1989

The Sinaitic Covenant and Law in the Theology of Dispensationalism

Keumyoung Ahn
Andrews University

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The Sinaitic covenant and law in the theology of dispensationalism

Ahn, Keumyoung, Ph.D.
Andrews University, 1989

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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE SINAITIC COVENANT AND LAW IN THE THEOLOGY
OF DISPENSATIONALISM

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Keumyoung Ahn
March 1989
THE SINAITIC COVENANT AND LAW IN THE THEOLOGY
OF DISPENSATIONALISM

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
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by

Keumyoung Ahn

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11 April 1989
ABSTRACT

THE SINAITIC COVENANT AND LAW IN THE THEOLOGY OF DISPENSATIONALISM

by

Keumyoung Ahn

Faculty adviser: Hans K. LaRondelle
Title: THE SINAITIC COVENANT AND LAW IN THE THEOLOGY OF DISPENSATIONALISM

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Date completed: March 1989

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the dispensational position concerning the Sinaitic covenant and law and to evaluate it. The design of the study includes three major sections: the historical (chaps. 2-3), the descriptive (chap. 4), and the critical (chaps. 5-6).

Chapter 2 presents the meaning of Dispensationalism and briefly outlines its origin and its modern development in North America. Chapter 3 reviews the covenant theologians' hermeneutics in respect to the Sinaitic covenant and their conflicts with Dispensationalists, with the analysis of the main differences between the old and new positions of dispensational theology on the Sinaitic covenant and law. Most covenant theologians consider the
Sinaitic covenant as the continuum of the previous covenants and reject the dispensational idea of the covenant of works.

Chapter 4 presents the contemporary dispensational concept of the fundamental features of the Sinaitic covenant and law. According to it, the Sinaitic covenant is conditional, temporal, and legal, and because of an indivisible unit, the Mosaic law, including the Decalogue, has been abolished at the cross and has become irrelevant to the church. The phrase "the law of Christ" means the law of love rather than a concrete corpus of Christian norms.

Chapters 5 and 6 evaluate the dispensational view of the Sinaitic covenant and law. The basic problem does not arise from the covenant itself but from Israel which regarded it as a juridical relationship without faith and love. Unconditionality—the expression of God's love—and conditionality—the response of participants—are the two aspects of the same covenant. The promises and grace always precede the requirements of the participants, which is a way of preserving the love-relationship with God who saved His people. It is foreign for the biblical writers to separate pure law from the Decalogue, to see the Sermon on the Mount primarily applicable to the millennial kingdom, or to assume an antithetical relationship between law and grace.

Chapter 7 presents a synthesis of the results of this descriptive, critical investigation.
To my beloved wife Youngsoon
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<td>AR</td>
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<td>AR</td>
<td>Adventist Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Asbury Seminarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATR</td>
<td>Anglican Theological Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUSS</td>
<td>Andrews University Seminary Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Biblical Archeologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASOR</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
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<tr>
<td>BKC (NT)</td>
<td><em>The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scripture by Dallas Seminary Faculty, New Testament edition</em></td>
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<td>BKC (OT)</td>
<td><em>The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Theological Seminary Faculty, Old Testament edition</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Biblical Research</td>
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<td>BRR</td>
<td>Baptist Reformation Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSac</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Sacra</td>
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<tr>
<td>BV</td>
<td>Biblical Viewpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Christian Century</td>
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<td>CF</td>
<td>Calvin Forum</td>
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| CH   | Church History       |
| CL   | Christian Life      |
| CTJ  | Calvin Theological Journal |
| CTM  | Concordia Theological Monthly |
| CToday | Christian Today    |
| CTQ  | Concordia Theological Quarterly |
| Dia  | Dialog              |
| ET   | Eglise et Thelogie  |
| Ete  | Eternity            |
| EvQ  | Evangelical Quarterly |
| ExpTim | Expository Times   |
| GTJ  | Grace Theological Journal |
| HTR  | Havard Theological Journal |
| IB   | Interpreter's Bible |
| IDB  | The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible |
| Inst | Institute of the Christian Religion |
| Int  | Interpretation      |
| ISBE | The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia |
| JAOS | Journal of the American Oriental Society |
| JBL  | Journal of Biblical Literature |
| JES  | Journal of Eccumenical Studies |
| JETS | Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society |
| JLR  | Journal of Law and Religion |
| JSNT | Journal for the Study of the New Testament |
| JSS  | Journal of Semitic Studies |
| Jud  | Judaism             |

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<tr>
<td>SDABC</td>
<td>The Seventh-day Bible Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEAJT</td>
<td>The South East Asia Journal of Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>SJT</td>
<td>Scottish Journal of Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>The Samaritan Pentateuch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spr</td>
<td>The Springfieldian</td>
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<td>SRB</td>
<td>The Scofield Reference Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>TDNT</td>
<td>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>TDOT</td>
<td>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>TE</td>
<td>Theological Educator</td>
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<td>Tradition</td>
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<td>TZ</td>
<td>Theologische Zeitschrift</td>
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<td>USR</td>
<td>Union Seminary Review</td>
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<td>VT</td>
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<td>Wisenschaftliche Monographien zum alten und neuen Testament</td>
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<td>Wisenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum neuen Testament</td>
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<td>WTJ</td>
<td>Westminster Theological Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die Altestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<td>ZTK</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</td>
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My interest in the theme chosen for this dissertation probably arose in a course taught by Dr. Hans K. LaRondelle on the doctrine of salvation. It is to a great extent due to his advice, encouragement, and assistance as my academic adviser from that time on that I am now presenting the results of my investigation. Thus, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude not only for help in pursuing this work but also for the graciousness with which this assistance was forthcoming. I would also like to thank Dr. Daniel Augsburger both for his valuable constructive criticisms and suggestions and for his unfailing sympathetic encouragement as my esteemed professor. I cannot forget his sincere prayers for me and my research whenever I met him. I wish to thank Dr. Robert Johnston, my gracious professor from my college days, whose scholarly critiques and assistance were indispensable for this result. However, I bear the responsibility for any deficiencies herein.

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Union Conference.

Finally, I recall with gratitude all those of my
family and friends whose influence in my life and contribu-
tions to my education can never be truly evaluated.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the distinctive phenomena in the contemporary evangelical world is the pervasive influence of dispensationalism. It is greatly popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible and the prominent works of Dispensationalists. The doctrine of the Sinaitic covenant and the law represents a basic feature of dispensational faith in understanding the Scripture.

Statement of the Problem

For Dispensationalists the Mosaic covenant is of a radically different character from the other biblical covenants. This is based upon the basic thesis of Dispensationalism: God has different purposes for "Israel" and the "church." The terms "Israel" and "church," for Dispensationalists, stand always for two different covenant peoples of God: an earthly, national-theocratic people for Israel and the body of Christ for the church. Ryrie clearly confirms this fact by saying that "the doctrine of the church is the touchstone of Dispensationalism"¹ and that "the time of her existence is distinctive to this present

dispensation, which makes the church distinct from Israel and not a new Israel."\(^1\) Dispensationalists insist that to deny that the two dispensations are concerned with different purposes of God is to cease to understand the exact meaning of Scripture. English states: "It is a mistake to confuse the N. T. church with Israel."\(^2\) This dichotomy of Israel and the church forms the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism and the central doctrine in Dispensationalism.

Dispensationalists regard the church age as a parenthesis in the divine program with Israel. As Walvoord states: "There is good evidence that the [church] age itself is a parenthesis in the divine program of God as it was revealed in the Old Testament."\(^3\) Israel is scheduled to play a decisive role again after the parenthesis of the church.


Dispensationalists distinguish among different divine ways of dealing with His people. They call each of these ways a dispensation, and for that reason are called Dispensationalists. Among these dispensations, three are especially important. Chafer explains:

Although seven dispensations are frequently distinguished in Scripture, three are more important than others, namely, the dispensation of law, governing Israel in the Old Testament from the time of Moses; the dispensation of grace, the present age; and the future dispensation of the millennial kingdom.¹

¹ Chafer, Major Bible Themes, 128. Chafer has set forth twenty-four contrasts between Israel and the church through which he and other Dispensationalists see the two groups as two separate entities with whom God is dealing in a special program. Pentecost outlines Chafer's theory as follows:

"(1) The extent of Biblical revelation: Israel—nearly four-fifths of the Bible; Church—about one-fifth. (2) The Divine purpose: Israel—the earthly promises in the covenant; Church—the heavenly promises in the Gospel. (3) The seed of Abraham: Israel—the physical seed, of whom some become a spiritual seed; Church—a spiritual seed. (4) Birth: Israel—physical birth that produces relationship; Church—spiritual birth that brings relationship. (5) Headship: Israel—Abraham; Church—Christ. (6) Covenants: Israel—Abrahamic and all the following covenants; Church—indirectly related to the Abrahamic and new covenants. (7) Nationality: Israel—one nation; Church—from all nations. (8) Divine dealing: Israel—national and individual; Church—individual only. (9) Dispensations: Israel—seen in all ages from Abraham; Church—seen only in this present age. (10) Ministry: Israel—no missionary activity and no gospel to preach; Church—a commission to fulfill. (11) The death of Christ: Israel—guilty nationally, to be saved by it; Church—perfectly saved by it now. (12) The Father: Israel—by a peculiar relationship God was Father to the nation; Church—we are related individually to God as Father. (13) Christ: Israel—Messiah, Immanuel, king; Church—Saviour, Lord, Bridegroom, Head. (14) The Holy Spirit: Israel—came upon some temporarily; Church—indwells all. (15) Governing principle: Israel—Mosaic law system; Church—grace system. (16) Divine enablement: Israel—none; Church—the indwelling Holy Spirit. (17) Two farewell discourses: Israel—Olivet discourse; Church—
The Doctrinal Statement of Dallas Theological Seminary, called "a landmark in the history of Dispensationalism," follows the same concept of history and warns, "These are not to be intermingled or confused."

The Dispensationalists' teaching on the Sinaitic covenant and the law is closely connected with their strict hermeneutical division between Israel and the church. Dispensationalism assigns only to Israel the purpose and function of the Sinaitic covenant, and claims that the


1See especially Dallas Theological Seminary, Doctrinal Statement (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1952), Article V.


3Dallas Theological Seminary, Doctrinal Statement, Article V.
Christian is not under the provisional covenant of Moses. Thus it makes a sharp distinction between the Mosaic covenant which is conditional and the Abrahamic or the new covenant which is unconditional. Rejecting any direct relationship of the conditional Sinaitic covenant of the law to this present church age of the so-called unconditional grace, they go on to conclude the Christian is "not under the conditional Mosaic covenant of works, the law, but under the unconditional New Covenant of grace."¹

Therefore, the law of God given to Israel alone through Moses which was a "covenant of works" was a temporary arrangement and effective until Christ should come.² Alva J. McClain, one of the editors of The New Scofield Reference Bible, considers the Mosaic covenant as set forth in the Pentateuch as describing a legal matter.³ He concludes that "the Israelite is under this Mosaic written law until he finds forgiveness in the new covenant under grace in Christ."⁴ Accordingly, the dispensation of law ended at Calvary.⁵ Since it was given only to Israel, the Decalogue

---


²See Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7: 225; idem, Major Bible Themes, 91.


⁴Ibid., 34; cf. NSRB, 94. n. 1.

⁵McClain, Law and Grace, 35; cf. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 54.
has no direct purpose and function for the New Testament church.\(^1\) In this sense Dispensationalism becomes antinomian.\(^2\)

This idea leads to the belief that the divine blessings were earned by legal obedience and that salvation was by works during the Mosaic era and not by grace,\(^3\) thus suggesting two different roads to salvation.\(^4\) In reply to the violent criticism of Calvinist theologians, Dispensationalists try now to show the existence of grace under the Mosaic law,\(^5\) insisting on a difference of degree in the contents of the revelation of grace between the Mosaic age and this present age. In essence, the revelation of grace

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\(^2\)The term antinomianism is a comparatively modern designation of several types of ethical thought in which hostility to the Mosaic law including the Decalogue is present.

\(^3\)SRB, ed. C. I. Scofield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 1115.


\(^5\)Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 116; NSRB, vii, 3.
is still antithetical to the revelation of law.\(^1\)

Dispensationalists do not believe that the law of the Ten Commandments constitutes the great moral, absolute moral idea for all men in all ages.\(^2\) Yet they cannot deny that the New Testament contains a number of texts which maintain the validity of God's law in the context of Christian conduct. In order to answer this problem and to escape antinomianism, Dispensationalists work out a dichotomy between the law as code and the so-called pure law in terms of the will of the Holy Spirit, of Christ, or of love. Ryrie, for instance, differentiates between a code and the commandments contained therein.\(^3\) This is an outworking of Chafer's idea that the term "my commandments" (John 14: 15, etc.) is understood as the teachings of grace for the Christian who is not under law.\(^4\) So "the believer," says Aldrich, "is not under the Ten Commandments," but "under the eternal moral law of God."\(^5\)

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\(^1\)Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 126.


\(^3\)Regarding this division between "a code and the commandments contained therein," Ryrie says that he has never seen it proposed by anyone else. See his *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 305; cf. Lightner, "A Dispensational Response to Theonomy," 240; Aldrich, *Holding Fast to Grace*, 63, 64.


\(^5\)Aldrich, *Holding Fast to Grace*, 76, 91.
antinomianism, Dispensationalists substitute for the Decalogue liberty with love as the standard of Christian life.

The attitude of Dispensationalists toward the law also affects their attitude toward the Sermon on the Mount. Their interpretation of the law is so closely connected with the concepts of Israel and kingdom that they adopt a peculiar position in interpreting the Sermon on the Mount. They consider it as a code of ethics, that is, as the true interpretation of the Mosaic law, but valid primarily for a future millennial kingdom, so that it has no primary application to current Christian life.

As the Mosaic law was a means by which Israel might be a "peculiar treasure" and a "kingdom of priests," so the Sermon on the Mount displays the characteristics of those who are living in the kingdom. Thus in this sermon our Lord reaffirms the Mosaic law of the O.T. theocratic kingdom as the governing code in His coming kingdom on earth ([Matt] 5:17) and declares that the attitude of men toward this law will determine their place in the Kingdom ([Matt] 5:19).

The dichotomy of Israel and the Church is closely linked with an opposition between law and grace. The

1Ryrie, Basic Theology, 230.


3NSRB, 997, n. 3 (Matt 5:3).
Mosaic law is perceived as a covenant of works. This contrast between law and grace is the basic, editorial position of the New Scofield Reference Bible (1967). It states:

Although not all Bible students agree in every detail of the dispensational system presented in the Reference Bible, it is generally recognized that the distinction between law and grace is basic to the understanding of the Scriptures.\(^1\)

Lest that dichotomy be misunderstood, Dispensationalists try to correct the impression that grace ended when the law was given at Sinai.\(^2\) "The Bible," according to Ryrie, "reveals the sharp antithesis and at the same time asserts these displays of grace during the Law dispensation."\(^3\) The Dispensationalist perspective appears clearly in what he writes:

What does determine the distinguishability of [these] two dispensations is simply the different bases on which He[God] dealt with them[Israel]. Promise and law are sharply distinguished by Paul in Galatians 3 even though he maintains that law did not annul the promise. And the Mosaic law is kept so distinct from the promise to Abraham that it is difficult not to recognize a different dispensation. This is the essence of the definition, and if anything is kept distinct in that chapter, the law is. Therefore, the separate dispensation of promise or of the Patriarchs is justified.\(^4\)

\(^1\)NSRB, vii.

\(^2\)Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 117; see also Arno C. Gaebelin, ed., The Annotated Bible (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1913), 1:152; Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:162.

\(^3\)Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 121.

\(^4\)Ibid., 61.
Thus Dispensationalists provides another chapter in the long debate on the relationship between law and gospel. Dispensational theology agrees with the antithesis between law and grace and, then, goes beyond this by rejecting the Decalogue as the moral law for the church.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study tries to determine clearly what Dispensationalists teach about the covenant and how they relate to their

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1 Much has been written about the law-gospel relation from a Lutheran perspective. In his 1535 "Lectures on Galatians" (Luther's Work, vol. 27, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964], Luther uses this relation as the touchstone by which to identify true and false doctrine in Christianity. Lutheran theology since the sixteenth century has continued the so-called proper distinction, the inseparable distinction or the dialectic relation between law and gospel. The Formula of Concord declared this in articles V and VI. C. F. W. Walther carefully deals with this Lutheran position in his The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel, ed. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1929). On the contrary, Calvin thinks that the antithesis does not mean disparagement of the function of the law. So law and gospel together represent the totality of grace, and the relation between the two is one of quantitative supplementation. There is no basic or teleologically insoluble tension. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.2.7. The difference between these two traditions on the law and the gospel has led to a number of controversies since the nineteenth century. J. C. K. von Hofmann opened the gate of the modern law-gospel debate, for he replaced law with Heilsgeschichte and rejected the old idea of a lex aeterna. Law was only a part of the historical dispensation when Israel existed as a nation. See Gerhard O. Forde, The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 30.
biblical hermeneutics. The main intention of the present investigation is to explore the Dispensationalists' position regarding the Sinaitic covenant and law and to evaluate it. It also seeks to pay attention to the following areas: It investigates the dispensational claim of a distinction between the relationship of the Sinaitic covenant and the other covenants. Can it be demonstrated that the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai was an unfolding of the covenant He made with Abraham? Furthermore, did the Sinaitic covenant share the essential part of the so-called promissory covenants? Accordingly, this study gives careful consideration to our objection that the concept of the two covenants, based on the sharp compartmentalizing of Israel and the church, destroys the organic unity of Scripture and of God's plan of salvation.¹

¹The traditional view of the Sinaitic covenant held by most pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventists maintains the theory of two covenants—the old and the new covenants—that it was in the mind of God to make a different covenant with Israel from the one He made with Abraham. In the old covenant God made a temporary, educationally oriented covenant with Israel, purely based on the legal demands of law imposed upon them, because of the depraved spiritual condition of Israel. Regarding this position, see Thorolf Gunn Paulson, "The Two Covenants" (M.A. thesis, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1952), 36; F. D. Nichol, Answers to Objections (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1952), 19-20; M. L. Andreason, The Book of Hebrews (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1948), 280-281, 304-305. But Edward Heppenstall rejected the traditional interpretation of the Sinaitic covenant at the 1952 Bible Conference in Washington, D.C. He regards the old and the new covenant as essentially identical and vindicates God's direct redemptive purpose in the giving of the Sinaitic covenant. See his article "The Covenant and the Law," Our Firm Foundation (Washington, DC: Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Second, it investigates whether the dispensational understanding of the law of Moses as having no direct relationship to the New Testament church is faithful to the spirit of the New Testament. Was the Decalogue intended for the benefit of Israel or God's people through the ages? Did Yahweh give the law to the church just as much as to Israel with the full intent that His people obey it and live by it? Also, it attempts to analyze the dispensational understanding of the character of the law itself. This accompanies an inquiry of the covenantal nature of the law, the dichotomy of pure love and law as a code, the understanding of the Sermon on the Mount as a teaching reserved primarily for the millennial kingdom, and the antithesis between the law and grace.

The justification for this study can be seen in the fact that among a number of investigations which have been produced during the past several decades, none of the dissertations dealt with the topic of the present study.¹

Organization and Methodology

To achieve our goal the following methodology has been employed. This study, which mainly uses the descriptive method, is organized in the following manner. In order

Dallas Theological Seminary, 1942); Hoyt Chester Woodring, Jr., "Grace under the Mosaic Covenant" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1956); Aiden Arthur Gannett, "Law in the New Testament" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1956); Paul David Nevin, "Some Major Problems in Dispensational Interpretation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965); Charles E. Piepgrass, "A Study of New Testament References to Old Testament Covenants" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968); Robert J. Hilgenberg, "The Law of Moses: Its Character and Function in the Old Testament" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972); Paul DeWitt Lowery, "Covenant Implications for Old Testament Exposition: An Overview of Some Pertinent Themes" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979). Daniel Payton Fuller wrote a dissertation, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism" (Th.D. dissertation, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957), and a book, Law and Gospel: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), which analyze dispensational hermeneutics and the relation between law and gospel. In the dissertation, he concludes that there is only one people of God generated by faith. Since salvation is always by grace through faith, dispensational antithetical relationship between the unconditional Abrahamic covenant and the conditional Mosaic covenant is contradictory. The hypothetical distinction of law and grace, therefore, does not give any basis for the distinction between Israel and the church. In the other work, Fuller enters into a critical and constructive dialogue with Reformed federalism and the dispensational reading of Scripture. He points out the common inability of both the dispensational and the federal perspective in portraying the unity of the biblical message because of their "dualism between law and grace." Fuller uses the Pauline passages to interpret the law as demanding a response of faith. As the reader can see, I am deeply indebted to Fuller for the work he has done. Recently Wayne G. Strickland criticizes the guiding principle in Fuller's theological system as unconvincing in his dissertation, "A Critical Analysis of Daniel Fuller's Gospel and Law Concept" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986).
to analyze dispensational theology on the Mosaic covenant and law systematically, I establish briefly in chapter 2 the growth of Dispensationalism. Since a series of debates on the law between the dispensational and the nondispensational theologians influenced the establishment of the new position, chapter 3 deals with the recent covenant theologians' hermeneutics regarding the law and the Mosaic covenant, a series of controversies between them and Dispensationalists, and the main differences between the old and the new positions of dispensational theology concerning the Mosaic covenant. In seeking the distinctive differences of the old and the new positions on the Sinaitic covenant, the analysis is limited mainly to all pertinent data from the writings of the normative Dispensationalists,¹ The Scofield Reference Bible, and The New Scofield Reference Bible, whose notes have been generally recognized by other scholars as being representative of Dispensationalism. Thus chapter 3 will provide the basis for chapter 4.

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the distinctive features of the contemporary dispensational interpretation of the covenant and law given through Moses. The consistency of the use of the Dispensationalists' hermeneutical

¹For this study, Lewis S. Chafer, Cyrus I. Scofield, Arno Gaebelein, Charles C. Ryrie, John F. Walvoord, E. Schuyler English, Edward Pentecost, and others are chosen as representatives of the so-called normative Dispensationalism.

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principles is considered. I also deal with the different aspects of the Sinaitic covenant—its meaning, its purpose, and its relationship to the other covenants. In chapter 4, I also investigate what function and character Dispensationalists give to the law of Moses in the New Testament. For this task, recent Dispensationalist writings are carefully considered to try to establish the new position on this topic.

Chapters 5 and 6 utilize the data of chapter 4 and provide a critical evaluation of the dispensational interpretation of the covenant and law given through Moses. For this evaluation, some ideas of covenant theologians are also examined as a context for this evaluation. However, decisive importance is attached to the biblical, theological perspective in evaluating the dispensational tradition.

Chapter 7 gives a summary and the conclusions of this study.

**Delimitations of the Study**

Because of the breadth of this theme, the following limitations are set for this research. I do not deal with every aspect of the Sinaitic covenant and law. I assume that the Mosaic law was written by Moses and, therefore, the issue of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the unity of the five books, and the completion
of the law before the Israel's entrance into Canaan are not discussed.

Furthermore, I believe that in this dissertation there is no need to consider the civil law, the health laws, and the typology of the ceremonial system such as the sacrifices, the priesthood, the tabernacle, and the festal seasons. Obviously, in the Pauline material attention is given only to the texts that are fundamental to the dispensational theology. Therefore, the procedure is to select only those aspects in the NT which are connected with the explicit existence of the law in the new covenant.
CHAPTER II

THE GROWTH OF DISPENSATIONALISM

Definition of Dispensationalism

Modern Dispensationalism traces its origin to the Plymouth Brethren movement which reacted to the lethargic condition of the church of England and Ireland and sought to restore in the early nineteenth century the simple teaching of the Apostolic Church.\(^1\) Because of its concern

\(^1\)Arnold D. Ehlert questions the use of the term 'modern,' for it may not convey the historicity or ancient Dispensationalism. He compiles an extensive survey of its bibliographical data and attempts to trace the presence of dispensational systems dating back not only to apostolic times but also to Jewish and pre-Jewish thought. Thus the historical roots of the "genuineness and authenticity of the doctrine of Dispensationalism" through the light from the past are finally found from the concepts of the six creative days and the seventh day of rest, of Genesis, for he considers this creation week as prophetically symbolic of periods of development--the sex- and septa-millenary concept. From this point of view each day of the creation week represents a thousand years in the successive development of history and then time is arranged into seven thousand years of seven periods. The seventh period, after the analogy of six thousand years, was designated as an era of rest or a millennium. For the confirmation of this theory he uses such writings of the apostolic and subapostolic eras as the Epistle of Barnabas (33:1), Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho, Irenaeus' Against Heresies (Book 5, chapter 28, section 3), etc. See a series of Arnold D. Ehlert's articles, "A Bibliography of Dispensationalism," BSac 101 (1944): 95-101, 199-209. See also this kind of argument in Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 65-78; idem, The Basis of the Premillennial Faith, 17-33.
with the eschatological goal of history, Dispensationalism is often defined as a system of theological interpretation set in a framework of a particular type of premillennialism.¹

To know the meaning of Dispensationalism, it is necessary to grasp the term "dispensation." The English word "dispensation" is an anglicized form of the Latin dispensatio which the Vulgate uses to translate the Greek word oikonomia.² Darby seems to reject the idea that oikonomia is derived from a combination of oikos, "house," and nomos, "rule, management, etc." Rather, he prefers a combination of oikos and nemo, as do also Liddell and Scott,³ for "nemo," according to Darby, "means to distribute, divide, feed, etc.; and thus in a house there was a steward, and an economy—a man who arranged, distributed,


²W. W. Skeat, An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 174. The masculine noun form oikonomos occurs ten times (Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 4:1, 2; Gal 4:2; Titus 1:7; and 1 Pet 4:10). The feminine noun form oikonomia appears nine times in the New Testament (Luke 16:2, 3, 4; 1 Cor 9:17; Eph 1:10; 3:2, 9; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 1:4), where it is usually translated either "stewardship" or "administration" in the NASB.

provided for the family; and all the order which resulted from this was the economy, the administration, of the house.\textsuperscript{1} Thus for Darby dispensation means "an order of things established by God."\textsuperscript{2} In fact, the central idea of oikonomia in the scripture is that of a stewardship, administration, oversight or management of other's property.\textsuperscript{3}

From this etymological connotation of the word dispensation, the NSRB defines a dispensation as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God."\textsuperscript{4} Ryrie also construes its theological meaning as "a divinely established stewardship of particular revelation of God's mind and will which brings added responsibility to the whole race of men or that portion of the race to whom the revelation is particular given by God."\textsuperscript{5} A dispensation, according to Ryrie's concise definition, is "a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose."\textsuperscript{6} Thus it


\textsuperscript{2}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{4}NSRB, 3, n. 3 (Gen 1:28).

