, (2) to help break down the middle walls of doctrinal partition that exist within and between Dispensational Theology and Covenant Theology, (3) to further establish PTS as a theological institution, and (4) to positively contribute to the ongoing reformation of the Church’s collective understanding of Scripture, the

Gospel, and orthodox Christian theology.

No issue of the PTSJ will include any paid advertisements or endorsements. Furthermore, the exhibition of an author’s article does **not** constitute an endorsement (on the part of PTS) of every aspect of his or her theology. That being said, PTSJ will **never** publish any article, whose content does not firmly agree with the essentials of biblical Christianity. As the seventeenth-century German theologian Rupertus Meldenius once said, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”¹ We earnestly hope that the PTSJ will edify all those who read the articles contained therein.

PTS gladly welcomes any questions, comments, or feedback regarding the content of the PTSJ. Please e-mail all editorial material and questions to info@ptstn.org and Zachary S. Maxcey, the editor of the PTSJ, at zmaxcey@ptstn.org. We cordially welcome all those who are likeminded to support the seminary through prayer. Graphic design of the PTSJ is jointly credited to Ron Adair and Zachary S. Maxcey. *Soli Deo Gloria! Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda Secundum Verbum Dei!*

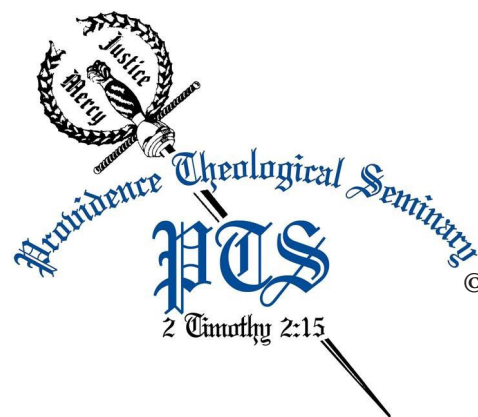
Providence Theological Seminary

¹Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII: Modern Christianity and the German Reformation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910; reprint 1974), 650.

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– 2 Timothy 2:15 –

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of Truth” (NASB).

Introducing Providence Theological Seminary

Providence Theological Seminary (PTS) inaugurated resident night classes in Colorado Springs, CO on September 4, 2007. A full curriculum was offered during the inaugural year of studies less the Biblical Languages. Instruction in the Biblical languages commenced with the fall semester of 2008. In 2015, PTS moved from Colorado Springs, CO to Franklin, TN.

- Degree Programs -

- Primary emphasis upon a *Master of Divinity* (M.Div.) degree for training gifted men for the pastoral ministry
- Two bachelor level programs:
 - *Bachelor of Divinity* (B.Div.) degree
 - *Bachelor of Theology* (B.Th.) degree
- *Diploma in Theological Studies* (DTS)

- Doctrinal Distinctives -

New Covenant Theology
Doctrines of Grace
Baptist Ecclesiology

- The Need For PTS -

One of the greatest needs of the Church today is the teaching and proclamation of sound doctrine in the context of obeying the two greatest commandments: love of God and neighbor. The Apostle Paul charged Timothy to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, NASB). In light of this apostolic exhortation and focus upon the ministry of the Church in carrying out the Great Commission, PTS is committed to the training of scholars-saints to become preachers and teachers of the Word of God witnessed by personal holiness in life, both in word and deed.

- Doctrinal Reasons For PTS -

The doctrinal reasons for PTS can be summed up in *The Three Phrases*; *New Covenant Theology* (NCT); *the Doctrines of Grace*; and *Baptist Ecclesiology*. The latter two areas are taught in other Christian institutions of higher learning. But the first areas of emphasis, NCT, is not widely and openly taught in the American evangelical educational system. Not to be detached from holiness of life, the focus of NCT, is upon Christ as revealed in the whole counsel of God inscripturated in the 66

books of the Holy Bible. Instruction is grounded upon the exegetical, biblical-theological and systematic teaching of principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutic). The hermeneutic is based upon the way that the Lord Jesus and the writers of the New Covenant Scriptures understood and explained the fulfillment of the final revelation of God’s eternal redemptive purpose. In brief, this is what is meant by the term *New Covenant Theology*.

- The Educational Purpose for PTS -

The educational purpose of PTS, an English-speaking theological institution, is twofold: **(1)** to train spiritually gifted (Rom. 12:3-8) and qualified men (1 Tim. 3:1-7) called by God to preach and teach the gospel of Christ; and **(2)** to train spiritually gifted women to exercise their gifts (Rom. 12:3-8) in a woman’s role (Acts 18:26; 1 Tim. 2:12-14; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15) in the service of Christ (Rom. 16:1).

- The Educational Purpose for PTS -

The philosophy of education places primary emphasis on training the student to understand and explain the redemptive purpose for the people of God from the sacred text. The principles of interpretation of the Bible for the Christian church are derived from the New Covenant Scriptures. PTS understands the need to consider and interact with gifted scholarship of the past and present, but emphasis would be placed upon the contextual exegesis and exposition of the biblical text itself. Care will be taken to not over-burden the student with hundreds of pages of reading and reporting on writings of contemporary scholarship. Students will be exhorted to be diligent in their studies to handle accurately the Word of God and to put in practice their faith and walk in their personal life and workplace. Emphasis is placed upon their family and upon active participation in a mission-oriented, doctrinal local church while daily beseeching their Heavenly Father to enable them to love God with all their heart, soul and mind and their neighbor as themselves.

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The New and Better Covenant in Hebrews 7 & 8

by Joe W. Kelley

Introduction. There is little question amongst NT scholars that the Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the most elegantly written, theologically profound, and rigorously argued books in all the NT.¹ It is unparalleled in its portrait of the glories of Jesus Christ. He is the full, final, complete revelation of God (1:1-4). He is the very Son of God. He is consubstantial with God—the *radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being* (1:3). A Son who is fully divine and fully human (2:14, 17-18; 5:7-8); who holds both the office of King and High Priest (1:3, 5; 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 5:5-6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 27, 8:1; 9:11; 10:19; 12:2); who by His sinless life (5:7-10; 7:26-27) and propitiatory death (2:17; 7:27; 9:12, 28; 10:12) has inaugurated the New Covenant wherein God remembers sins no more (8:12). Furthermore, by His resurrection and exaltation He ever lives to mediate the promises of that covenant to His people (7:22, 25; 8:6) so that the children whom God gave Him (2:10-13) might draw near to the throne of grace (4:16; 7:19, 25; 10:25) to find the strength to run the race of the Christian life (12:1-2); and thus, enter that eschatological

heavenly country with its city whose architect and builder is God (11:10, 16) to celebrate with God for all eternity His Sabbath rest (4:9). John Calvin summed up the magnificence of the Epistle in the preface to his commentary this way:

There is, indeed, no book in the Holy Scriptures which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, so highly exalts the virtue and dignity of that only true sacrifice which he offered by his death, so abundantly treats of the use of ceremonies as well as their abrogation, and, so fully explains that Christ is the end of the Law.²

However, for most Christians, Hebrews is one of the most enigmatic and difficult books to understand. It abounds with quotes and allusions to the OT³ which the author relies upon to advance his argument. A lack of familiarity with the OT can easily evoke confusion and head scratching. Although the author's points are carefully argued, they are also difficult to follow at times. The author oscillates between two genres: *exposition* of OT passages where he points out Jesus' fulfillment of the OT, and *exhortation*, where he seeks to motivate his readers to respond in faith.⁴ At times, the author will interrupt his carefully reasoned *exposition* of the OT with a lengthy, earnest, even terrifying, *exhortation* before returning to his main point in the *exposition*. If a reader doesn't

pay close attention to what is being said, then he can easily get lost in all the oscillation. Moreover, Hebrews is a challenge because so much of the Epistle's background is unknown, leaving the reader with only an approximate knowledge of the original audience, their location, the situation they faced, the identity of the author, and the date of the letter.⁵ In spite of these difficulties, the theme of the Epistle is not in doubt—the unqualified Superiority of the Son of God. The adjective "*better*"⁶ occurs some thirteen times whereby the motif "better" or "superior" can be tracked. For example, "Christ is Superior to the Prophets" (1:1-3), "Christ is Superior to the Angels" (1:4—2:18), "Christ is Superior to Moses" (3:1—4:13), "Christ is Superior to Aaron" (5:1—10:18), "Christ is the Superior New and Living Way" (10:19—12:29).⁷ This is a very popular way of analyzing the Epistle; however, as many interpreters have pointed out, this approach fails to take seriously the impassioned *exhortations*, or warning passages, which are interspersed throughout the book (cf. 2:1-4; 3:7—4:11; 5:11—6:12; 10:19-39; 12:25-29).⁸ More recent commentators have recognized the value of both genres (exposition and exhortation) and by integrating the two have arrived, in this writer's opinion, at a clearer understanding of the overall purpose of the book.⁹

¹Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 1.

²John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 22: xxvi.

³David Allen notes that there are 38 direct quotes from the OT and approximately another 55 allusions. David Allen, *Hebrews* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2010), 84. In quoting the OT, R.T. France says: "The author of Hebrews reads the OT in light of its fulfillment in Christ, and his object in selecting these texts is to show that they point beyond their own context to something 'better' still to come." R. T. France, "Hebrews" in *Expositors Bible Commentary: Revised Edition*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 13:27. The basis for the "Christological" reading of the OT is Jesus himself. See R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of OT Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1982).

⁴George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 27.

⁵See D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 391-406 for a thorough discussion of these matters.

⁶κρείσσων (kreisson).

⁷This is the outline of the book which appears in Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), ix-x.

⁸Guthrie, 27; For a thorough discussion of the structure of Hebrews based on Guthrie's observations see William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1991), xc-xcviii.

⁹See O'Brien, 29-34; Guthrie, 30; Lane, lxx-xcviii; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2015), 13-15.

To focus almost exclusively on the expositional portions of the book to the neglect of the warning passages, is to give the “misleading impression that Hebrews is a piece of systematic theology.”¹⁰ Hebrews is rich in theology but it is much more than a theological monogram. In 13:22, the author identifies his letter as a “*word of exhortation*.”¹¹ This same expression is found in Acts 13:15 as a description of the sermon Paul preached in the synagogue at Pisidia Antioch. This, coupled with the fact that on several occasions the author refers to himself as speaking to his readers (2:5; 5:11; 6:9; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32) and that the readers need to pay close attention to what they have heard (2:1; 12:25), leads to the conclusion that Hebrews is a written sermon.¹²

By piecing together numerous hints in the sermon it is possible to arrive at a tentative, though not beyond a reasonable doubt, formulation of the letter’s background and thus its purpose. Authorship is highly contested and Origen’s (A.D. 185-220) assessment—“But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows”¹³—is probably the best we can do. What we do know for sure about the author is that he was a second-generation Christian (2:3) who knew his readers personally and hoped to see them soon (10:32-34; 13:23). It is most likely

that the author and his readers were Hellenistic Jewish Christians,¹⁴ since (1) the elementary teachings (6:1) which the people should have progressed beyond are basic Jewish teachings; (2) the heart of the exposition focuses upon all things Jewish—angels, Moses, the Levitical priesthood, tabernacle and sacrificial system, and (3) the OT quotations are all taken from the LXX, which was the principle text of the Bible for Hellenistic Jews.¹⁵ Although the location of the sermon’s recipients cannot be pinpointed with certainty,¹⁶ NT scholarship has generally accepted the destination to be the city of Rome, since the concluding greeting “*those from Italy*” (13:24) appears to represent those absent from Italy who are sending their greetings back to Rome.¹⁷ The occasion which motivated the author to write his message seems to be linked to the problem of persecution. The author notes that his readers had experienced persecution in terms of public insult and the loss of private property in the “*earlier days*” of their Christian sojourn (10:32-35).¹⁸ Although the persecution was severe, there is no indication that any of the Jewish Christians had suffered martyrdom (12:4). However, 12:4 speaks of a new crisis that was looming on the horizon which very

well may be referencing, or predicting, the persecution and killing of Christians ordered by Nero after the great fire of A.D. 64.¹⁹ Since Judaism was a legal religion under Roman law, and Christianity was not, then an abandonment of Christ and a return to Judaism would provide protection from imperial persecution.²⁰ If this reconstruction of the background of Hebrews is correct, then the letter would be dated in the mid 60’s.²¹ In light of this background, the purpose of the letter emerges from the warning passages which pervade the book. Hebrews was written to arouse, exhort, and encourage Jewish Christians to persevere in their Christian faith (3:6, 1-14; 4:14; 10:23; 11:1; 12:1-2) no matter the cost (2:1; 4:1-2; 10:35-39; 12:1-2; 13:13-14), and not revert back to the Mosaic Law which would lead to apostasy and eternal destruction (6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29). The author uses the expositional sections organized around the adjective “*better*,” to demonstrate Christ’s superiority to and replacement of the entirety of the OT religion, so that his readers would never turn back to obsolete pre-Christian forms of piety but go on to maturity, fully assured that Jesus had already pioneered the way into heaven (2:14-18; 4:14-16; 6:1; 10:19-24; 12:1-3; 13:12-14).

¹⁰Schreiner, 12.

¹¹**παράκλησις** (paraklesis) = “Act of emboldening in belief or course of action, encouragement, exhortation” cited by Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Revised and edited by William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 766. Here after the abbreviation BAGD. The term occurs 7 times in Hebrews 3:13; 10:25; 12:5; 13:19; 13:22 (2x) all with the sense of either encouragement or exhortation, although most modern English versions render the term “urge” in 13:19; cf. NASB, ESV, NIV, NRSV.

¹²F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), xlviii; Donald A. Hagner, *Encountering The Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 29; Lane, lxxv.

¹³Quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C.F. Crise (Peabody Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) 6.25.13.

¹⁴This does not eliminate Gentiles Christians from being recipients, just that the majority were Jewish Christians.

¹⁵O’Brien, 11-13.

¹⁶Hughes, 17-19, advocates for a Roman origin with a Jerusalem destination; Allen, an Antioch destination, 71-74.

¹⁷O’Brien, 14-15; Schreiner 8-9; Guthrie, 20; Carson, Moo, and Morris, 401.

¹⁸Lane suggests that this persecution might be linked to Claudius’ expulsion of all Jews from the city of Rome in A.D. 49, a banishment mentioned in Acts 18:2. The ban was lifted after the Emperor’s death with most Jews returning to the city. See Lane, ixiv-lxvi.

¹⁹Ibid, lxvi.

²⁰O’Brien, 15; Schreiner, 10.

²¹Hebrews gives the impression that the sacrificial system was still in operation at the time of the letter’s composition (See 9:6-9; 10:1-2; 13:10-11), thus placing the date sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The “Better” Covenant in

Hebrews 7 & 8: Over a century ago, B. F. Westcott called the High Priesthood of Christ “the ruling thought of the Epistle.”²² Schreiner concurs but clarifies that Jesus’ High Priesthood is the main theological point of the Epistle. He writes, “...the main point of the book is don’t fall away, but here (in 8:1) we have the main theological point undergirding that command.”²³ The High Priesthood of Christ buttresses the author’s goal of encouraging his Jewish Christian brethren to not give up the faith in the midst of persecution. As High Priest, Jesus has accomplished what none of the Aaronic High Priests could ever accomplish, namely the putting away of sin once and for all by the sacrifice of Himself (9:12, 15, 26; 10:11-18). The specter of Jesus’ priesthood was first raised in the prologue: “*When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (1:3, NASB). The word purification (**καθαρισμός/katharismos**) is a cultic expression that will be explored in chapters 9 and 10. The second half of the sentence is an allusion to Psalm 110:1, the significance of which is twofold—(1) Jesus is a seated priest emphasizing the completed work of atonement, and (2) He is seated with God signaling that He now reigns as the Davidic King and Lord of the universe. The central thrust of this marvelous opening prologue is captured by Schreiner who writes:

The writer identifies the entire OT as prophetic...the revelation given in the past is described as occurring “long ago” (**πάλαι**). The author is not emphasizing primarily that the revelation occurred in the distant past. His main point, given the remainder of the book, is that the OT revelation belonged to a previous era. A new day has arisen, a

new covenant has arrived, and the old is no longer in force. The “first” covenant is “old” (**παλαιούμενον**) and hence obsolete (8:13). The words of the previous era are authoritative as word of God, but they must be interpreted in the light of the fulfillment realized in Jesus Christ.²⁴

(1) Better than the angels

1:5—2:18. The author is fond of the literary device *inclusio* to frame and advance his arguments. The mention of “angel” at the conclusion of the prologue is unexpected, but he uses it to introduce the topic of his next discussion. The mention of “angels” in 1:5 and again in 2:16 sets the parameters of the discussion with 2:17-18 providing the transition to what follows. Though the topic of angels seems strange to the modern reader, amongst the Jews angels were very important since they functioned as intermediaries in the giving of the Law at Sinai (Deut. 33:2, LXX; Acts 7:38, 58; Gal. 3:19; also see Heb. 2:2). The central point that the author makes in this section is that the Son, as the full and final revelation of the Word of God (1:1-2), is far superior to the revelation mediated to Moses through angels. The readers should never return giving their full allegiance to such inferior, partial, and piecemeal revelation which came to Moses through the angelic messengers.²⁵ Because of the presence of angels at the creation (Job 38:7) and their participation in mediating the Law (Deut. 33:2, LXX) many Jews believed the administration of the world to come would be subject to angelic administration.²⁶ The author quotes Psalm 8 to demonstrate such was never God’s intent. The world was to be subject to man, yet this is not

seen on account of the fall of man. However, God’s purposes have come to pass in Jesus. By accepting the status of a human being in His incarnation, He was made lower than the angels for a little while in order to atone for sin, but now in the resurrection He is crowned with honor and glory—thus dethroning sin and death and so fulfilling God’s purposes for man outlined in Psalm 8. The work of redemption in bringing many sons to glory involves the work of a priest (2:17) which transitions the author to the next topic of discussion.