\textsuperscript{5}Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 32.

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., 29.
is an economy from God's viewpoint; a responsibility from man's; a stage in relation to progressive revelation.\(^1\) So Dispensationalists see the world as a household run by God. In this extended household God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of progressive revelation in the process of time.\(^2\) Consequently, there is much variety in the divine economy in the Bible.

The dispensation scheme contains three distinct elements: the divinely revealed will, man's responsibility and accountability of obedience to the divine revelation, and a time-measurement. In this way the NSRB concisely summarizes these elements of dispensation:

\[\ldots\] (1) a deposit of divine revelation concerning God's will, embodying what God requires of man as to his conduct; (2) man's stewardship of this divine revelation, in which he is responsible to obey it; and (3) a time-period, often called an "age," during which this divine revelation is dominant in the testing of man's obedience to God.\(^3\)

Since God has dealt with man over different time-periods in a progressive order, these different time-periods are called dispensations.\(^4\) Each time-period marked

\[^1\text{Ibid.}, 32.\]
\[^2\text{Ibid.}, 31.\]
\[^3\text{NSRB}, 3, n. 5 (Gen 1:28).\]
\[^4\text{The final stage of history, for Dispensationalists, will be developed in a special framework of a particular type of premillennialism, following a very strict literalism in biblical interpretation of Israel and the church. The seven-year period in Dan 9:24-27 will occur}\]
off its dispensation "by a new divine appointment and responsibilities with which it begins and by divine judgment with which it ends."\(^1\) Every dispensation, therefore, has a character of its own and is so distinct that it cannot be commingled with any others.

According to the above-stated meaning of the word dispensation, Dispensationalism can be defined as a system of biblical interpretation that designates periods of time, corresponding to God's different revelations during different dispensations of biblical history. Thus the English definition that it is "a system of Bible interpretation that seeks to discover completely the purpose of God by distinguishing things that differ as well as correlating things that are alike\(^2\) seems to be a rather generalized understanding. It does not expose directly one of the distinctive core elements of the word dispensation immediately prior to Christ's pre-millennial coming. The following events are to happen during the last seven years of the present dispensation: Christ's invisible return to resurrect the righteous and transform the living saints, the ascension of the bride, the tribulation of the Jewish people, Christ's visible return to the Mount of Olives, the destruction of antichrist, conversion of all Jews and their return to Jerusalem, the judgment of the nations, the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh dispensation, Christ's rule of justice and universal peace together with His "brethren," the Jews, for 1,000 years. See Pentecost, Things to Come, chapter 9ff.

\(^1\)Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 128.

understood by the dispensational theologians. Traditionally, Dispensationalists divide sacred history into seven periods, each of which is characterized by a special administration. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment—marking utter failure.¹

The Historical Development of Dispensationalism

Although its roots are thought by some Dispensationalists to trace back to ancient times, most theologians credit J. N. Darby, an Anglican lawyer and preacher, with the first systematic dispensational theology in the Church of England and Ireland in the mid-1820s.² A series of independent small groups of believers, deeply dissatisfied with the lethargic condition and formalism of the established church, began to meet together in Dublin for weekly Bible study and weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. They were deeply troubled about the prevalent liberalism in the Anglican Church. The preaching of the Second Coming

²Darby himself never claimed to have originated the pretribulation rapture theory. Rather, he was the famous organizer and promoter of the Plymouth Brethren movement. According to MacPherson, modern pretribulation rapture theory was originated from a private revelation of Margaret MacDonald, a young Scottish lassie, in the early part of 1830. See Dave MacPherson, The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin: The Recent Discovery of a Well-Known Theory's Beginning and Its Incredible Cover-Up (Kansas, MO: Heart of America Bible Society, 1973), 101, and The Great Rapture Hoax (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983), 47-53.
simply had become an object of ridicule at that time. Dispensationalism was, accordingly, developed in a climate of pessimism and reaction.¹ The main dissatisfied and unaffiliated dissenter groups were located at Plymouth, Bristol, and Dublin. The most outstanding among these groups was the fellowship at Plymouth, from which the movement derived its name—Plymouth Brethren—where their publishing institute was located. According to the practice of the apostles of addressing believers as "brethren," they designated the name of their group as Brethren. The movement is now also called Darbyism, after John Nelson Darby, the most prominent pioneer of the Plymouth Brethren. Along with Darby there were other early leaders: A. N. Groves; B. W. Newton; S. P. Tregelles, a famous biblical scholar; George Müller, the famous creator of the orphanage in England; W. H. Dorman; E. Cronin; J. G. Bellett; etc.²

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)
and His Influence

As already indicated. John Nelson Darby was one of

¹See Norman Kraus, Dispensationalism in America (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), 6.

the leading pioneers of the Plymouth Brethren movement. Although he was not the founder of the movement, he became the prime mover in systematizing and propagating its teachings. Darby was born in London and graduated from Trinity College at the age of eighteen. After his conversion, he abandoned the legal profession and became a servant of Christ. He was ordained a deacon in the Church of England. Soon he was appointed to the curacy of a parish in Wicklow.\(^1\) He worked vigorously and with remarkable success in his ecclesiastical district.\(^2\) In time, he began to doubt the claims of the formal established church. His first question was regarding the domination of the church by the state. For him the church was little more than a political organization,\(^3\) and it was basically corrupt and therefore useless. During the time he was passing through this inner struggle and doubt, he had an accident, falling from a horse, which forced him into a lengthy convalescence. At this time he had a religious experience which served to reinforce his dissatisfaction with the formal church and to found a practical picture of the Apostolic Church by reading *The Acts of the Apostles*. Because of the uncertainties of the time, he also became preoccupied with


the apocalyptic perspective of Scripture—the return of Jesus and the events surrounding the end-time. After he resigned his clerical position in 1827, he joined a Brethren movement which had been recently founded by A. N. Groves, and became the leader of the stricter Brethren which were organized as a separate body, viz., the "Darbyites." Darby made many trips abroad to lecture and preach in France, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, the U.S.A., the West Indies, and New Zealand. His seven lecture tours to the United States especially influenced American fundamentalism, which was deeply affected by the theology of the Brethren movement.1 Darby wrote voluminous controversial, doctrinal, and devotional works which show the breadth of his knowledge in the area of the Bible and ecclesiastical history.

Two prominent traits of Dispensationalism began to appear in the areas of ecclesiology and eschatology after Darby settled in Plymouth in 1831. As a reaction against the spiritual lethargy and formalism of the church, the Darbyite movement admitted any professing Christian to its informal services and denounced the system of order of

contemporary churches. Thus the Brethren refused to acknowledge any system of clergy and conducted their meetings including the Eucharist without the permission of the church. The church is the assembly of believers in the name of the Lord.\(^1\) Thus a great emphasis was made on the unity of the church by separation from the apostate. By 1840 when some 800 people attended this service, Darby insisted that the group should be known as Brethren.\(^2\)

The church as the body of Christ on earth is completely distinct from Israel. This present church age is "the great parenthetic anomaly of the Gentile dispensation"\(^3\) between the OT kingdom of Israel and the millennial kingdom. This doctrine of the parenthetic church along with the strict dichotomy between Israel and the church has become one of the chief characteristics of modern Dispensationalism.\(^4\) Darby further developed the theory of the

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\(^3\) Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 33, *Miscellaneous No. 2*, 2.

\(^4\) H[enry] A[llan] Ironside states in his *The Mysteries of God* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1946), 50-51, that this doctrine is the chief gem in the diadem of the truth of Christianity. See also *SRB*, vi; Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 154-155.
seven dispensations throughout biblical history. His anti-ecclesiastical tendency and complete distinction of the church from Israel seem to be the premises of his strong emphasis on the abolition of the law.

Another basic dispensational trait came from Darby's doctrine of the pretribulation rapture of the church. His eschatology is based on a rigid literalism along with the dichotomy of the church and Israel. When the church is raptured from the earth to its heavenly existence, Israel and the nations of the world will be left. After the tribulation Christ will return with His church to establish His terrestrial kingdom. This view is called the pretribulation of the church. However, some leaders such as B. W. Newton and S. P. Tregelles did not

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2His idea of the abolition of the law is well expressed in answer to a Romish priest--"... the sabbath . . . means Saturday. As regards the law, the change of the whole system involved the abolition of the Jewish sabbath. The Jewish sabbath was the sign of their covenant; but this was broken on their part, and gone, and buried on God's part in Christ's grave." See Collected Writings, vol. 18, Doctrinal No. 5, 74.

3Bass, Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, 128-129.

4For the documentation, see Larry Vance Crutchfield, "The Doctrine of Ages and Dispensations as Found in the Published Works of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1985), 279-339.
follow Darby's eschatological scheme. They were critical of the concept of a pretribulation rapture. As a result of the controversy, Darby treated his dissenters with intolerance.\(^1\) A division resulted among English Brethrenism.\(^2\) Numerous alignments and separations have been repeated in the movement. The identification of the blessed hope of the church with a particular chronology of eschatology became a principle of separation.\(^3\) Although many schisms consequently marred the subsequent history of the Brethren movement in England, the leading Plymouth Brethren writers such as William Kelly (1821-1906), C. H. Mackintosh (1820-1896), and William Trotter (1818-1865) followed Darby's train and developed the movement in England during the second half of the nineteenth century. Especially stressed was Darby's basic idea of the two peoples of God.

The Spread of the Dispensational Teachings

The vigorous activities and the writings of Dispensationalists became the means of establishing a


\(^2\)Darby even imposed the threat of excommunication against all non-dispensational assemblies which did not follow his decision. Regarding the origin and the development of dissension and divisions, see Ironside, Historical Sketch, chaps. 3-5.

\(^3\)Bass, Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, 99.
beachhead in North America. Begun as a small group, Dispensationalism was soon a cross-denominational phenomenon. Zens suggests three factors as the reasons for this expansion:

1. The major cause for the spreading of Dispensationalism into North America was the great eschatological concern in the nineteenth century. It was not primarily the result of a particular chronology in its eschatological schemes in connection with the rapture of the church but a well-timed advantage to meet the contemporary religious high tide of the movement of the Second Coming of Jesus. The preaching of Christ's Second Coming spread to England, Europe, Asia, India, Russia, Africa, South America, and the United States. The outstanding men who contributed to this international Advent Awakening in the eighteenth century were Edward Irving (1792-1834); Henry Drummond (1786-)

1Thus, there were some reactions to this influence by the non-dispensational side. For instance, James Inglis vigorously attacked the Plymouth Brethren concept of two peoples of God in his article "The Expectation of the Church," Waymarks in the Wilderness, January 1864, 15-16.


1860); Joseph Wolff (1795-1862), a Jewish advent herald on four continents; Manuel De Lacunza (1731-1801), a Jesuit scholar;\(^1\) William E. Blackstone,\(^2\) etc. The first prophetic conference in the old world was held at Albury Park in England.\(^3\) In North America William Miller initiated the Great Second Advent Awakening from 1831. Likewise, the dispensational emphasis on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ contributed to recapturing a hope which had been lost for many centuries. Ladd points out:

Once more, as in the early church, the return of Christ became a living and vital expectation in the lives of Christian people and in the pulpit ministry of many a preacher. . . . Darbyism in fact restored something precious which had long been lost.\(^4\)

2. Another factor for the rapid spreading of Dispensationalism in North America was the rise of anti-liberalism. The unbiblical antisupernatural philosophies such as evolution and deism gained strongholds in Christianity. Dispensationalism was thus welcomed by the minds

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\(^1\)He wrote *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* in Spanish about 1791 under the pen name of Juan Josafa Ben-Ezra. It soon became popular and circulated in Spain and all the way "from Havana to Cape Horn."

\(^2\)Millions of copies of Blackstone's *Jesus Is Coming* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), which formulated dispensational premillennialism, were distributed through the agency of the Moody Bible Institute all over the world. The first edition was published in 1878.

\(^3\)The first meeting was held in the summer of 1826. See Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 3:335-454.

of those who believed Scripture and feared the influence of reason in religion, for it defended the authority of scripture from the inroads of the prevailing rationalistic destructive attitudes. Thus, at the 1914 Prophetic Conference in Chicago, Dispensationalists regarded premillennialism as "a bulwark against modern theology"\(^1\) such as higher critics, evolutionary understanding of the Bible, and heretical movements.

3. The third reason for the development of Dispensationalism in America was that there was growth of a pessimistic view of the future history of the world. The two world wars became the fatal blows to the optimistic postmillennialists. It seemed difficult to bring in the kingdom of God by human effort. The dream of postmillennialism that the whole world of the twentieth century was now entering into an era of peace and prosperity was broken to pieces in the eyes of modern men. Thus prevailing conditions in the world produced a surge of antipostmillennial feeling.\(^2\) According to postmillennialism, the whole world of the twentieth century was now entering into an era of

\(^1\)Quoted in Zens' "Dispensationalism: A Reformed Inquiry into Its Leading Figures and Features," 47, from The Coming and Kingdom of Christ--A Stenographic Report of the Prophetic Bible Conference Held at The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Feb. 24-27, 1914 (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1914), 3; See also Kraus, idem., 61.

peace and prosperity. Darby's theory of the "any-moment" coming of Christ caught on as a response to the optimistic postmillennialism. The combination of this premillennialism with the literal interpretation of the Bible paved the road for many believers to accept the dispensational views.

Besides those three factors, it is noticeable that a host of prominent leaders contributed to gain the expansion of the essentials of Darbyism through their preaching, teaching, and writing. Especially "from their influence has come a host of Bible Institutes and Bible conferences which have supported the dispensational interpretation of prophecy." 

The Bible and Prophetic Conferences

The Bible Conference was the believers' meeting for prayer and general Bible study. These meeting became a decisive role for the development of Dispensationalism. The Prophecy Conference was the meeting concentrated for the most part on the discussion of prophetic subjects by

1Darby, Collected Writings, vol. 32, Miscellaneous No. 1, 244.

means of reading papers and delivering lectures, as an outgrowth of the Believers' meeting.

The important impetus of the Bible conference movement in North America can be traced back to James Inglis. In 1868 he gathered some prominent Christian leaders together for a time of mutual prayer and Bible study to seek God's grace in opposing the perfectionistic teaching.\(^1\) A similar meeting was held in 1869. After Inglis' death a private meeting of the small group was held in Chicago in 1875. J. H. Brookes,\(^2\) H. M. Parson, and Nathaniel West were invited to this meeting. Two annual events grew out of its success—the Bible Conference and the Prophecy Conference. In the view of the participants of this movement, the prophetic word was completely understandable\(^3\)—confidence made possible by their

\(^1\)C. I. Scofield, Rightsly Dividing the Word of Truth (Findlay, OH: Fundamental Truth Publishers, 1940), 67; George Needham, "Believers' Meeting for Bible Study," The Truth, August 1882, 468.

\(^2\)He was fascinated with Darby and his teaching. As an outstanding Bible scholar of that day, he exerted the most far-reaching influence for the future of American Dispensationalism. One of his influential books was Marantha or The Lord Cometh (St. Louis, MO: Edward Bredell, Publishers, 1870).

\(^3\)Henry Lummis says: "And the predictions of Jesus are easy to be understood, even before their fulfillments." See his article, "Christ's Predictions," Prophetic Studies of the International Prophetic Conference (1886), ed. George C. Needham (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1886), 46.
application of a rigid method of interpreting the Bible.¹

The Bible Conferences and the Prophetic Conferences were the centripetal force for the Brethren of the dispensational faith to spread their doctrines over North America in the latter nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.²

The First Bible and Prophetic Conference

The first general American Bible and Prophetic Conference was held in 1878 in New York City. The president of the committee was James H. Brookes. Other notable promoters were A. J. Gordon, George C. Needham, and Stephen H. Tyng.³ The Conference was concerned almost exclusively with the promotion of second adventism and the rebuke of postmillennial faith. The Conference, "composed of brethren from so many different branches of the one


²Regarding the "Believers' Meeting" for the Bible study, see Kraus, 71-110.

Redeemed Church of our Lord," resolved "that the doctrine of our Lord's premillennial advent . . . is one of the mightiest incentives to earnestness in preaching the Gospel to every creature, until He comes."¹ The Bible and Prophetic Conference had received an enthusiastic welcome for the new teaching on prophetic subjects among laity and clergy of many denominations. But as Kraus has indicated, Dispensationalism was neither a central issue nor an integral part of premillennialism at this conference. The speakers who used it often did not understand or accept all of its implications.²

The Second Bible and Prophetic Conference

The second Bible and Prophetic Conference was held in Chicago in 1886.³ Needham reports that there were ministers from all denominations from all parts of the United States and Canada. He summarizes the six purposes of the conference, which are the same as those given for


²Kraus, Dispensationalism in America, 88.

the first conference in 1878: (1) To give prominence to neglected truth, (2) to emphasize the true principles of Scripture interpretation, (3) to awaken Christians from slumber, (4) to present the most majestic of all motives for world-wide evangelism, (5) to call attention to the doctrine of last things as a bulwark against the skepticism of modern theology, and (6) to provide a chance of a real fellowship for thousands of our Lord's dear saints who love His appearing and kingdom.¹ At this conference W. E. Blackstone dealt with the feature of seven dispensations,² and A. J. Frost with the Mosaic dispensation.³ "Covenants in their relation to the Kingdom" was one of the topics for the meeting.⁴ References to dispensational doctrines are more often seen in this conference than in the previous one. During this period contemporary Dispensationalism was developed and strengthened.

The Niagara Bible Conferences

The so-called Niagara Bible Conferences were several series of meetings at Niagara on Lake Ontario

²Ibid., 199-200.
³Ibid., 167.
⁴Ibid., 157.
lasting fifteen years (1883-1897).¹ In 1895 the Niagara group put forth the famous Five-Points statement of doctrine, in which they insisted upon universal Christian acceptance of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, Christ's virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and His physical resurrection and bodily return to earth. A number of leaders at the Niagara conferences accepted J. N. Darby's pretribulation rapture along with the doctrine of Christ's Second Coming. The influential proponents of this dispensational view were James H. Brookes, A. T. Pierson, and C. I. Scofield.² According to the Dispensationalists' evaluation, no annual retreat did more to reinforce old-fashioned Protestantism than the Niagara Bible Conference.³

The decline of these conferences was inevitable. The death of such conference leaders as A. J. Gordon and J. H. Brookes was its immediate cause. The development of divergence of opinion on the premillennial outline of end-

¹Among the leading teachers of these conferences were James Brookes, A. J. Gordon, W. J. Erdman, Albert Erdman, George C. Needham, A. C. Dickson, L. W. Mundhall, H. M. Parsons, Canon Howitt, E. P. Marvin, Hudson Taylor, J. M. Stifler, Robert Cameron, W. G. Moorehead, and A. T. Pierson. See Ladd, Blessed Hope, 44.

²Kraus, Dispensationalism in America, 81-110.

time events, however, also contributed to its dissolution.\textsuperscript{1} For example, it is notable that both W. R. Nicholson at the 1878 Conference and G. N. H. Peters differed with Darby's eternal distinction between the two peoples of God.\textsuperscript{2} An important point of disagreement of opinion among the leaders was the pretribulation concept that the secret coming of rapture precedes the tribulation.\textsuperscript{3} Many leaders of the prophetic movement either rejected this theological scheme from the first or eventually gave up the dispensational doctrine after holding it for a certain period of time. These men were A. J. Gordon, Nathaniel West, W. J. Erdman, Robert Cameron, Henry W. Frost, and W. G. Moorhead. In more recent times, such men as Philip Mauro, Rowland Bingham, Oswald J. Smith, and Harold J. Ockenga at first joined the dispensational theology but rejected it after

\textsuperscript{1}C. I. Scofield himself admitted that this disagreement was the chief reason contributing to the closing of the conference. See Arno C. Gaebelein, The History of the Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Our Hope Publishing Co., 1943), 40-41.


\textsuperscript{3}In the pretributional understanding of future events, the rapture will occur before the tribulation. The church will be moved from the earth before any part of the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27 begins. The rapture and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ are separated by that one week which prophetically represents the seven years.
further study of the Bible. It is true, however, that Dispensationalism has prospered among the conservative-minded Protestants in the United States, for American fundamentalism has been deeply affected by this theology. It has infiltrated all major evangelical denominations. The SRB especially became a great aid in this solidification and popularization of the dispensational system.

The Scofield Reference Bible

Among the most influential supporters working together under the banner of dispensational hermeneutics were Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921) and Arno C. Gaebelein (1861-1945). They formed a nucleus for a new conference at Sea Cliff, Long Island, in 1901 after the Niagara Conferences were discontinued. They planned a

1Ladd succinctly summarizes their theological differences in his Blessed Hope, 45-60.

2Harvie M. Conn indicates that the teaching of seven dispensations also flourished in the land of the "younger churches." See his Contemporary World Theology: A Layman's Guidebook ([Philadelphia]: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), 107. He also states that some dispensational works were translated into Korean in the early twentieth century. During the Japanese occupation (1910-1945) some Christians went to the Shinto shrines, arguing that they were not under the law, but under grace, and therefore they did not need to observe the second commandment. This was a rationalization of Shinto worship under the pretext of dispensational antinomianism. For further information, see Harvie M. Conn, "Korean Presbyterian Church," WTJ 29 (November 1966): 51.

3Cf. Allis, Prophecy and the Church, 9-15.

4Ladd, Blessed Hope, 44.
prophecy conference at Chicago in 1914 and at New York in 1918, by which time Dispensationalism became identified with premillennialism for the next fifty years. It was during the conference at Sea Cliff that Scofield mentioned the plan of producing a reference Bible with dispensational notes.

Scofield, a lawyer without formal theological training, was converted to Christianity in 1879 and began intensive study of the Bible. At this time he was influenced by James H. Brookes. He became a minister of the First Congregational Church of Dallas in 1882. Drawing heavily upon the writings of J. N. Darby and other Plymouth Brethren, he spread the dispensational system in North America as a pastor, lecturer, teacher, and writer. At the 1888 Conference, he clearly stated the basic belief of

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1Kraus, Dispensationalism in America, 104.

2Gaebelein, History of the Scofield Reference Bible, 47.

3During the second term of his Presidency, Ulysses S. Grant (1822-85) appointed Scofield United States attorney for the district of Kansas and Indian Territory. He served in this position for a little over two years and went back to St. Louis to practice law.

4The most important event after his conversion was his early acquaintance with an able Bible scholar of that day, James H. Brookes, an ardent premillennarian. Being regularly instructed by Brookes in Bible study, he could be familiar with the prophecy relating to the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God. See Gaebelein, History of the Scofield Reference Bible, 22, 23; Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, The Life Story of C. I. Scofield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 35; Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Dr. C. I. Scofield," BSac 100 (January 1943): 6.

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Dispensationalism as the doctrine of the distinction between Israel and the church.¹ His statement of Darby's principles forms the core and guideline of contemporary dispensational hermeneutics.² In so doing, he became more influential in popularizing the dispensational doctrines than any other man. Bass goes so far as to say:

Not one representative dispensationalist has ever, to this author's knowledge, repudiated the principles he enunciates above; to do so would be to repudiate the very foundation on which dispensationalism is built.³

Scofield was a faithful herald of basic evangelical theology, vehemently despising theological liberalism.⁴ He also enthusiastically promoted world missions during the time that the denominational missions suffered from the liberal malaise. Through his encouragement a large number of Bible scholars went throughout all the world taking Scofield's works with them. It is natural that his evangelical theology and mission-oriented activities were

¹His message at this time was formulated in "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," The Truth, August, 1888.
²Ryrie recognizes the limitations of the dispensational pioneers such as Darby, Scofield, and Chafer, saying that they cannot be expected to have dealt with everything that could be said about Dispensationalism in their life time. See his book Dispensationalism Today, 99.
³Bass, Backgrounds to Dispensationalism, 150.
united in the conservative minds with Dispensationalism.

In 1902 Scofield retired from the pastorate and for seven years, he, along with the seven consulting editors, gave himself to the production of the Reference Bible. Gaebelinen seems to have been the most influential among the seven consulting editors of the SRB.¹ Scofield published the work under the title The Scofield Reference Bible in 1909.² Scofield was convinced that the Scripture, as a self-interpreting book, could be easily understood by everyone if it were only studied according to its

¹He had almost identical views on most of the sub­jects with Scofield. Sometimes, Scofield asked Gaebelinen to help him in interpreting some difficult prophetic texts. Gaebelinen was the prime mover of the Hope of Israel Move­ment while he was working for a German Methodist Episcopal Church in New York. During his work for Jewish people in 1887, orthodox Jews assured him that a literal messiah would come to claim King David's throne. Thus Gaebelinen gradually gave up the concept that the Christian church was now "Israel," and he became a confirmed premillennialist. Since that time, he never lost his love for the Jewish people. Realizing the necessity of literature for his work, he began in 1893 a publication written in Hebrew, Ticwath Israel— The Hope of Israel Monthly—which advocated the premillennial Second Coming of Christ and the role of literal Israel in eschatological prophecy. See Gaebelinen, "The Story of the Scofield Reference Bible," MM 43 (October 1942): 65-66; David A. Rausch, Arno C. Gaebelinen 1861-1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 1-11.