(2) Better than Moses 3:1—

4:13. After introducing Jesus as a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, he advances his argument by comparing Jesus with Moses (3:1-6). The reason for this is because Moses held a distinctive place of honor among the Jews. Not only was he extolled as the law-giver but also as a priest.²⁷ As Frank Thielman points out, though the author does not call Moses a priest, undoubtedly he recognized that Moses was a Levite (Exod. 2:1), he offered sacrifices (Exod. 24:3-8; Heb. 9:19-22), and was designated a priest in Psalm 99:6.²⁸ Moses is not denigrated in any way and is even compared favorably with Jesus in terms of faithfulness to the Divine mission (3:2). However, as Apostle and High Priest, Jesus is far superior to Moses. Jesus is the builder of the household of God, while Moses is just a member (3:3). Moses was a faithful servant of the household, but Christ as the Son is the owner of the household (3:6). The main point is found in verse 5, where it is said of Moses that he was “*a servant for a testimony of those things which were*

²²B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrew* (reprint 1889; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1974), 70.

²³Schreiner, 242.

²⁴Ibid., 53.

²⁵France, 40; Lane, 32-33; O’Brien, 61-63, Schreiner, 60.

²⁶Hughes, 82.

²⁷Allen has some interesting citations from Philo in this respect. Allen, 236.

²⁸Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 114-115.

to be spoken later.” Like the angels, Moses’ ministry was eschatological, serving those who would inherit salvation (1:14). God spoke through Moses in the past (OT), yet the focus of God’s utterance through Moses anticipated what was to come in Christ.²⁹ As Schreiner summarizes, “Moses should be honored as a faithful servant, but it is a serious mistake to see him as the terminus of revelation, for he pointed forward to a greater word...Jesus is the emissary sent by God to fulfill God’s covenanted promise... to accomplish salvation, to enable humanity to have access to God.”³⁰

In 3:7—4:13 the theme of faithfulness continues; however, the author shifts gears no longer comparing the faithfulness of Jesus and Moses, but rather the communities which followed them. The first generation that followed Moses in the Exodus is compared to the Jewish Christian readers. The purpose of this lengthy warning passage is to exhort the readers to continued faithfulness in their earthly pilgrimage toward the final eschatological rest in God. The basis of the exhortation is Psalm 95:7-11 with emphasis falling upon the word “today” (3:13, 16; 4:7).

(3) Better than the Levitical Priesthood of Aaron 4:14—10:25.

George Guthrie’s ground breaking analysis of the structure of Hebrews has convinced most modern commentators that 4:14—10:18 forms the principle theological argument of Hebrews.³¹ The key is seen in the *inclusio* in 4:14-16 “*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens...*

let us hold fast our confession...Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” and virtually the same expressions in 10:19-21 “*...since we have a great priest over the house of God (10:21)... enter the holy place (10:19)... through the veil, that is, His flesh (10:20)... therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter (10:19)... let us draw near (10:22)*. The *inclusio* frames this section of the book around the “High Priesthood” of Jesus Christ—a sinless High Priest who has gone into heaven (4:14—7:28) and who now can bring believers into heaven (8:1—10:25). The theme of Christ’s High Priesthood alluded to in 1:3, declared in 2:17, and discussed in 3:1 is resumed³² in the transition of 4:14-16. The large section from 4:14—10:25 has two main parts: (1) 5:1—7:28, marked off by the *inclusio* 5:1 “*...high priest taken from men*” and 7:28 “*...the Law appoints men as high priest.*” This section focuses upon Christ’s status, His appointment by God as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek in Psalm 110:4 and (2) 8:1—10:18, where Melchizedek drops from the scene and the focus is on the function of Christ’s High Priestly ministry based on the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34.³³

After exploring the theme of Christ’s faithfulness as a High Priest (3:1—4:13), as noted in 2:17, the author now directs his attention to the other characterization of Christ’s priesthood, namely mercy.³⁴ In 5:1-10³⁵ we find the first major

subdivision of the overall large section which spans 5:1—7:28. The central point the author makes in this section is twofold: (1) every high priest must be able to sympathize with the people he represents; and (2) every high priest is appointed to his office by God.³⁶ The second point gives the author the opening to point to Psalm 110:4 (recorded in 5:6) where God declares that He has appointed the Son—the Messianic King (Ps 2:7 in 5:5), as “*...a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*” The section concludes by explaining the pathway Jesus had to walk in order to qualify for and fulfill God’s declaration of His Melchizedekian priesthood in Psalm 110:4—a lifelong pathway of obedient suffering culminating in His death.³⁷ In the second subdivision God’s designation of Jesus as a Melchizedekian High Priest, in fulfillment of Psalm 110:4, is extremely important, something the author wants to explain, but cannot until the readers’ spiritual dullness is addressed in 5:11—6:20.

The third subdivision is found in 7:1-28, where the author returns to the discussion he began in 5:6, 10 respecting Jesus’ appointment as a High Priest in fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 110:4. The burden of this section is the superiority of Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood by virtue of it being a totally different priesthood than the Aaronic Levitical priesthood authorized by the Law of Moses. This third and final subdivision falls into three parts noted by three *inclusios* “*met*”³⁸ Abraham 7:1 repeated in 7:10; “*perfection*”³⁹ in 7:11 repeated in 7:19; and “*oath*”⁴⁰ in 7:20 repeated in 7:28.

²⁹O’Brien, 134; like the angels, Moses, too, was a mediator.

³⁰Schreiner, 113.

³¹Guthrie, 173; O’Brien, 179; Allen, 302; France 70-71; Schreiner, 150-151.

³²οὕν/oun/therefore has a resumptive nuance in 4:14.

³³Allen, 439; O’Brien, 286.

³⁴Theilman, 118.

³⁵Most commentators note the structure of a chiasm in 5:1-10. See Lane, 111; O’Brien, 188; Allen, 313-314.

³⁶Allen, 314.

³⁷Guthrie, 186.

³⁸συναντάω/sunantao.

³⁹τελείωσις/teleiosis in the noun form v.11; the verb τελειώω/teleioo in the perfect tense in v.19.

⁴⁰ὄρκωμοσία/horkomosia.

The thought breaks down as follows: (1) The historical meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham demonstrates the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood to that of the Levitical priesthood (7:1-10); and (2) The Levitical priesthood had to be replaced by Christ's Priesthood since it was incapable of perfecting the people (7:11-19); God's oath in Psalm 110:4 (in contrast to the Levitical priesthood which had no oath) made Christ's Priesthood both eternal (never to be annulled) and savingly effectual (7:20-28).

Returning to prophecy concerning Melchizedek in Psalm 110:4,⁴¹ the author fills in the details of this enigmatic priest by summarizing the account of him given in Genesis 14:17-20. Melchizedek (whose name means king of righteousness 7:2), the king of Salem⁴² (meaning the city of peace 7:2), priest⁴³ of the Most High God,⁴⁴ met Abraham after his victory over the kings of the east when he rescued his nephew Lot (7:1) pronouncing a blessing upon him in the name of God Most High. Melchizedek's importance is readily noticed; he combines the office of king and the office of priest in his

person.⁴⁵ Focusing on the silence of the Genesis account, the author makes a series of superlative pronouncements concerning Melchizedek...*"Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life."* Some early patristic writers took these pronouncements about Melchizedek as a reference to a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Son of God.⁴⁶ This view is uniformly rejected by modern commentators. The key is the silence of Genesis, a book so careful to record genealogical paternity. This is the author's point: Melchizedek has no paternity. His interpretative conclusion of Genesis' silence is—*"made like the Son of God"* (7:3).⁴⁷ The passive voice of the participle *made like* is a Divine passive signifying that it was God or the Scriptures themselves that made the priest (i.e. Melchizedek) a type or prefiguring of the Son of God.⁴⁸ Scripture made Melchizedek to typify Christ's priesthood at that very point where His priesthood is fundamentally different from Aaron's Levitical High Priesthood authorized by the Law, namely no traceable genealogy. From this historical encounter, the author draws three theological conclusions:

(1) Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, the patriarch from whom all Jews descended, because Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (7:4); (2) Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, the one to whom God gave the promises, because Melchizedek blessed Abraham (7:7); (3) Melchizedek is greater than the Levitical priest, because the Law granted the Levites the right to collect tithes from the people (7:5), and yet Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek through His great-grandfather Abraham for he was in Abraham's loins when the patriarch met Melchizedek (7:10).

In the second paragraph of the section where the author is proving the superiority of Christ's High Priesthood to the Levitical High Priesthood of Aaron (7:1-28), he advances his argument in 7:11-19 by pointing to the inability of the Aaronic order to *"perfect"* the people—hence the need for its replacement. He uses a second-class condition clause (condition contrary to reality to open the new paragraph).⁴⁹ *"Now if perfection⁵⁰ was through the Levitical priesthood [understood, it wasn't] ... what further need [understood, there was need] for another priest to arise*

⁴¹γάρ/gar/For; the subordinate conjunction "for" has an explanatory nuance, it connects 7:1 back to 6:20 and the quote from Psalm 110:4.

⁴²Psalm 76:2 links the city of Salem with Mount Zion, i.e. Jerusalem.

⁴³Genesis 14:18 is the first mention of the word "priest" כֹּהֵן *kohen*.

⁴⁴EL ELYON אֱלֹהֵי עֵלְיוֹן (Gen 14:18) terminology which describes God's transcendent majesty.

⁴⁵In Israel the two offices were divided, being held by separate individuals. However, the OT did predict the uniting of the offices in God's servant, "the branch"—i.e. the Messiah (Zech 6:12-13).

⁴⁶See the references in Hughes, 250.

⁴⁷The perfect passive participle of ἀφομοιόω/aphomoioo/made like, functions as a predicate adjective describing "priest" Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 619.

⁴⁸O'Brien, 249. Typology is based on God's sovereign control over history (See Is 46:10). He so governs the events of human history that people, places, events, and institutions in the OT correspond to their realities in the NT. For a thorough discussion of typology in the Bible, see Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982).

⁴⁹F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 182.

⁵⁰τελείωσις/teleiosis has the concept of reaching a goal or bringing an action to completion. DBAG, 996-997. The term was used earlier for the qualifying of Christ for His priestly office (2:10; 5:9), but here it is applied to believers. It signals spiritual maturity in 5:14, but here as in 9:9; 10:1,14 it seems to have a cultic sense. The sacrifices offered by the Aaronic priesthood could never take away sin, hence the worshiper's conscience was never cleansed, thus could never draw near to God. See France, 95. Schreiner thinks the term in the context of 7:11 is eschatological. Probably both nuances are present; neither in the present nor in the eschaton could the Levitical order bring one to God.

according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?" The point is that Psalm 110:4, coming centuries after the establishment of the Aaronic High Priest, prophesying another⁵¹ priesthood automatically spells the end of the Levitical order. As Schreiner observes, this means the Levitical priesthood was but an interim order preparing the way for the better Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ.⁵² The parenthetical statement in v. 11 (*"for on the basis of it the people received the Law"*) is a surprising statement, i.e. the Law is based on the priesthood. Garth Cockerill clarifies:

Although the law given at Sinai established the priesthood, living under that law was based on and dependent upon its [i.e. Levitical priesthood's] perpetual functioning... Before the advent of Christ, God's people could not live under the law without the priesthood as a means of approaching God through atonement.⁵³

This mutually dependent permanent relationship between the Law and the Priesthood means a change in one necessitates a change in the other. *"For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also"* (7:12). Since the Levitical priesthood could not perfect the people, the priesthood and the Law were indissolubly linked, and God prophesied the coming of another priesthood, then the only conclusion one can draw is that God purposefully instituted both the Law and the Priesthood as a temporary arrangement. The arrival of Christ brings an end to the Levitical order, but in bringing an end to the Levitical order He also by necessity brings an

end to the Law.⁵⁴ Schreiner brings out the full import of this idea:

Indeed, God planned all along that a new priesthood would arrive, a Melchizedekian one. Hence the Aaronic priesthood is passé. But if the priesthood has changed, then the Mosaic law is no longer in force either. Hence there is no basis for saying that Hebrews limits what he says about the law to the priesthood and sacrificial instructions. The law and the priesthood are entwined together, and thus the passing of the priesthood also means that the law as a whole is no longer in force.⁵⁵

The author goes on to prove that the Levitical priesthood, and the Mosaic Law linked to it, has changed due to the personal history of Jesus. The Melchizedekian priest who God prophesied of was from another tribe—Judah, which the Law prohibited from officiating at the altar (7:12-13). The Mosaic Law jealously guarded priestly service against any encroachment by the royal line. But the Melchizedekian High Priest prophesied by God in Psalm 110 is both a King (110:1) and a Priest (110:4). The conclusion of the paragraph begun in v. 11 is reached v. 18-19. The emphasis in these two verses is not on the Levitical priesthood, but on the Law with which it was inseparably linked. The change of the Law described in v.12 is now described by the much stronger term *"set aside"*⁵⁶ (7:18). With the coming of Christ, the Law, which God gave through Moses, He annulled totally. The reason for the annulment is given in v. 19. *"..for the Law made nothing perfect;"* it could not forgive sins (10:4), it could not cleanse the conscience (9:9), and

people never had free unfettered access to draw near to God (9:8). Given these deficiencies, the Law had to be annulled and replaced with Christ through whom believers can *"draw near to God."* O'Brien affirms Schreiner's earlier comment on the change of the Law:

...the parenthetical comment of v. 19 about the law making nothing perfect shows that it is most natural to understand the former regulation as alluding to the law of Moses as a system in its entirety. The specific command which was related to the Levitical priesthood [i.e. the priestly law of physical descent] is the embodiment of the whole law. The weakness and uselessness of that 'one commandment is a reflection upon, and an expression of the character of, the entire law'. The law as a whole could not effect perfection.⁵⁷

The third paragraph (7:20-28) in this broader section where the author is demonstrating the superiority of Christ High Priest over Aaron's Levitical priesthood (7:1-28) argues from the oath (v. 20, 28) that God swore to the Messianic King in Psalm 110:4. The significance of an oath is that it *"demonstrates in the clearest way possible the immutability of God's will."*⁵⁸ The author begins by observing that the prophecy of Psalm 110:4 came with a Divine oath (7:20), something that did not occur in the inauguration of Aaron's High Priesthood (7:21). But when God spoke to His Son, David's Lord in Psalm 110:4, the prophecy that authorized the Son's priesthood came with an oath. *"The Lord has sworn And will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever.'" At this point, the author drops the final phrase in*

⁵¹ἕτερος/heteros The adjective reference is to being dissimilar in kind or class from all other entities. BAGD, 399.

⁵²Schreiner, 216.

⁵³Garth Cockerill quoted in Schreiner, 216.

⁵⁴O'Brien, 259.

⁵⁵Schreiner, 217.

⁵⁶ἀθέτησις/athetesis means "a refusal to recognize the validity of something; legal annulment;" BAGD, 24.

⁵⁷O'Brien, 265.

⁵⁸Theilman, 120.

the Psalm “according to the order of Melchizedek” and introduces the name Jesus in v. 22. Jesus is the eschatological priest to whom God swore an oath in Psalm 110:4. Unlike Aaron’s Levitical priesthood which was not inaugurated with an oath and was later annulled, Jesus’ High Priesthood came with an oath that was strengthened by an additional stipulation from God that He would never change His mind, thus giving a double guarantee that Jesus’ priesthood could never be annulled—He is an eternal priest. And since God’s oath stands behind Jesus’ priesthood, then “*Jesus has become the guarantee⁵⁹ of a better covenant.*” The “*better hope*” that replaced the Mosaic Law and its Levitical Priesthood, granting access to “*draw near to God,*” (7:19) is now explained as “*a better covenant*” (7:22). The identity of the better covenant that Jesus guarantees will be expounded further in 8:6. There, Jesus is the mediator of the better covenant which is the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. The point here is this: the hope of the worshiper is sure because the covenant which embodies the hope of God’s people is guaranteed by the High Priest whose office was founded upon God’s unalterable oath proclaimed in Psalm 110:4.

The blessing of Jesus’ permanent priesthood is that “*He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him*” (7:25). Such was not true of Aaron’s Levitical priesthood. Aaronic priests

were appointed on the basis of a hereditary law of physical descent, but death prevented those priests from carrying out the work of their priesthood.⁶⁰ A dead priest saves no one! Such was the nature of the Levitical priesthood—temporal and ineffectual. However, Jesus’ priesthood is eternal in that He holds His priesthood “*permanently*” (7:24), an allusion back to 7:16 and the reference to His “*indestructible life.*” Jesus entered heaven through the blood of His sacrifice having obtained eternal redemption (9:11-12). He died but then conquered death in His resurrection.⁶¹ And since his death put away sins once for all (7:28), then it saves forever, and He lives forever to intercede, mediating the benefits of His better covenant to all who draw near to God through Him.

The author concludes this whole section by emphasizing again the superiority of Jesus’ High Priesthood based on Ps 110:4; He is a High Priest who truly meets the needs of sinners.⁶² Unlike the Levitical high priest, who were sinners themselves and could not bring the needs of the people directly to God without first offering a sacrifice for their own sin, Jesus achieved sinless perfection in life; then by the offering of His perfect life He achieved the definitive forgiveness of sin (7:26-27). The value of His sacrifice is of infinite worth putting away sin *once for all* never again needing any other offering (9:12; 10:10). The entire matter is summed up in v. 28. “*For the Law appoints men as high priests*

who are weak”...The mention of weakness reminds the reader of what was said in 5:2 and 7:18. The Law of Moses appoints sinful mortals (7:8, 23, 27) to the office of High Priest. This was an imperfection inherent in the Law itself that could never take away sin or perfect the people it was ordained to serve. In addition, “*the word of the oath, which came after the Law appoints a Son*”...Because the Law of Moses was ineffective in establishing a priest which could achieve the will of God in perfecting His people, God superseded the Law with a prophetic oath He swore to His Son. This means that the Law and the Levitical priesthood, which was inseparably linked with it, was by Divine design a temporary arrangement valid only until the coming of the Son. Now in these last days (1:2) Christians have a High Priest who is “*a Son made perfect forever.*” The *perfection* relates to His sinless life (2:10; 5:7-9; 7:26), His redeeming death (9:11-12, 10:14), His resurrection and heavenly exaltation (1:3, 13; 4:14; 8:1; 10:19-21), and now from His perfect place in heaven is able to save and perfect all who draw near to God through Him. (7:25). As Schreiner notes, the perfected High Priesthood of the Son in heaven “*testifies that the old order has been terminated and a new day has begun.*”⁶³

The mid-point of the author’s argument of Christ’s superior High Priesthood is found in 8:1. Like a good preacher, he restates his main theological point, no doubt to help his

⁵⁹The word guarantor ἔγγυος/egguos is a legal term which appears only here in the NT. In the Greco-Roman world the guarantor was a person who assumed the responsibility of paying another individual’s debt in the event that the debtor was unable to meet his obligations. James Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1930), 179.

⁶⁰O’Brien, 272; notes that when Aaron died he was succeeded by his son Eleazar (Num 20:22-29). When Eleazar died he was succeeded by his son Phinehas (Josh 24:33). The succession continued until the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. Citing Josephus, from Aaron to the destruction of the Temple, there were eighty-three High Priests who served and died.

⁶¹Schreiner, 233.

⁶²Again the author picks-up on the word “fitting,” πρέπω/prepo. He used it in 2:10 to explain how necessary it was in bringing many sons to glory for God to perfect the pioneer of salvation through suffering. In this context the author considers the process Jesus went through to attain that perfection. See O’Brien, 278-279.

⁶³Schreiner, 240.

readers pay attention to what he is driving at. “Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (8:1). As noted earlier, the section dealing with the High Priesthood of Christ is marked off by the *inclusio* in 4:14 “... we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens...” and again in 10:21 “...we have a great high priest over the house of God...” This large division of the book has two basic parts: (1) Jesus, the Great High Priest who has entered heaven is superior to the Aaronic Levitical High Priest (4:14—7:28). Here the focus was upon the status of Jesus as a High Priest according to Psalm 110:4. (2) Jesus’ High Priestly ministry, covenant and sacrifice are superior to those ordained by the Law of Moses (8:1—10:25). In this second argument, the author focuses in on Jesus’ function as a High Priest according to Jeremiah 31:31-34.⁶⁴ The first subdivision of this second part in the argument is framed by the *inclusio* “minister” in v. 2 (Λειτουργός/leitourgos) and “ministry” (Λειτουργία/leitourgia) in v.6. The point of this opening paragraph (8:1-6) is that Jesus is a seated King and High Priest whose ministry is in heaven—far superior to the earthly ministry of the Levitical priests. The author’s emphasis is on the fact that Jesus ministers “in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (8:2)

—a reference to the presence of God in heaven.⁶⁵ Throughout this paragraph the author speaks of the tabernacle described in the book of Exodus and its successor, the Temple in Jerusalem. The reason for this is that the author is linking the place of OT ministry and worship with the Law, thus it shares with the Law all its imperfections and obsolescence.⁶⁶ Like all other priests who have been appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin, Jesus also ministers as a priest on the basis of a sacrifice (8:3)—the sacrifice of Himself (7:27; 10:8-10). But the benefits of His sacrifice must be mediated in heaven, because according to the Law He is prevented from ministering as a priest on the earth.⁶⁷ Verse 4 reminds the readers of what he said in 7:13-14. Jesus is from the tribe of Judah and the Law prevented anyone outside of the tribe of Levi from serving as a priest. Moreover, for Jesus to minister in the earthly tabernacle would be anti-climactic since the earthly tabernacle was but a shadowy suggestion of heaven. Those to whom the Law gave authority to minister in the earthly tabernacle were serving in a structure that was just a *copy* (ὑπόδειγμα/hupodeigma), a *shadow* (σκιά/skia), a *type* (τύπος/tupos) of the *heavenlies* (8:5).⁶⁸ But now (νυνί/nuni)⁶⁹ “He has obtained a more excellent ministry”—a ministry carried out in the presence of God in heaven. It is a ministry in which

“He is also the mediator of a better covenant.” Jesus’ function as covenant mediator is based both on His death (9:15; 12:24), where the benefits of the covenant were procured, and His heavenly session (7:24) where the benefits are applied. The New Covenant is superior to the Old for it was enacted⁷⁰ on “better promises” (8:6). The better promises of the covenant are set forth in the quotation from Jeremiah 31.

The second paragraph (8:7-13), in the larger section which looks at the functional aspects of Jesus’s High Priestly ministry (8:1—10:25), emphasizes the replacement of the deficient Mosaic Covenant by the superior New Covenant. The *inclusio* which the author uses to frame the discussion in this paragraph is the ordinal *first* (πρώτος/protos) appearing in v. 7 and again in v. 13. As was the case in 8:4, the author introduces his argument with second class conditional “if; a condition contrary to reality. The thought is as follows: *For if the first covenant had been faultless [and it wasn’t] there would have been no need for a second [but there was need].* It should be observed that the better covenant mentioned in 8:6 in this verse is the *second* [covenant], which in the citation Jeremiah 31:31 and v. 13 is called *new*. The *first covenant* is identified in the citation for Jeremiah as the *Mosaic covenant* in v. 9 and then described as *old* in v. 13. As with the

⁶⁴Allen, 439

⁶⁵Lane reminds us that the language in verse 2 is *analogical* and not *literal*. The adjective *true* is used not in contrast to that which is false, but in contrast to that which is symbolic, temporal and earthly. The author is not thinking of a literal physical tabernacle in heaven. Rather the physical earthly tabernacle of Moses was but a symbolic foreshadowing of the eschatological reality of Christ’s heavenly session in the last days. Lane, 200.

⁶⁶France, 105.

⁶⁷The author presents another second class condition clause, which is contrary to reality. Note εἰ+indicative ἦν+ἄν meaning: “If he were on earth [and he is not] he would not be at all [but he is]...”

⁶⁸Contrast between the heavens and earth, copy/shadow and true reality, is not to be understood in the Platonic metaphysical sense but in the temporal redemptive-historical sense. The OT tabernacle and its priestly ministry pointed forward to the eschatological ministry of Jesus in heaven at the consummation of the ages. Hagner, 112.

⁶⁹The adverb is eschatological, *the last days* (1:2), *the consummation of the ages* (9:26). Schreiner, 245.

⁷⁰The verb to *enact* (νομοθετέω/nomotheteo) means to enact on the basis of a legal sanction; BAGD, 676. O’Brien says the word indicates that the New Covenant is a legal sanction, and more than that the passive voice of the perfect tense verb implies that God is the one who has drawn up the covenant. O’Brien, 292-293.

Levitical priesthood in 7:11, if it could have perfected the worshiper, then another priesthood would not have been instituted. The argument is the same here with the covenants. If the first covenant had been adequate, then there would have been no need to establish a second. Again the author underscores the mutual interdependency of the Law and the Levitical priesthood. The Levitical priesthood was woefully deficient and so was the Law of Moses. This brings to question the location of the deficiency. Is it in the Law itself or the people to whom the Law was given? In a question somewhat related—is the Law an altogether new covenant or is it a fresh *renewal* of the old covenant? Concerning the former question, as noted earlier, the Levitical priesthood was flawed (7:23, 27), so also is the Law, since it is inseparably linked to the priesthood (7:11-12, 19). Therefore, the Law itself is flawed (10:1-4). Also, the passive of the verb *sought* (ἐζήτηίτο/ezeteito) implies that it is God who faulted the old covenant and sought its replacement with the new.⁷¹ Furthermore, this view is strengthened if the variant reading at the beginning of v. 8 is the original—“*For finding fault with it, He says to them.*”⁷² However, the failure of the generation of the Exodus mentioned in the Jeremiah citation v. 9 “*for they did not continue in my*

covenant” is enough to warrant Schreiner’s assessment: “at the end of the day, the author finds fault with both the people and the old covenant.”⁷³ But since God does find fault with the old covenant, at least to some degree, then the question naturally arises—why would God institute a covenant in the first place that He deemed faulty? The solution is not found in denigrating the Law as if it were bad or wrong. No, as Paul said, “...*the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good*” (Rom 7:12). The solution is to be found in redemptive history. The Mosaic Covenant with all of its individual commandments, its Levitical priesthood, sacrifices, and tabernacle, things upon which it was mutually dependent, were all faulty by design (8:5; 10:1). God enacted the old covenant, and all that was inherently linked to it, with a built-in obsolescence. It was never meant to be permanent. It was a temporal, intermediate covenant, always designed to anticipate, to foreshadow, and to typify the good things to come in Jesus Christ (9:11; 10:1). Returning to the latter question is the nature of the new covenant that of a historical new-in-time covenant or is it a fresh renewal of the Mosaic Covenant? Many brethren in the Reformed tradition, emphasizing continuity of the covenants, view the

New Covenant as a fresh renewal of the Old Covenant.⁷⁴ The superiority of the New Covenant over the Old is seen to be in its form, but not its content. For example, referencing the Ten Commandments, O. Palmer Robertson writes:

...Jeremiah indicates that as an integral part of the new covenant God will write his torah on the hearts of his people (Jer. 31:33). The substance of the covenant law [i.e. Ten Commandments] will provide a basis for continuity between the old and new covenants. Indeed, God shall write his will on fleshly tablets of the heart [i.e. a different form], in contrast to the older engraving of his law on stone tablets. But it will be essentially the same law of God [i.e. Ten Commandments] that will be the substance [i.e. the same content] of this engraving. [Later he clarifies:] While the form of the old covenant administration may pass away, the substance of blessing which it promises remains. God’s torah will be written in the hearts of his people, God shall redeem his people in an ultimate sense, as it will be done typologically in the old covenant.⁷⁵

The principal difficulty in seeing the New Covenant as a renewal of the Old, particularly when it comes to the Decalogue, is that the term *new* in the context of Hebrews 8:7-13 does mean new temporally—“recent in contrast to something old.”⁷⁶ In addition, in the Jeremiah quote, God says specifically

⁷¹O’Brien, 444.

⁷²The question is whether the third person pronoun *them* in the accusative case (αὐτούς) is the original or if the dative case (αὐτοῖς) is original. If the accusative case is original, then the pronoun *them* would function as the object of the participle *finding fault*, which is the way NASB, ESV, NRSV understands the text. However, if the dative is original, then the pronoun *them* would function best as the object of the verb *He says*, which is found in the alternate reading of the ESV. The external manuscript evidence is evenly divided forcing the decision on to the subjective internal behavior of the scribes. Contextually, the dative appears to be the stronger reading. The first covenant is not faultless (v.7), then finding fault with it, *He says to them*, which is followed by the quote of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Yet, the very strength of this translation works against it, for scribes would most likely change the dative to the accusative in order to harmonize with the context of verse 7. The editors of the UBS give the accusative αὐτούς a B grade in both the 4th and 5th editions, which then is reflected in most English translations as the original.

⁷³Schreiner, 248.

⁷⁴Walter C. Kaiser notes that the Greek term *new* frequently has the nuance of *fresh* or *renewal*. He thinks this is the best way to describe the nature of the New Covenant as a *renewal* of the Old. Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 234.

⁷⁵O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 282, 286. Lane in his commentary agrees saying, in the New Covenant the content of the Law has not changed, only the new manner in which the Law is inscribed—on minds and hearts instead of stones. Lane, 209.