²Prominent Plymouth Brethren business men supported the project of this publication with their financial resources. The final form of notes and definitions of the reference Bible were adopted under Scofield's responsibil­ity because of the serious differences among the seven consulting editors. This Reference Bible was published by Oxford University Press in the United states, and since 1909, it has sold more than three million copies. See E. Schuyler English, "The New Scofield Reference Bible," BSac 124 (April 1967): 125.
dispensational schemes. In this book he provided a new system of reference to help the Bible student. The outline of each book was arranged along dispensational divisions. Definitions of the important words were given, fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecies, and types and important themes were discussed in notes. This Bible created a formidable sensation, encouraging tens of thousands of people to study the Bible dispensationally. It was revised in 1917 and again in 1967. In 1917 Ussher's chronology was added. The Scofield Bible has been a target of countless critics who maintain that it contains many teachings which are at variance with the historic teachings of the Christian church. Most of the severe criticism of Scofield's Bible came from the leading scholars who once belonged to his camp. Therefore a new revision committee was organized. The 1967 revision committee maintained the same doctrinal

1C. I. Scofield, "God's Purpose in This Age," Our Hope 8 (March 1902): 465-466.


3Among the list of these opponents are Mauro, Gordon, G. Campbell Morgan, Harry Rimmer, etc. See Cox, An Examination of Dispensationalism, 15.

4The members of the revision committee were E. Schuyler English, Frank E. Gaebelein, William Culbertson, Charles L. Feinberg, Allan A. MacRae, Clarence E. Mason, Alva J. McClain, Wilbur M. Smith, and John F. Walvoord.
system, so that the separation between Israel and the church continues. In its eschatological outlook there has been no change. The seven dispensations, the heart of the NSRB, basically remain unaltered in the new version, for the revision committee was charged to maintain the system. The Scofield Bible attempts to assign the dispensations in the light of God's program of redemption. The seven dispensations are: (1) the dispensation of Innocency or freedom (Gen 1:28); (2) the dispensation of conscience or moral responsibility (Gen 3:7); (3) the dispensation of human government (Gen 8:15); (4) the dispensation of promise (Gen 12:1); (5) the dispensation of the Mosaic law (Exod 19:1); (6) the dispensation of the church (Acts 2:1); and (7) the dispensation of the Kingdom (Rev 20:4).\(^1\) The name of the sixth in the 1967 revision has been changed from "grace" to "church." This designates an important concession of Dispensationalism to covenant theology.\(^2\) The definition of a dispensation has been refined. The introductory parts of the sixty-six books have been completely reworked, the language updated, and Ussher's chronology abandoned. Because of the charge that in some dispensations men were

\(^1\)NSRB, 3, n. 3 (Gen 1:28); Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 57-64.

\(^2\)By this designation dispensationalists try to obviate the traditional criticism that grace was an innovation limited to a single age.
saved by works, the new version improved the problematic notes of the previous edition.

The Types of Dispensationalism

Although Dispensationalism is a system of biblical hermeneutics set in a framework of dispensations, the literal interpretation of the Scripture, the premillennial return of Christ, the distinctions between Israel and the church, the differences between the church and the millennial kingdom, and the basic differences between law and grace, unanimity and consistency are not found among its thinkers, writers, and systematizers. Historically there have been divergences in understanding of the number and category of each distinctive administration of God throughout the entire Scripture. For example, the beginning point of the church is differently conceived in the world of Dispensationalism, so much so that the different types of Dispensationalism can be classified. Among these divergences

1 This arose from notes such as the one for John 1:17 of the SRB.

2 For examples, the NSRB eliminated or refurbished some very damaging notes on Zech 9:10; John 1:17; Matt 6:33, etc.

3 Regarding different systems of Dispensationalism, see Charles F. Baker, A Dispensational Theology (Grand Rapids: Grace Bible College Publications, 1971), 4-8.
those denoted "normative Dispensationalism" and "ultradispensationalism" can be named as the major types. Besides, there is a third type which is called "moderate Dispensationalism."

Criteria to Discern the Major Types

It is not easy to determine the differences of normative Dispensationalism from other types. Fuller suggests several criteria to test normative Dispensationalism.\(^1\) The first step is to select the primary influential writers and systemizers in the history of Dispensationalism.\(^2\) However, it is a fact that inconsistencies appear even in the primary thinkers and systemizers.\(^3\) Fuller, therefore, adds another criterion to distill normative Dispensationalism in the ideas of the primary writers. That is the hermeneutical consistency of departmentalizing Scriptures on the basis of whether they concern Israel or the church. In so

\(^1\) Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism," 198-203.

\(^2\) Throughout the history of Dispensationalism those who exercised the more controlling influence over the rest of the adherents are Darby, Kelly, Mackintosh, and Trotter among the Plymouth Brethren of England, and James H. Brookes, C. I. Scofield, Sperry Chafer, and E. Schuyler English in America. See ibid., 195.

\(^3\) For example, Scofield, Chafer, and Walvoord show contrasting opinions on the new covenant of Jer 31. Scofield applied it both to the church and Israel, while Chafer and Walvoord applied it to Israel only. See ibid., 199.
doing, Fuller defines the meaning of normative Dispensationalism as

that system which is the more consistent structure arising from the hermeneutic of departmentalizing Scripture in accord with whether it is for Israel or the Church, and yet which at the same time has enjoyed acceptance by the majority of the adherents to this hermeneutical procedure, even though these have not followed out this procedure to its logical conclusions.¹

Even though the normative Dispensationalism can be defined by using those two steps, they do not determine when the dispensation of the church began. The third step to distinguish normative Dispensationalism from other types of Dispensationalism lies in the starting point of the dispensation of the church.² It is of greater importance for us to grasp the information about the starting point of the present dispensation, for there is a lack of consensus concerning this problem in the dispensational world. In the normative Dispensationalism the church began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, while the other schools make a separate dispensation out of part or all of the Book of Acts.

Normative Dispensationalism

The mainstream of Dispensationalism is referred to as normative Dispensationalism. It emphasizes (1) a different method of divine dealing with man in each

¹Ibid., 203.

dispensation, (2) the distinction between the conditional and the unconditional covenants, (3) the same way of salvation throughout the dispensations, (4) postponement of the millennial kingdom, (5) beginning of the parenthetical church at Pentecost, and (6) the pretribulational rapture.

The factors for development of this school as the main stream of Dispensationalism are identical with those for the spread of Dispensationalism. Above all things, a host of the outstanding scholars and preachers have belonged to this school and vigorously taken part in supporting their doctrines and establishing the biblical institutes. One of the Bible institutes is the Dallas Theological Seminary.¹ Its founder was Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952), who was encouraged to become a dedicated Bible student and teacher by C. I. Scofield. Chafer, along with other lecturers such as H. A. Ironside and A. C. Gaebelein, produced some significant dispensational works through this institution.² Chafer was the most prominent defender of Darby's tenets against the covenant theologians' criticism. Contemporary thinkers like E. Schuyler English, Charles L. Feinberg, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Charles Caldwell Ryrie elaborate on Dispensationalism and

¹It was founded in 1924. Its original name was the Evangelical Theological College.

²Chafer's Systematic Theology is regarded as the magnum opus of the old dispensational thinking.
try to remedy the weak points of Dispensationalism which was formulated by their forerunners.

Ultradispensationalism

Ultradispensationalism had its origin in the teaching of Ethelbert W. Bullinger (1837-1913), who asserted that the church could not be founded at Pentecost nor at any time covered in Acts in which so much of Judaism appears.¹ There are two types of ultradispensationalism:²

1. The extreme type—the mystery of the church—began after Acts 28. As already noted, this group follows the teaching of the English clergyman E. W. Bullinger, who taught that neither water baptism nor the Eucharist was an ordinance for the church.³

2. The moderate type—the church, the body of Christ—began sometime after Paul's conversion, i.e., between Acts 9 and 13. This type is the most prevalent in America.⁴ This group keeps the Lord's Supper but does not


³ Charles H. Welch was a successor of Bullinger in London, and A. E. Knoch and Vladimir M. Gelesnoff promoted this extreme ultradispensationalism in America. See Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 194-195.

⁴ It is represented by the Grace Bible College, the Grace Gospel Fellowship, Grace Mission, and Berean Bible Society. The well-known names of this type are Cornelius...
believe in water baptism for the church dispensation.

**Moderate Dispensationalism**

Moderate dispensationalists agree with most of the basic beliefs of Dispensationalism, but they do not always apply them consistently. Furthermore, they reject some points of normative Dispensationalism. For example, Peters generally distinguishes the church from Israel, but he admits the concept of the church from the seed of Abraham. Thus the church as "believing Jews" and the elect of Israel constitute the "Israel of God."¹

It is also noticeable that some recent modern Dispensationalist writers challenge their own dichotomy in the understanding of Israel and the church. Along with "the growing rapprochement that has been taking place between covenant and dispensational theologians of orthodox persuasion over the last decade or so,"² some dispensational

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writers stress the continuities between the Old and the New Testaments according to God's comprehensive purpose and unified program. For example, Barker presents four false dichotomies between the Testaments: (1) The circumcision of the flesh in the OT and that of the heart in the NT; (2) the letter of law in the OT and the spirit of the law in the NT; (3) the OT as the Testament of law and the NT as that of grace; and (4) Israel as the OT concern and the church as the NT concern. Barker concludes that the present kingdom of God is moving toward the grand climax of history, the finalization of His kingdom which includes elect Israel, the true church, and elect Gentiles.¹

Summary

Dispensationalism is a system of biblical interpretation that divides the history of God's dealing with humans into several dispensations, which are distinguished by different ways of divine dealing with them. At the heart of the teaching stands the concept of a radical discontinuity between the Old and the New Testaments. It traditionally emphasizes a twofold purpose of God: one related to the heavenly people, the church, and the other related to the earthly people, Israel. Especially it is an

(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 163.

eschatological scheme that had a strong appeal for conservatives who fear liberal theology.

Dispensationalism traces its origin to the Plymouth Brethren and their reaction to the lethargic religious situation of the established church in England in the early nineteenth century. Its theological scheme spread to North America by riding on the religious high tide of the movement of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, a conservative reaction against liberal theology. The old Scofield Reference Bible greatly contributed to the spread of the dispensational teaching and to American fundamentalism, and its notes have spelled out the normative Dispensationalism in the United States. Yet some moderate dispensational writers have challenged their views by stressing the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments. Throughout the development of Dispensationalism, the negative attitude toward the law, especially in the Sinai covenant, has prevailed as an important doctrinal scheme. It rejects any relevance of the Sinaitic covenant to the church.
CHAPTER III

DISPENSATIONALISM AND COVENANT THEOLOGY

Introduction

The dispensational understanding of the Sinai covenant has been dialectically formed out of its debates and dialogues with covenant theology. Facing covenant theologians' ceaseless opposition and criticism, the dispensational thinkers have tried to avoid some blind points and elaborated their assertions on the Mosaic covenant and law. Hence, it is necessary for us to explore the point of view of the recent covenant theology on this matter. The covenant theologians themselves have been struggling with the concept of the covenant of works and its relation to the Sinai covenant. The divergences appear clearly in the series of the debates between the representatives of these two schools, which led to substantial shifts of theological positions among the Dispensationalists. It may be said, in fact, that there is a new Dispensationalism.

1Covenant theology is sometimes called federal theology. This system describes the relationship between God and man in form of covenants. It appeared in the writings of Zwingli, Bullinger, Olevianus, and Calvin and played a dominant role in Reformed theology of the seventeenth century, especially among the Puritans.
Covenant theology was the predominant type of theology underlying most of seventeenth-century Puritan and congregational theology. It sees "the relation of God to mankind as a compact which God established as a reflection of the relationship existing between the three persons of the Holy Trinity."\(^1\) Its origin can be traced back to the Reformation era.\(^2\) The concept of covenant theology as an undeveloped form appeared in the writings of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)\(^3\) and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). The covenant of God was especially, for Bullinger, the center of

\(^1\)M. Eugene Osterhaven, "Covenant Theology," Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 279. Osterhaven here explains three essential covenants—the covenant of works, the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace—in covenant theology. Charles Fred Lincoln considers the covenant theory of the covenant of redemption and the covenant of works before Adam's fall is an assumed theological principle, not an exposition of distinct portions of Scripture, in his article "The Development of the Covenant Theory," BSac 100 (January-March 1943): 134, 162.


\(^3\)His concept of the covenant was not prominent because of his defense for infant baptism. See J. Wayne Baker, Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), xxv.
his theological reflection. In the development of Reformed theology, especially in John Calvin (1509-1564), the idea of the covenant of grace played a prominent role. Even though he was not the inventor of covenant theology, Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669) is regarded as "the most eminent theologian of federal theology," for he drew his historical conclusions for the economy of redemption from the covenant concept, the organizing principle of the Bible. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)

1Bullinger presented an important background for his later covenant concept in the treatise De Scripturiae negotio (1923). He had a clear and complete idea by late 1525. In 1534 Bullinger wrote a treatise in church history on the covenant entitled Of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God in which he asserted that the Scriptures must be understood in the light of the Abrahamic covenant. He stressed the conditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant. The Sinaic covenant was regarded as the same covenant that had been made with Adam and Abraham. Baker, Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant, 2, 8, 17, 77. Cf. Mark Walter Kalberg, "The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology" (Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980), 162.

2Vos states: "The German Reformed tradition saved the old Protestant truth from the hands of deteriorated Lutheranism. Thus, the doctrine of the covenant is supposed to be German-Protestant, not Reformed. Or rather . . . Melanchton, not Calvin, would be the one who took the lead." Redemptive History, 235.


4Ibid., 360.
recognizes this doctrine as an official creed for the Presbyterian Church.\(^1\) Because of the influence of rationalism and of Placaeus' theory of mediate imputation,\(^2\) the doctrine of the covenant was refuted in the Netherlands, in Scotland, and in New England in the eighteenth century. Likewise the doctrine of works received little response in Roman Catholic and Lutheran theology because of their theory of the immediate imputation of Adam's sin to his descendants. Charles and A. A. Hodge, James H. Thornwell, Robert L. Dabney, etc., attempted to revive covenant theology in the American church in the nineteenth century. Their efforts eventually failed. It again began to draw attention under the activities of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck in the Netherlands at the turn of the present century, and it still displays its influence in the church.

Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace

Recent covenant theologians have suggested three kinds of covenants: the covenant of works, the covenant of redemption, and the covenant of grace in covenant theology.


\(^2\)Rejecting the immediate imputation of Adam's actual sin itself to his descendants, Placaeus asserted that only the consequences of that sin as mediated by the inherited sinful subjective state are transmitted by propagation. The posterity, therefore, do not participate in the apostatizing act of the individual Adam immediately. See William G. T. Shedd, A History of Christian Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1868), 2:158-159.
Among these covenants the latter two are so closely related that some consider them as one mode of the one evangelical covenant of mercy and some regard them as the Godward and manward aspect of the same covenant of grace.¹

The Covenant of Works

The covenant of works is that which God made with Adam as the representative of the whole human race before the Fall.² The elements of this covenant are: (1) two contracting parties—the triune God and Adam; (2) the promise—life in the highest sense; (3) the condition—absolute obedience; and (4) the penalty—death. Scriptural support


²Towards the end of the 16th century the Adamic administration before the fall had come to be interpreted as a covenant called variously the Edenic covenant, the covenant of nature, a covenant of life, or preferably the covenant of works. Yet the early covenant theologians did not develop this Adamic administration as a covenant. The covenant of works might appear from such expressions as foedus legis, pactum legis, or foedus legale which were enunciated by John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin uses these expressions to indicate the Mosaic covenant in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2.11.4. This Mosaic foedus legale was not equivalent to the idea of the covenant of works, as that pertained to the pre-fall creation arrangement. The Mosaic covenant is not one of works in contrast with grace. Rather, Calvin is insistent that the covenant of all the fathers is identical with the new in substance and differs only in mode of administration (Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2.10.2, 8). The doctrine of the covenant of works was more extensively unfolded in the classic Reformed theology of the 17th century.
for this view is found in Rom 5:12-21; 9:4; Hos 6:7; Gen 2:17; Gal 4:24.1

The Covenant of Redemption

The covenant of redemption is between the members of the Trinity. The Father, representing the Trinity, originated this covenant. The Son, as the representative of His people, executed it, and the Holy Spirit applies it. Zech 6:13; Eph 1:4-6; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9, and other texts suggest this interpretation.2

The Covenant of Grace

The covenant of grace is that which God established on the basis of the covenant of redemption. It extends from the Fall to the end of history, encompassing all the covenants of the Bible such as Abrahamic, Noachic, Sinaitic, and new covenants. Thus the single covenant unites both Testaments and combines Israel with the church into the one people of God. The elements of the covenant are: (1) two contracting parties—God and the elect sinner in Christ; (2) promises—the complete restoration of man's proper relation to God; (3) requirements—man's work earns no merits whatsoever (in this sense the covenant is unconditional, yet man must accept the covenant promises by


2Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 266.
faith and consecrate himself to God in new obedience—in this sense it is conditional); and (4) eternal validity, as well as being gracious and universal. Its Scriptural basis is found in Jer 31:33; 32: 38-40; Ezek 34:23-31; Heb 8:10, etc.

With this concept one can easily see why covenant theologians have attacked the dispensationalist teachings. They have objected especially to the idea of different ways of salvation in the Old and New Testaments. They have protested against the dispensationalist denial of the existence of grace before Jesus Christ. They have expressed their horror at the thought that God did not provide enabling power before the Cross. Finally, they have proclaimed that the moral principles of the law are eternally binding.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)

The covenant theologians have attacked Dispensationalism from different viewpoints. Both Kuyper and Bavinck are leading figures in reviving covenant theology as the governing principle for hermeneutics within the Reformed tradition. Kuyper maintains that the essence of the covenant reflects the nature and image of the triune God. Therefore, man as created in the image of God cannot

be conceived apart from the covenant life of the triune God. The first man had the idea of a covenant relationship with God so that the idea of the covenant of works was essential in the original state.\(^1\) After the Fall, the covenant of works was not abolished even though man was incapable of keeping it. Rather it was modified. That is, the grace of God "transfers the covenant of works from our shoulder to Christ's."\(^2\) This means that Christ's righteousness is now the sole ground of salvation. Accordingly, the Mosaic covenant belongs to the covenant of grace. That covenant reveals the grace of God. Of course, the Mosaic covenant was given in the shape of the covenant of works because of its uniqueness, but it is distinct from the original covenant of works. Saving grace precedes the works-obedience in the Mosaic covenant.\(^3\)

Bavinck brings out another facet of the covenant in his discussion of the image of God as a result of the

\(^1\)The original relation between God and Adam is called a covenant relation. The Westminster Confession expressed this relationship as a covenant of works: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect obedience" (chap. 7, 2). Kuyper construes this covenant of works from the inseparable relation between the image of God and the covenant arrangement and the parallel between Adam and Christ in Rom 5.

\(^2\)Ibid., 50.

\(^3\)Karlberg quotes Abraham Kuyper's Dictaten in his "The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics," 229.
intertrinitarian relationship of the three persons. Adam had to achieve eternal life by his proper commission as caretaker of the earth and compliance to God's law. Yet because of the Fall, the order was reversed. In the covenant of grace, eternal life comes first and out of that life the good works follow as fruits of faith. Moreover, Bavinck connects covenant with eschatology. For example, the meaning of Adam as a type of Christ is to be understood with this eschatological perspective. The coming of Moses, even though it led to a new period, did not break off the earlier promise of God to Abraham. Rather, the dispensation of grace continues under the law and the law was to fulfill the promise by pointing to the righteousness of Christ. The same covenant of grace took only a


2Ibid., 219.

3Ibid., 272. Before the Fall, the order was: "through works to eternal life," but after the Fall, it is: "through eternal life to the good works." This logic is supported by the eschatological nature of God's creative six-day work. With the result of the new order Bavinck rationalizes the Sunday-keeping, for "now the Sabbath begins the week and hallows all its days."

4Ibid., 276-277. The type refers to the reality of the covenant representation of the two Adams in the light of Rom 5:14 and 1 Cor 15:45. Thus Christ takes upon Himself the responsibility of the first man and satisfies for us the demands made by moral law. Adam as type of Jesus Christ is eschatologically perceived.

5Ibid., 81.
national form and character at Sinai, for God is immutable and faithful.\textsuperscript{1} Bavinck does not, of course, tone down the responsibility—the demand for faith and repentance—devolving upon those embraced in the covenant. But "taken by itself the covenant of grace is pure grace, and nothing else, and excludes all works. It gives what it demands, and fulfills what it prescribes. . . . The Gospel . . . is not duty but gift."\textsuperscript{2}

Bavinck considers the covenant relationship as inseparable from the biblical account of creation. This is a different way from Robert Dabney (1820-1898) and James H. Thornwell (1812-1862), who constructed the covenant of nature\textsuperscript{3} based upon the nature-grace dualism of the Thomistic conception of the natural relation of the creature to God's will.\textsuperscript{4} Bavinck understands creation as the basis of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Ibid., 274-275.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 278.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Because of the possible misunderstanding, later federalists preferred the phrase "covenant of works," indicating the way in which eternal life was to be rewarded to man.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Robert L. Dabney, \textit{Lectures in Systematic Theology} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 280-283; 300-301; James Henley Thornwell, \textit{Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell} (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:254-256. Thomas Aquinas teaches that reason can take us a certain distance toward the knowledge of God even though revelation is necessary to the attainment of a "saving" or existential knowledge of Him. Man alone can know himself. Cf. \textit{Summa Theologica}, 1.q.12a.4. In the famous statement "grace does not elevate (reduce), but (presupposes and) perfects nature," he overcomes the qualitative distinction between nature and grace by means of

\end{itemize}
the covenant established by God and realized in creation as the law of nature.\(^1\) By virtue of his natural endowments, man was able to keep the covenant of works without supernatural grace and could fully enjoy the highest blessing, the goal of creation.\(^2\) But, since the violation, "the covenant of grace is fixed and established solely in the compassion of God."\(^3\) Christ became the last Adam for the human race.\(^4\) This means that the covenant concept cannot be separated from the biblical account of creation. The unchanging and faithful grace of God, indeed, stands behind the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) and Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)


\(^2\)Ibid., 211-220.

\(^3\)Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 271, 274.

\(^4\)Ibid., 275-277.
perceives the covenant doctrine, the image of God, the original state of man from the eschatological point of view.¹ He prefers the terminology "the covenant of works" to "the covenant of nature," for the latter is apt to give "the impression that this covenant was simply a part of the natural relationship in which man stood to God."² There is the Adam-Christ typology in the covenant structure. As Adam stands in the covenant relationship with his descendants, so Christ stands in a covenant relationship with humans. Christ met the condition of works which Adam failed to do.³ But Berkhof distinguishes between the natural and the covenant relationship in this typology. God is the Creator, the absolute Sovereign and Lawgiver to humanity, He establishes a natural relationship between Himself and mankind. In addition to this general relationship to mankind, God also revealed Himself as a loving Father taking care of His dependents' happiness. So, by a positive enactment, He graciously established a covenant relationship which includes some obligations of man, probation given to man, and the conditional eternal life through perfect obedience.⁴ This covenant of works is not


²Ibid., 211. Berkhof recognizes some doubt regarding the fitness of the expression "the covenant of works," but rejects any objection to the covenant idea. See ibid., 214.

³Ibid., 214. ⁴Ibid., 215.
abrogated even after the Fall, but its obligations were met by the Mediator.\(^1\) In this context, Berkhof sees the Mosaic covenant as in some sense a covenant of works. He states that the church and the state definitely became one in the national form of the Sinaitic covenant. In this covenant the coming Redeemer and other elements are prefigured in ceremonies and types.\(^2\) And "the law constituted for Israel an explicit reminder of the demands of the covenant of works."\(^3\) It was not a renewal of the covenant of works. Rather, "the law was made subservient to the covenant of grace."\(^4\) God did not intend that Israel should merit life by observing the law.

Explaining the fact that the covenant idea appears so much in the foreground of Reformed theology, Vos asserts that it "took hold of the Scriptures in their deepest root idea."\(^5\) He further compares the Lutheran horizontal approach with the Reformed vertical view on the original state of man. For Lutheran theology man already reached the state of uprightness in which there was no need to add

\(^1\)Ibid., 218.
\(^2\)Ibid., 293.
\(^3\)Ibid., 292. Berkhof indicates a greater danger of mistaking the way of law for salvation, as the history of Israel shows.
\(^4\)Ibid., 298.
anything. In other words, the Lutherans have no place to accommodate the covenant idea. In contrast to this teaching, the Reformed theology sees "man not as being placed in eternal bliss from the beginning, but as being placed in such a way that he might attain to eternal bliss."\(^1\) Thus, man has not yet attained to the highest level, so that an ideal to be reached is placed before him. "He has to develop the divinely given good that lies within him."\(^2\) Furthermore, "the meaning of obtaining it is the covenant of works."\(^3\) "The covenant of works," for the Reformed theology, "is something more than the natural bond which exists between God and man."\(^4\) A denial of the covenant of works goes hand in hand with a lack of appreciation for the counsel of peace, the covenant of redemption. Thus, the doctrine of the covenant began with a concept of God's saving act in the history of redemption. This means the theological understanding of the covenant rather than its anthropological interpretation.\(^5\) Even after the covenant of works was broken, God kept it in man's memory. Thus, when the Holy Spirit awakens man to repent by means of the law and the gospel, "the longing for this lost ideal of the

\(^1\)Ibid., 243.
\(^2\)Ibid., 244.
\(^3\)Ibid., 243.
\(^4\)Ibid., 244.
\(^5\)Ibid., 249.
covenant appears as an essential part."¹ Because of this essential content of the concept of covenant in our consciousness, man's obligation to enter into the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant have not been clearly distinguished in the Reformed theology. "At Sinai," therefore, "it was not the 'bare law' that was given, but a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interest of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai."² The separation of the law from covenant is meaningless, for there is a covenantal obligation, the demand of faith, even in the state of grace as man before the Fall was obligated to enter into the covenant of works. In this sense, the law always retains something of the covenanted form.