⁷⁶καίνός/kainos, BAGD, 497.

that the New Covenant is “*not like the covenant which I made with their fathers...*” (8:9). Finally, this understanding of the New Covenant as a form of renewal of the Mosaic Covenant is based upon a tripartite understanding of the Law of God. This view was first set forth by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 A.D.) in his work, *Summa Theologiae* where he divides the Law into moral injunctions, civil injunctions, and ceremonial injunctions. The civil and ceremonial divisions of the Law are fulfilled and abrogated in Christ, but the moral injunctions, (i.e. the Ten Commandments) are different. Being promulgated by God Himself they are retained first by their presence inherently in man’s reason and secondly as an expression of God’s eternal will.⁷⁷ However, there is no indication that the author of Hebrews understands the Law of Moses as being tripartite—the law written on the heart notwithstanding. As noted earlier, the intertwining of the Law and the priesthood makes the deficiency of any single commandment in the Law a characterization of the whole Law. So if one commandment in the Law is slated for annulment, then the whole law is slated for annulment. Thielman has demonstrated that the author of Hebrews did not hold to a tripartite conception of the Mosaic Law. Thielmann observes:

In 9:15-22 he makes the term “first covenant” synonymous with every

commandment spoken by Moses according to the “law” (9:19)...The entire Mosaic covenant, therefore, and not merely a part of it, has been superseded by the new covenant.⁷⁸

The prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 corrects three deficiencies in the Mosaic covenant. First, the Law of God is to be internalized in the minds and hearts of His people. “*For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel*”⁷⁹ after those days, says the Lord: *I will put my Laws into their minds and I will write them on their hearts.*” And I will be their God and they shall be my people. The basic flaw in the Old Covenant is that the Law was incapable of effecting the obedience which it commanded. In the New Covenant, God remedies that problem by sovereignly implanting His Laws in the minds and hearts of the people, thus effecting obedience to all that He commands. This sovereign implantation echoes Ezekiel’s new covenant promise where God implants a new heart and a new spirit through the implantation of His Spirit, thus causing the people to walk in His statutes (Ezek. 36:26-27). Theologically, the language is that of regeneration. The inner transformation of the heart and mind by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit renders the Law of God a delight to be obeyed for the believer. Now the prophecy does say that God will put His Laws (**νόμους**/plural) in their

minds and will write (**ἐπιγράψω**/epigrapho) them on their hearts. The mentioning of the Laws plural and the act of God writing does tether the internalization of God’s Law in the New Covenant back to the Decalogue (Exod. 31:18).⁸⁰ Be that as it may, the tethering is not understood by Hebrews to mean that there is a one-to-one direct correspondence between the Decalogue written on stone in the Old Covenant and the Laws of God written on the heart in the New. Rather, Hebrews sees the Mosaic Law as a unit—the Old Covenant (9:18-20). With the nullification of the priesthood, by necessity there was the nullification of the entire Mosaic Law, including the Decalogue (7:11, 19; 8:13). Yet there are many commandments in the Decalogue which reflect the unchanging, eternal righteous character of God. Those eternal elements are assumed into the New Covenant, and in the words of Barry Joslin, the Laws of the Decalogue do not come over into the New unaffected. They have been escalated, magnified, and transformed by the person and work of Christ—in other words, the Law of God has been Christologicalized.⁸¹

The second deficiency of the Old covenant that is corrected in the New is the transformation of the covenant community from a theocratic state into a believing body. Quoting Jeremiah 31:34 in 8:11, the author writes: “*And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and*

⁷⁷St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. By Timothy McDermott (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1989), 294-307.

⁷⁸Thielman, 131.

⁷⁹If the OT context of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the sole basis of understanding the meaning of *house of Israel and house of Judah* as the recipients of the new covenant, then it must be concluded that the gentiles are excluded from these new covenant blessings. However, the rest of the Epistle makes it abundantly clear the members of God’s household are those who draw near to God through Christ, holding fast their confidence in Him unto the end (3:14; 4:3; 5:9; 7:25). Moreover, the people of God consists of those children whom God gave to Christ, those He calls His brethren (2:13, 17), who are also designated the church of the firstborn (12:23). There is no indication that all these verses should be interpreted exclusively as Jewish Christians. The context of the sermon as a whole interprets promises of the new covenant as applying to anyone, Jew or gentile, who comes to God through faith in Christ.

⁸⁰Allen, 447.

⁸¹Barry C. Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law: The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews 7:1—10:18* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 220-222.

everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' For all shall know Me, From the least to the greatest of them." In the Old Covenant, people became members of God's covenant community through physical birth (Gen. 17:10; Lev 12:13). The people all inherited the promise of physical land with physical borders (Gen. 15:18; Ex 32:18). The community itself was organized as a political state—a kingdom ruled by God (Deut. 17:14-20). This resulted in the nation of Israel being a spiritually mixed community where only a remnant knew the Lord in a salvific sense (Isa. 10:22; Hos 4:1; Heb. 3:10). Hence, there was the constant need in the OT for the exhortation "Know the Lord." The nature of the community under the New Covenant is vastly different. It is a believing community wherein everyone knows the Lord in a salvific sense, since all have been given new life by the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:26-27; Isa. 54:13). No longer is the covenant community an ethnic, geo-political nation, with definable borders; rather it is a multiethnic, transnational, spiritual body whose only definable land is the new heavens and new earth (Heb. 11:16).

The third deficiency in the Old Covenant which God corrects in the New is the full and complete forgiveness of sin. Quoting Jeremiah 31:34 in 8:12, the author writes: "For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more." God was merciful to His people in the Old Covenant (Exod. 34:6-7), a mercy expressed in the sacrificial system for the forgiveness of sin (Lev. 1—7; Num. 7). However, the forgiveness provided was only a temporary covering-up⁸² of sins, for in the perpetual repetition of the sacrifices

there was a reminder of sins year by year (10:3). The repetition of the sacrifices revealed the deficiency of the Law—"the Law made nothing perfect (7:19); for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:4). However, Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice of Himself, which inaugurated the New Covenant, achieved a full and permanent forgiveness of sin (9:12-14, 26, 28; 10:10, 14). In v. 13 the author sums up Jeremiah's prophecy: "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete." In other words, the moment God prophesied the coming of a new covenant, the first covenant or Mosaic covenant was made old/obsolete.⁸³ God never planned for the two covenants to co-exist; they are successive covenants within the history of redemption with the New succeeding and replacing the Old.⁸⁴ The author's final analysis: "But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." The two present tense participles "becoming obsolete" (*παλαιούμενον*) and "growing old" (*γηράσκον*) have led some to suggest that the author was prophesying the imminent destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and its sacrificial system.⁸⁵ However, this understanding would conflict with the previous sentence, when God said *new covenant*, the first was made *obsolete*, preventing the two from co-existing at the same time. A better understanding is to take both sentences as referring to a reflection of the effects of the New Covenant on the Old at the time when Jeremiah wrote his prophecy.⁸⁶

FINIS



Joe W. Kelley currently serves as Professor of New Testament Literature & Exegesis, Biblical and Systematic

Theology at Providence Theological Seminary. He holds degrees from Hardin-Simmons University (B.A., 1973), Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M., 1978), University of Central Texas (M.S., 1992), and Reformed Theological Seminary—Charlotte, N.C. (D.Min., 2010). From 1978 to 2008, he served as pastor of Killeen Bible Church in Killeen, TX.



⁸²The word for atonement in the OT כַּפַּר (*kaphar*) means to cover; Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 497.

⁸³*παλαιόω*/*palaioo*; the adverb *πάλαι*/*palai* occurs in 1:1 translated *long ago*

⁸⁴Schreiner, 254.

⁸⁵Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 418.

⁸⁶Schreiner, 255.

Questions Surrounding New Covenant Theology: Popular & Doctrinal¹

by Zachary S. Maxcey²

- Introduction -

In 1977, New Covenant Theology began to emerge as a developing theological system through the diligent labors of such men as S. Lewis Johnson, Gary D. Long, John Reisinger,

and Tom Wells. However, *what is New Covenant Theology?* In addition to the many explanations³ that have already been put forth, I suggest the following as a concise summary of New Covenant Theology (NCT): “a theological system which emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the nexus & climax of God’s plan in redemptive history, that the New Testament Scriptures have interpretive priority over the Old Testament Scriptures due to the former being the final revelation of God, and that the new

covenant truly is a new arrangement between God and man; this system also strives to maintain the biblical tension of continuity and discontinuity found in Scripture.”⁴ This eclectic theological system seeks to achieve a clearer and more accurate understanding of Scripture through the consistent application of the Protestant axiom of *sola Scriptura*,⁵ *Christotelic*⁶ (or Christocentric) *hermeneutics*⁷ and a *biblical theology*.⁸ As a theological system, NCT has a *great deal* in

¹This article is an adaptation of a paper presented on July 21, 2015 at Providence Theological Seminary’s 2015 Council on Biblical Theology.

²Zachary S. Maxcey is a Master of Divinity graduate of Providence Theological Seminary (www.ptstn.org). He currently serves as the PTS Social Media Administrator (<http://nct-blog.ptSCO.org/>) and the editor of the *Providence Theological Seminary Journal*.

³For example, Fred Zaspel describes New Covenant Theology both as a “recent attempt” to “gain a clearer understanding of the unfolding of Biblical redemptive history” and as a theological system occupying “middle ground” between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. Fred G. Zaspel, “A Brief Explanation of ‘New Covenant Theology’” (online article from Zaspel’s Biblical Studies); accessed October 20, 2015; available from <http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/hermeneutics/nct.htm>. A. Blake White writes: “New Covenant Theology is the system of theology that allows the Bible to have the ‘final say’ most consistently.” A. Blake White, *What is New Covenant Theology? An Introduction* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 1. Robert Plummer describes New Covenant Theology as “[t]he theological system that attempts to systematize the Bible through the lens of old and new covenant, especially focusing on the ‘newness’ brought in Jesus.” Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 155. Gary D. Long states that New Covenant Theology “may be defined broadly as *God’s eternal purpose progressively revealed in the commandments and promises of the biblical covenants of the OT and fulfilled in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.*” Gary D. Long, *NCT: Time for a More Accurate Way* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2013), 2.

⁴PTSJ 1.1 (Nov 2014): 3.

⁵*Sola Scriptura* (Latin: “by the Scriptures *alone*) is the Protestant theological maxim encapsulating the truth that Scripture (which is the plenary inspired, wholly infallible, wholly inerrant, and wholly sufficient Word of God) is the *sole* authority of faith & practice for the believer. PTSJ 1.1 (Nov 2014): 6.

⁶Peter Enns is generally held to have coined the term *Christotelic*. That being said, Enns’ view of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture is problematic. Although Providence Theological Seminary views *Christotelic* as a biblical term in light of Romans 10:4, it seeks to distance itself from Enns’ understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. A *Christotelic* hermeneutic, as defined by Providence Theological Seminary, assumes outright that the Old and New Testaments comprise the wholly inspired, wholly infallible, and wholly inerrant Word of God, which is the *sole* authority of faith and practice in the life of a believer.”

⁷The word *Christotelic* results from the combination of two Greek words: **Χριστός** (*Christos* – Christ) and **τέλος** (*telos* – end or goal). A *Christotelic hermeneutic* views the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate goal or end of God’s Word and seeks to consistently interpret all Scripture in view of this great truth. A *Christotelic* hermeneutic, as defined by Providence Theological Seminary, assumes outright that the Old and New Testaments together comprise the wholly inspired, wholly infallible, and wholly inerrant Word of God, which is the *sole* authority of faith and practice in the life of a believer. Furthermore, this particular method of interpretation emphasizes five principles: (1) the Lord Jesus Christ is the *nexus* of God’s plan in redemptive history, (2) *all* Scripture either refers to Christ *directly* (e.g. the Gospel narratives, messianic prophecies), refers to Christ *typologically*, or *prepares the way* for Christ by unfolding redemptive history which ultimately points to His person and work (e.g. the Flood, the calling of Abram), (3) *the New Testament Scriptures must have interpretive priority over the Old Testament Scriptures due to the former being the final revelation of God*, (4) an accurate analysis of a passage’s context is key: local, literary, historical, and canonical, and (5) the principle of historical-grammatical interpretation (guided by the first four principles).

⁸*Biblical Theology* can be generally defined in the following manner: “a theological approach that seeks to determine the theological teaching and distinctives of the individual biblical authors and understand them in light of the progressive revelation of God’s Word.” PTSJ 1.1 (Nov 2014): 14. Brian Rosner defines *biblical theology* in the following manner: “...theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible’s teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible’s overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.” See Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, Donald A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, IL:

common with both *Dispensational Theology*⁹ (DT) and *Covenant Theology*¹⁰ (CT). That being said, NCT does differ with these two systems at certain points. On account of these differences, questions have risen surrounding NCT– some which have resulted in confusion and misunderstanding. This article’s purpose is to provide helpful answers to these questions and, in doing so, hopefully dispel certain misunderstandings or misconceptions about NCT.

This article, therefore, attempts to answer some of the chief questions surrounding NCT. Each individual section that follows is intended to be a concise response to its respective question, not an exhaustive treatment. This work focuses upon twelve particular questions: (1) Does NCT view DT and CT as theologically monolithic? (2) Does NCT look first to theological systems rather than Scripture? (3) Is NCT a new or updated CT? (4) Does NCT equate the Old Covenant with the Old Testament Scriptures? (5) Does NCT deny the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures? (6) Is NCT Antinomian?

(7) Does NCT believe salvation was not the same in both Testaments? (8) Does NCT minimize or dismiss the Davidic Covenant? (9) Does NCT teach Replacement Theology? (10) Does NCT reject historic Protestant theological traditions? (11) Is NCT anti-creedal and anti-confessional? and (12) Is the Sabbath the only difference between NCT and 1689 Federalism?

– A Christian Discussion –

Sadly, on account of non-essential theological differences, Christians too often hurl harsh, bitter invectives against those whom they should unashamedly claim as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Pejorative labels such as *antinomian*, *legalist*, *anti-Semite*, *anti-Judaic*, *replacement theologian*, *heretic*, and others are frequently applied with little or no justification. In other instances, believers break fellowship or refuse to fellowship with fellow Christians due to differences in non-essential matters of the faith. Such behavior, not to mention the doctrinal divisions, both damages the public witness of the Body of Christ

and significantly hinders the proclamation of the Gospel. In the words of the Apostle James, “My brothers, this should not be” (Jas. 3:10).¹¹ As believers in Christ, we *must* be able to lock arms together on all essential matters of the Christian faith, while agreeing to disagree in non-essential or disputable matters. We *must* remember that famous statement of Rupertus Meldenus, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”¹² When we fail to do so, we stand in *direct* violation of Christ’s command to love one another as He loved us (John 13:34; Matt 22:39). As long as we accept the *absolute* essentials of the Christian faith, we should be able to agree to disagree with fellow believers on disputable matters (e.g. the non-essential differences between/within CT, DT, and NCT).¹³ *If we are unable to respectfully differ in Christian love with fellow believers in disputable theological matters, we, including this author, have absolutely no business communicating our theological opinions.* It is with this spirit that I approach the task of providing answers to the above questions.

InterVarsity Press, 2000), 10. Stephen Wellum succinctly describes biblical theology as “an attempt to unpack the redemptive-historical unfolding of Scripture.” Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: a Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 27.

⁹*Dispensational Theology* can be generally defined in the following manner: “a theological system that tends to emphasize the elements of discontinuity between the Old & New Testament Scriptures; this system divides redemptive history into a number of distinct time periods known as dispensations; among its other distinctives, generally speaking, are its sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, a literal premillennial kingdom, a pretribulation rapture, and a restoration of national Israel.” *PTSJ* 1.1 (Nov 2014): 8.

¹⁰*Covenant Theology* can be generally defined as follows: “a theological system stressing the elements of continuity between the Old & New Testament Scriptures; this system holds the concept of covenant to be the central, unifying theme of God’s Word – specifically its *covenant of works/covenant of grace* schema; among its other distinctives, generally speaking, are God’s one redemptive plan, the Decalogue as God’s unchanging, moral law (often understood as God’s “eternal” moral law), and Sunday as a Christian Sabbath; also known as Reformed Theology.” *PTSJ* 1.1 (Nov 2014): 7.

¹¹This quotation of James 3:10 is from the New International Version.

¹²Although frequently attributed to Augustine of Hippo, Schaff notes that the theological axiom “appears for the first time in German, A.D. 1627 and 1628” and “has recently been traced to Rupertus Meldenus, the otherwise unknown divine.” Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII: Modern Christianity and the German Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910; reprint 1974), 650.

¹³Although I maintain that Dispensational Theology (in both its Classical and Progressive forms) is not the most accurate theological paradigm with which to approach the Scriptures, I *wholeheartedly* assert that I share a great deal of theological common ground with both its versions of Dispensational Theology. Likewise, although I maintain that Covenant Theology (in both its *paedobaptistic* and *baptistic* forms) is not the most accurate theological paradigm with which to approach the Scriptures, I *wholeheartedly* assert that I share a great deal of theological common ground with both its versions of Covenant Theology.

This is *not* to say that non-essentials theological matters cannot and do not significantly affect one's understanding of Scripture and overall theology. Of course, they *can* and certainly *do* in many cases. *This notwithstanding, every Christian must zealously labor to be abundantly gracious when interacting with Christian brethren in all matters.* As Ephesians 4:1-3 declares: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (KJV).

- Question 1: Does NCT View DT & CT as Theologically Monolithic? -

One question surrounding NCT is whether it promotes a monolithic view of both DT and CT. Put differently, when NCT compares itself with these other two theological systems, the perception is that NCT ignores the eclectic variations within DT and CT. For instance, all proponents of CT, it is suggested, are assumed to be *paedobaptistic*, or all *baptistic* Covenant Theologians are assumed to uniformly agree with

the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession. Along the same lines, the perception is that NCT assumes that all advocates of DT unvaryingly subscribe to *Classical Dispensationalism*. So, does NCT view DT and CT to be theologically monolithic? In short, NCT does not.

NCT readily acknowledges that numerous variations exist in both DT and CT.¹⁴ Within each theological system, there are *two* principal branches out of which emerge various eclectic offshoots. For example, the two main divisions of CT are Westminster Federalism (as generally defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith) and 1689 Federalism (as generally defined in the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession). In a similar fashion, DT essentially divides into Classical Dispensationalism and Progressive Dispensationalism.¹⁵ To be fair, proponents of NCT have contributed to this misperception in that when NCT is defined in a *negative* sense – that is to say, how NCT differs from DT and CT as a theological system – NCT is usually contrasted with Classical Dispensationalism and Westminster Federalism.¹⁶ As a result, because NCT does not typically address 1689 Federalism

and Progressive Dispensationalism, it has been suggested that NCT does not fully understand these theological variations. However, this conclusion is much too hasty.

In this author's estimation, NCT advocates have primarily focused on contrasting NCT with Classical Dispensationalism and Westminster Federalism for at least *four* reasons.¹⁷ *First*, Classical Dispensationalism and Westminster Federalism represent the chief historical *exemplars* of their respective theological systems. *Second*, given that NCT has even more in common, theologically-speaking, with both Progressive Dispensationalism and 1689 Federalism, it is much easier, not to mention more efficient, to differentiate NCT from Classical Dispensationalism and Westminster Federalism. *Third*, it is often beyond the purpose and scope of many NCT messages, discourses, or treatises to compare / contrast NCT with multiple variations of DT and CT.¹⁸ That being said, as NCT continues to develop as a theological system, its proponents will do well to fairly and accurately demonstrate how NCT differs from other versions of DT and CT.¹⁹ *Finally*, if NCT can effectively rebut the *sine qua non*²⁰ of both

¹⁴For example, Wellum notes that "each view," referring to DT and CT, "is not monolithic," as "variations and debates" exist each theological system. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 26.

¹⁵Following Craig Blaising, Wellum describes three historical divisions within Dispensational Theology: *classic*, *revised*, and *progressive*. Using this theological taxonomy, the version of DT to which this author refers as Classical Dispensationalism would be *Revised* Dispensationalism.

¹⁶Although comparing/contrasting is a valid method for defining NCT as a theological system, NCT adherents *must* strive for balance. In short, we must define NCT not only in a negative sense (i.e. what it is not) but also in a positive sense (i.e. what it actually is). NCT must be defined *primarily* by Scripture and *secondarily* by comparing/contrasting it with CT and DT. Admittedly, in attempting to answer some of the chief questions surrounding New Covenant Theology, this article is defining NCT in a *negative* sense (i.e. what it is not).

¹⁷See Michael J. Vlach, "New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism," *TMSJ* 18/1 (Fall 2007): 202. Vlach, a Dispensational theologian, notes that NCT has principally focused on defining itself in contrast to CT as opposed to DT.

¹⁸It is *always* important to accurately assess the purpose and scope of any theological message, treatise, or discourse to determine why it may or may not address a particular topic or detail.

¹⁹See the comparison charts on the PTS Blog (<http://nct-blog.ptsc.org/comparison-charts/>) that depict the principal commonalities and differences between NCT (as defined by Providence Theological Seminary), CT (as defined by its two major branches – WCF Federalism and 1689 Federalism), and DT (as defined by its two major branches – Classical Dispensationalism and Progressive Dispensationalism).

²⁰Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines *sine qua non* in the following manner: "something absolutely indispensable or essential." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Springfield: Merriam Webster, 1993), 1095.

DT²¹ and CT,²² the respective subvariations in both systems matter little. In other words, if NCT can successfully refute the *essential* theological distinctives common to *all* variations of DT or CT, the various subvariations stand negated as well.

– Question 2: Does NCT Look First to Theological Systems Rather Than Scripture? –

Another question surrounding NCT is whether or not it looks *first* to theological systems rather than the Scriptures. Admittedly, NCT often defines itself in contrast to DT and CT. Having said that, it would be inaccurate to conclude from this that NCT looks first to theological systems rather than Scripture. Why? *First*,

NCT resoundingly affirms that the Scriptures constitute not only the plenary inspired, wholly infallible, wholly inerrant, and wholly sufficient Word of God but also the *sole* authority of faith and practice for the Christian believer. Simply put, its adherents strive to *consistently* apply the Protestant *principium* of *sola Scriptura* (Latin: “by the Scriptures *alone*”). In doing so, NCT endeavors to heed the biblical principle of not going beyond what is written (cf. 1 Cor. 14:6) – by seeking to *consistently* limit its own terminology (not to mention its theology) to the language of the biblical text. In the words of Gary D. Long, “The driving motive of NCT is *back to the Bible*.”²³ *Second*, NCT *adamantly* affirms that believers discover biblical truth *only*

through humble, Spirit-illuminated investigation of the Holy Scriptures.

In the spirit of Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:26), advocates of NCT seek to uphold another Protestant maxim: *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei* (Latin: “The Church reformed & always reforming according to the Word of God”; cf. 1 Thess. 5:21). In other words, New Covenant theologians earnestly hope to positively contribute to the ongoing reformation of the Church’s collective understanding of Scripture, the Gospel, and orthodox Christian theology. In doing so, NCT hopes to help break down the middle walls of doctrinal partition which exist within and between

²¹What is the *sine qua non* of DT? Charles C. Ryrie is particularly helpful: “The essence of Dispensationalism, then, is the distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist’s consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.” Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, IL: Moody 1966; reprint 1995, 2007), 46-8. See also Michael J. Vlach who holds to a six-fold *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism: “At this point, I would like to offer what I believe are the core essential beliefs of Dispensationalism. By ‘essential’ I mean foundational beliefs of Dispensationalism that are central and unique to the system, beliefs upon which the system stands or falls....1. Progressive revelation from the New Testament does not interpret or reinterpret Old Testament passages in a way that changes or cancels the original meaning of the Old Testament writers as determined by historical-grammatical hermeneutics....2. Types exist but national Israel is not a type that is superseded by the church....3. Israel and the church are distinct, thus, the church cannot be identified as the new or true Israel....4. There is both spiritual unity in salvation between Jews and Gentiles and a future role for Israel as a nation....5. The nation Israel will be both saved and restored with a unique identity and function in a future millennial kingdom upon the earth....6. There are multiple senses of ‘seed of Abraham’, thus, the church’s identification as ‘seed of Abraham’ does not cancel God’s promises to the believing Jewish ‘seed of Abraham.’” Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles, Theological Studies Press, 2008), 18-30.

²²What is the *sine qua non* of CT? It is the *covenantal superstructure*, that is to say, the theological framework through which CT, generally speaking, understands redemptive history: *pactum salutis* (the Covenant of Redemption), *foederus operum* (the Covenant of Works), and *foederus gratiae* (the Covenant of Grace). It is necessary to note there are significant *differences* regarding the *covenantal superstructure* between the two main branches of CT: Westminster Federalism and 1689 Federalism. R.C. Sproul exemplifies the Westminster Federalist understanding of the *covenantal superstructure*: “1. God entered into a covenant of works with Adam and Eve. 2. All humans are inescapably related to God’s covenant of works. 3. All human beings are violators of the covenant of works. 4. Jesus fulfilled the covenant of works. 5. The covenant of grace provides us with the merits of Christ by which the terms of the covenant of works are satisfied.” Robert C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 1992), 73. Westminster Federalism teaches that the *covenantal superstructure* theologically buttresses the following doctrinal distinctives: (1) *infant baptism*; (2) the *transcovenantal* nature of the Decalogue; (3) the Church existing in the Old Testament; and (4) Sunday as the New Covenant equivalent of the Old Covenant Sabbath. Although 1689 Federalists generally agree with Westminster Federalists regarding the *pactum salutis* and *foederus operum*, they differ with the Westminster Confession’s presentation of the ‘covenant of grace’ as *one covenant with multiple administrations*. Instead, modern 1689 Federalists assert that the *foederus gratiae* is the New Covenant *in substance*. See Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 64-65, 77, 82.

²³Gary D. Long, *NCT: Time for a More Accurate Way* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2013), 4.

CT and DT.²⁴ In saying that NCT seeks to offer a *via media* (Latin: “a middle way”) between these two theological systems, NCT is not attempting to imply, convey, or teach that seeking a middle way between two systems is the way to discover Scriptural truth. Again, NCT *adamantly* affirms that believers *only* discover biblical truth through humble, Spirit-illuminated investigation of God’s revelation in the Scriptures.

– Question 3: Is NCT a New or Updated CT? –

A third question surrounding NCT is whether it is a new or updated version of Covenant Theology (CT). In short, NCT *decisively* differentiates itself from CT (in all its forms) as it does *not* affirm the *sine qua non* of CT.²⁵ Having said that, what is the *sine qua non* of CT? It is CT’s *covenantal superstructure*, i.e., the theological

framework through which CT, generally speaking, understands redemptive history: *pactum salutis* (the Covenant of Redemption), *foederus operum* (the Covenant of Works), and *foederus gratiae*²⁶ (the Covenant of Grace). This *covenantal schema* theologically buttresses the following doctrinal distinctives that proponents of CT champion to varying degrees: (1) *infant baptism* [Westminster Federalism]; (2) the

²⁴Stephen Wellum wisely notes that “one must be careful not to overplay the differences between these views, for when it comes to a basic understanding of the gospel, they agree more than they disagree.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 39. On page 24, Wellum also writes: “It is probably at these points—ecclesiology and eschatology—that we see the greatest differences between dispensational and covenant theology.” Hal Brunson states that “covenantalism and Dispensationalism wobble upon the same rickety bridge—biological descendants are the rightful heirs of the covenant of salvation.” He continues: “...the dispensationalist commits an eschatological error—the covenant finds its ultimate fulfillment in the biological descendant of the ethnic Jew, and the paedobaptist commits an ecclesiastical error—the covenant finds its immediate fulfillment in the biological descendant of the Christian parent.” See Hal Brunson, *The Rickety Bridge and the Broken Mirror: Two Parables of Paedobaptism and One Parable of the Death of Christ* (New York: iUniverse, 2007), 13. Brunson argues two pivotal points: (1) the adoption of the *biological principle* by both paedobaptistic CT (i.e., Westminster Federalism) and DT stems from their understanding of the biblical covenants—the Abrahamic Covenant, in particular; and (2) in both systems, the *biological principle* results in *presumptive election*. Brunson describes presumptive election in the following manner: “‘Presumptive election’ asserts that, like the ethnic Jew, a Christian parent should *presume* that God has elected his child unto salvation and, based upon that presumption, sprinkle his child.” Ibid., 14.

²⁵Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum describe the “species of ‘new covenant theology’” outlined in their seminal work *Kingdom through Covenant* as “progressive covenantalism.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 24. This is not to indicate that NCT is a *new* or *updated* version of CT. Rather, the name was chosen to distinguish their version from other questionable understandings of NCT.

²⁶Though a Reformed Baptist, Wayne Grudem describes CT’s *covenant of grace* in a manner similar to Westminster Federalism (i.e. *one covenant, multiple administrations*): “The legal agreement between God and man, established by God after the fall of Adam, whereby man could be saved. Although the specific provisions of this covenant varied at different times during redemptive history, the essential condition of requiring faith in Christ the redeemer remained the same.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 1239. Another explanation of the post-fall *covenant of grace* can be found in Chapter VII of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF): “(3) Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (4) This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed. (5) This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament. (6) Under the Gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.” Although 1689 Federalists generally agree with Westminster Federalists regarding the *pactum salutis* and *foederus operum*, they overwhelmingly reject the Westminster Confession’s presentation of the ‘covenant of grace’ as *one covenant with multiple administrations*. Instead, modern 1689 Federalists assert that the *foederus gratiae* is the New Covenant *in substance*. See Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 64–65, 77, 82. Admittedly, 1689 Federalism’s view of the *foederus gratiae* is much closer to NCT than that of Westminster Federalism. That being said, substantial differences remain between 1689 Federalism and NCT on this particular point. Modern 1689 Federalists both identify the *foederus gratiae* as the New Covenant and teach that the *foederus gratiae* was revealed to Adam in the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15. In contradistinction, all forms of NCT do not identify the New Covenant as the *foederus gratiae*. However, there is significant debate within NCT circles as to whether or not Genesis 3:15 has a covenant in view. Some NCT proponents hold the view that the *protoevangelium* is not a

transcovenantal nature of the Decalogue [Westminster Federalism & 1689 Federalism]; (3) the Church existing in the Old Testament [Westminster Federalism]; and (4) Sunday as the New Covenant equivalent of the Old Covenant Sabbath [Westminster Federalism & 1689 Federalism]. NCT rejects not only CT's theologically-deduced *covenantal superstructure* but also the aforementioned doctrinal distinctives. For example, Dennis Swanson, a Dispensational theologian, aptly writes:

NCT has been characterized as being to Covenant Theology what Progressive Dispensationalism is to Traditional or Classic Dispensationalism. However, this assessment is not accurate. Despite its differences with the traditional or classic position, Progressive Dispensationalism still retains a measure of the core Israel-church discontinuity with the resulting ecclesiological and eschatological schemes essentially intact. On the other hand, NCT entirely abandons all the distinctive fundamentals of Covenant Theology, so that no connection remains or is possible.²⁷

In short, NCT is not simply a *new* Covenant Theology. Rather, it is *New Covenant* Theology, i.e., the theology of the New Covenant.

One factor in particular that has

led many to ask this particular question is that NCT has principally emerged, historically speaking, from the theological confines of CT. In fact, this is the assessment of Michael Vlach, another Dispensational theologian: "NCT appears primarily to be a movement away from CT."²⁸ Vlach concludes this for *two* chief reasons: (1) "New Covenant theologians...have devoted most of their attention so far to explaining and defending their system in contrast to CT" and (2) "...some of the key theologians of NCT received their theological training within an environment of CT."²⁹ To be sure, Vlach's assessment is both fair and generally accurate. However, many adherents of NCT, such as this author, have emerged from a predominantly Dispensational background.

Just as it would be inaccurate to characterize NCT as a *new* or *updated* version of CT, it would also be inaccurate to characterize NCT as an even *more progressive* iteration of DT. How so? NCT *decisively* differentiates itself from DT (in all its forms) as it does not accept the latter's *sine qua non*, i.e., its sharp distinction between Israel and the Church.³⁰ To be fair, at the time of this writing, this author has yet to encounter a description of NCT as a *new, updated, or more progressive* version of DT.

Having stated that NCT does

not accept the *sine qua non* of both CT and DT, it is fitting to attempt an explanation of NCT's indispensable elements. The *sine qua non* of NCT can be defined as the *consistent Christotelic*³¹ interpretation of the OT in light of the NT (Luke 24:27, 44; Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 1:20) which results in the following theological distinctives: **(1) the plan of God:** one plan of redemption, centered in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:10; 2 Cor. 1:20; Col. 1:18), implemented according to God's eternal purpose (Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9), and securing the salvation of God's elect (Rom. 8:28-32); **(2) the biblical covenants:**³² the covenants of Scripture progressively unfold God's kingdom purpose (Matt. 6:10) in history, culminating in the New Covenant; **(3) the Old Covenant:** the *conditional* (Exod. 19:5-6) treaty that God established with the ethnic descendants of Jacob at Mount Sinai – a covenant which formed *the nation* of Israel as a geopolitical entity, the sign of which was the Sabbath (Exod. 31:15-17), which was *temporary* in terms of its purpose and duration (Heb. 8:7-13), and which was superseded by the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-33); **(4) the New Covenant:** the promised everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20) established by Christ Jesus (Luke 22:20; Dan. 9:26-27) that fulfills all preceding biblical covenants – a covenant in which all believers have full forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34),

covenant at all but rather God's promise of redemption. Others teach that the *protoevangelium* does constitute the heart of covenant – a pre-fall covenant that ultimately anticipates the New Covenant yet is *wholly* distinct from it. In addition, NCT maintains that 1689 Federalism's understanding of the *foederus gratiae* still flattens the redemptive-historical distinctions of the biblical covenants, though *considerably* less than Westminster Federalism. For example, 1689 Federalism teaches that all Old Testament saints received the indwelling Holy Spirit prior to Pentecost, a teaching which runs counter to such texts as John 7:38-39; 14:16-17; Luke 24:49; and Acts 1:4-5,8. By identifying the *protoevangelium* of Gen. 3:15 as the *foederus gratiae* which in substance is the New Covenant, 1689 Federalists apply the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a promise unique to the New Covenant age, to the Old Testament saints before Pentecost. Thus, the redemptive-historical distinctions of the biblical covenants are 'flattened'.