John Murray (1898-1975)

John Murray rejects the traditional Calvinistic concept of the covenant of works, attempting to overcome the logical difficulty of the doctrine of a covenant of law as viewed in some sense a covenant of works. According to him, we find one single covenant of grace throughout the Bible. A covenant is an administration of grace and promises.³ The traditional conception of the covenant in

¹Ibid., 255.
²Ibid.
³John Murray, The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-Theological Study (London: Tyndale Press, 1954), 31. To Murray the Noachic covenant provides the pattern by which the rest of the covenants of Scripture are to be

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Reformed theology attempted to establish the doctrine of the covenant of works in the first relationship between the Creator and the creature and regarded the Mosaic covenant as a repetition, in some sense, of the features of the first covenant of works.\(^1\) To Murray, however, this is not an accurate designation but rather a grave misconception because it involves an erroneous construction of the Mosaic covenant.\(^2\) If the term "covenant" is used, the designation in the Shorter Catechism, "covenant of life," is preferable.\(^3\) Thus he repudiates the work-principle in the covenant of creation and avoids the parallel between the first and the second Adam.\(^4\)

In spite of the terminological problem, Murray understood. See ibid., 15.


\(^4\)Murray maintains the peculiar nature of Christ's obedience to the law of God. "The obedience Christ rendered fulfilled the obedience in which Adam failed. It would not be correct to say, however, that Christ's obedience was the same in content or demand. Christ was called on to obey in radically different conditions and required to fulfill radically different demands. Christ was sin-bearer. . . . This was not true of Adam. Christ came to redeem, not so Adam." See "Adamic Administration," 2:58.
quotes John Calvin's terms, "the covenant of the law" and "the legal covenant" (*foedus legis*, *pactum legis*, *foedus legale*),\(^1\) which refer to the Mosaic covenant, not to the Adamic administration.\(^2\) He, therefore, concludes that in contrast to the non-soterico Adamic covenant "the Mosaic covenant was distinctly redemptive in character and was continuous with and extensive of the Abrahamic covenant."\(^3\) Since the Mosaic covenant is identical in substance to the new covenant, the description of it as "legal" must not be understood with respect to the traditional law-gospel distinction. The Sinaitic covenant, for Murray, could not be a covenant of works in any sense. The real nature of the Mosaic covenant is "a sovereign administration of grace, divinely initiated, established, confirmed, and fulfilled."\(^4\) Thus Murray states:

> This use of terms to designate the Mosaic covenant or, more inclusively, the Old Testament should guard us against the assumption that they have any affinity with or give any support to what, later on, had come to be called the covenant of works.\(^5\)

Since the Mosaic covenant is the covenant of grace, a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant, it is wholly

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\(^1\) *Inst.*, 2.11.4.


gratuitous and depends solely upon God's good pleasure. Even when it is said that faith is the condition of the covenant, this is not to be understood "absolutely but relatively and instrumentally."¹

Meredith G. Kline

Along with John Murray, Meredith G. Kline has led Reformed theology into a deeper level of understanding of the biblical concept of the divine covenant. A covenant, for Kline, is an administration of "God's lordship consecrating a people to himself under the sanctions of divine law or an administration of the 'kingdom of God.'"² Thus Kline gives the priority to the legal aspect of the covenant. The covenant with Israel at Sinai is the model covenant by which the rest of the covenants of Scripture are to be understood or the nucleus covenant for understanding Israel's history and religion.³ He explains the centrality of the Sinaitic covenant as follows:

¹Ibid., 4:233. Murray indicates Francis Turretini's method on this point. According to Turretine, if condition is understood in the sense of meritorious cause, then the covenant of grace is not conditioned. But if understood as instrumental cause, receptive of the promise of the covenant, then it cannot be denied that the covenant of grace is conditioned. See ibid.

²Meredith G. Kline, By Oath Consigned: Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 36.

The origin of the Old Testament canon coincided with the founding of the kingdom of Israel by covenant at Sinai.¹

There is probably no clearer direction afforded the biblical theologians for defining with biblical emphasis the type of covenant God adopted to formalize his relationship to his people than that given in the covenant he gave Israel to perform, even "the Ten Commandments." Such a covenant is a declaration of God's lordship, consecrating a people to himself in a sovereignly dictated order of life.²

Kline has provided valuable insights into the meaning and significance of biblical eschatology and typology, particularly in connection with the Sinaitic covenant.³ The Mosaic tabernacle and Aaron's garments, the replicas of God's glory-robe, are described as an act of investiture, an adorning of the bride (His bride-people) in her wedding garments, which means a token of covenantal engagement.⁴ He defines a covenant as a "relationship under sanctions."⁵ In other words, the substance of a

¹Idem, Structure of Biblical Authority, 43.


³Idem, Structure of Biblical Authority, 155-157. Kline says, "Interpretations of a dispensational brand, while quite insistent on the fact of divinely differentiated eras, misconstrue the discontinuity aspect of the redemption process aspect of the redemptive process . . ." (p. 96).

⁴Idem, "Investiture with the Image of God," 57. This covenant of marriage was a shadow of the church in Rev 21 and 22 in which we again see the combination of the figures of clothing and building (pp. 53-54).

⁵Idem, By Oath Consigned, 16.
divine covenant is an administration of God's lordship based on God's law. God may administer either grace or promise, accompanying legal requirements providing the ultimate basis of all covenantal relations. This is a difference of Kline's teaching in comparison with Murray, who sees the covenant as an administration of grace and promise. There, for Kline, are two kinds of covenants in Scripture—a law-covenant and a promise-covenant according to the kind of oath.¹ If God swears, the covenant is one of promise. If man swears, the covenant is one of law.² This is another difference from Murray, who emphasizes a single covenant type. Even though the covenant of Sinai was originally connected with what preceded, its distinct identity as a covenant of law must be maintained. Kline's attempt to establish the priority of the law-covenant is based on his supposition that God's relation to man is characterized as "strictly law administration."³ Thus he

¹O. Palmer Robertson discusses the priority of the two distinctive types of covenants in connection with John Murray and Meredith G. Kline in his article "Current Reformed Thinking on the Nature of the Divine Covenants," WTJ 40 (1977): 63-76.

²Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 16-21. Robertson doubts the validity of this criterion by showing some contrary evidences that both parties are involved in oath-bond commitment in the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants. "Current Reformed Thinking," 70-71.

interprets Paul as stating that the Sinaitic covenant "made inheritance to be by works."¹

O. Palmer Robertson

O. Palmer Robertson rejects the idea of trying to give priority to one covenant as Murray and Kline had done. He is a contemporary figure in hearing many of the dispensational criticisms of covenantal theology and responding with his thoughts in *The Christ of Covenants*. He defines covenant as a "bond in blood sovereignly administered."² He presents a powerful argument for the unity of the covenant-plan of salvation in its several manifestations of the Scripture.³ On the basis of this view, he criticizes the covenant-of-works doctrine.⁴ There was grace before the Fall, and works are a part of covenant even after the Fall. Therefore, the designation "covenant of creation"⁵ and "covenant of redemption"⁶ are desirable instead of "covenant of works" and "covenant of grace."

Robertson uses the terminology "the covenant of

¹Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 23.
³Ibid., 28-52.
⁴Ibid., 54-57.
⁵This refers to the bond which God established with man by creation.
⁶This refers to the various administrations by which God has bound Himself to man since the Fall.
"law," stressing the character of the specific concept of law in the larger concept of covenant.¹ The covenant of law as belonging to the totality of God's redemptive purpose is a historical manifestation of an externalized summation of the will of God toward man in sin.² The Mosaic covenant does not replace the preceding covenant; therefore, it is "an advancement beyond all that precedes" and a shadowy, prophetic administration of the covenant of redemption.³ Furthermore, Robertson considers the revelation of God's law to His people as the embodiment of the grace of God.⁴ The presence of the law must be recognized throughout the history of redemption. So law functioned significantly in the period preceding and succeeding Moses.⁵ Both law and gospel based on the nature of God itself "will continue to manifest themselves throughout God's covenantal dealings."⁶ The Ten Commandments as the central core of the Mosaic phase of the covenant of

¹Ibid., 71.
²Ibid., 172-175.
³Ibid., 186. See also p. 63.
⁴Robertson, "Current Reformed Thinking," 74.
⁵Robertson, Christ of the Covenants, 175.
⁶Robertson, "Current Reformed Thinking," 76. Here Robertson sees any attempts to settle the priority of one over the other between law and promise as shown in Murray and Kline.
redemption reflect the nature of God Himself and play a binding power on the new covenant believer.¹

Thus, the Mosaic covenant for most of the covenant theologians belongs to the covenant of grace accompanied by some features of the first covenant of works. They have understood its works-principle from the standpoint of the creation event and the Adam-Christ typology and treated it as having a subservient role. Some regarded the Mosaic covenant as a continuation and expansion of the previous covenant of grace, or a model covenant because it provided the legal foundation as the ultimate basis of all covenant relationships. Because of this fundamentally gracious character of each covenant of God, covenant theologians reject the dispensational view of the Mosaic covenant.

The Debates of Dispensationalism with Covenant Theology on the Sinaitic Covenant

Throughout its historical development, Dispensationalism has faced not only internal, theoretical objections on various points of its system but also external criticism. In proportion to the increase of influence of the SRB, numerous points of contention have been raised by non-Dispensationalists. Especially from 1935 to 1937 the Dispensationalists came into a most heated conflict with covenant theologians, who were more critical

¹Idem, Christ of the Covenants, 74.
than any other group. There are three main phases in debates between the covenant theologians and the Dispensationalists. As the controversies continued, the field of their differences was limited and thus the differences of two perspectives became clear.

The First Phase

During the first phase, which goes approximately from the later 1920s to the early 1930s, the debate arose between Philip Mauro and Isaac Massey Haldeman. The key issue in the first phase was mainly related to the dispensational two ways of salvation. As already indicated, Mauro at first supported Dispensationalism but broke completely with the dispensational view of the Sinaitic covenant in The Gospel of the Kingdom.  

Philip Mauro versus Isaac Massey Haldeman

Philip Mauro regarded the dispensational teaching as a "contrivance" of man, something "imposed" upon the Scriptures, not something "derived" from the Scriptures, a

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1This conflict between Dispensationalism and covenant theology did not break out into the open in the United States earlier because of the united front of the conservatives against liberalism and evolutionism.

2In 1913 Mauro defended the pretribulation of Dispensationalism in Looking for the Saviour. He rejected the dispensational view of the postponed kingdom in The Kingdom of Heaven (1918) and departed from the usual futurist interpretation of the Revelation in A Study of the Apocalypse (1925). See Ladd, The Blessed Hope, 53.
"crude system" which has done "the greatest harm" "to the revealed truth," and a system "to be feared and shunned because it comes to us in the guise and garb of strict orthodoxy."¹ He looked at Dispensationalism as a movement that has no roots in Christian history and as a revival of first-century rabbinism.² Fearful of seeing the law as a form of bondage, he uses Calvinistic language to celebrate the gift of the law at Sinai. It was, he states, "an act of grace and goodness," "a distinguished honor," and "an unspeakable benefit."³ The giving of the law to Israel was "in fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham" (Psalm 105:8-10).⁴ Accordingly, he rejected the dispensational position that grace was entirely absent from the era of law⁵ and that Israel was placed under the law of God by their own choice. Rather, it was an essential part of God's plan that Israel should be the custodians of His law.

Mauro did not accept this age as the age of grace. Instead, he saw it the era of law and grace. As there was

¹Philip Mauro, The Gospel of the Kingdom with An Examination of Modern Dispensationalism (Boston: Hamilton Brothers, 1928), 17-20.

²Ibid., 20-21; see also Philip Mauro's again emphasizing this argument in "Modern Dispensationalism: Its Origin and Distinctive Tenets" (July 1938); reprinted paper in Res 1 (Spring 1971): 12-13.

³Mauro, Gospel of the Kingdom, 35-36.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 34.
grace during the era of the law, so there is law during the era of the gospel.¹ The law, he states, "is indeed a two-edged sword, bringing life to those who submissively receive it . . . but bringing death and condemnation and a curse to those who despise it."² Rejecting the dispensational teaching that the Sermon on the Mount is law, not grace,³ Mauro pointed out the display of grace in it.⁴

To this attack, Isaac Massey Haldeman replied that Mauro's criticism was a result of the pitiful spiritual darkness by ignorance of dispensational truth.⁵ According to Haldeman, the Mosaic law was not given to any Gentile nation or people on the earth and it was given only to the nation Israel.⁶ Considering this age as the age of grace without law, he accused Mauro for his "evil mixture of law and grace."⁷ Because of his literal interpretation of the

¹Ibid., 38.
²Ibid., 49.
³See SRB, 989. Along with this fact, Mauro quotes the following statement of the SRB: "The doctrines of grace are to be sought in the Epistles, not in the Gospels" (ibid.).
⁴Ibid., 181-191.
⁶Ibid., 129-130.
⁷Ibid., 135-143.
Sermon on the Mount, Haldeman argued that it cannot apply to the present "world as now controlled."¹

In this conflict the issues became clear-cut: Mauro exposes the dispensational system as unbiblical and self-contradictory in seeing a lack of grace in the Mosaic covenant and law, the application of the law only to the nation Israel, the antithetical relationship between law and grace, and the impossibility of the application of the Sermon on the Mount to this age; whereas Haldeman regards Mauro's mistake as coming from ignorance of the dispensational truth.

The Second Phase

As a result of wave of debates in the 1920s and the early 1930s, there was a series of conflicts between the covenant theologians and Dispensationalists from the second half of 1930 to the first half of the 1940s. An especially heated debate held forth from 1935 to 1937. Most issues of the first phase were repeated at this second phase, but they were more sophisticated. The core issue was the question of unity in God's purpose in the Scriptures, in the covenant of grace, in the way of salvation, and in the church. It was especially related to the difference between the ages of the law and grace, whether they were the expressions of God's one purpose or not. The main exponents of the covenant theologians during this

¹Ibid., 149.
stage were Albertus Pieters, Oswald T. Allis, John Murray, J. Gresham Machen, James E. Bear, Louis Berkhof, etc., while the main defenders of the dispensational theology were Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Lee Feinberg, John F. Walvoord, John F. Strombeck, etc. The most serious criticism came from the Presbyterians. The Presbyterian Guardian and the Christian Beacon carried articles of John Murray, R. B. Kuiper, Carl McIntire, Allen MacRae, J. O. Buswell, J. G. Machen, and others, which occupied the attention of the whole Presbyterian Church of America.

The Attacks of the Covenant Theology

Albertus Pieters

Slightly before this period, a criticism of non-dispensational theology appeared in a series of articles by the Lutheran scholar, T. Engelder. From the camp of

1 T. Engelder concluded that Dispensationalism, as a man-made doctrine, went against the gospel principle; for instance, its teaching shows two different saving gospels by denying that the gospel of forgiveness of sins provides the way of salvation in all periods of history. His concrete reasons for rejecting Dispensationalism are: (1) It turns the heart of the believer away from the hidden spiritual glory of the Christian life; (2) the center of its theology is eschatology, not soteriology; (3) the dispensation of the kingdom to come will exceed in glory and universality that of grace; (4) it sets up a different way of salvation from that of the gospel. It teaches the possibility of salvation by works of the law and the rule of the legal system in the millennial kingdom as the vehicle of God's blessings. T. Engelder, "Notes on Chiliasm," CTM 6 (July 1935): 481-654. Engelder attacked Henry W. Frost, an ardent Dispensationalist of his time. Frost asserted that Christ came between the dispensation of law and that of grace, that He will come again between the
covenant theology, Albertus Pieters was one of the first who denounced the influence of the SRB in the 1920s and criticized it in publications of the 1930s.\(^1\) Treating Scofieldian knowledge as man-made religious idea,\(^2\) he classified the Reference Bible as one of the most dangerous books.\(^3\) After examining the entire dispensational scheme of the book\(^4\) in the light of the Scripture, he concluded that it "breaks down completely."\(^5\) One of the reasons for this conclusion is that the Sinaitic covenant was no more than a repetition and confirmation of preceding promises and that the giving of the law in the Pauline Epistles did not end the dispensation of promises.\(^6\) The church is, for

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\(^1\)Albertus Pieters, *A Candid Examination of the Scofield Bible* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, n.d.), 3-5. This small pamphlet was a lecture delivered before the Ministerial Association of the Christian Reformed Church at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 1, 1936. Cf. Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism," 140.

\(^2\)Ibid., 9.

\(^3\)Ibid., 26.

\(^4\)Pieters presents four distinctive features of the SRB: (1) its artificial and extravagant typology; (2) its doctrine of dispensations and covenants; (3) its futuristic eschatology; (4) its doctrine of the church.

\(^5\)Ibid., 15.

\(^6\)Ibid., 15-16.
Pieters, the true Israel and the heir to all the glorious OT kingdom promises.¹

Oswald T. Allis

Allis rejected Dispensationalism as having been derailed from historical Protestantism.² He accused it of being "intensely supernaturalistic and even catastrophic in its view of human history and destiny."³ The hermeneutical aberrations in Dispensationalism were exposed by Allis as follows:

First, Dispensationalism divides and compartmentalizes the Scriptures. Since the Scriptures are divided into contrasting and contradictory dispensations with mutually exclusive characteristics,"... the Bible ceases to be a self-consistent whole."⁴ The divided dispensations, especially of grace and of the kingdom, differ from and even contradict each other. Therefore, the gospel of the kingdom-age and the gospel of the grace of God for the church-age are mutually exclusive. Each age has a gospel of its own.⁵ Man is saved by obedience in the kingdom-age,

¹Ibid., 23.
²Allis, "Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity," 25.
³Ibid., 23, 24.
⁵Idem, "Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity," 29.
while by faith in Christ in the church-age. Thus, two ways of salvation are unavoidable in dispensational theology.

Second, Dispensationalism excludes the Lord's Prayer from the order of worship because the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer—"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"—is considered legalistic. Law, they assert, belongs to the dispensation of law, not to the church-age, the dispensation of grace. In fact, the SRB claims the Sermon on the Mount is pure law, to be kept by all the righteous in the kingdom age.

Third, Dispensationalists misconstrue the Sinaitic covenant as legalism, for they assert that God proposed to Israel the covenant of law at Sinai and the people rashly accepted the law instead of humbly pleading for a continued relation of grace. The Dispensationalists' contrast between the conditionality of the Mosaic covenant and the unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant upon which much of Dispensationalism is based, according to Allis, is a flimsy foundation, for the dispensation of promise required obedience just as definitely as the dispensation of the

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1See SRB, 1002, n. 1.


3SRB, 999, n. 2.

4Allis, "Modern Dispensationalism and the Law of God," 272-289. See also Scofield, Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, 22.
law. The Mosaic covenant magnified both law and grace and became a new form of the same covenant of grace. The dispensational failure to recognize that the Mosaic covenant belongs to the covenant of grace is, therefore, one of the fundamental errors in the Scofield Bible.¹

John Murray

In a series of articles, John Murray asserted that the Reformed faith must not only be distinguished from the modernist perversion of biblical ideas but also from two systems of belief--Arminianism and modern Dispensationalism.² The main targets of his criticism were the SRB, Arno C. Gaebelein's The Jewish Question, Lewis S. Chafer's The Kingdom in History and Prophecy, and Charles L. Feinberg's Premillennialism or Amillennialism. He supported Allis's examination and repeatedly attacked the dispensational system and indicated some of its problems--the sharp antitheses between the Mosaic and Christian dispensations and the mutually destructive relation between the

¹Ibid., 280, 282. Allis supports the condition of obedience in the life of Abraham's faith with such passages as Gen 21:5; 22:2, 18; Heb 11:17. Another reason that Allis sees the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants as essentially one comes from the fact that the singular form of the word "covenant" is used throughout the OT (ibid., 275).

principles of law and grace. The covenant of grace, for him, was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel. He affirmed Chapter 11.6 of the historic Westminster standards, "the justification of the believers under the OT was one and same with the justification of the believers under the New Testament." He also challenged the validity of the dispensational distinction of "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God." Furthermore, he exposed the problem of teaching that the law of Moses, the Sermon on the Mount, and the preaching of John the Baptist were purely based on law, according to the distinction between two kinds of kingdoms.

As a result of Murray's several articles, some articles appeared which supported him and caused much doctrinal discussion within the Presbyterian Church of America over the question of the millennium. For instance, Carl McIntire published an editorial in the

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3 Ibid.


6 Later it was called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
Christian Beacon accusing R. B. Kuiper of his assertion that the premillennial view of the Lord's second coming is contrary to the Reformed Faith. Kuiper replied to Carl McIntire that he did not condemn premillennialism but the Scofieldian system which creates a sharp distinction between the dispensation of grace and that of law and their antinomian tendency.

J. Gresham Machen, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., and Ned B. Stonehouse

J. Gresham Machen, in an editorial, supported Kuiper's position in which he accused McIntire of misrepresentation that Kuiper regarded the premillennial view of the return of the Lord as contrary to the Reformed faith.

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1At that time R. B. Kuiper followed Murray's idea by pointing out two errors—Arminianism and the dispensationalism of The Scofield Reference Bible—which were extremely prevalent among American fundamentalists. See R. B. Kuiper's article entitled "Why Separation Was Necessary," reprinted in PG, September 1936, 225-227.

2Carl McIntire charged that "eschatological liberty" had been called into question within the church. See Carl McIntire, "Premillennialism," editorial in the Christian Beacon (October 1936), reprinted in PG, November 1936, 53-54.


4PG, November 1936, 41-45.

5Although he considered premillennialism as being contrary to the Scriptures, Machen did not regard it as being incompatible to true Presbyterianism because of the vagueness of the standards. J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923), 49; Machen, PG, November, 1936, 42, 71.
and in which he also attacked the Scofieldians for denying the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster standards. Machen rejected the Scofieldian view that the Sermon on the Mount, including the Lord's Prayer, is not primarily applied to the church. He further declared that if a believer accepted the Scofieldian Dispensationalism, "he is seriously out of accord with the Reformed Faith and has no right to be a minister or elder or deacon in The Presbyterian Church of America." In these debates, Dispensationalism had so attached itself to premillennialism that any attack against it was understood as an attack against premillennialism.

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., also defended the Reformed faith against many of the teachings of modern Dispensationalism, for the Scofield notes teach that the Mosaic system was fundamentally legalistic. He disagreed even with the moderate dispensational idea that the Mosaic order was "demonstrative of the fact that man could not be saved by the law" because it offered "a way of eternal life to show that man was not able to attain salvation by this hypothetical means." The Mosaic system, for Buswell, was

1Ibid., 42-43.
2PG, November, 1936, 42.
3But the editorial in the PG (March 1937) asserted premillennialists could be true Calvinists. See 217-220.
4J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., "A Premillennialist's View," PG, November 1936, 47.
an economy of grace. Furthermore, "the moral law in Exodus," Buswell argued, "has the same relation to a man of faith which the moral law in Ephesians has to the Christian."¹

Ned B. Stonehouse's central objection to Dispensationalism in his editorial was that the Scripture is regarded as setting forth more than one religion, that is, the two ways of justification.²

At that time, Machen's seminary faculty, Westminster Theological Seminary, soon found itself in turmoil over the question of Scofield Dispensationalism.³ After the Third General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America in June of 1937, the Bible Presbyterian Synod itself separated from the Presbyterian Church of America and emphasized the dispensational eschatology.

James E. Bear

In 1938 James E. Bear accused the Dispensationalists of rejecting the one central message of the Bible to a sinful race—God's one way of salvation, the covenant of promise (Eph 2:12), from the time of Adam's sin to the present—and of considering various messages for different

¹Ibid.


³Because of a thorny problem of the millennium, a further process in splintering took place with the formation of the Faith Theological Seminary under the headship of Carl McIntire.
groups.¹ For Bear, God has one plan for His people running through the ages. He uses the term "people of God" as comprehending the Jewish and the Gentile Christians for that one group.² And the phrase "the covenant of promise" in Eph 2:12 is a proof text for the covenant position, for the singular "promise" can be interpreted as one central covenant promise which reaffirms the same promise of deliverance through many covenants.³ In these discussions Bear criticizes the major Dispensationalists such as Charles Feinberg, C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, William Evans, and others. He accuses Feinberg of a radical inconsistency. On the one hand, he does not believe in one covenant of grace in accord with the Scripture, and on the other hand, he affirms it when he faces the criticism of teaching two ways of salvation.⁴ The distinction between law and grace is the first of the two great theological teachings in Dispensationalism. It leads to the inevitable conclusion that some people in some dispensations were

¹James E. Bear, "Dispensationalism and the Covenant of Grace," USR 49 (July 1938): 293. At this time, Bear belonged to the Southern Presbyterian Church; he was a professor at Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.


saved by their obedience or by work-righteousness. Also, the concept that the kingdom will be on the basis of legal obedience means, for Bear, that Dispensationalism breaks up not only the unity of God's method of salvation but the unity of His ultimate purpose for mankind.

Under Bear's headship, by 1944 the Eighty-Fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States adopted a report that concluded: "It is the unanimous opinion of your committee that Dispensationalism as defined and set forth above is out of accord with the system of doctrine set forth in the Confession of Faith. . . . It attacks the very heart of the theology of our Church."3

Louis Berkhof

The Sinaitic and the Abrahamic covenants are different in form but not in essence, according to L. Berkhof. Accordingly, he repudiates the Scofieldian view of the Mosaic covenant as the covenant of works. He suggests that one read the Pauline antithetical references on the law and promise from the standpoint of the Jewish misunderstanding


2Ibid., 297.

3This report is found in its entirety in the Minutes of the Eighty-Fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (Austin, TX: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1944), 123-127; cited in Jon Zens, "Dispensationalism in Conflict," 9; James M. Efird, End-Times, 86-87.
of the function of the law, not of their essential contrast.\textsuperscript{1} The concept of a covenant of works for the Sinai covenant only means a curse for Israel because they could not obtain salvation by their works.\textsuperscript{2} The law in the covenant of Sinai which served as a rule of life assumed three aspects—the moral, the civil, and the ceremonial law—and was made subservient to the covenant of grace.\textsuperscript{3}

Other Covenant Theologians

Paul A. Hittson disputed the dispensational assertion that the Mosaic law and the Sermon on the Mount along with the Lord's Prayer were not intended for this age but applicable only to the kingdom-age.\textsuperscript{4} This kind of criticism was repeated by Leslie W. Sloat.\textsuperscript{5} John P. Clellend, supporting Allis' charge against the dispensational view regarding the law, kingdom, and grace, claimed that both the Old and the New Testaments teach that God demands faith and obedience. As obedience was a requisite before Sinai (cf. Gen 26:5), so it is essential in the New

\textsuperscript{1}Berkhof, \textit{Systematic Theology}, 297.

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 298, 299.

\textsuperscript{4}Paul A. Hittson, "Is the Sermon on the Mount for This Age?" \textit{PG}, July 1940, 27-28.

\textsuperscript{5}Leslie W. Sloat, "Pilgrim on the Wrong Road," \textit{PG}, September 1948, 221.
Testament dispensation of grace (cf. John 14:15, etc.).

The dispensational response

Lewis Sperry Chafer

To these attacks Dispensationalists elaborated the dispensational theology in their replies. Lewis Sperry Chafer admitted that Dispensationalists were in the midst of a wave of criticism. In a lengthy article he replied to the attacks of Oswald Allis and tried to justify the dispensational concept by an appeal to ancient church history to prove that dispensationalism belongs to orthodox Christianity. According to Chafer, the early church purportedly advocated two distinct purposes of God: one is related to the earthly people and the other to the heavenly people. Because of these two purposes, it is possible to presuppose two ways of salvation. Chafer thus admits the opposing principles between the divine administrations. He also contends that the real unity of the Scriptures is in the fact that these messages are the revelation of one God and are preserved "only by those who observe with care

2 Lewis Sperry Chafer, "'Modern' Dispensationalism," BSac 93 (1936): 129.
3 Chafer, "Dispensationalism," 390-449.
4 Ibid., 410.
5 Ibid., 416.
the divine program for Gentiles, for Jews, and for Christians in their individual and unchanging continuity.\(^1\)

The Mosaic system was a temporary form of divine government which is done away with and abolished in the church-age.\(^2\) Blessings under the Mosaic covenant were conditioned to an individual faithfulness to the law. The church is seen as accepted solely through a perfect standing in Christ and the ennobling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christians are already constituted as citizens of heaven.\(^3\) Further, this church will be removed. On the other hand, the national entity of Israel has been and will be preserved forever according to the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the new covenant for Israel.\(^4\) "The terms of admission into this kingdom as set forth in Matt 5:1 to 7:27 are, in reality, the Mosaic requirements intensified by Christ's own interpretation of them."\(^5\) Through Chafer's response, the features of the two perspectives were sharply contrasted.

In response to the verdict of the Presbyterian Church, Chafer argues that the issue should be whether there is harmony between dispensational teaching and the

\(^{1}\text{Ibid., 406.}\)
\(^{2}\text{Ibid., 414-415.}\)
\(^{3}\text{Ibid., 412.}\)
\(^{4}\text{Ibid., 411.}\)
\(^{5}\text{Ibid., 443.}\)
Scripture itself, rather than whether there is harmony between dispensational teaching and the Confession of Faith. Here he again contends that "the covenant of grace" is not a biblical term but a supposed theological term. Following the same stream of thought as his predecessors, Chafer considers the law as "the representation of the merit system" and as the antipodes of God's plan of salvation by grace. In the coming age, God will govern with law, not on the ground of grace. Thus, Chafer rejects the one-covenant theory (the covenant of grace) as "superimposed on the Sacred Text" and strongly supports the validity of the dispensational scheme. Thus, on the one hand, he uplifts the achievements of Scofield as an interdenominational expositor and, on the other hand, he condemns the man-made creed by which covenant theologians measure exposition. Chafer's flat rejection of covenantism is well expressed in the final statement of his editorial: "It should be remembered that basic Presbyterian

1Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Dispensational Distinctions Challenged," BSac 100 (1943): 337-340.

2Ibid., 338. Cf. Chafer, "Dispensationalism," 438. Although Chafer protested the decision of the 1944 Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the decision of the 1945 Assembly reaffirmed that of the 1944 Assembly (Minutes, 1945, 65).

3Chafer, Systematic Theology. 3:343.

4Ibid., 4: 222.

5Chafer, "Dispensational Distinctions Challenged," 337-345.
doctrines existed before Johannes Cocceius was born.

Charles Lee Feinberg

In *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, Charles Lee Feinberg attempts to refute the arguments of Bear, Berkhof, and Allis. Stressing the continuity of salvation through grace in all ages, he states: "Whatever God has done in behalf of man in any age, being based on the death of Christ, is manifestation of grace." Regarding the issue of unity in Scripture, Feinberg simply lays stress on the messages of one God. God has two different purposes for Israel and the church, but both of these purposes will be realized under one Lord Jesus Christ. Opposing the concept of the covenant of grace, he exposes the covenant theologians' confusion between law and grace as hopeless. Their principles are mutually exclusive, so that it is impossible for them to exist together. The basis of the law is the covenant of works of which man's merit is the foundation stone. On the contrary, the merit of Christ is the foundation stone in the covenant of grace and the

1Ibid., 345.

2Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism*, 261. Regarding the law, Feinberg interestingly says that the Seventh-day Adventists are more consistent and logical in their view of its perpetuation than amillennialists. Ibid., 238, 260.


4Ibid., 244.
standard in grace is no less than a walk worthy of and in conformity with the high and glorious calling of sons of God in Christ Jesus.¹

John F. Walvoord

For a plausible interpretation of Paul's concept of law, John F. Walvoord attempts to show that the definite article or its absence has special significance in Romans. It establishes a distinction between two kinds of laws. Nomos without article denotes not the law of Moses but law viewed as "a principle, abstract and universal."² Law without article in Rom 3:31 refers to all moral law. By this Paul is arguing in the epistle for something more than a setting aside of Mosaic law. That is, Paul intends that Christ met the requirements of all moral law in order to set forth the doctrines of justification and sanctification. Law is fulfilled, not made void by the Cross of Christ.³ It is impossible for Christians to keep the law even after they are saved. Sanctification is apart from law. God's instrument of sanctification is the Holy Spirit, not the law. "Law is fulfilled in us through love born of the Holy Spirit."⁴ Walvoord's concept of two kinds

¹Ibid., 172-176.
⁴Ibid., 287, 289, 294.
of law will have much influence on later Dispensationalists.

John F. Strombeck

John F. Strombeck attempts to show the preeminence of Jesus Christ and grace over law by using John 1:17 as the key text for the understanding of the whole Gospel of John. Thus he explains that the Gospel of John is based on the contrast between law and gospel.¹ According to John, even though the Mosaic law was based upon love, the new commandment in John 13:34 is much greater than the old, for the measure of love of the old commandment was 'thy heart,' 'thy soul' and 'thy mind' which is on the human level.² The new commandment transcends the old. Likewise the gift of the Spirit is greater under grace than under the law. The Spirit was partially given to certain individuals under the law, but the Spirit of God indwells all believers under grace. Strombeck sees in that failure to recognize this quantitative distinction and transition from law to grace the reason that Christians through the ages have looked at themselves as having to seek in the law guidance on how to please God. "This conflict between law and grace still continues."³

³Ibid., 219.
A very practical and tragic result of that second phase of the debates was a schism in the Presbyterian Church. Covenant theologians interpreted the differences between Israel and the church, law and grace as the manifestations of one purpose of God on the basis of the historical and theological interpretations. On the contrary, Dispensationalists regarded them as the manifestations of two purposes of God. Interestingly, Feinberg sought the unity of two purposes from the fact that they rooted in one God. Walvoord and Strombeck based their arguments upon the biblical and grammatical ground.

The Third Phase

The debates rebounded from the later 1940s to the early 1960s with a new emphasis. As a result of the debates with covenant theology since the 1920s, the dispensational theologians had made an important shift in their position. Dispensationalists were willing to admit salvation by grace through all ages, but they emphasized the eschatological millennial glory as the unifying principle of history, maintaining two different peoples. On the contrary, the covenant theologians regarded the covenant of grace as the unifying principle for the philosophy, maintaining the unity and continuity of the people of God. The main covenant theologians during this period were H. Wilson Albright, John W. Bowman, and William E. Cox, etc., whereas Dispensationalists who refuted the covenant
theologians' attacks were Charles Fred Lincoln, Arno C. Gaebelein, E. Schuyler English, Clarence E. Mason, Charles Ryrie, Roy L. Aldrich, etc.

**Covenant Theologians' Criticism**

H. W. Albright, John W. Bowman, and William E. Cox

H. Wilson Albright also criticized the dispensational concept of two separated covenant peoples and the meritorious obedience under the Mosaic law. The theological basis for his attack was unity in the covenant of grace. The dispensational teaching was, for him, a disruption in the unity of God's dealings with His people. After explaining Chafer's refutation of the term "the covenant of grace," he pointed out that the doctrine of grace and faith are tragically obscured with a multiplicity of covenants and with an emphasis upon human merit.

John Wick Bowman dismissed Dispensationalism as "a

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2 Albright did not forget to present the specific biblical evidences of some dispensational errors.

3 According to Chafer, there were two sorts of covenants: primary covenant dealt with the nation Israel and secondary covenants dealt with the individual Israelite. The first does not extend to individuals.

term descriptive of a fantastic type of interpretation of the Scriptures. . . ."¹ After indicating some major problems in the Scofield Bible,² he also equated the dispensation of law with a dispensation of grace.³ Furthermore, Bowman saw that it was God who appointed a "pedagogue" (Gal 3:24) to serve man's welfare, and that the divine grace was "seen to be functioning through the law" in the context of Gal 3:8-24.⁴ Thus, Bowman declared that all the covenants are one. The relationship between God and man is on a gracious plane and the covenant of law. Because of this position, he regarded the dispensational concept of the eight covenants as a rigorous schematization of the Bible.⁵

Dealing with the major dispensational doctrines as presented by Scofield, Chafer, and others, William E. Cox raised the question of the dual plan of salvation and of legal obedience for salvation in the Mosaic- and kingdom-


²They are the seven dispensations, the eight covenants, prophecy relating to the kingdom of heaven, and the Scofieldian doctrine of the Apostolic Church.

³Ibid., 177, 181.

⁴Ibid., 177.

⁵Ibid., 178-181. Bowman here considers a significant phenomenon that the plural "covenants" nowhere occurs in the OT. Based on Heb 8:7 and 9:1, Gal 4:24, etc., he argues that there are only two covenants in the Scriptures. The expression of "the covenants of promise" in Eph 2:12 and Rom 9:4 refers to "those repeated occasions on which God renews His single covenant with His people under whatever form" (ibid., 181).
ages.\textsuperscript{1} He overlooked the new emphasis of revisionist Dispensationalism such as salvation alone by grace in all ages.\textsuperscript{2}

**The Dispensational Response**

Charles Fred Lincoln

In a series of articles Charles Fred Lincoln criticized the system of the covenant theologians and denied the existence of a single grace covenant as unique, continuous, uninterrupted covenant relationship of God throughout the ages. He also rejected the existence of any covenant relationship prior to the time of Noah. The Abrahamic covenant is basic and it has a personal, national, and universal character. The Sinaitic covenant is basically different from the Abrahamic, Palestinian, and Davidic covenants which are founded on God's grace toward Israel. The covenant of law is legalistic in character.\textsuperscript{3} Therefore, a basic incompatibility exists between the


\textsuperscript{3}Charles Fred Lincoln, "The Biblical Covenants," *BSac* 100 (October-December 1943): 572-573.
covenant of law and that of Abraham in the Scripture.\footnote{Idem, "The Biblical Covenants," BSac 100 (July-September 1943): 442-443.}

Arno C. Gaebelein

In his brief response to covenant theology's criticism, Arno C. Gaebelein regards it as dependent upon a man-made creed and as misinterpretations of the Word of God. He defends the validity of the typical application of the Scofield Bible for most of his answer,\footnote{Gaebelein, The History of the Scofield Reference Bible, 61-71.} for Pieters accused the Scofieldian typology as "artificial and extravagant."\footnote{Pieters, A Candid Examination of the Scofield Bible, 11-13. This pamphlet was still of use against Dispensationalism in the church during the third phase.}

E. Schuyler English

E. Schuyler English, chairman of the revision of the Scofield Reference Bible, repudiates Bowman's criticism that Dispensationalism teaches that man has been saved by different means in different ages and claims that Dispensationalism teaches that man is saved by grace alone in any age,\footnote{English, "E. Schuyler English Looks at Dispensationalism," 25; E. Schuyler English, ed., The Holy Bible, Pilgrim ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 1240. Here he states,"The Old Testament saints . . . are saved through faith in God' Word, and by the Blood." See also Fuller, Gospel and Law, 34.} for the different ways of salvation in each dispensation are not harmonized with the Scriptures. Thus, he
does not vindicate Scofield's and Chafer's two ways of salvation. To them, this was the best way to defend the criticism of the covenant theologians. Thus, this becomes a turning point in the development of Dispensationalism.

Clarence E. Mason and W. W. Barndollar

In reply to Bowman's assertion of one covenant, Clarence E. Mason states: "The dispensational viewpoint is inherent in the facts of the Bible's sequence of events." Following English's new emphasis, he elaborates on salvation by grace in any age and seeks the reason for different dispensations in God's administration, not in His nature. Yet he distinguishes obedience from work, for true faith always works. The law was never given as an enemy of justification. "It was not a way to life (Gal 3:11), but a way of life given to a people already sheltered by blood." No intelligent Dispensationalist wants to dishonor any part of the Scripture. Because law was the revealed truth of God, it has eternal values. Yet its main role is not the rule of life of the righteous man in this age but is designed to condemn the wicked.

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3Ibid., 110-111.
4Ibid., 111.
5Ibid., 111-112.
positive viewpoint shows a progressive understanding of law in Dispensationalism. Along with Mason, W. W. Barndollar answers Bowman and other covenant theologians from the viewpoints of hermeneutics, logic, a philosophy of history, and the meaning of dispensation and Dispensationalism for the validity of biblical Dispensationalism. In his hermeneutics he not only considers the dispensational approach to the Scripture as a basic proposition to its interpretation, but also it is of the greatest importance to distinguish between law and grace.¹

Charles C. Ryrie

Charles C. Ryrie tries to show the validity of dispensational theology from the standpoint of the necessity of biblical distinctions in the dispensational scheme, of a philosophy of history with its millennial consummation, and of consistent, literal hermeneutics.² He briefly exposes some weak points of the covenant theologians such as John Wick Bowman, George E. Ladd, Louis Berkhof, and James Orr. One of his main focal points centers around God's purpose and plan of biblical history. In covenant theology the unifying principle for the philosophy of history is the covenant of grace. In other words, the covenant of grace

is soteriological. In contrast to this covenant tradition, the dispensational unifying principle of history is the eschatological millennial glory, the goal of history.¹ Thus Ryrie concludes: "Only dispensationalism can cause historical events and successions to be seen in their own light and not to be reflected in the artificial light of an overall covenant."²

Roy L. Aldrich

Roy L. Aldrich quotes the statements of the covenant theologians which lift the importance of the Ten Commandments for the Christian Church.³ He concludes that the Christian is free from every aspect of the law of Moses. He especially distinguishes the eternal moral law of God from the Mosaic legal system. Even the moral law of God is not identical with the Mosaic Ten Commandments.⁴ The abrogation of the Mosaic law does not mean abrogation of the eternal moral law of God which exists in all dispensations.⁵ He, therefore, argues that the existence of the eternal moral law of God in all dispensations is

¹Ibid., 248.
²Ibid., 249.
⁴Ibid., 226.
⁵Roy L. Aldrich, "Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?" BSac 116 (October-December 1959): 335.
one of the agreements with the covenant theologians.¹

The RPC/ES Statement

A committee on Dispensationalism, appointed by the 1969 General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, presented a lengthy report in 1970 in which the dispensational view of Charles C. Ryrie was analyzed and various areas of discrepancy with the Westminster Standards noted. In its concluding part, Dispensationalism was regarded as a misinterpretation of Scripture. In a further report of 1971 the committee affirms:

... the unity of the covenant of grace in all ages; salvation by grace through faith in all ages; the unity and continuity of the people of God of all ages as the body of Christ as set forth in the Confession of Faith ... and the applicability of the moral law to the whole of human history on earth.²

To sum up, a series of debates on the Sinaitic covenant between the dispensational and the covenant theologians developed under the categories of their own theological schemes: the differences between Israel and

¹Roy L. Aldrich, "A New Look at Dispensationalism," BSac 120 (January-March 1963): 49. Aldrich attempts to show that Dispensationalists have much more in common with the non-dispensationalists. According to him, the suggested areas of agreement are: (1) a simple definition of a dispensation; (2) a minimum of two or four dispensations for all Bible history; (3) one way of salvation for every dispensation since the Fall; and (4) the existence of the eternal moral law of God in all dispensations. See ibid., 42-49.

church, law and grace in covenant theology as God's one purpose, while they are the expression of two purposes in Dispensationalism. The Mosaic covenant in covenant theology was grasped as a covenant of grace, while it meant in Dispensationalism a covenant of works. The law of Moses in covenant theology is applicable in the church age, while in Dispensationalism it is only appropriate to the kingdom age. However, since the 1950s the Dispensationalists began to recognize the existence of grace under the Mosaic covenant and the role of law in the present age in a limited sense. This does not mean that the debate between Dispensationalists and non-Dispensationalists was over. We are still facing their conflicts regarding the law-grace issue and God's purpose for biblical history.¹

Old and New Interpretations of the Sinaitic Covenant in Recent Dispensationalism

Through the debates with covenant theologians, the newer Dispensationalists such as John F. Walvoord, E. Schuyler English, Charles C. Ryrie, etc., realized their problems and delved deeper into the related areas of the dispute. This development of interpretation caused them to come closer to the covenant theology in the concept of

grace. The publication of The New Scofield Reference Bible was a step of development of the newer position on the Mosaic covenant in this direction.

Did they move away from the old dispensational landmarks in the new revised Scofield Bible? One of the dispensational publications offers an answer to this question by stating that the basic approach and viewpoint of the older Dispensationalists remains unchanged.\(^1\) E. Schuyler English, the chairman of the editorial committee of the NSRB, further states: "Neither the publisher nor the committee of revision had any intention at any time of altering Scofield's theological position or system of interpretation."\(^2\)

The heart of the old and new Scofield annotated Bible remains the dispensational system of interpretation. There are still seven dispensations, but a major change was made in connection with the designation of the sixth dispensation. It was changed from the dispensation of grace to the church-age, thereby preventing any misconception that grace was an innovation limited to a single age.\(^3\) Accordingly, God deals with man in different ways during different dispensations.

\(^1\)"Behind the New Scofield Reference Bible," MM, April 1967, 28-29.


\(^3\)Compare SRB, 5, n. 5, with NSRB, 4, n. 4.
The NSRB also continues the distinction between Israel and the church. The church cannot be found in the Old Testament.¹ The plenary inspiration of the Bible and the pretribulation rapture of the church were convictions held by the 1967 revision committee. There are some important modifications of the older positions. For instance, the distinction between the kingdom of heaven and that of God is no longer rigidly retained.² These terms now are said to be "often" used synonymously.³ But the old distinction is still refurbished in the new edition.⁴ All these facts mean that there remain some broad areas of difference between the newer Dispensationalism and covenant theology. In fact, the contemporary leading dispensational thinkers are not trying to defend all the aspects of Scofield's and Chafer's teachings. Rather, they attempt to find a way to meet the charges of two ways of salvation and of the absence of enablement under the Mosaic covenant, for which the earlier version was severely criticized. A new presentation of these doctrines, thus, is the basic

¹NSRB, 1162, n. 1 (Acts 2:1); 1225, n. 1 (Rom 11:1); 1324, n. 1 (Heb 12:23).

²The SRB did not appear to recognize the synoymous use of these terms. Compare SRB, 996, n. 1, with NSRB, 994, n. 3 (Matt 3:2).

³NSRB, 994, n. 3 (Matt 3:2).

⁴Compare SRB, 1003, n. 1 with NSRB, 1002, n. 1 (Matt 6:33). Here the kingdom of heaven means "the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God." In this sense, it is a subordinate concept of the kingdom of God.
difference between the old edition of the Scofield Bible and the new.

Divine Enablement under the Sinaitic Covenant

The Scofield Reference Bible notes teach that the Mosaic order was fundamentally legalistic. One of these notes states:

The Dispensation of promise ended when Israel rashly accepted the law (Ex. 19.8). Grace had prepared a deliverer (Moses), provided a sacrifice for the guilty, and by divine power brought them out of bondage (Ex. 19.4); but at Sinai they exchanged grace for law.\(^1\)

In other words, the people of Israel rashly abandoned the Abrahamic unconditional covenant and instead tragically adopted on their own the conditional and legalistic Mosaic covenant. Thus, the Mosaic system is regarded as purely a legal system. Chafer follows the same line on this point and states:

When the law was proposed, the children of Israel deliberately forsook their position under the grace of God which had been their relationship to God until that day, and placed themselves under the law. . . .

Upon the determined choice of law, the mountain where God was revealed became a terrible spectacle of the unapproachable, holy character of God. . . .

The children of Israel definitely chose the covenant of works, which is law, as their relationship to God. In like manner, every individual who is now under law is self-placed. . . . To such as seek to come to Him by the law, God is as unapproachable as flaming Sinai.\(^2\)

Chafer, therefore, considers the Mosaic covenant as a

\(^1\)SRB, 20, n. 1 (Gen 12:1).

\(^2\)Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4: 162-164.
covenant of meritorious works in which divine blessing was conditioned strictly on human faithfulness.\textsuperscript{1}

Based on that assumed exchange of grace for law, Dispensationalists argue that at Mount Sinai there was no divine enablement and the people of Israel obeyed in the power of the flesh. Every individual was under the meritorious covenant of law and was responsible for keeping the law in full. That, however, was impossible. No one could keep the law fully, especially not in the power of the flesh with no divine enablement. Thus Chafer says:

The law, being a covenant of works and providing no enablement, addressed itself to the limitations of the natural man. No more was expected or secured in return from its commands than the natural man in his environment could produce. The requirements under the law are, therefore, on the plane of the limited ability of the flesh.\textsuperscript{2}

There is no divine enablement such as grace and a universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit among the Old Testament saints under the Mosaic covenant.\textsuperscript{3} This means that the Old Testament saints were limited to the energy of sinful flesh in obeying God's law.

The only reason salvation was possible for ancient

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., 3: 77; 4: 162-163, 211-212.

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 4: 247; see also p. 51.

\textsuperscript{3}The SRB says: "The indwelling of every believer by the abiding Spirit is a N. T. blessing consequent upon the death and resurrection of Christ" (p. 982). Ryrie recognizes that Dispensationalists often described the complete lack of divine enablement under the dispensation of the law. See Dispensationalism Today, 120.
Israel was because the people had the sacrificial rituals as a means for obtaining forgiveness for their transgressions of the law. Chafer says:

> In case of failure to do the law, sacrifices were accepted as a means to restoration. As the Christian may be forgiven and cleansed on the ground of confession of his sin to God (1 John 1:9), so Israelites both individually and nationally were restored by sacrifices.¹

Neither the by-faith principle of grace nor the imputed righteousness of Christ was, for Chafer, a part of the Old Testament salvation.²

The dispensation of promise ended at Sinai when Israel rashly accepted the conditional Mosaic covenant of works and made "the most presumptuous vow that mortal lips could utter."³ However,

> The law did not abrogate the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 3:15-18), but was an intermediate disciplinary dealing "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal 3:19-29; 4:1-7). Only the dispensation, as a testing of Israel, ended at the giving of the law.⁴

The reason that the Abrahamic covenant could not be abrogated is that it was a national covenant which continued to offer title to the blessings promised to Abraham no matter what Israel did. Individual Israelites after

¹Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:159.

²Chafer understands Paul's experience in Phil 3:6 as having provided the requisite sacrifices. See Chafer, Dispensationalism, 92.


⁴SRB, 20, n. 1.
Sinai were, therefore, in a position to receive God's blessings, yet these could be given only through the condition of perfect obedience to God's commands. Thus the old dispensational position almost universally found no formal exhibition of grace in the Mosaic covenant.

Because of this fact, the dispensational theologians were challenged by covenant theologians. They pointed to a systematic demonstration of undiminished grace throughout the Old Testament. The recent dispensational thinkers acknowledge the error of the negation of the divine enablement under the Mosaic covenant. Ryrie admits the failure of dispensational theology on this point.

Dispensationalists have often pictured the law as a period when enablement was completely lacking. It is true that there was a sharp contrast between the enablement under the law and the works of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17), but it is not accurate to say that there was no enablement under the law.1

Woodring attempts to vindicate the dispensational interpretation of grace under the Mosaic law in face of objections of covenant theology and concludes that Dispensationalism recognizes a comprehensive, unabridged grace in harmony with an antithetical view of the Sinaitic covenant. Divine grace was available to every Old Testament saint in a measure that was fully adequate to meet the demands of the Sinaitic covenant as a rule of life. There exists a wide discrepancy, however, between the law as a standard for the

1Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 120.
Jewish earthly nation and grace as the rule of life for the Christian. The manifestation of enabling grace corresponds to the difference in the respective rules of life.