²⁷Dennis Swanson, "Introduction to New Covenant Theology," *TMSJ* 18/1 (Fall 2007): 158.

²⁸Michael J. Vlach, "New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism," *TMSJ* 18/1 (Fall 2007): 202.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰See Footnote 21 for a fuller description of the *sine qua non* of DT.

³¹See Footnotes 6 and 7 for a fuller explanation of a *Christotelic* hermeneutic.

³²Stephen Wellum rightly argues that "the biblical covenants form the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture, and apart from understanding each biblical covenant in its historical context and then in its relation to the fulfillment of all of the covenants in Christ, we will ultimately misunderstand the overall message of the Bible." Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 21.

are *permanently* indwelt by the Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27; Eph. 1:13-14), and are empowered by the Spirit to please God (Jer. 31:31-33; Phil. 2:12-13); **(5) the people of God:** all God's elect, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:15), first formed as the body of Christ, which is the Church, at Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-41), not before (John 7:39; 17:21; Col. 1:26-27; Heb. 11:39-40), as one corporate spiritual body in New Covenant union with Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:19-21; Col. 1:18, 24); **(6) the nation of Israel:** the ethnic descendants of Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15) formed into a geopolitical entity at Sinai via the Old Covenant (Exod. 19:5-6), comprised of *both* believers and unbelievers (1 Cor. 10:1-5; Heb. 3:16-4:2), eschatologically fulfilled in Christ – *the True Israel* (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15) – and His Church (Exod. 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9), the believing remnant (Rom. 9:27; 11:5) of which was transformed into the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-10, 41), and which awaits a future *spiritual* restoration (Amos 9:8) in the form of a massive, end-time ingathering of *elect* Jews into the Church at Christ's Parousia (Rom. 11:12, 15, 25-27); **(7) the law of God:** the two greatest commandments – love of God and neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40) – constitute God's *absolute* or *innate law*, which is righteous, unchanging, and instinctively known by man (Rom. 2:14-15) created in God's image (Gen. 1:27), and of which each *system of covenantal law* is a temporary, historical outworking (Heb. 7:12) in accordance with God's eternal purpose (Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9); **(8) the Law of Moses:** the *covenantal* outworking of God's *absolute* law under the Old Covenant–

the exhaustive, *indivisible* (Jas. 2:10; Gal. 5:3) legal code, summed up in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:28), covenantally binding upon *the nation of Israel* (Exod. 19:5-6; 24:3), temporary in its duration (Heb. 7:11-12; Col. 2:14), and fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:4; Matt. 5:17-18; Col. 2:16-17); **(9) the Law of Christ:** the *covenantal* outworking of God's *absolute* law under the New Covenant – the gracious law of the New Covenant (Rom. 6:14), which is covenantally binding upon the Church (1 Cor. 9:20-21) and consists of the *law of love* (Matt. 5:44; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 2:8; Rom. 13:8-10), *the example of the Lord Jesus Christ* (John 13:34; Phil. 2:4-12), *Christ's commands and teachings* (Matt. 28:20; 2 Pet. 3:2), *the commands and teachings of the New Testament Scriptures* (2 Pet. 3:2; Eph. 2:20; Jude 1:17; 1 John 5:3), and *all Scripture interpreted in light of Jesus Christ* (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:27, 44; 2 Tim. 3:16-17); **(10) the Kingdom of God:** the everlasting reign of God over the universe and His people, progressively unfolded via the biblical covenants – ultimately realized in the messianic reign of Jesus Christ in heaven with His saints (Heb. 1:1-4; Rev. 20:4; Eph. 2:6), that was eschatologically inaugurated at His ascension (Dan. 7:13-14) in fulfillment of the biblical covenants (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Acts 2:25-36), is advanced through the Spirit-empowered preaching of the Gospel (Acts 1:7-8), and will be consummated in the new heavens and new earth at the Second Coming when Christ subdues all His enemies (1 Cor. 15:24-28).³³

– Question 4: Does NCT Equate the Old Covenant with the Old Testament Scriptures? –

Another question surrounding NCT is whether it equates the Old Covenant with the Old Testament Scriptures. In short, the theological system does not equate the two. NCT defines the Old Covenant as the *conditional* (Exod. 19:5-6) treaty which God established with the ethnic descendants of Jacob at Mount Sinai – a covenant which formed *the nation* of Israel as a geopolitical entity, the sign of which was the Sabbath (Exod. 31:15-17), which was *temporary* in terms of its purpose and duration (Heb. 8:7-13), and which was superseded by the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-33). That being said, NCT defines the Old Testament Scriptures as the first thirty-nine books of the Bible (Genesis to Malachi), which together with the New Testament Scriptures,³⁴ comprise the *wholly* inspired, *wholly* infallible, and *wholly* inerrant Word of God– the *sole* authority of faith and practice in the life of a believer. John Reisinger is particularly helpful here: “There is a clear distinction between the *Old Testament*, meaning the thirty-nine books of the Bible written before Christ came, and the *Old Covenant*, meaning the legal covenant that God put Israel under at Sinai. These two nouns (*testament* and *covenant*) are not synonyms for the same thing, but name two radically and distinctly different things.”³⁵ Elsewhere, he writes: “Conflating the literary use and the linguistic use of the terms Old Covenant/Old Testament and New Covenant/New Testament creates problems for understanding what the Bible means.

³³Recounting a telephone conversation between himself and Fred Zaspel, Dennis Swanson writes: “When asked what the *sine qua non* of NCT is, Zaspel replied, ‘I’m not sure NCT can be reduced to that level.’” See Dennis Swanson, “Introduction to New Covenant Theology,” *TMSJ* 18/1 (Fall 2007): 157. It is difficult to define a *sine qua non* for NCT as this author’s attempt clearly demonstrates.

³⁴Regarding the New Testament Scriptures, Robert L. Plummer notes: “The New Testament is so named because it is a witness to the fulfillment of God’s promise of a new covenant (Latin: *testamentum*), instituted and centered on the person of Jesus (Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 22:20). Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 161.

³⁵John G. Reisinger, *Continuity and Discontinuity* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2011), 4.

The phrases ‘Old and New Testament’ describe a humanly-devised division in our Bible. It is purely a literary term—convenient, but not inspired.”³⁶ Again, NCT does *not* equate the Old Covenant with the Old Testament Scriptures.

– Question 5: Does NCT Deny the Authority of the Old Testament Scriptures? –

A fifth question surrounding NCT is whether it, as a theological system, undermines, minimizes or denies altogether the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. This question is typically asked for one of three reasons. It may be presented as a logical outworking of the previous question, where it is assumed that NCT equates the Old Covenant with the Old Testament Scriptures. To be sure, the Old Covenant was abrogated by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Heb. 8:13). *Not so with the Old Testament Scriptures.* NCT neither equates the Old Covenant with the Old Testament Scriptures nor teaches that the Old Testament Scriptures have been abolished.

It is also questioned whether NCT undermines or minimizes the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures due to its hermeneutics. On what grounds? In short, because NCT emphasizes that *the New Testament Scriptures must have interpretive priority over the Old Testament Scriptures due to the former being the final revelation of God.* Vlach differs with this approach: “That approach goes beyond the idea

of progressive revelation to holding that the NT actually jettisons the original historical-grammatical sense of certain OT passages. Thus, according to NCT..., at times the NT overrides or supersedes the original authorial intent of the OT authors. This is particularly true of OT passages that teach the restoration of the nation Israel.”³⁷ Elsewhere, Vlach states, “With the hermeneutics of...NCT, the OT is muted.”³⁸ Again, he writes: “Though acknowledging the varied applications that the NT writers make in using the OT, one is not justified in jettisoning the authorial intent of the OT writers. The approach of NCT..., at times, casts doubt on the integrity of some OT texts. It also casts doubt on the perspicuity of the OT.”³⁹ William D. Barrick likewise states: “Any hermeneutic that begins with the assumption that the NT fulfillment alters OT fulfillment must beware of implying that the NT contradicts or revises the OT. The NT complements the OT, contributes to the teachings of the OT, and explains the OT in context.”⁴⁰ These brethren appear to reframe the theological issue from one of biblical hermeneutics to one involving the very nature of the Scriptures themselves. The *real* issue is *not* the infallibility or authority of the Old Testament, but rather *the manner in which the OT must be interpreted* (i.e. hermeneutics).

NCT proponents maintain that there are sound, biblical reasons for their view that the New Testament Scriptures must have interpretive priority over the Old Testament

their view that the New Testament Scriptures must have interpretive priority over the Old Testament Scriptures. *First*, the Lord Jesus Christ understood the message of Scripture to be about Himself (John 5:39, 46; Matt. 5:17; 2 Cor. 1:20; Luke 24:27, 44). Tom Wells appropriately states, “The Lord Jesus...treated the Old Testament as a sign that pointed to him.”⁴¹ Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum also declare in *Kingdom through Covenant* that within Scripture is “an underlying story line, beginning in creation and moving to the new creation which unfolds God’s plan centered and culminated in Jesus Christ.”⁴² *Second*, the Apostles and writers of the New Testament interpreted the Old Testament in light of Christ, *as He had taught them* (John 1:45; Acts 3:18, 24; 26:22-23; 28:23; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Rom. 10:4). *Third*, the New Testament revelation is a higher, *clearer* revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ than the Old Testament Scriptures. This is *not* to say that the Old Testament should be discarded, devalued, or considered less the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17) than the New Testament. Rather, it is to say that the New Testament *must* have *interpretive* priority over the Old *due to the former being the final revelation of God.* Commenting on Hebrews 1:1-2, Fred G. Zaspel notes, “God has spoken climactically and most fully in his Son. We have in Jesus Christ God’s fullest—indeed, his final—revelation.”⁴³ In other words, “New Testament revelation, due to its finality, must be allowed to speak first on every issue that it addresses.”⁴⁴ As a result, Christians “must read the Old in the

³⁶Ibid., 23.

³⁷Vlach, “New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism,” 213.

³⁸Ibid., 217.

³⁹Ibid., 214.

⁴⁰William D. Barrick, “New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants,” *TMSJ* 18/1 (Fall 2007): 171.

⁴¹Tom Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ: Why Christians Turn to Jesus First – A Study in New Covenant Theology* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2005), 61.

⁴²Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 91.

⁴³Tom Wells and Fred G. Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002), 35.

⁴⁴Ibid., 7.

light of the New, so that the Lord Jesus has the first and the last word.”⁴⁵ John Reisinger also describes the *interpretive* priority of New Testament: “First, we consider the promise/prophesy as stated in its Old Testament text. Next, we ask questions of that text. Finally, we turn to the New Testament for answers to those questions.”⁴⁶ Consider also the Transfiguration account of Luke 9:28-36, in which God the Father says, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Luke 9:34-35, KJV).

Fourth, Scripture unequivocally teaches that God the Father’s ultimate purpose is to glorify His Beloved Son (Col. 1:16-18; Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 1:2). In Colossians 1:18, the Apostle Paul effectively sums up God the Father’s purpose: that Christ “might come to have first place in everything.” Consider Paul’s declaration: *Christ is to have first place in everything*. The implications of this statement are *staggering*: God the Father desires Christ to have first place in the Church, in the world, in our nations, in our states, in our cities, in our local churches, in our public lives, in our private lives, in our thoughts, in our hearts, in our minds, in our jobs, in our schools, in our relationships, in our leisure time, in our spiritual disciplines, in our marriages, *and in our interpretation of Scripture*. The Lord Jesus Christ must have first place in our interpretation of Scripture. *Finally*, the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit (who inspired the writers of Scripture) to reveal and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ also demonstrates

the necessity of a *Christotelic* hermeneutic for accurate biblical interpretation (John 14:26; 16:12-15; 2 Pet. 1:21).

NCT also maintains the Old Testament *Scriptures* are *authoritative* for the New Covenant believer. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 declares: “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (KJV). Consider also Matthew 5:17-18: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (KJV). Thus, the Old Testament *Scriptures* (i.e., the Law and the Prophets) and the New Testament *Scriptures* together comprise God’s infallible and authoritative communication to mankind. To be sure, Christians are neither members of the Old Covenant nor under its authority. However, Christians are *still* under the authority of the Old Testament *Scriptures* (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Reisinger notes: “Christians, while being free from the Mosaic law (the Old Covenant), are not free from the Old Testament. Failure to maintain this distinction will result in confusion and can lead either to legalism or to antinomianism.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere, he states that “the New Covenant has

replaced the Old *Covenant* in totality, but it has not replaced the God-breathed Old *Testament Scriptures*.”⁴⁸

- Question 6: Is NCT Antinomian? -

Another question is whether or not NCT promotes *antinomianism*. This particular one results from a misconception regarding NCT’s position on *the Law of Moses* and the Ten Commandments. As stated above, proponents of NCT define the Law of Moses as the *covenantal* outworking of God’s absolute law under the Old Covenant – the exhaustive, *indivisible* (Jas. 2:10; Gal. 5:3) legal code, summed up in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:28), covenantally binding upon *the nation of Israel* (Exod. 19:5-6; 24:3), temporary in its duration (Heb. 7:11-12; Col. 2:14), and fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:4; Matt. 5:17-18; Col. 2:16-17).⁴⁹ Concerning the Decalogue, NCT understands the Ten Commandments to be *the summary statement* of the Law of Moses (see Exod. 34:28). As a result, the Ten Commandments are effectively synonymous with the Law of Moses, not to mention the Old Covenant itself. As such, the Ten Commandments *cannot* be extricated, extracted, or excised *in any sense* from the Law of Moses. Thus, when the Old Covenant was abolished (Heb. 8:13), the Law of Moses *along with the Ten Commandments* was abolished *as a system of covenantal law*.

NCT does *not* reject the

⁴⁵Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ*, 70.

⁴⁶Reisinger, John G. *New Covenant Theology & Prophecy* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 23

⁴⁷Ibid., 4.

⁴⁸Ibid., 14.

⁴⁹See Gary D. Long, *Biblical Law and Ethics: Absolute and Covenantal: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Matthew 5:17-20* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2009), 86. Long writes: “...God’s absolute law- individually and personally binds all mankind by virtue of their being moral creatures of God regardless of dispensational and covenantal distinctions. But God’s covenant law corporately and covenantally binds only those who are in the covenant community according to the terms of the covenant in force at a specified time within redemptive history. In its absolute sense, then, God’s law is ethically and morally binding upon all mankind as individuals forever- whether Jew or Gentile (Rom. 2:12-15), whether living in the Old or New dispensation era (Matt. 22:36-40). But in its covenantal sense, God’s law is only binding upon a covenant community so long as that specified covenant is in force. The law of Moses as covenant law was binding upon the physical seed of Abraham under the Old Covenant dispensation. The law of Christ is binding upon the spiritual seed of Abraham under the New Covenant dispensation.”

existence of *transcovenantal* law.⁵⁰ However, it refuses to equate such law, which it calls *the absolute, unchanging law of God*, with the Ten Commandments – something most variations of Covenant Theology generally do. NCT asserts that Matthew 22:36-40 unmistakably identifies the absolute, unchanging law of God. In this passage, Christ Jesus declares that “all the Law and the Prophets” depend (or hang) “on these two greatest commandments” – that is to say, love of God and love of neighbor. Note that He does not say that the Law and the Prophets depend upon the Ten Commandments; rather, He states that the Law and the Prophets (which includes the Ten Commandments) depends upon the two greatest commandments. In other words, Christ Jesus clearly identifies the two greatest commandments, *not* the Ten Commandments, as *transcending* the Law and the Prophets. Thus, the Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments) constitute a *temporary covenantal* outworking of the two greatest commandments, i.e., love of God and love of neighbor. Accordingly, Providence Theological Seminary defines *the absolute law of God* in the following manner: the two greatest commandments – love of God and neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40) – constitute God’s *absolute* or *innate* law, which is righteous, unchanging, and instinctively known by man (Rom. 2:14-15) created in God’s

image (Gen. 1:27), and of which each *system of covenantal law* is a temporary, historical outworking (Heb. 7:12) in accordance with God’s eternal purpose (Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9).