The NSRB also emphasizes the existence of grace throughout all the Scripture.\(^1\) As already noted, it changes the designation of the sixth dispensation from the dispensation of grace\(^2\) to that of the church\(^3\) in order to obviate "any misconception that grace was an innovation limited to a single age."\(^4\) In this way, the contemporary Dispensationalists open the way to recognize the existence of grace even under the Mosaic covenant.

The Way of Salvation under the Sinaitic Covenant

The negation of any divine enablement under the Mosaic covenant is directly connected with the method of salvation in the Old Testament. The most frequent criticism of Dispensationalism was that it teaches different ways of salvation in different ages.\(^5\) The old Scofield annotated Bible and certain dispensational writers often gave the impression that they were teaching salvation by a

\(^1\)NSRB, p. vii.
\(^2\)SRB, 5, n. 5.
\(^3\)NSRB, 4. n. 1.
\(^5\)Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 110.
meritorious system of works in the Mosaic covenant and the kingdom ages. For this purpose they described the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works. So the old Scofield Reference Bible says:

The Christian is not under the conditional Mosaic covenant of works, the law, but under the unconditional new covenant of grace.1

Chafer also claims:

The kingdom teachings, like the law of Moses, are based on a covenant of works. The teachings of grace, on the other hand, are based on a covenant of faith. In the one case, righteousness is demanded; in other it is provided, both imputed and imparted.2

Under grace, the fruit of the Spirit is . . . the present possession of the blessing through pure grace; while under the kingdom, the blessing shall be to such as merit it by their own works.3

The teachings of Moses and the teachings of the kingdom are purely legal, while the instructions to the believer of this dispensation are in conformity with pure grace.4

In Chafer's original understanding of the Mosaic covenant as a meritorious covenant of works, divine blessing was conditioned strictly on human faithfulness.5 The Mosaic covenant was the antithesis of a covenant of grace.

Another example of these dual systems was clearly expressed in the note on John 1:17 where the Scofield Bible

1SRB, 95, n. 1.
2Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4: 215-216.
3Ibid., 219.
4Ibid., 225.
5Ibid., 3:77.
was contrasting the dispensation of law with that of grace.

The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation.\(^1\)

From the above statement one observes that a peculiar manner of testing was needed when the dispensation of law began. It was a legal obedience. For non-Dispensationalists this different testing seems to be a different plan of salvation and, consequently, legal obedience could be interpreted as the means of salvation. In other words, it was felt that OT salvation did not involve a covenant relationship with Christ in the older system of Dispensationalism.

Dispensationalists posited a strong dichotomy between national and individual promises and blessings in the Abrahamic covenant after Sinai.\(^2\) Israel as a nation was able to obtain salvation under the unconditional Abrahamic covenant. They had been redeemed as a nation from Egypt. The Abrahamic covenant with its land promise to the patriarch and the seed is the unconditional portion, the features of the eschatological portion of the covenant. But individual Israelites had an unsure salvation under the conditional Mosaic covenant. This is well described in the following:

What Jehovah has covenanted to His elect nation is one

\(^1\)SRB, 1115, n. 1.

\(^2\)Cf. 153-154.
thing, and what He covenants to individuals within that nation is quite another thing. The national entity has been and will be preserved forever according to covenant promises (Isa 66:22; Jer 31:35-37; Gen 17:7, 8). The individual Israelite, on the other hand, was subject to a prescribed and regulated conduct which carried with it a penalty of individual judgment for every failure (Deut 28: 58-62; Ezek 20:33-44; Matt 24:51; 25: 12, 30).  

In their effort to eliminate the concept of different ways of salvation in different ages, the new Dispensationalism emphasizes the permanence of the concept of salvation in Scriptures. The editors of the NSRB clarify this: "Throughout all the Scriptures there is only one basis of salvation, i. e., by grace through faith." And Ryrie clearly explains the principle of salvation by faith in the Old Testament:

The basis for salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the requirement for salvation in every age is faith; the object of faith in every age is God.  

This statement seems to reflect the thought of covenant theology. Yet Ryrie raises an objection to the assertion of the covenant theologians that both Testaments teach "the same Saviour, the same condition, the same salvation."

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1Chafer, Dispensationalism, 43; Systematic Theology, 4: 15.  
2NSRB, p. vii.  
3Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 123.  
Discussing Payne's assertion of that belief, he rejects the assumption that everything about salvation must be the same and that the conscious objects of the faith of Old Testament saints must have been Christ, for the average Israelite could not understand the grace of God in Christ. The content of faith has been different in the various dispensations.

The changeability of the content of faith in the various dispensations, the new Dispensationalists affirm, is the point "which distinguishes dispensationalism from covenant theology." The Dallas Theological Seminary doctrinal statement takes the same direction:

We believe . . . that the principle of faith was prevalent in the lives of all the Old Testament saints. However, we believe that it was historically impossible that they should have had as the conscious object of their faith the incarnate, crucified Son, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and that it is evident that they did not comprehend as we do that the sacrifice depicted the person and work of Christ.

Accordingly, the object of faith in every age has been the

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1J. Barton Payne states: "There is but one, unified testament, God's sole plan of salvation, through which Christ offers a redemption that is equally effective for the saints of both dispensations." The Theology of the Older Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 241; cf. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 122-123.

2Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 123.

3Ibid.

4Ibid.

5Dallas Theological Seminary, Doctrinal Statement, Article V, p. 11.
gracious God. God always reveals grace in the same manner. Yet the new dispensational theologians assert the distinction between the content of faith of the ancient Israel and the content of ours, as Ryrie states. Old Testament people could not see the cross of Calvary in spite of the sacrificial system. The fact that the object of their faith, Christ, was always God does not mean that their faith always explicitly included His Son. They did not comprehend the full story of redemption. It was impossible for them to exercise personal faith in Jesus Christ. All Israelites were related to God only through the theocratic state. Thus, on the one hand, the newer Dispensationalists deny two ways of salvation, but on the other hand, they claim a different content of faith under the Mosaic covenant.

Obedience to the Law According to the New Dispensationalism

Along with the strict distinction between Israel and the church, the older dispensational theology made sharp distinctions between God's methods of dealing with these two peoples. The Mosaic law was given to the people

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1Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 131.


of Israel. It defined the manner of the Israelites' daily life.\(^1\) It was also "an ad interim dealing in effect only until Christ should come."\(^2\) The older dispensational theology, therefore, asserted very sharply that the law of Moses as a whole has been abrogated in the present church age. "The Christian is not under the conditional Mosaic covenant of works, the law, but under the unconditional new covenant of grace."\(^3\) The time limit of the reign of the law was only till "the death of Jesus Christ."\(^4\) That abrogation of the Mosaic law also included the Ten Commandments. Chafer clearly states this fact: "It is declared that these commandments [the Ten Commandments] were 'done away' and 'abolished.'"\(^5\) During the reign of the law, forgiveness was conditional upon a legal ground\(^6\) and legal obedience, therefore, was the condition of salvation.\(^7\)

The newer dispensational thinkers removed the above earlier "unguarded statements" from the **NSRB**, for they had

\(^1\)Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:225.
\(^2\)Ibid., 7:226.
\(^3\)**SRB**, 95.
\(^4\)**SRB**, 1244, n. 2.
\(^6\)**SRB**, 1002, n. 1.
\(^7\)**SRB**, 115, n. 1.
become one of the main reasons for the charge of teaching more than one way of salvation.\textsuperscript{1} As long as the expression of faith has changed somewhat from dispensation to dispensation, saving faith has always been expressed by obedience, but not always by following the same rules. Each dispensation has its own laws, for each has its own test. The newer thinkers vigorously reject equating the tests of a dispensation with the way of salvation. Attempting to harmonize the dispensation of law with grace, Ryrie argues that there are different ways of being acceptable to God:

\begin{quote}
Under the law God provided a way whereby man could be eternally acceptable before him... He also provided ways whereby man could be temporally acceptable before Him.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

For Ryrie eternal salvation was by grace, but temporal life was governed by law. The newer thinkers explain the meaning of the early problematic statements as alluding to the means of temporary life rather than the means of justification before God.\textsuperscript{3}

Furthermore, the recent dispensational thinkers distinguish the moral law from the Ten Commandments and vindicate the binding force of the moral principles of the law in the church era, because the moral law is a revelation of the character of God. They interpret this moral

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today}, 112.

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid.}, 126.

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}
law as the unchangeable pure law in terms of the "law of Christ"—the law of love.\(^1\) Ryrie works out a dichotomy between the law as code and the commandments contained therein.\(^2\) Therefore, the moral law and the Ten Commandments, for contemporary Dispensationalists, are not identical. The moral law of God proceeds from His righteousness and cannot be abrogated. In contrast to the earlier assertion, the newer dispensational theology recognizes certain values of the Mosaic law in the present age.\(^3\) Pentecost analogizes the values of the Mosaic law from the standpoint of distinction between the permanent revelatory and the temporary regulatory aspects. The permanent aspect of the law is concomitantly the holiness of God and the unholliness of man. In this sense it may still be useful. On the contrary, the temporary aspect which regulated the life and the worship of the Israelite has been done away.\(^4\) This position is a radical development in comparison with the earlier position.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) NSRB, 1347, n. 1 (2 John 5); Wayne G. Strickland, "Preunderstanding and Daniel Fuller's Law-Gospel Continuum," BSac 144 (1987): 191.

\(^2\) Ryrie, Basic Theology, p. 305.

\(^3\) NSkh, 1254, n. 1 (2 Cor 3:11).


\(^5\) Because of this development of dispensational theology on law and grace, Daniel P. Fuller in his Gospel and Law concludes that there is no longer any substantial difference between covenant theology and Dispensationalism on the subject of the law and the gospel (p. 45).
it is an attempt to cast off the skin of antinomianism while maintaining God's twofold purpose toward Israel and the church.

Summary

The dispensational theology has caused a spirited controversy between Dispensationalists and Calvinist covenant theologians. The Sinai covenant for most covenant theologians belongs to the covenant of grace, which also includes a work-principle, a special feature of the first covenant of works. Some regarded the Mosaic covenant as a continuation and expansion of the previous covenant of grace or as the model covenant of all other covenants. Because of its character of grace, covenant theologians reject the dispensational view that the Sinai covenant belongs to the covenant of works. They stress the unity of God's redemptive purposes, so that the Sinaitic covenant in the context of Yahweh's historical acts in favor of His people is meaningful for the church.

The covenant theologians' frontal attacks provided a dynamics in the dialectical development of the dispensational understanding of the Sinai covenant and law.

Realizing that the normative theology raised serious problems in regard to salvation in the Old Testament, dispensational thinkers who retained antinomianism have modified their position. Thus, contemporary Dispensationalists recognize the existence of grace under the
Mosaic covenant of works and affirm that there is one way of salvation in Scriptures. They assert that the object of faith was different in the Old Testament saints, for it was difficult for the ancient Israelites to exercise personal faith in Jesus—grace in the Mosaic covenant was connected with the corporate body of Israel rather than individuals. They have maintained their negative attitude toward the law.

In this context law is defined in dialectical relationship with grace. The law of Moses as a unit, including the Ten Commandments, has been abolished by the death of Jesus Christ. The newer dispensational theology emphasizes the dichotomy between the law as code and the moral principles contained therein. Thus, it recognizes the revelatory value of the Mosaic law in the church age as a source of moral principles.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF THE SINAITIC COVENANT AND LAW IN DISPENSATIONALISM

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I showed how the basic points of the contemporary American dispensational view on the Sinaitic covenant and law have developed and indicated the focal point of the covenant theology. At this point we need to consider the place of the Sinaitic covenant and law in the system of the dispensational belief. One cannot help but observe that the newer dispensational theologians rarely give serious attention to that covenant in their systematic theology books.¹ This is a surprising phenomenon in view of its importance during those long centuries when, according to Dispensationalism, the Sinaitic covenant determined God's relation with His people. This attitude may arise from the fact that for Dispensationalists the Sinaitic covenant is quite distinct in nature from the

¹For examples, Ryrie did not treat the covenant instituted at Sinai in his systematic theology book Basic Theology. Pentecost also skipped over this in dealing with the covenants in his Things to Come.
preceding Abrahamic covenant and the following Transjordan and the Davidic covenants.

First of all, I set forth the main features of the historic context and of the nature, purpose, and relationships of the Sinaitic covenant in comparison with other covenants from the standpoint of dispensational understanding. Then, I examine how Dispensationalists interpret the character and role of the law of Moses in the teachings of Jesus Christ and Paul. The covenant and the law in the Mosaic corpus are so closely interrelated that it is necessary to consider both in this chapter. In order to understand the setting for the Mosaic covenant and law, there is also a need to explore their relationship with other covenants.

The Concept of Covenant

The ordinary rendering for the Hebrew word berit is "covenant."¹ In the Septuagint, diathēkē² is the most


²This word is used nearly 300 times in the LXX. In the NT it occurs some 30 times. This term does not imply an agreement or covenant by mutual parties, but a free

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usual translation for the Hebrew berit. The relationship between God and Israel is basically presented in the Scriptures as a covenant. Eichrodt has constructed an entire theology of the OT on the covenant theme, especially the covenant of Mount Sinai. He looks at the Sinaitic covenant as the unifying factor of the OT and the center of Israel's religion. In other words, the Sinaitic covenant was the expression of an historical event experienced by Israel and this experience was the foundation and explanation of Israel's very existence in his theological scheme of the OT.¹ McCarthy points out the importance and the complexity of the concept of covenant in the beginning of his book by stating: "Covenant is so important in the Scriptures that in the form 'testament' it has provided the title for the book, but it is so complex an idea that we have our problems in understanding it."² Thus the attempt to define the concept of covenant has been largely confined to the promise on the divine side and an undertaking of obligations on the human side. It is used in connection with a solemn and religious transaction. On the contrary, sunthēkē, which is used in classical Greek, designates a covenant between two mutual parties making a mutual agreement, with both parties having an equal part in setting forth the terms and arranging the compact. See J. B. Payne, "Covenant in the New Testament," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 1:995-996.


²McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, 1.
philological study of the use and meaning of the Hebrew word *berit*.¹ Such studies have been helpful, but, because of the etymological uncertainty of the term *berit*, there is by no means an agreement among the scholars.²

Some trace *berit* to *brh* "to eat," "to dine" with the attachment of the feminine th, and say that it refers to the festive meal accompanying the covenantal ceremony.³

¹ Sigmund Mowinckel tries to establish a close connection between the Sinai narrative and the cult of the new year festival by illustration from the Psalms (Pss. 50, 81, and 95, which he considers to be liturgies pointing to a renewal of the covenant in his *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 155-158. From Mowinckel's cultic view, McCarthy concludes that the covenant, including the Sinaitic covenant, was made, reaffirmed, and renewed in the affairs of cult. *Old Testament Covenant*, 6, 30-32, 57-58. See also Klaus Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, WMANT 4 (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964), 48-70.


This view is, however, problematic, considering that brh is not the normal verb for eating and it is basically associated with recuperation.\(^1\) For Noth, b\(\text{erit}\) derives from the Akkadian bir\(\text{It}\): "between," "among," which developed into a noun "a between," "a mediation," then finally "covenant."\(^2\) This view also has the difficulty of a tautology when b\(\text{erit}\) appears with the Hebrew word b\(\text{en}\), "between."\(^3\) E. Kutsch suggested the derivation of the word from the Akkadian bar\(\text{u}\), "to look for," "to choose," which evolved into "determination" or "obligation."\(^4\) Robertson, however, considers this view as inadequate in overthrowing the basic concept that a covenant is a "bond."\(^5\) Botterweck and Ringgren come to the conclusion that the most recent plausible solution through the contextual usage of the term seems to be the one that associates b\(\text{erit}\) with the Akkadian bar\(\text{u}\), "to bind," "to fetter" and the related noun bir\(\text{Itu}\),

\(^1\)Weinfeld, "b\(\text{erit}\)," TDOT, 2:254.


\(^3\)Weinfeld, "b\(\text{erit}\)," 254.


\(^5\)Robertson, The Christ of the Covenant, 5.
"band" or "fetter." A covenant in its essence has the concept of a bond.\textsuperscript{1}

If the word berit etymologically means "bond," "fetter," or "a certain relationship," it, then, implies the concept of "imposition," "liability," or "obligation." In the OT berit is used for the designation of two main relationships—the human relationship\textsuperscript{2} and the God-man relationship. The most significant usage of berit occurs in the covenantal relationship between God and man. In this case, God is the maker of the berit-relationship. Concerning this relationship, Begrich states: "A mightier one offers the berith-relationship to one who is not mighty."\textsuperscript{3} The emphasis is on the one-sided guarantee of the superior one, although it does not exclude a certain response by the recipient of the berit-relationship. From this point of view it is meaningful for Hasel to define

\textsuperscript{1}Weinfeld, "berit," 255. Robertson is also following this view. See also Robertson, The Christ of the Covenant, 5. Gerhard F. Hasel implicitly explains the concept of covenant on this working basis in his book Covenant in Blood, 17. See also the article of Edward Heppenstall who shares the same view, "The Covenants and the Law," Our Firm Foundation, 439. The idea of the covenantal binding together of parties is explicitly stated in Ezek 20:37.

\textsuperscript{2}In this case the mutual relationship between human or nation partners is sometimes a reciprocal one that seems to imply a certain equality of status. It sometimes shows an unequal standing. Based on the status of the contracting parties, berit can mean "contract," "alliance," or "treaty." See Gen 14:13; 21:22-32; 26:26-31; 1 Sam 18:3; 1 Kgs 20:34; Ezek 17:15; Mal 2:14, etc.

\textsuperscript{3}Begrich, "Bērīt," 2.
the covenant as "a divinely initiated and sovereign-ordained relationship between God and man,"¹ and for Kline, as "a relationship under sanctions."²

The Dispensational Concept of Covenant

Dispensationalists basically accept the concept of relationship in understanding the word covenant. Observing the Scriptural use of the word covenant, they admit the various types of relationships—such as the relationships between God and man, man and man, nation and nation.³ But they emphasize a strong dichotomy between the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, which was expanded into the Palestinian covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant, and the conditional Sinaitic covenant.⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost explains the meanings of the unconditional and conditional covenants as follows:

¹Hasel, Covenant in Blood, 17. Heppenstall also defines covenant as the relationship between God and His people, "The Covenant and the Law," 438. Calvin considers the word covenant (foederis) as "bond (conjunctionis) with God." Inst. 4.1.20. Here he regards the covenant as the means of union with God. This binding is God's own act of joining Himself with His own creatures. See John Calvin, Sermons on the Ten Commandments, ed. and trans. Benjamin W. Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 45.

²Kline, By Oath Consigned, 16.

³See Pentecost, Things to Come, 66-67.

⁴Chafer, Major Bible Themes, 141-149; idem, Dispensationalism (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary Press, 1936), 73-75; idem, Systematic Theology, 7:97; Pentecost, Things to Come, 68; Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 149-158.

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There are two kinds of covenants into which God entered with Israel: conditional and unconditional. In a conditional covenant that which was covenanted depends for its fulfillment on the recipient of the covenant, not on the one making the covenant. Certain obligations or conditions must be fulfilled by the receiver of the covenant before the giver of the covenant is obligated to fulfill that which was promised. . . . In an unconditional covenant that which was covenanted depends on the one making the covenant alone for its fulfillment. That which was promised is sovereignly given to the recipient of the covenant on the authority and integrity of the one making the covenant apart from the merit or response of the receiver.1

Two kinds of covenants based on conditionality or unconditionality are a crucial issue and an integral feature of dispensational theology, for if it is conditional, then Israel has no assurance of a future national identity, and if it is unconditional, there arises a question whether the unfulfilled parts of the promises will be fulfilled by the church or by Israel.2 They thus define the word covenant based on the two kinds of covenants—unconditional and conditional—in connection with the literal Israel.3

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1Pentecost, Things to Come, 68.
2Ryrie, The Basis of Premillennial Faith, 49.
3Cf. Calvin, Inst. 2.10.2. Here Calvin says: "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in mode of dispensation." In Calvin's mind there are not two covenants—the Old Testament and the New Testament—at all but, to use his own words, "one and the same." Christ is the foundation and substance in both Testaments. Not even the Mosaic legal system can be seen to be without its necessary conjunction with the one divine covenant (Inst. 2.7.1). For Calvin mutuality is one of the basic ideas of the covenant—the conception of a bilateral conditional covenant. But the covenant is unconditional from God's vantage point in one sense, for God's plans and promises as revealed in the
instance, Pentecost quotes a dispensational definition of covenant which is found in Lincoln's dissertation. It states:

A divine covenant is (1) a sovereign disposition of God, whereby he establishes an unconditional or declarative compact with man, obligating himself, in grace, by the untrammeled formula, "I WILL," to bring to pass of himself definite blessings for the covenanted ones, or (2) a proposal of God, wherein he promises, in a conditional or mutual compact with man, by the contingent formula "IF YE WILL," to grant special blessings to man provided he fulfills perfectly certain conditions and to execute definite punishment in case of his failure.¹

The covenant is the divine initiative, as shown in the phrases "a sovereign disposition of God" and "I will." It is the compact between unequals—between God and man. The phrase "if ye will" implies that the fulfillment of the conditional covenant depends upon its recipient, not upon the one making it. This conditionality is of primary importance in the Sinaitic covenant. In the sense that the covenants are normally unconditional,² Dispensationalists do not consider conditionality as one of the basic natures

¹Lincoln, "The Covenants," 25-26; Pentecost, Things to Come, 67-68.

²NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).
of the covenants.\(^1\) In the unconditional covenants the promised blessings are sovereignly offered to the recipient of the covenants on the authority of the one making the covenants apart from the response of the receiver. Dispensationalists admit that even an unconditional Abrahamic covenant may have certain conditional blessings attached to it.\(^2\) Yet the agency and circumstances of the fulfillment of the covenant are not an important point, for God promised to fulfill it. Dispensationalists believe that it would be fulfilled exactly as promised to the literal Israel.

The NSRB defines covenant as an one-sided sovereign declaration creating the relationship of responsibility in accordance with the recipients of the covenant. It states:

A covenant is a sovereign pronouncement of God by which He establishes a relationship of responsibility (1) between Himself and an individual (e.g. Adam in the Edenic Covenant, Gen. 2:16ff.), (2) between Himself and mankind in general (e.g. in the promise of the Noahic Covenant never again to destroy all flesh with a flood, Gen. 9:9ff.), (3) between Himself and a nation (e.g. Israel in the Mosaic Covenant, Ex. 19:3ff.), or (4) between Himself and a specific human family (e.g. the house of David in the promise of a kingly line in perpetuity through the Davidic Covenant, 2 Sam. 7:16ff.).\(^3\)

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\(^1\)See Pentecost, Things to Come, 69; cf. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 149-154.

\(^2\)Pentecost, Things to Come, 68, 74; Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 149. Here Dispensationalists indicate that, when Abraham's act of obedience in leaving the land had been accomplished, no further conditions were laid upon him, and God instituted an irrevocable, unconditional covenant through this single, original condition.

\(^3\)NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).
By the phrase "a relationship of responsibility," the role of the recipient is stressed in Dispensationalism. Yet the meaning of "responsibility" is not clear. It seems to convey the same meaning with that of "dispensation," which is a responsibility from man's viewpoint. Then it probably indicates man's obedience to the revelation of God. The various types of covenants between God and an individual, between God and humankind, between God and a nation or a family are divided into two models—three universal and general covenants related to the whole race and the other covenants were made with Israel. Dispensationalists again classify the latter into the conditional and unconditional covenants. The NSRB basically agrees with Lincoln's view in pairing the phrases, "I will" and "If ye will." This means that the NSRB also stresses distinguishing between the conditionality and unconditionality of the covenants.

Furthermore, Dispensationalism considers the ultimate blessing for the whole world contained in the theocratic program. The phrase "the theocratic program" means the progressive unfolding through special revelation of God's intention and plan to establish upon this earth a kingdom by using Israel, whose authority is exercised by

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1Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 32.
2NSRB, 3, n. 3 (Gen 1:28).
3NSRB, 5, n. 2 (Gen 2:16).
4NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).
Him.\(^1\) For instance, the unbroken royal line in the Davidic covenant is extended to the whole world in the reign of Jesus Christ.\(^2\)

With this understanding of the program, Piepgrass defines a biblical covenant as

the formulation of God's sovereign purpose, outlining the theocratic program for humanity by relating it to an individual and/or his posterity, disclosing this program by divine revelation in progressive stages, not limiting the eventual accomplishment of His plan by imposing conditions upon man as the basis for the final fulfillment of the divine purpose, but recognizing the need of individual relationship by faith to Himself by those who would enter into the benefits of the covenant program, and therefore including in the master plan a provision to care for the sin problem.\(^3\)

Thus, the dispensational definitions of the covenants can be described by the following words: God's sovereign dispositions, conditionality or unconditionality, the relationship of responsibility or faith, the diversity of types in accordance with the different objects of recipients, the theocratic programs in the progressive revelation.

Yet one needs to think of the dispensational concept of covenants which are characterized with the

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\(^1\)Pentecost, Things to Come, 446-475. Dispensationists believe that the divine revelation is progressive: therefore, "the knowledge of God and His works was revealed progressively throughout history." Ryrie, Basic Theology, 26. Cf. Chafer, Systematic Theology, 1:60.

\(^2\)Ibid.

covenants made with Israel. According to Pentecost, four facets exist in the nature of the covenants into which God entered with Israel: literality, eternality, unconditionality, and nationality.\(^1\) The covenants must be literally interpreted;\(^2\) they are eternal in their duration; their fulfillments depend upon the integrity of God; and they are made with the covenant people—Israel. But by way of exception, the Mosaic covenant was temporal and conditional.\(^3\) This means that the dispensational understanding of the nature of the covenants is based on a dualistic concept of the different types of covenants made with Israel—a promissory or grant type and an obligatory type.\(^4\)

The common denominator of the two types is literality and nationality.

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\(^1\) Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 68–69.

\(^2\) This literality also means a formal establishment of the covenant relationship, so that the so-called Adamic covenant prior to the Fall, having no definite word covenant in the Scripture, cannot be recognized. See Lincoln, "The Biblical Covenants," 312. The NSRB, however, recognizes the existence of the Edenic (Gen 2:16) and Adamic covenants (Gen 3:15). See *NSRB*, 5, note 1 (Gen 2:16).

\(^3\) Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 69. Walvoord also asserts that all Israel's covenants except the Mosaic were unconditional in *The Millennial Kingdom*, 150.

Summary

The importance of the concept of covenant is found in the fact that the most remarkable relationship between God and Israel is presented in the Scriptures as a covenant. According to the most recent studies of the usage of the term, the essence of covenant is the concept of bond, fetter, or a relationship between God and men. Dispensational theology emphasizes the aspects of responsibility, God's sovereign pronouncement, the theocratic programs in the progressive revelation, and the division between conditionality and unconditionality. The literality, the eternality, the unconditionality, and the nationality are understood as the essential nature of the covenants into which God entered with Israel. One exception was the Sinaitic covenant, which was conditional and temporal.

The Sinaitic Covenant

It is common understanding that an historical event is not an independent unit in isolation from its historical setting. A preceding event offers some favorable or unfavorable conditions for the events that follow. This is true also of the Sinaitic covenant, for the God of Moses, the same God of his forefathers, connected the main reason of His manifestation at Sinai with the past events with the Fathers. The covenant with the patriarchs in Genesis underlies the Exodus of Israel and the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant. In order to understanding the Sinaitic
covenant, according to the dispensational writers, one needs to clarify its historical context and the character, structure, and relationship to other national covenants.

God—the Keeper of the Covenants

Yahweh appeared as the acting God to Moses at the "Mountain of God." The same God who ordained that Israel should go down to Egypt from the promised land (Gen 46:1-4) and made the Israelites's sojourn in Egypt and their journey in the wilderness the providential means of disciplinary training to prepare a people for the theocratic kingdom commissions Moses for this task.¹

Exodus states emphatically that God is the promise-keeper of covenants. The writer of Exodus explicitly connects the Exodus event with the patriarchs. The redemption of Israel from Egypt is God's faithfulness to His covenant promise.² Hearing the anguish and plight of the children

¹The beginning word of Exodus is a Hebrew conjunction we, "and." In fact, Exodus is designated by the Jews according to its first phrase, we'eleh še'emôt, "and these are the names." This suggests that the same author of Genesis and Exodus is continuing his writing. See Arno C. Gaebelein, Gaebelein's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1985), 51. Accordingly, it is natural that one believe there occurred the same covenant event in Exodus as a continuation of the previous one in Genesis.

of Israel, God remembered His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:24; 6:1-6), and He affirmed the covenant relation made to the patriarchs at the burning bush of Moses (Exod 3:6). The LORD declared that Israel is "my son, my firstborn" (Exod 4:22), which implies the recognition of a covenant relationship. Because they were the object of His special concern, God graciously condescended to enter into covenant relation with them and began a miraculous course to accomplish His merciful purpose for them.

Gaebelein calls the book of Exodus "Israel's birthday book" because the starting point of the national existence takes place in Exod 12. That process reaches its grand climax at Sinai where the twelve tribes were "inwardly united into one nation." In the manifestation of a theophany of unprecedented majesty and grandeur, God's

1See Gen 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:3-8 for the covenant to Abraham; Gen 17:21 to Isaac; Gen 35:10-12 to Jacob.


3Gaebelein, Gaebelein's Concise Commentary, 52.

covenant with Israel fulfilled a distinctive role in the history of redemption. It was Israel's mediatiorial task as a whole to minister to the needs of the nations. The Sinaitic covenant was initiated by Yahweh for this aim. It was thus characterized as a national covenant. The NSRB also recognizes this fact and states: "God, hitherto connected with the Israelitish people only through His covenant with Abraham . . . , brings them to Himself nationally through redemption, puts them under the Mosaic covenant."\(^1\) From the standpoints of the dispensational progressive revelation\(^2\) and of the connection between the event at Sinai with the God of the patriarchs, it is very logical to see the Sinaitic covenant as an extended and developed form of the previous Abrahamic promise.

When Israel was born as a nation, Moses appeared as the dominant figure through whom the wonderful redemptive plan of God was accomplished. Moses had more than one role in fulfilling God's covenant promises. As stated by Alva J. McClain, Moses exercised a threefold mediatiorial role.\(^3\) First, as shown in his predictions, he was a prophetic mediatrix.\(^4\) Then, he represented God toward the people as a

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\(^1\)NSRB, 71.

\(^2\)Regarding the progressive revelation, see Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:60; Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 26.

\(^3\)McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 56-60.

mediatorial ruler. This means that he exercised the office of king.\(^1\) Finally, he also represented the people of Israel toward God. As a priest he was also a mediator pleading the mercy of God and interceding for his people.\(^2\) In this way Moses is presented in the Scriptures as a type of Christ. The NSRB also recognizes this aspect and states that Moses typifies Christ as prophet, advocate, intercessor, and leader or king.\(^3\)

To sum up: It was God who initiated Israel's deliverance from Egypt on the basis of His covenant with Abraham, and He chose Moses as a type of Christ to fulfill His covenant promises.

The Establishment of the Covenant

The way in which the covenant was established reveals its unique characteristics. God described His plan first to Moses in the third month after they came out of Egypt as they camped near Mount Sinai.\(^4\) This unusual

\(^1\)See Exod 7:1; Deut 33:4-5; Acts 7:35.
\(^2\)For instance, see Deut 9:24-29.
\(^3\)NSRB, 72, n. 1 (Exod 2:2).
\(^4\)Some scholars who accept the JEDP theory hold that the covenant only arose as a late concept at the time of the Deuteronomist or after. For instance, this view is seen in the picture which Wellhausen presented of B\(\text{Er\textit{it}}\). According to Wellhausen, it was after the introduction of Deuteronomy that the covenant arose as a concept which fitted in well with the prophet's idea of theocracy. See Julius Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 417-418.
relationship would give them an exalted position among the nations. They were to be His peculiar treasure (šegullah) above all people and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The Israelites, however, were still bound to their past. They still lusted after the Egyptian way of life. In spite of that, God made "exceeding great and precious promises" to them. They were to become a free people fulfilling the promise of the "seed." It is meaningful that this promise of the new relation between Yahweh and His people begins with the words "for the whole earth is mine" (Exod 19:5, 6). Through them the divine promises for the world should be fulfilled, for God is the liberator of all nations.

In the context of the gracious deliverance from Egypt, God presented His intentions conditionally. In order to fulfill their task as a holy people, they had to surrender to God continually and obey His requirements. Moses returned to his people and reported God's proposal. The people responded by saying, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exod 19:8). Then, God commanded Moses to prepare Israel for the giving of the law (vss. 10-15). They were to sanctify themselves and set out bounds around the mountain. Attention was to be paid to the fact that this demand followed the deliverance of God as shown in the metaphor of the eagle's wing, for divine deliverance is the first step of the ordo salutis, and sanctification is its
second step in the narration. The instructions were carried out, and the glory of the Lord was manifested.

After the reiteration of God's deliverance from Egypt (Exod 20:1, 2), an historical prologue written according to the customs of that time, God pronounced the words of the covenant, the Ten Words, to His people (Exod 20:3-17; 34:28; Deut 4:11). After another pledge of the people to hear in fear and awe (Exod 20:19), God gave the so-called "Book of Covenant" (Exod 24:7) which elaborated on the Decalogue for the civil, social, and religious life of His people (Exod 20:22-24:11). Moses repeated to the people all the words and the ordinances by which God proposed that the Israelites should bind themselves with Him. In accordance with the agreement of the people, Moses recorded the word of LORD in the book (Exod 24:3, 4). Then, the blood ceremony was executed. Blood was sprinkled on both book and people, and the compact was solemnly ratified (Exod 24:4-8). In this way Israel entered into a solemn blood covenant with God.

The Character of the Covenant

The foregoing observation of the historical context of the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant suffices to show its character. As we have seen, the Sinaitic covenant is "a sovereign pronouncement of God by which He [God]
establishes a relationship of responsibility."¹ As a relationship between God and nation, it belongs to the obligatory type. Hutchison concludes that the Sinai covenant per se is a bilateral agreement, not unilateral.² It is different in character from universal and general covenants.³ The covenants are normally unconditional and eternal, outlining the theocratic program for Israel and the earth.⁴ But this covenant is characterized with temporality and conditionality. Besides, it has also the features of literality and nationality, as understood by Pentecost.⁵

Piepgrass sketches the character of the Sinaitic covenant by pointing out six aspects.⁶ According to him, the first character of the Sinaitic covenant is its gracious origin. This is confirmed by the fact of God's deliverance from Egypt (Exod 19:4; 20:2).⁷ Second, its

¹See p. 135.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.: Pentecost, Things to Come, 69.
⁵Ibid.
⁷Gaebelein also states that God reminded the people first of all of His gracious dealing with Israel; see Gaebelein's Concise Commentary, 70.
address was specifically made with the theocratic nation of Israel (Exod 19:6). The law embodied in the covenant can never be applied to a Gentile nation nor to the Church (Rom 2:14; 6:14; 9:4). Third, the promises given under the Sinaitic covenant were conditional in the covenant's fulfillment (Exod 19:5). Man's responsibility under this covenant was not a means of individual salvation; yet obedience was proof of faith in God and of submission to His will. Fourth, it was legal in its administration and in nature, for it regulated every area of the Israelite's religious, moral, and civil life (Deut 4:45). Fifth, there is an indivisible unity in the divisions of moral law, judicial law, and ceremonial law. Last, the covenant was unmistakably temporary in its provision (Gal 3:19).

In these characteristics of the Sinaitic covenant, one may easily feel that it is severed from this age. Yet it must be considered that the NSRB stresses its ultimate blessing to the whole world. ¹ In this respect McClain's concept of the mediatorial kingdom in the divine proffer of a covenant in Exod 19:4-6 gives a clear perspective. In setting up the new kingdom, the other nations of the earth are not ignored. The blessings of God had to be mediated through the covenant kingdom under His direct rule to all the nations on the earth. Israel was to have the high moral and spiritual requirements for this task. The

¹NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).
promises to this covenant nation were conditioned by their obedience.¹

The answer of the people that "all that the Lord hath spoken we will do" was commended by the LORD in Deut 5:27-28. Yet the NSRB comments on this oral response as follows:

Their subsequent history, however, shows that they had failed to realize their own spiritual and moral weakness and the infinite perfection of the divine law which they so easily were engaging themselves to obey.²

Gaebelein regards it as a fatal thing. He states:

It was a presumptuous declaration, which sprang from self-confidence and showed clearly that they had no appreciation for that grace which had visited them in Egypt and brought them hitherto.³

In this respect "the legal covenant had its beginning with the rejection of the covenant of grace."⁴

One may summarize the foregoing dispensational discussions on the character of the Sinaitic covenant thus: it is literal in its fulfillment, gracious in its origin, national in its object, conditional upon its works,⁵ legal

¹McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, 61-63.
²NSRB, 95, n. 4 (Exod 19:4).
³Gaebelein, Gaebelein's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible, 70-71.
⁴Ibid. 71.
⁵Gaebelein states: "When at least Israel becomes the kingdom of priests, it will be through grace and not of works." Gaebelein's Concise Commentary, 70. On the other hand, Chafer points out: "Although containing gracious elements, it was basically a covenant of works." See Major Bible Themes, 144.
in its nature, temporal in its provision, unified in its
diverse regulations, and mediatorial in its task.

Structure of the Sinaitic Covenant

In the ancient world berit, as Mendenhall showed in
his study of the Hittite sovereignty treaties of 1450-1200
B.C., there were obligations as well as promises between a
major and minor partner. Certain promises were made by the
major which could have created certain expectations by the
minor. Likewise the Sinaitic covenant includes both
duties and commitment, and this is the reason why Dispensa-
tionalists interpret that covenant as conditional and
totally different from the other covenants. D. J. McCarthy
admits this point by stating that "Israel did use the
treaty structure to express its covenant relation with
Yahwe." Dispensationalists have made use of that

1In 1954 Mendenhall published Law and Covenant in
Israel and the Ancient Near East (Pittsburgh: Bible Collo-
quium, 1955), in which he compared the form of the Mosaic
covenant with that of the suzerainty treaties. See pp. 28-
40. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. explains the historical setting
of Exodus in comparison with the Egyptian version of the
treaty between Hattusilis and Ramses II in his article "The
Covenant with Moses and Its Historical Setting," JETS 14
(Summer 1971): 147-148. Regarding the obvious parallel
between the Mosaic law and the ancient treaties, see
Kline, Treaty of the Great King, 13-44; Delbert R. Hillers,
Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea (Baltimore: Johns

2The promise itself implied moral obligation.

3Dennis J. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant: A Study
in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old
discovery in the interpretation of the Sinaitic covenant.¹ In the classic form of the suzerainty treaty there are some salient features: the preamble, the historical prologue, the stipulations, the oath or pledge, the witnesses, the ceremony, the blessings and curses, and the token.

The preamble to the Sinaitic covenant, the introduction of the speaker, is found in Exod 20:2, "I am Yahweh thy Elohim." The Israelites are being addressed by God, both as their Ruler and the supplier of their needs. God is the absolute suzerain or "great king," and His people were the vassals. This is, therefore, a suzerainty treaty or a sovereignty covenant.

As was customary in those pacts, the kindness of the suzerain was recalled in the historical prologue in Exod 20:1 and 2. God briefly summarized what He had done for Israel in delivering them from the bondage of Egypt.² This divine act means that He brought to mind Israel's redemption³ and He fulfilled the promise made to Abraham.

¹For instance, John D. Hannah, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, in the commentary on Exodus interprets the Sinaitic covenant in the context of Mendenhall's conclusion. Furthermore, he considers the form of the suzerainty treaty as the basic literary structure of Deuteronomy and Josh 24. See "Exodus," 137. This comparison is basically the same as given by K. A. Kitchen, The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), 82.

²Hannah, "Exodus," 139.

Thus, this became a striking event in the redemptive structure of the theocracy as a whole.

At the heart of the suzerainty treaty were specific conditions. The stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant are given in three parts: the general stipulations of the Decalogue (Exod 20:3-17); the specific stipulations of the judgments— the judicial law of the theocracy; and the ceremonial law of worship (Exod 20:22-23:33; 25:1-31:11). This mixture of religious and civil laws is due to the fact that Yahweh was both Israel's ruler and God.

The oath of the covenant is recorded in Exod 19:8 and 24:3, 7. The people promised to keep the stipulations of the covenant. As noted above in the character of the covenant, the Dispensationalists understand this oath as an expression of presumptuous confidence. No persons or objects are expressly designated as witnesses to the covenant. The solemn ceremony is recorded in Exod 24:4-8. The blessings and curses of the covenant are based upon the obedience or disobedience of the people (Lev 26). The sign of the covenant is the observance of the Sabbath (Exod 31:12-17). The stipulations including the tables of the Decalogue and the civil and the ceremonial dispositions were deposited in the same sanctuary for, as we have seen,

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1Gaebelein, Gaebelein's Concise Commentary, 70-71; McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, 63.

2Hannah, "Exodus," BKC (OT), 155.
in the theocracy God was both God and civil head of the people.

The Relationship of the Sinaitic Covenant to Israel's Other Covenants

For Dispensationalists the Sinaitic covenant is of a radically different nature from the other biblical covenants. According to their classification, there are eight major covenants in the Scripture: the Edenic, the Adamic, the Noachic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Palestinian, the Davidic, and the New covenant. The first three covenants are general and universal for the whole race; all the other covenants are made with Israel. Dispensationalists assert that the Sinaitic covenant among the latter five is the only one which is conditional.

The Abrahamic Covenant

According to dispensational view, a close relationship exists between the Sinaitic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant, which was initiated (Gen 12:1-4) and confirmed by God (Gen 13:14-17; 15:1-7, 18-21; 17:1-8), the Dispensationalists assert, 1

1NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).


must be considered as the basis or center of the entire covenant program. It is "the great parent covenant."1 All the major aspects of that covenant are reflected in the others.2 The essential promises of the Abrahamic covenant consist of the land, the seed, and the blessing. They are personally, universally, and nationally made to Abraham in Gen 12 and chapters that follow. The personal promises include: numerous descendants (12:2); temporal blessings of land (13:14-15, 17), servants (15:7), wealth (13:2; 24:34-35), spiritual blessings (13:18; 21:22); and personal fame and good reputation (12:2). The universal promises are: the divine blessing or cursing on people on the basis of their treatment of Abraham (12:3; 20:2-18; 21:22-34; 23); and blessing of all the families of the earth through Abraham and his seed (12:3; cf. Gal 3:16).3 The national promises are: being the father of a great nation (15:18-21; 21:2); and having the land of Canaan as an inheritance and an everlasting possession (12:7; 171-3, etc.).4


2Therefore, it is logical that some features of the Abrahamic covenant are reflected in the Sinaitic covenant.

3Ryrie states: "Seed may be both collective and individual." See Basic Theology, 453.

4Ryrie, Basic Theology, 453-454; NSRB, 19-20, n. 3 (Gen 12:2); see also Pentecost, Things to Come, 71-94.
The question as to whether the Abrahamic covenant is conditional or unconditional has been a crux in the debates between dispensational theology and covenant theology.\(^1\) The Dispensationalists believe that the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional, eternal, and irrevocable plan of God. Its literal fulfillment is not based on the obedience of individuals or nations. Walvoord suggests eleven reasons for supporting the unconditional character of the Abrahamic covenant.\(^2\) They are: (1) All Israel's covenants are eternal except the Mosaic. It is logical that those eternal covenants are unconditional. (2) No conditions are stated in this agreement. Walvoord recognizes the conditional element—the first act of obedience—in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1). Yet, he states, this is rather a prophetic declaration of God. "The one condition having been met, no further conditions are laid upon Abraham," and God instituted an irrevocable, unconditional program.\(^3\) Ryrie interprets this imperative, "Go forth from your country," as God's intention rather than an imperative.\(^4\) (3) Nowhere in the reiterated and enlarged

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\(^1\)Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 455-457; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 74-84; NSRB, 19, n. 1 (Gen 12:1).


\(^4\)Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 455. Likewise, Ryrie interprets the phrase "walk before Me" as God's intention.
repetition of this covenant are the promises conditioned upon the faithfulness of man. (4) This covenant was solemnized by a divinely ordered ceremony. (5) Circumcision was not a condition but a sign of covenant relationship. The land promise was given before the rite was introduced. (6) No conditions were required in regard to the same promises to Isaac and Jacob. (7) The covenant was confirmed in spite of the patriarch's disobedience. (8) Even national apostasy did not destroy the covenant, for Israel as a nation continues forever (Jer 31:36). (9) The NT declared the Abrahamic covenant immutable (Heb 6:13-18; cf. Gen 15:8-21). (10) The Scriptural revelation regarding Israel and its future confirms it. (11) This unconditional character of God's promises to Abraham's seed is reflected in other unconditional covenants.

The Dispensationalists emphasize the eschatological importance of the promise of land. There has been no literal fulfillment of that prediction in the past or present. There must come a time of fulfillment in the future millennial kingdom.1

And the phrase "be a blessing" is understood as a result of that intention.

1The dispensational writers, therefore, deal with the covenants in the eschatological section of their books. For instances, see Ryrie, Basic Theology, 453-460; Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 139-220.
Relationship of the Abrahamic Covenant to the Sinaitic Covenant

Dispensational theology places the Abrahamic covenant at the center of God's covenant program in striking contrast with the view of scholars such as Eichrodt and Kline who look upon the Sinaitic covenant as the unifying factor of the OT and the center or the nucleus of Israel's history and religion.¹ According to this view, the promises of the Abrahamic covenant completely control the past and future history of Israel. The theocratic and the redemptive plans depend on the fulfillment of this covenant. Pentecost asserts that the land promise of this covenant is developed in the Palestinian covenant, that the seed promise is strengthened in the Davidic covenant, and that the blessing promises are enlarged in the new covenant.²

As already noted, the Dispensationalists emphasize the fact that the Scriptural records of the Sinaitic covenant refer often to the Abrahamic covenant promises. The relationship between these two covenants is reflected throughout the OT. This is the ground of the foundational nature of the Abrahamic covenant in God's program for the

²Pentecost, Things to Come, 72.
dispensational thinkers.\textsuperscript{1} Yet they do not consider the Sinaitic covenant as the development of a single covenant. It is the dispensational basic conviction that the Mosaic law was added \textit{alongside} the Abrahamic covenant for the purpose of helping Israel to accomplish the goals of that covenant and that the basis of grace and blessings in the Sinaitic covenant was found in the Abrahamic covenant. The view that the later covenants are the continuation, renewal, or enlargement of previous covenants is, according to them, nothing but an evolutionary view of Israel's religion.\textsuperscript{2}

As noted above, for Dispensationalists, the Sinaitic covenant was basically different. It was temporal and conditional. The promise preceded the requirement in the Abrahamic covenant, but the order was reversed with the Sinaitic covenant.\textsuperscript{3} The Sinaitic covenant, therefore, was an exceptional phenomenon in comparison with the other unconditional covenants which God entered into with Israel. Regarding this contrast, Campbell says: "The two are fundamentally different in nature. They do not commingle; they

\textsuperscript{1} Hutchison, "The Relationship of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Palestinian Covenants in Deuteronomy 29-30," 149-150.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 151.

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{NSRB}, 95, n. 1 (Exod 19:5).
cannot be combined."¹ Hutchison, however, recognizing an error in the older Dispensationalism, says that both covenants are complementary rather than contradictory.² They have their own distinctive characteristics, but are not identical.³

This different or distinctive nature of the two covenants deepens in the interpretation of Gal 3 and 4. According to Campbell and Hutchison, in Gal 3:19 God offered promises to Abraham directly, but the law was established by a mediator.⁴ There were two mediatorships, the angels representing God and Moses representing the people.⁵ Ryrie interprets this verse by stating: "The presence of a mediator assumes two parties, and the need of a mediator shows the inferiority of the law."⁶ In this


²Hutchison names Scofield, Gaebelain, Crowell, Chafer, and Rand as the representatives of the view that the legal covenant had its beginning with the rejection of the covenant of grace, that is, "the exclusion of Abrahamic grace under the Mosaic covenant." See idem, "The Relationship of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Palestinian Covenants in Deuteronomy," 159-160.

³Ibid., 161.

⁴The Mosaic covenant of law did not add a new condition to the Abrahamic covenant.

⁵Campbell, "Galatians," 599.

respect, the Sinaitic covenant is inferior to the Abrahamic covenant.

In the allegorical contrast relating to two covenants, Paul points to two mothers (Hagar and Sarah), two sons (Ishmael and Isaac), two mountains (Sinai and Calvary), and two cities (earthly Jerusalem and heavenly Jerusalem) which figuratively represent the Sinaitic and the Abrahamic covenants (Gal 4:24-27). For Campbell and DeHaan this emphasizes the contrast between law and grace. The story tells us that the references to the covenant, represented by Sarah-Isaac-Calvary-the heavenly Jerusalem, implicitly show its graciousness, while the legal covenant and law represented by Hagar-Ishmael-Sinai-earthly Jerusalem was created in an attempt to work out God's purpose according to a man-made plan.¹

This has a direct bearing upon the question, Is there no grace under the Sinaitic covenant? Woodring answers that Dispensationalism recognizes a comprehensive, unabridged grace under the Sinaitic covenant. Yet this spirit was not founded in the Sinaitic covenant. The grace of God exists "in harmony with the antithetical view of the Mosaic covenant."² The grace of God appearing in the prologue of the Sinaitic covenant was actually


²Woodring, "Grace under the Mosaic Covenant," 396.
a reminder of Jehovah's gracious help in the past under the Abrahamic covenant and a tacit proposal of the continuous availability of that divine aid under the new legal arrangement of Sinai where it would be needed more than ever.¹

Although Ryrie admits that the Mosaic law was not entirely a merit system because of its mixture with grace,² the display of grace in the Mosaic covenant was like "a dark negative."³ Moreover, the NSRB, putting its emphasis on the contrast relationship between grace and law, connects law with Moses and works and grace, with Christ and faith.⁴ In short, whatever grace and blessings are found in the Sinaitic covenant came from the Abrahamic covenant.

The Palestinian Covenant

Dispensationalists find the fulfillment of the land promises to Abraham in the Palestinian covenant. This is the covenant which Yahweh made with the young nation on the plains of Moab on the eve of Israel's entrance into the promised land (Deut 28-30). "Because it answers the question of Israel's relation to the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant,"⁵ the dispensational scholar calls this covenant the Palestinian covenant. In Ezek 16:60, they

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¹Ibid., 388-389.
²Ryrie, The Grace of God, 35.
³Ibid., 55.
⁴NSRB, 1124, n. 1 (John 1:17).
⁵Pentecost, Things to Come, 95.
believe, "the word covenant alludes to the Palestinian covenant."\(^1\)

Seven main parts make up this covenant, according to Deut 30:1-9:\(^2\) (1) dispersion for disobedience (30:1); (2) the future repentance of Israel while in the dispersion (30:2); (3) the return of the Lord (30:3); (4) the restoration to the land (30:5); (5) national conversion (30:6); (6) the judgment of Israel's oppressors (30:7); and (7) national prosperity (30:9).\(^3\)

This covenant strengthens and expands the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant. Thus it is an amplification of the national promises found in the Abrahamic covenant. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness and unbelief repeated in their past history, the covenant was not abrogated. Therefore, the land stipulation must be considered as unconditional.\(^4\) Pentecost affirms the unconditionality of the Palestinian covenant for four reasons: (1) It is called by God an eternal covenant in Ezek 16:60; (2) it is an amplification of the Abrahamic covenant and, therefore, it is an unconditional covenant; (3) Rom 11:26-27; Hos 2: 14-23; Deut 30:6; and Ezek 11:16-21 guarantee that God will

\(^1\)NSRB, 854, n. 2 (Ezek 16:60).