In accordance with 1 Corinthians 9:20-21, proponents of NCT argue that the members of the New Covenant are “not without the law of God,” as they are covenantally obligated to obey the Law of Christ, *not* the Law of Moses as a *system of law*. “[W]e must recognize that the NT speaks of ‘the law of Christ’ as the rule of the Christian (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), whatever is intended by this phrase.”⁵¹ Providence Theological Seminary, a NCT institution, defines *the Law of Christ* in the following manner: the *covenantal* outworking of God’s *absolute law* under the New Covenant – the gracious law of the New Covenant (Rom. 6:14), which is covenantally binding upon the *Church* (1 Cor. 9:20-21) and consists of *the law of love* (Matt. 5:44; Gal. 6:2; Jas. 2:8; Rom. 13:8-10), *the example of the Lord Jesus Christ* (John 13:34; Phil. 2:4-12), *Christ’s commands and teachings* (Matt. 28:20; 2 Pet. 3:2), *the commands and teachings of the New Testament Scriptures* (2 Pet. 3:2; Eph. 2:20; Jude 1:17; 1 John 5:3), and *all Scripture interpreted in light of Jesus Christ* (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:27,44; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). NCT advocates *wholeheartedly* acknowledge that NC believers are not only “not under the

Law” of Moses (1 Cor. 9:20-21) but also are “not without the law of God” since they are under the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is a *new* law (Heb. 7:12), a *higher* law (Matt. 5:20), and a *better* law (Matt. 5:21-48; Heb. 7:19) than the Law of Moses with its Ten Commandments. In view of these facts, charges of *antinomianism* against NCT are unfounded.⁵²

– Question 7: Does NCT not teach that Salvation was the same in both Testaments? –

NCT has at times been questioned for implying or openly teaching that salvation was not identical for believers in the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Barrick writes: “NCT holds that the Israelites redeemed from Egypt were physically redeemed, but not spiritually redeemed because the Mosaic Covenant was based on works. This leads to the strange position that OT saints were not saved until after the death and resurrection of Christ.”⁵³ Barrick’s analysis falls short in that it does not fully grasp what NCT teaches regarding the nature of the Mosaic Covenant and the nation of Israel. Hence, he concludes that NCT promotes the view that salvation was not the same for Old and New Testament believers.

NCT, however, unashamedly teaches that Old Testament saints were saved *in the exact same manner* as New Testament saints: *by grace*

⁵⁰Tom Wells, a proponent of NCT, has at times used the term moral law to describe the absolute law of God, which is *transcovenantal* and *unchanging*. See Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, 75, 164-6, 176-7. Such usage entertains confusion as to how NCT understands the *law of God*. NCT affirms that the tripartite distinction (i.e., moral law, civil law, ceremonial law) can be helpful – *strictly* as far as the *internal legal categories* of the Mosaic Law are concerned. NCT also emphasizes that the Old Testament Israelite was morally obligated to keep the entire Law of Moses. Put differently, it views the Law of Moses including the Ten Commandments as an exhaustive, *indivisible* (Jas. 2:10; Gal. 5:3) legal code.

⁵¹Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, 66.

⁵²Referencing R. Scott Clark’s article “NCT tends toward antinomianism,” Michael J. Vlach fairly states: “This view that the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law has led to the charge of lawlessness or antinomianism by some. Many Dispensationalists, too, have faced this charge for their view that the NT Christian is not under the Mosaic Law but under the Law of Christ. Now New Covenant theologians are facing this accusation as well. The charge is baseless, however. It is not as though New Covenant theologians (and Dispensationalists) are saying that Christians are not bound to any law—they are. But there is a new law for the New Covenant era—the Law of Christ, which consists of the commands, principles, and precepts of the NT. Thus, it cannot rightfully be claimed that New Covenant theologians are antinomians.” See Vlach, “New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism,” 211.

⁵³Barrick, “New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants,” 165.

alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Gary D. Long writes: "Paul, like Abraham, had believed the gospel, and God had accounted their faith for righteousness. The way of salvation was the same in both the Old and New Testaments: justification by faith alone. God had declared them righteous by faith that it might be by grace (Rom. 4:16). That is why Paul gloried in the cross of Christ (6:14)."⁵⁴ In fact, NCT *wholeheartedly* agrees with Barrick's own statement regarding salvation: "...OT and NT believers are all saved by the same grace through the same faith in the same Savior and His atoning work. OT saints looked forward to Christ's atoning work and the NT saint looks back on it – but it is still forgiveness of sins and eternal life as the outcome, based upon the work of Christ."⁵⁵ NCT emphatically declares that *all* saints throughout history are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Regarding the Mosaic Covenant, NCT teaches the Old Covenant was a *conditional* (Exod. 19:5-6) treaty which God established with the ethnic descendants of Jacob at Mount Sinai – a covenant which formed *the nation* of Israel as a geopolitical entity, the sign of which was the Sabbath (Exod. 31:15-17), which was *temporary* in terms of its purpose and duration (Heb. 8:7-13), and which was superseded by the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-33). On what grounds was the Old Covenant *conditional*? Exodus 19:5-6 declares: "Now therefore, if ye will obey My Voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth *is* Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (KJV). Notice the very *clear* cause and effect relationship in God's

declaration to the people of Israel: *if* they will obey Him and keep His covenant, *then* they will be His very own possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Thus, the Old Covenant set *national* Israel apart from all other nations as God's *special covenant* people (cf. Eph. 2:11-16) on the condition of her obedience.

Did Israel fulfill her covenantal obligations? No, she did not. While Moses was atop Mt. Sinai with God, the Israelites fashioned a golden calf and worshipped it saying, "These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 32:8, KJV). When Moses descended the mountain and witnessed this harlotry with his own eyes, he smashed the first set of the Ten Commandments, symbolizing Israel's breach of the covenant (32:19). After destroying the calf of gold (32:20), he gathered the Levites who went through the camp slaying "about three thousand men" (32:28). Sadly, such harlotry largely defines Israel's history as God's *special covenant* people. In Jeremiah 31:32, Yahweh through the prophet Jeremiah described the Old Covenant as "the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them" (KJV). Although God punished Israel whenever the nation broke covenant with Him, He would always raise up members of Israel's elect remnant to renew the covenant until the time He saw fit to fulfill it in Christ Jesus.

Under the Old Covenant, Israel *was* a mixed multitude. While there always existed a believing remnant in the nation of Israel (Rom. 11:5), the

vast majority of Israelites were unbelievers. Consider Jeremiah 9:26b: "all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart" (KJV). Other Scripture passages which evince this fact are Hebrews 3:15-19, 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, Isaiah 1:9; Romans 9:29, etc. Unlike the New Covenant, the Old Covenant did *not* guarantee to its members the internal work of the Spirit. In other words, membership in the Old Covenant community *in no way* indicated that an Israelite was spiritually redeemed and empowered by the Spirit to keep the Torah, live righteously, and please God. It is precisely for this reason that the Apostle Paul describes the Old Covenant as a "ministry of death" (2 Cor. 3:7) and "condemnation" (2 Cor. 3:9). The internal working of the Spirit was only experienced by a small remnant of the OC community to whom God freely and sovereignly chose to extend it in partial fulfillment of the spiritual promises made to Abraham. That being said, those individual Israelites who were recipients of God's sovereign grace in the Old Testament era experienced salvation *immediately* upon the exercise of Spirit-wrought faith.

- Question 8: Question 8: Does NCT Minimize or Dismiss the Davidic Covenant? -

Another question circulating with regard to NCT is whether or not its proponents minimize or dismiss the Davidic Covenant. For example, Barrick writes: "This covenant seems to be largely ignored by NCT."⁵⁶ Elsewhere, he notes that "when it comes to listing those other covenants, it [NCT] includes only the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants," highlighting a supposed "[a]bsence of a reference to the Davidic Covenant

⁵⁴Gary D. Long, "The Grace of God and Departures from It," *PTSJ* 1.2 (Feb 2015): 9.

⁵⁵Barrick, "New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants," 177.

⁵⁶Ibid., 178.

by NCT writers”⁵⁷ [brackets mine]. This criticism is without foundation and results from too narrow of a sampling of NCT writings. Rather, NCT heartily acknowledges the Davidic Covenant to be one of the most important biblical covenants.

In fact, the importance of the Davidic Covenant in the plotline of Scripture cannot be overstated. Wellum’s insight is helpful here:

There are two main parts to the Davidic covenant: (1) the promises of God concerning the establishment of David’s house forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Chron. 17:11-14), and (2) the promises concerning the intimate relationship between God and David’s descendant, namely, the Davidic king as a “son” in relation to the Lord (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13; cf. Ps. 2; 89:26-27). In this way, the Davidic king(s) is (are) the administrator and mediator of the covenant, and as such, the Davidic sons function as the Lord’s representative to Israel.⁵⁸

Again, he writes:

In relation to the story line of Scripture and the biblical covenants, the significance of this “sonship” is twofold. First, it inextricably ties the Davidic covenant to the previous covenants, and secondly, it anticipates in type and shadow the greater Sonship of the new covenant mediator to come. For example, in terms of the former, the sonship applied to Israel as a nation

(Ex. 4:22-23; cf. Hos. 11:1) is now applied to David and his sons. In other words, the Davidic king, as an individual, takes on the representative role of Israel as nation. He becomes the administrator and mediator of the covenant, thus representing God’s rule to the people and representing the people as a whole (2 Sam. 7:22-24).⁵⁹

In other words, the promises of sonship that had been ‘nationalized’ at Sinai to the nation of Israel were now refocused and crystallized in the Davidic monarch(s) – thus, anticipating Christ Jesus, David’s Greater Son.

In the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7), Yahweh promised David that He would raise up his seed to sit upon his throne and that this son would build a God’s temple (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-15; Ps. 89:3-4, 29, 36-37). 1 Chronicles 28:5-7 demonstrates that the promises of the Davidic Covenant find a *near fulfillment* in David’s son, Solomon. In fulfillment of *the son of God promise*, the Lord declares of Solomon, “...for I have chosen him *to be my son, and I will be his father*” (1 Chr. 28:6b). In fulfillment of *the throne promise*, the Lord chose “Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel” (1 Chr. 28:5). Finally, Scripture affirms that Solomon built God’s Temple in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kgs. 5-9)

in fulfillment of *the temple promise* in the Davidic Covenant. How the promises of the Davidic Covenant find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ is a subject of great debate among Christians. That being said, all Christians affirm that the Jesus Christ is both Solomon’s antitype and the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic ‘son’ promise (cf. Mark 1:1; Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:30-33). What’s more, NCT teaches that all the Davidic promises are fulfilled typologically in Christ Jesus and the New Covenant.

Since the Davidic monarch *is* typologically analogous to God Himself (as God’s son), the Davidic throne must also be typologically analogous to God’s throne. Thus, when Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of His Father, He did so in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a Dispensationalist, asserts: “It is foolish to claim that the Throne of David and the Throne of God are the same unless Covenant Theologians wish to insist that David once sat on the Throne of God the Father!”⁶⁰ It is obvious that David’s throne and God’s throne *cannot* be equated in any real sense. However, this fact does not rule out a typological correspondence. In fact, the Old Testament *typologically* equates David’s throne with God’s throne on no less than three occasions.⁶¹ Recall King David’s testimony

⁵⁷Ibid., 168.

⁵⁸Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 640.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1989), 633.

⁶¹See Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1995), 113.

Regarding Daniel 7:13-14 which many Dispensationalists understand to refer to the establishment of Christ’s thousand-year reign on the earth, Mathison writes the following on page 112: “Dispensationalists consider this passage a prophecy of the second coming of Christ to earth to establish His millennial kingdom. But that is not what Daniel says. Verse 13 indicates clearly that this is not a vision of Christ’s coming *down* to earth. Daniel sees the Son of Man coming up to the Father, the Ancient of Days. Daniel, writing from the perspective of one standing in the throne of God, sees Jesus coming up. Daniel 7 cannot be a prophecy of the second coming....Only one place in Scripture vividly describes the fulfillment of a scene like the one in Daniel 7. In Acts 1, Jesus Christ, the *Son of Man*, comes up to the Ancient of Days on the clouds (Acts 1:9). Daniel 7:13-14 is thus a prophecy of the ascension of Christ. In verse 14, we are told what happened after Christ ascended to the Father: He was given an everlasting dominion. He was given glory. He was given a kingdom that extends over all peoples, nations, and men of every language....Despite the Dispensationalist denials, the Bible distinctly teaches that Jesus Christ was crowned King of Kings at His ascension. He is now “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever’ (Rev. 11:15).”

before the princes of Israel regarding his son Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:5: "And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) **He hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel**" (KJV) [emphasis mine]. 1 Chronicles 29:23 also states, "Then Solomon sat on **the throne of the LORD as king** instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him" (KJV) [emphasis mine]. Additionally, the Queen of Sheba declares to Solomon, "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee **to set thee on his throne, to be king for the LORD thy God**: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them forever, therefore made he thee king over them, to do judgment and justice" (2 Chr. 9:8, KJV) [emphasis mine]. It would appear that Scripture indicates that David's throne is typologically analogous to God's throne. Thus, Christ's enthronement at God's right hand in heaven over the entire cosmos constitutes the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.

If Solomon is a type of Christ Jesus, then the temple that Solomon built *must* likewise typologically correspond to the temple(s) that Christ would one day build. Moreover, the temple that Christ would construct *must* transcend Solomon's Temple, as it is antitypical of the Temple in Jerusalem. What temple(s) did Christ raise up? *First*, Christ's body is the ultimate temple of God, since one key characteristic of God's Temple was that it served as the location where God manifested His Presence. Accordingly, Colossians 2:9 declares of Christ, "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (KJV). Can there be any doubt that Christ is *far* greater than a physical temple in Jerusalem? Indeed, the Savior says exactly this in Matthew 12:6, "But I

say unto you, 'That in this place is *One* greater than the temple.'" Moreover, John 2:19-21 states: "Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ²⁰Then said the Jews, 'Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou rear it up in three days? ²¹But He spake of the temple of His body'" (KJV). *Second*, the Church is another temple constructed by the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ baptized His followers with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Church was born. Through Pentecost and its subsequent apostolic extensions, the Lord forever joined elect Jews and elect Gentiles into one new body in *one* New Covenant (cf. Eph. 2:11-18). Thus, the 'near' fulfillments of the Davidic promises in the OT are typological of their 'ultimate' fulfillments in Christ Jesus and the New Covenant.

- Question 9: Does NCT Teach Replacement Theology? -

At times, NCT is criticized by Dispensational Premillennialists for purportedly teaching *supersessionism*. Vlach states that NCT "*adopts supersessionist views regarding Israel and the church.*"⁶² He proceeds to define *supersessionism* as "the view that the NT church supersedes, fulfills, or replaces the nation Israel as the people of God."⁶³ According to Vlach, NCT teaches that the Church has replaced Israel, that is to say, *Replacement Theology*. In a very strict sense, NCT *does* teach that the Church, composed of elect Jew and elect Gentile, has *eschatologically* replaced the mixed-multitude nation of Israel *as the people of God*. To Dispensationalists, however, the terms *supersessionism* and

Replacement Theology typically indicate more than just this.

Two suppositions typically undergird the Dispensational use of these terms. *First*, it is often implied that *supersessionists* believe that "God can make unconditional and eternal promises to a specific people—Israel—and then not fulfill His promises to this people."⁶⁴ In short, *supersessionism*, according to Dispensationalists, portrays God as a promise-breaker. In this author's opinion, it is *unwise* to place God's perfect character on trial regarding non-essential matters of the faith. The real issue is *not whether* God keep His promises (He most certainly does); the issue is the *manner* in which He keeps His promises. *Second*, it is also implied that *supersessionists* (as well as other non-premillennialists) do not take God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament *seriously* in that they do not interpret them *literally*. Concerning Old Testament promises that allegedly point to "an irreversible restoration" for Israel as a geopolitical entity, Richard Mayhue asserts the following: "Only FP [futuristic premillennialism] takes these promises seriously."⁶⁵ Here, the issue is one of hermeneutics not whether one is a serious student of God's Word. Christians should be able to differ on all non-essential matters of the Christian faith without misrepresenting the position of those with whom we differ theologically.

Since the terms *Replacement Theology* and *supersessionism* are often used in the aforementioned manner, most proponents of NCT prefer to emphasize that the Church is the *fulfillment* of Israel *as the people of God*. However, this 'fulfillment' (or 'replacement') is

⁶²Vlach, "New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism," 201.

⁶³Ibid., 217.

⁶⁴Ibid., 216.

⁶⁵Richard L. Mayhue, "New Covenant Theology and Future Premillennialism," *TMSJ* 18/1 (Fall 2007): 232

secondary to an even greater ‘replacement’ regarding the nation of Israel— namely, that *Jesus Christ is the True Israel*.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the One that has ultimately replaced and fulfilled Israel. As He is the True Seed of Abraham and David’s Greater Son, Christ fulfills all God’s promises, including those given to Israel (2 Cor. 1:20). Not only does He recapitulate Israel’s history in His own sinless humanity but He also perfectly succeeds where all God’s previous mediators, including Israel, miserably failed. R.T. France writes:

Jesus then saw himself as God’s son, undergoing prior to his great mission as Messiah the testing which God had given to his ‘son’ Israel before the great mission of the conquest of Canaan. Israel then had failed the test; now, in Jesus, was found that true sonship which could pass the test, and be the instrument of God’s purpose of blessing to the world which Old Testament Israel had failed to accomplish. ‘The history of Israel is taken up by him and carried to its fulfilment.’ The antitype, as always, is greater than the type. Old Testament Israel had failed; Jesus must succeed.⁶⁶

‘The resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of Israel of which the prophet spoke.’ It is not so much that Israel was a type of Jesus, but Jesus is Israel.⁶⁷

Thus, it is only by virtue of the Church’s spiritual union with Christ, that she can be understood to replace Israel *in any sense*. In other words, by virtue of being “in Christ,” the True Israel, the Church is by extension the fulfillment of Israel *as the people of God*.

Although NCT teaches that the Church has *fulfilled* (or replaced) Israel *as the people of God*, NCT *adamantly* maintains that God has not broken any of His promises to Israel. He has fulfilled them all in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, NCT also rejects the notion that the only serious interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is a strictly literal one. Instead, NCT insists that many Old Testament promises be understood typologically with relation to Christ. To sum up, Christ *is* the True Israel, and He has ultimately replaced Israel, and it is only by virtue of the Church’s spiritual union with Him that she can be understood to replace Israel *in any sense*.

– Question 10: Does NCT Reject Historic Protestant Theological Traditions? –

Another question regarding NCT is whether it devalues or rejects altogether the theological traditions of the Protestant Reformation. In truth, the Protestant Reformation constitutes one of the most glorious and earth-shaking movements of the Holy Spirit in the history of the world. This momentous event saw the recovery of the biblical Gospel, the formulation and widespread dissemination of sound biblical doctrine, the refutation of Catholic Rome’s errors, the study of the biblical text in its original languages,⁶⁸ and the translation of the Scriptures into the ‘common’ languages of the people. NCT advocates readily acknowledge that we ‘stand’ upon the shoulders of Protestant Reformers, such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox, and others – men whom God raised up and through whom He shook the world.

Eventually, the theological principles of the Reformation became crystallized into the Protestant *Solas* – doctrines which NCT ardently affirms. For example, proponents of NCT champion *sola Scriptura* (Latin: “by Scripture alone”), the Protestant maxim that Scripture (which is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God) is the *sole* authority of faith & practice for the believer (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Matt. 4:4; 5:17-18; Rom. 15:4; John 17:7; Heb. 4:12; John 10:35; 1 Cor. 4:6). Likewise, NCT upholds *sola fide* (Latin: “by faith alone”), the Protestant axiom that believers are justified before God by faith in Christ *not* by works (Rom. 3:20-22; 3:23-24; 5:17; Titus 3:5-7; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10). Moreover, adherents of NCT affirm *sola gratia* (Latin: “by grace alone”), the Protestant teaching that God’s unmerited favor (not man’s will or effort) *alone* initiates, secures, & applies salvation to His elect (Eph. 2:4-5; Rom. 6:14; Eph. 2:4-5; 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-12; 3:7; 1 Pet. 5:10; Heb. 4:16). In addition, NCT advocates *solo Christo* (Latin: “by Christ alone”),⁶⁹ the Protestant dictum that salvation is found *only* in the God-Man Jesus, the sole mediator between God and man (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5; Matt. 1:21; John 3:36; 14:6; Rom. 4:23-25; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). NCT also embraces *solī Deo gloria* (Latin: “to God alone be the glory”) the Protestant maxim which teaches not only that God does all things for His own glory but also that man is to glorify God, *not* himself, in all that he does (Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:11; 5:12; 1 Cor. 10:31; Isa. 6:3; Luke 2:14; Heb. 1:1-3). Additionally, NCT enthusiasts champion *solo evangelio* (Latin: “by the Gospel alone”), the Protestant teaching that the Gospel *alone* is the power of God unto salvation and that it is the duty and privilege of every

⁶⁶R.T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998) 53.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁸The Protestant Reformers harnessed the phrase *ad fontes* (Latin: “to the sources”) from Renaissance *humanism* in order to promote the practice of studying God’s Word in its original languages.

⁶⁹*Solo Christo* is also rendered *solus Christus* in Latin.

believer to herald the Gospel in life, word, and deed (Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Gal. 1:6-8; Eph. 1:13; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:6; Matt. 24:14; Mark 16:15-16). Finally, NCT upholds *solo cruce* (Latin: “by the cross alone”), the Protestant axiom which encapsulates the biblical truth that salvation is *only* found in Christ’s penal substitutionary death on the cross (1 Cor. 1:17-18; Eph. 2:15-16; Phil. 2:7-8; Col. 1:19-20; 2:13-14; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:24).

NCT resoundingly affirms the Doctrines of Grace, that is to say, soteriological Calvinism. To be sure, these doctrines, commonly referred to as the *five points of Calvinism*, are *exceedingly* offensive to the self-exalting spirit of fallen man. Nevertheless, these difficult truths are *unmistakably* taught in Scripture. NCT upholds the doctrine of *total depravity*⁷⁰ – namely, that man (1) is guilty of Adam’s first sin, (2) desperately corrupted his entire being in Adam, and (3) is wholly unable to do anything that pleases God. Proponents of NCT also hold to *unconditional election*⁷¹ – i.e., that God in eternity past freely chose a specific number of people to become recipients of His saving grace, not because of any foreknown choices or merits but because He was sovereignly pleased to do so. NCT acknowledges the doctrine of *limited (or definite) atonement*⁷² – namely, that Christ’s penal substitutionary sacrifice is fully efficacious for the particular people

whom God freely and sovereignly elected to salvation. NCT also confesses the Reformed teaching of *irresistible grace*⁷³ – i.e., that the *special* inward call, whereby the Holy Spirit regenerates and enables individuals to come to Christ, *invincibly* secures the salvation of the elect. Finally, proponents of NCT teach the *perseverance of the saints*⁷⁴ – namely, that (1) God preserves to the end all those who are saved and (2) those who persevere to the end are *truly* saved.

The *Solas* and the Doctrines of Grace are *not* the only aspects of historic Protestantism with which NCT agrees. NCT agrees with the Protestant axiom *semper reformanda* (Latin: “always reforming”), the fuller statement of which is *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei* (Latin: “the Church reformed, always reforming according to the Word of God”). This theological principle details the Church’s constant need to reform her doctrine and theology in accordance with the Scriptures. NCT also upholds the Protestant maxim *coram Deo* (Latin: “in the Presence of God”), which concisely communicates the biblical truth that a believer is to live life before God in such a way as to glorify God in *all* things and at *all* times. There are even a few proponents of NCT who affirm the Reformers’ doctrine of *papa Antichristus* (Latin: ‘the pope is Antichrist’), a belief which was held

by most Protestants for the greater part of three centuries. Advocates of NCT also affirm God’s *absolute* sovereignty in *all* things, the existence of *one* redemptive plan to secure the salvation of God’s elect, the indispensability of the dual imputation of righteousness to the biblical Gospel, the centrality of preaching, and that good works *always* result from genuine faith. In summation, NCT affirms the theological traditions of the Protestant Reformation.

- Question 11: Is NCT Anti-Creedal & Anti-Confessional? -

Recently, a question has arisen as to whether NCT is anti-creedal or anti-confessional. While there is room for Christian liberty on this particular issue, most within NCT acknowledge that creeds and confession statements, whether historic or contemporary, can be and often are helpful systematic expressions of the Christian faith. For example, Providence Theological Seminary, heartily agrees with the First London Baptist Confession of Faith (1644/46 A.D.) along with Benjamin Cox’s 1646 appendix to the confession.⁷⁵ That being said, proponents of NCT *firmly* oppose the elevation, whether perceived or actual, of any creed or confession to a level of authority approaching the Scriptures themselves. When this happens, “[o]ur creeds and confessions are one immense

⁷⁰For biblical references to the doctrine of *total depravity*, see the following: Romans 3:10-12; 5:12; 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 15:21-22; Psalm 51:3; 58:3; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19; Isaiah 64:6; Genesis 6:5; and Jeremiah 17:9.

⁷¹For biblical references to the doctrine of *unconditional election*, see the following: Ephesians 1:3-11; John 6:38-39; 12:37-40; 15:16; 17:24; Romans 8:29-30; 9:10-18; 11:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Matthew 11:25-26; and Acts 13:48.

⁷²For biblical references to the doctrine of *limited atonement*, see the following: Matthew 1:20-21; 1 Timothy 1:15; Mark 10:45; Galatians 3:13; 1 John 4:10; Acts 20:28; Isaiah 53:8; and John 10:11.

⁷³For biblical references to the doctrine of *irresistible grace*, see the following: John 3:5-8; 6:44, 65; 10:3; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Acts 5:30-31; 16:14; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 4:6; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:24-25; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Philippians 1:29.

⁷⁴For biblical references to the doctrine of *perseverance of the saints*, see the following: John 6:37-39; 10:27-30; Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; 1 John 2:19; 5:13; Romans 8:29-32; Luke 22:31-32; Hebrews 3:14, 7:25; Ephesians 1:13-14; and Matthew 10:22.

⁷⁵See also *The First London Confession of Faith 1646 Edition with an Appendix by Benjamin Cox*, reprint ed. with historical background in a preface by Gary D. Long (Charleston, SC: www.CreateSpace.com; an Amazon Co., 2004).

barrier to unity,” and “[t]here is no easy or obvious way to cross this divide.”⁷⁶ Although creeds and confessions can be and often are helpful summaries of what Scripture teaches, such statements are formulated by fallible men and, hence, are *not* inspired.

– Question 12: Is the Sabbath the only difference between NCT and 1689 Federalism? –

Since NCT has principally emerged, historically speaking, from the theological confines of Covenant Theology, there exists a great deal of common theological ground between NCT and CT – especially its baptistic branch, 1689 Federalism. There is significant agreement in such areas as the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the interpretive priority of the New Testament Scriptures, the Protestant *Solas*, God’s *absolute* sovereignty in *all* things, the Doctrines of Grace, the Church being composed of believers, believer’s baptism, the centrality of preaching, church polity, and eschatology. That being said, there are also significant, though non-essential, differences between these two theological systems. Richard Barcellos, an advocate of 1689 Federalism, aptly writes:

...the issue of the Sabbath is not the only thing upon which we differ. New Covenant Theology adherents often tout this as the only difference between us....though we differ on the Sabbath, our differences cut much deeper than this subject alone. Those differences are exegetical, theological, and historical. It is improper, therefore, for those on either side of this issue to claim that the Sabbath is the only issue dividing us.⁷⁷

Such differences would generally include: 1689’s *covenantal superstructure*⁷⁸ (i.e., *pactum salutis, foederus operum, foederus gratiae*), the Sabbath, the tripartite division of the Mosaic Law, the Ten Commandments as *moral law*, defining the Law of Christ, the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, water baptism as the sign of the New Covenant, and the relationship between the first and second generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists (as well as their confessions of faith).

– Conclusion –

As a theological system, NCT has a *great deal* in common with both DT and CT. However, NCT does differ with these two systems at certain points. On account of these differences, questions have risen surrounding NCT– some of which have resulted in confusion and misunderstanding. It is this author’s hope that the explanations provided above will not only help clarify certain aspects of NCT but also stimulate meaningful discussion among proponents of CT, DT, and NCT. It is the goal of NCT, through such positive interaction, to help break down the walls of doctrinal partition that exist within and between DT and CT. In doing so, New Covenant theologians hope to positively contribute to the ongoing reformation of the Church’s collective understanding of Scripture, the Gospel, and orthodox Christian theology.

FINIS



Zachary S. Maxcey serves as the Social Media Administrator for Providence Theological Seminary, as well as the editor of the seminary’s journal - the PTSJ. He holds degrees from the United States Military Academy at West Point (B.S. in Leadership Studies, 2004) and from Providence Theological Seminary (Masters of Divinity, 2012). He is currently enrolled as a doctoral candidate at Breckbill Bible College for a Th.D. in Historical Theology. He served 8 years as an Infantry officer in the United States Army with two deployments to Iraq.



⁷⁶Wells and Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, 259.

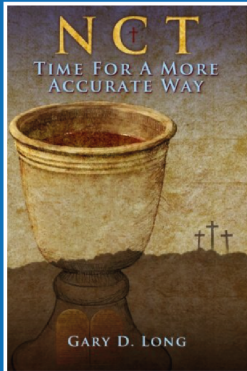
Michael J. Vlach, “New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism,” TMSJ 18/1 (Fall 2007): 202.

⁷⁷Richard Barcellos, “Book Review of New Covenant Theology,” Cited in Appendix A, *A Reformed Baptist Manifesto: the New Covenant Constitution of the Church* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004), 102.

⁷⁸See Question 3 and Footnote 26 on a fuller explanation as to how NCT differs from 1689 Federalism with regard to its *covenantal superstructure*.

NCT: TIME FOR A MORE ACCURATE WAY

BY GARY D. LONG



“The doctrinal partitions that sadly divide sovereign grace theology held by both Presbyterians and Baptist cannot be broken down for the gospel’s sake without questioning the heart of Reformed Theology’s system of Covenant Theology (CT), namely, its one overarching covenant of grace with its infant baptism of covenant children (the Achilles’ heel to major doctrinal portions of its theological system). Since the writing of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Baptists have dealt with the result of CT for over 360 years by rightly rejecting its doctrine of the church consisting of a mixed multitude primarily caused by the practice of baptizing infants of one or both believing parents. However, they have not adequately dealt with the cause, the heart of CT’s

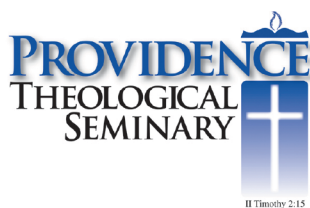
whole doctrinal system, namely, its teaching that the Old and New Covenants are the outworking of one overarching covenant of grace rather than the covenantal outworking in redemptive history of God’s eternal kingdom purpose (II Tim. 1:9). Now is the “Time for a More Accurate Way” for such middle-walls of doctrinal partition to be broken down biblically, to include differences with CT over the covenantal administration of the Law of God. May our merciful and gracious God bring it to pass.”

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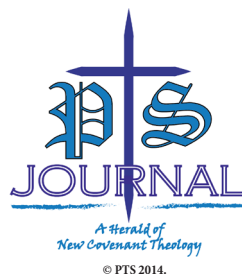
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