\(^2\)Deut 28-29 are an integral part of the Palestinian covenant which was declared in 30:1-9. See NSRB, 247, n. 1 (Deut 28:1).

\(^3\)NSRB, 251, n. 1 (Deut 30:3).

\(^4\)Pentecost, Things to Come, 98.
effect the necessary conversion of Israel which is essential to its fulfillment; and (4) portions of this covenant have already been fulfilled literally. These portions, then, indicate a future, literal fulfillment of the unfulfilled portions. Yet Dispensationalists recognize that there is one conditional element in this covenant, that is, the time element.

Relationship of the Palestinian Covenant to the Sinaitic Covenant

Essentially the Palestinian covenant is a renewal of the Sinaitic covenant. Israel had repeatedly violated the covenant stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant from Sinai forward. It was necessary for the new generation to renew its commitment. The book of Deuteronomy records that renewal of the Sinaitic covenant. This fact is so clearly discernible in the book that Gaebelein and other dispensational writers recognize the repetition of the Sinaitic

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{Ibid. Cf. pp. 29-30.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\text{In his chart on the Mosaic covenant compared with suzerainty treaties, Hannah shows that the entire book of Deuteronomy, excluding the last part of the book, is the document record of the covenant which God made with Israel on the plains of Moab. See "Exodus," BKC (OT), 137. Kline has shown that Deuteronomy is a covenant-renewal document that reflects the form of suzerainty treaties common in Moses' day. See Kline, The Structure of Biblical Authority, 131-153.}\]
covenant in the so-called Palestinian covenant. As Gaebelein puts it:

The words of the covenant are once more brought to their remembrance. Once more all the goodness of the Lord towards them is unfolded by Moses, how the Lord had dealt with Egypt and how their eyes had seen the signs and great miracles.\(^1\)

Deere describes the Palestinian covenant as a renewal of the Mosaic covenant as follows:

The Israelites were not entering into a new covenant, but were committing themselves afresh to the Mosaic covenant. In this covenant renewal the Israelites so committed themselves to obeying the LORD that He was able to confirm them as His people (v. 13) and Himself as their God.\(^2\)

Considering this undeniable fact, Hutchison asserts that the two streams of the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenants appear in the book of Deuteronomy. On the one hand, he acknowledges the renewal of the Sinaitic covenant and, on the other hand, he points out the frequent references on the gift-of-the-land promise belonging to the Abrahamic covenant in Deuteronomy. Israel's love for God has a direct relation to their obedience to the Sinaitic covenant, yet God's love for Israel refers to the Abrahamic covenant.\(^3\) Therefore, Dispensationalists recognize that the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenant programs are combined in the Palestinian covenant

\(^1\)Gaebelein, *Gaebelein's Concise Commentary*, 183.

\(^2\)Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," *BKC (OT)*, 314.

\(^3\)Hutchison, 137-162.
reflecting God's fulfillment of patriarchal promises and assurance of all blessing in the Sinaitic covenant.

The Davidic Covenant

According to Dispensationalists, the Davidic covenant is the fulfillment of the divine promise of a seed to Abraham. They look at the statement in 2 Sam 7:8-17 as a covenant, although the word covenant does not occur. This treaty rests upon the same basis as the Abrahamic covenant. According to Pentecost,

The eschatological implications of the Abrahamic covenant lie in the words land and seed. The land promises are enlarged and confirmed through the Palestinian covenant. In the next of Israel's great covenants, that made with David, God is enlarging and confirming the seed promises.¹

The promise of a seed is fulfilled because David would have a son who would succeed him and establish his kingdom. Concerning the promise of the kingdom, David's throne and kingdom would be set up forever. The NSRB says:

The Davidic covenant . . . upon which the future kingdom of Christ, "of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3) was to be founded, provided for David: (1) the promise of posterity in the Davidic house; (2) a throne symbolic of royal authority; (3) a kingdom, or rule on earth; and (4) certainty of fulfillment, for the promises to David "shall be established forever."²

According to Walvoord, the provisions of this covenant made to David can be summarized as follows:

¹Pentecost, Things to Come, 100.
²NSRB, 365, n. 2 (2 Sam 7:16).
(1) David is to have a child, yet to be born, who shall succeed him and establish his kingdom. (2) This son (Solomon) shall build the temple instead of David. (3) The throne of his kingdom shall be established forever. (4) The throne will not be taken away from him . . . even though his sins justify chastisement. (5) David's house, throne, and kingdom shall be established forever.¹

Among these five unconditional promises, the first two have been fulfilled, but the last three, while in a sense fulfilled insofar as God's purpose is concerned, still await the ultimate fulfillment. In other words, the temporal aspects of the promises of this covenant are said to have been fulfilled by establishing Solomon's temple and throne. Yet the eternal aspects of the covenant will be fulfilled in the eschatological millennial kingdom.² The importance of the Davidic covenant lies in the eschatological promises concerning David's posterity, kingdom, and throne. It points to and centers in his lineal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His rule over David's kingdom.

Relationship of the Davidic Covenant to the Sinaitic Covenant

The royal office itself indicated there was a close relationship between the Mosaic and the Davidic covenant. The function of the king is rooted in the prophetic statement of Deut 17, which demands that the king be chosen from

¹Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 195.

²The history of Israel shows only its partial fulfillment, for the throne of David has not been continuously occupied.
among the covenant brethren (vs. 15). The king was to read the Mosaic covenant every day (vss. 18-20). He was to rule the covenant community. The demand for a king is presented as a mistake in Samuel, but we must keep in mind, Dispensationalists say, that the fact that Israel made a mistake only brings out God's real choice—David, "the beloved," type of One who is indeed that, and in whom a king is found who reigns forever. He is the One of whom the king that Deuteronomy announces is the shadow.¹

The Davidic covenant is unconditional in its character. A conditional element found in 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Kgs 2:4; 8:25; 9:45; Isa 24:5 and Ezek 16:59 means "personal and individual invalidation of the benefits of the covenant" which cannot affect the transmission of the covenant.² In this respect the Davidic covenant seems to have no direct relation to the Sinaitic covenant.

Yet the unconditional aspects of the Mosaic covenant are considered to anticipate the millennial kingdom in the eschatological implications of the Davidic covenant. In the millennial kingdom a temple would be built as the center of worship in fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy (40:1-46:24) and its literal worship would contain even the animal sacrifices,³ which would have a retrospective

¹Gaebelien, Gaebelien's Concise Commentary, 177.
²Ryrie, Basic Theology, 459.
³Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 309-315; Merrill F. Unger, Great Neglected Bible Prophecy (Chicago: Scripture Press, 1955), 55-95; A. C. Gaebelien, The Prophet
meaning for a memorial of the death of Jesus Christ. The Sabbath would be observed again during the kingdom age (Isa 66:23). And "the Mosaic law of the O.T. theocratic kingdom" would become "the governing code" in His future kingdom.

The New Covenant

The Promises

The new covenant is the last and most important of the covenants, because through it the promise made to Israel will be fulfilled. The new covenant is recorded in Jer 31:31-34. It is a literal and unconditional covenant. It is an amplification of the original Abrahamic covenant. Its promises for the house of Israel and the house of Judah are among the most specific of the Scripture. This covenant was instituted with the death of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. In other words, Christ laid the foundation for Israel's covenant by His death.

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1NSRB, 1010, n. 3 (Matt 12:1). According to the statement of Matt 24:20-21, NSRB here says that the Sabbath will be kept during the tribulation period. It comments that Sabbath as "a day of legal obligation" celebrates a completed creation, and, on the contrary, that Sunday, as one of voluntary worship and service, commemorates a finished redemption.

2NSRB, 997, n. 4 (Matt 5:3).

3Pentecost, Things to Come, 126-127.
The promises of this covenant are: (1) impartation of a renewed mind and heart, i.e., regeneration (Jer 31:33); (2) forgiveness and removal of sin (Jer 31:34; Ezek 36:26); (3) indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:27; Joel 2:28, 29); (4) knowledge of the will of God through the direct teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:34); (5) national restoration (Jer 32:40; Isa 61:9); (6) material blessings—the reestablishment of the sanctuary in Jerusalem, the cessation of war, and the reign of Messiah (Jer 32:41; Ezek 36:24, 28; 37:21-27; Isa 2:4; 61:8; Hos 2:18); and (7) the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ as the foundation of all the blessings of the new covenant (Zec 9:11).¹

The Fulfillment of the Promises

There are four basic dispensational views regarding the fulfillment of the promises of this covenant. The first view was held by J. N. Darby, who declared that there is only one new covenant, and it was to be made formally with the Jewish people in the future millennium. The church, therefore, bears no direct relationship to it.²

The second view is that of C. I. Scofield, and it allows for only one new covenant with a twofold application—

¹Ryrie, Basis of the Premillennial Faith, 112-114.

tion; one to the church now and one to Israel in the future. This covenant not only secures "the personal revelation of the Lord" and "the eternal blessedness" to every believer in the sacrifice of Christ, but also "the perpetuity, future conversion, and blessing of a repentant Israel."¹

The third view is that of George Peters who asserts that this covenant is nothing but the Abrahamic covenant renewed and reconfirmed in this dispensation.²

The fourth view is held by the major normative dispensational scholars of Dallas Theological Seminary such as Chafer, Walvoord, Ryrie, and Pentecost. This view declares there are two separate and distinct new-covenant events. They divide the references to the new covenant in the NT into two groups, one to be fulfilled for Israel nationally in the future millennium and the other to be fulfilled in the present church-age.³

¹SRB, 1297-1298; NSRB, 1317-1318, nn. 1 and 2 (Heb 8:8).
³The references in the Gospels and in Heb 8:6; 9:15; 10:29; 13:20 are related to the new covenant with the church, but Heb 8:7-13 and 10:16 to the new covenant with Israel. Exceptionally, Heb 12:24 would refer to both entities. See Pentecost, Things to Come, 124; cf. Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:325; Walvoord, Israel in Prophecy, 53-54; The Millennial Kingdom, 210; Ryrie, The Basis of the Premillennial Faith, 105-25.
Based on the literal, premillennial interpretation of the continuance of national Israel, dispensational writers deny that the church fulfills the promises of the new covenant stated in Jer 31:31-34 and Heb 8:7-10:17.

Relationship of the New Covenant to the Sinaitic Covenant

Dispensationalists argued that the Sinaitic covenant itself was recognized as ineffectual and temporary and was ultimately to be superseded by the new covenant. They saw that both the Sinaitic covenant and the new covenant are related to Israel exclusively or primarily, but the first is inferior to the latter in their efficacies. As Piepgrass indicated, the violation of the Sinaitic covenant provided the ground of the prophecy of the new covenants in the time of Jeremiah. Israel failed to obey the law. It

1Dispensationalists admit that the church is participating in some of the benefits of the new covenant, but they do not regard these blessings as the fulfillment of the covenant for the church. According to them, the ultimate fulfillment of this covenant is applied to the millennial reign of Christ over Israel. Charles H. Dyer, "Jeremiah," in BKC (OT), 1172; Pentecost, Things to Come, 127. English also states that "the special recipient of this new covenant that was promised of old is the nation Israel." Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1955; repr., 1976), 234. Strickland considers the church's participation in some blessings of the new covenant as an application to the church. "A Critical Analysis of Daniel Fuller's Gospel and Law Concept," 267.

2NSRB, 1317, n. 1 (Heb 8:8).

eventually broke the covenant with God and persistently refused to listen to the prophets whom God sent to turn it from its evil ways. It, therefore, rested under condemnation. Jeremiah saw the coming of God's judgment and told the people the reason for the coming disaster. He then declared the new covenant. Thus, the new covenant appeared when the old one was violated. Through the new covenant, the nation would establish the relationship that would obtain the promises enumerated above.

Dispensational thinkers agree with other scholars who see the new covenant of the Gospels in the Passover context of the Sinaitic covenant. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Paschal Lamb, becomes the basis of the new covenant in the passages of Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24, and Luke 22:20, "in keeping with the remission of sins promised in the New Covenant . . . a covenant that would replace the old Mosaic covenant." Though the new covenant is understood in the context of the Sinaitic covenant, the relationship between the two covenants is that of replacement, not of continuity—according to Dispensationalism.

Through the reference to law found in both


2 Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," BKC (NT), 83.
covenants, Dyer realizes that the new covenant will contain an internalization of God's law.\(^1\) The old covenant has a significant feature in common with the new. The law is an integral element of the new covenant no less than it is of the old covenant. The law in the new covenant will be internalized in the hearts and minds instead of the stone tablets. E. Schuyler English points out the difference between the Sinaitic covenant and the new:

Under the old covenant, God's laws were upon the lips of the people, and they were written in stone. Under the new covenant, His laws are in the minds, rather than only upon the lips: they are written in hearts rather than upon stone. What a difference! Now He will truly be their God, and they His people, because they will be born anew. . . .\(^2\)

Both covenants require obedience. From the dispensational perspective, "God's new covenant will give Israel the inner ability to obey His righteous standards and thus to enjoy His blessings."\(^3\) Both covenants create a people whose lives are to be characterized by righteousness that can be defined by law. Law regulates the covenant relationship. Yet Dispensationalists think the requirement and the promise in both covenants appear in reverse order. That is, the requirement precedes the promise in the Sinai

\(^1\)Dyer, "Jeremiah," 1171.

\(^2\)English, Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 233.

\(^3\)Ibid.
covenant; and the promise precedes the requirement in the new covenant.¹

Dispensationalists see that in the book of Hebrews the writer develops a more complete understanding and appreciation of the ministry of Jesus Christ by comparisons and contrasts between the typical system in the OT and the reality in the NT. Thus the writer points out the superiority of the order of Christ's priesthood to the provisional priesthood in the Mosaic covenant in chapter 7. He then declares the superiority of the new covenant over the first covenant in chapter 8.² Dispensationalists deny the complete fulfillment of the new covenant of Heb 8:6-13 in the present church-age,³ for Christ as the mediator is described as the guarantee that God will fulfill His promise. Only the Sinaitic covenant anticipated the new

¹NSRB, 95, n. 1 (Exod 19:5).
²See English, Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 183-236; Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in BKC (NT), 797-800.
³Strickland, "A Critical Analysis of Daniel Fuller's Gospel and Law Concept," 267-272. Here Strickland suggests four reasons: (1) The context shows that the covenant is not necessarily completely fulfilled; (2) the promises to Israel in Jer 31:38-40 are not discussed in Hebrew and await their future fulfillment during the millennial kingdom; (3) one must not mix an application of the new covenant blessings to the church with Israel's fulfillment of its provisions; (4) the new covenant is the expansion of the Abrahamic covenant blessings. See also Dyer, "Jeremiah," 1172; Hodges, "Hebrews," 800.
covenant in its provisional and external fashion of types.¹

In this relationship between the first (Mosaic)² and the second (new) covenants, English construes that the termination of the first covenant occurred six centuries before Christ's earthly ministry, that is, prior to the establishment of the new covenant.³ The Sinaitic covenant was temporary and has served its purpose. It is no longer in effect for the Christian.⁴ The new covenant is more effective than the Mosaic covenant. It is established upon the better (unconditional) promise of "I will" (Heb 8:10, 12), which is contrasted to "If ye will" in the Mosaic covenant. Under the Sinaitic covenant, obedience of the people arose from fear; under the new covenant, it comes from a willing heart.⁵ Although the first covenant was inaugurated with blood, it was not a covenant unto life but unto death.⁶ "It [the first covenant], as English noted,


²For the first covenant denoted in the context of the passages is "the covenant that I [the Lord] made with their [Israel's and Judah's] fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt" (Heb 8:9). Consequently the first covenant is the covenant of the law made with Israel. See English, Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 228-229.

³Ibid., 229.

⁴Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 216.

⁵NSRB, 1317, n. 1 (Heb 8:8).

⁶English, Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 266.
was never intended to be the ultimate in man's relationship with God, but came in response to man's desire to have it."¹

English, furthermore, points out that the faultiness of the first covenant came from man's part, that is, the weakness of the flesh as explained in Rom 8:3. It is not from God's part, the covenant itself.² According to Piepgrass, the faultiness of the covenant lies in the fact that man "could not fulfill its requirements apart from divine enablement promised in the new covenant."³ In short, the promises seen in the Sinaitic covenant were legal, conditional, temporary, carnal, and typical. On the contrary, those of the new covenant are gracious, eternal, unconditional, spiritual, and realized.

Summary

God's faithfulness to His covenant promise underlies the deliverance of His people from Egypt and the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant. In spite of this context, dispensational writers understand the Sinaitic covenant as a quite distinct covenant from Israel's other unconditional and eternal covenants—the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the new covenant, in which the promise pre-

¹Ibid., 229.
²Ibid.
cedes the demand. The Mosaic covenant was a conditional, legal, temporal, and national pact for a specific period and theocratic purpose. The command precedes the promise in it. It was the covenant of law based on a bilateral agreement, including people's presumptuous confidence. Dispensationalists admit the gracious origin of the Sinaitic covenant, but a comprehensive grace under the Sinaitic covenant was nothing but the expression of the Abrahamic covenant. The Sinaitic covenant has a contrasting and inferior relationship to Israel's other covenants. It has no direct relation to the unconditional covenants. Dispensationalists interpret that the Sinaitic covenant was replaced by the new covenant which promises complete fulfillment in the millennial kingdom through Israel.

The Law of Moses in the Teachings of Jesus Christ and Paul

According to Dispensationalists, the Mosaic law was given to the nation Israel. Its place was of vital importance to Israel, not to the church, for it was given as a rule of living or a method of divine dealing for a people already in the Abrahamic covenant. Thus, its jurisdiction did not continue into the present church-age. Dispensationalists also argue that it was antithetically presented to the gospel in the NT. Accordingly, Christians are not under the Mosaic covenant of law. Gannett even condemns the Seventh-day Adventists for their teaching of
the OT law.¹ In fact, one does not go very far into the NT before one meets again the law of Moses, and one does realize that the law of Moses becomes a significant issue. Some, like Dispensationalists, teach the nullification of the Mosaic law as a whole, while maintaining only the principles of the Decalogue under the concept of the pure law. Is it the true biblical teaching? It is, therefore, important to consider its meaning, its purpose, its relationship to the Sermon on the Mount, the content of the moral law, and the relation of law and gospel in the NT from the standpoint of Dispensationalism.

The Nature of Law

Dispensational writers often list the subdivisions in scriptural usage in order to seek the meaning of the law. Since any study of the character and function of the Mosaic law must involve an observation of the words which conceptualize that law, it is most natural to investigate the terms rendered "law."

Terminology of "Law"

Dispensationalists agree with other scholars regarding the terminology of law.² In the OT, tōrāh³ is

the most frequent Hebrew word for law, the Hiphil of the verb yārāh, "to cast," "to send out the hand," hence "to show, to indicate," and from pointing out or showing "to teach, to instruct." 1 Other forms from the same root are mōreh, "teacher" (Isa 30:12), and hōrāh, as in the form of the Hiphil, "to teach," "to instruct" (Exod 24:12). Regarding a close relationship between tōrāh and hōrāh and their meaning, Östborn sets forth the following convincing argument:

Both in its form and significance, tōrāh has close affinities with the verb hōrāh, "to instruct," a relationship which is, indeed, unanimously admitted by scholars. It is therefore a natural step to regard tōrāh as a noun derived from yārāh, the stem of the verb hōrāh. The substantial meaning of tōrāh would thus be "instruction." There are ample instances to show that hōrāh means "to instruct." 2

In the etymological meaning, it is clear that most scholars have generally agreed that tōrāh meant "direction," "guidance," or "instruction" in a broad sense. In

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3 This term occurs some 220 times in the OT. Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament (1980), s.v. "law."
the OT, tōrāh appears with a broader and richer meaning than the English word "law" connotes. Through a brief survey on the terminological usages of tōrāh, Hilgenberg suggests that it is used for five categories: (1) to represent any particular divine requirement or message; (2) to denote an aggregate of divine messages or requirements; (3) to refer to an abstract concept of divine requirements; (4) to indicate the Mosaic legislation in particular; (5) to convey a portion of the tōrāh aggregate.  

He then concludes that tōrāh is a broad concept that lends itself to various applications. His concepts of requirement and message in these categories are similar to those of "halakah" and "hagadah." This means that the word tōrāh is not limited to denote the legal aspect. Dyrness also observes that this word paints more than a legal setting. It includes not only "halakah," the stipulations of conduct such as commandments, statutes, and ordinances, but also "hagadah," religious teaching of God's gracious acts in story form as a unit. Hilgenberg points out that the word tōrāh is also used to govern every aspect of the lives of the people. In this sense it most frequently describes the

2Ibid., 75.
3William Dyrness, Themes in Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 129.
general body of the divinely revealed law which was to
guide the covenant people.¹ According to Hilgenberg's
dispensational perspective, "the very giving the Mosaic
law" was "a means of achieving of the Abrahamic covenant."²

"Law" is to be understood in relation to the con­
cepts of covenant and the covenant community. Pointing out
the nature of the law such as the unconditionality of its
demand, its negative form, its comprehensiveness, and its
address to the covenant people, Gutbrod persuasively
concludes as follows:

It should be emphasized, however, that the validity of
the commandment does not reside in its social utility,
but in the underlying will of the covenant God. Hence
the law seeks to regulate the relation of the covenant
people and individual to the covenant God and to the
member of the people belonging to this God, to regulate
it on the basis of the election of this people by God,
and by the avoidance of things which might destroy or
disrupt the relation.³

The translators of the Septuagint in the vast

¹R. K. Harrison, "Law in the OT," The International
Bromiley and Others (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publish­
ing Co., 1986), 77. Out of 220 occurrences of the word
tôrāh, only 17 cases indicate anything other than the law
of God. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward an Old Testa­
ment Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House,
1978), 155.

²Hilgenberg, "The Law of Moses," 57. Hilgenberg,
however, does not directly describe law as a safeguard of
the covenant relationship.

³W. Gutbrod, "The Law in the Old Testament," TDNT
(1967), 4:1037-38.
majority of cases rendered tōrāh by the Greek word nomos1 which is formed from the verb nemo, "to distribute," "to deal out," or "to assign." In this sense, nomos means "what is assigned to some one." It has "a comprehensive range of meaning which embraces any kind of existing or accepted norm, order, custom, usage or tradition."2 This basic etymological meaning of nomos conveys existence of some relationship in its communal aspect. Many modern scholars, however, contend that use of the word law nomos conveys a somewhat narrow, restricted meaning of tōrāh, that is to say, the legislative body of rules. Yet the nuances of tōrāh in terms of teaching, instruction, and revelation are also transmitted to some degree into nomos.3 "Nomos had at least the same breadth of meaning which tōrāh had for Judaism." Thus "in some NT passages, and especially in Paul, nomos is used in the sense of Torah story as well as Torah stipulations."4

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1In the LXX nomos occurs about 430 times, of which about 200 are Hebrew equivalents, and the commonest equivalent of the rest is tōrāh. In the NT the noun nomos occurs 191 times, of which 119 times are used by Paul.


Definition of Law

It is not easy to define the word law,\(^1\) for it can be discussed from various angles. Dispensational theologians have mainly attempted to find its meaning by analyzing the biblical usages of the term "law." Chafer and Ryrie try to establish the basic meaning in the ethical or the juristic sense. Chafer defines it as "a rule which regulates human conduct."\(^2\) In adherence to Chafer, Ryrie states it as "a system of rules or principles for conduct."\(^3\) This kind of definition reflects the most comprehensive concept of the law which is generally accepted in the judicial society.\(^4\)

As noted earlier, study in etymology has pointed out that the word תּוֹרָה does not convey a single meaning. The

\(^1\)For instance, "The Definition of the Law," the title of the first chapter in DeHaan's work Law or Grace seems to lack this point. DeHaan shows only three different uses and three parts of the word "law" with the emphasis on their unified character, and then he explains the purpose of the law by using Galatians 3:19.

\(^2\)Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7:225.


\(^4\)For instance, John Austin defines the law in his The Providence of Jurisprudence Determined and the Uses of the Study of Jurisprudence (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955), 10, as follows: "A law, in the most general and comprehensive acceptance in which the term, in its literal meaning, is employed, may be said to be a rule laid down for the guidance of an intelligent being by an intelligent being having power over him." This definition is cited by Archibald M'Caig, "Law in the New Testament," The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (1939), 3:1852, and Gannett, "Law in the New Testament," 8.
word *nomos* has several meanings in the Bible. Thus, to grasp the meanings of the word "law" used in different senses in the Bible becomes the key to avoid misunderstanding the nature of the biblical law and law and grace. Chafer and Walvoord suggest a sevenfold use of "law" in Scripture as follows:¹

1. The Ten Commandments (Exod 31:18). The Commandments are the heart of the entire law given to Moses as the direct writings of God. The Decalogue is not identical with the moral law. Although the principles of the Ten Commandments are restated under grace, the Commandments ceased to be the rule of conduct when Christ fulfilled the law.

2. The whole Mosaic system of government for Israel in the land. The Mosaic system was given through Moses to govern Israel in the land of promise. It is divided into three parts, namely, the Ten Commandments

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¹Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 191; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace; The Glorious Theme* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1950), 102-109. Aldrich enumerates 12 uses by quoting from Robert McQuilkin, *Law and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), 9-10. They are as follows: (1) the Pentateuch (Luke 24:44); (2) the OT (John 12:34; 15:25); (3) the Mosaic law; (4) the Ten Commandments (Exod 20); (5) the Moral law (Matt 22:37-40); (6) some particular precept or regulation of the law (John 19:7); (7) the ceremonial law (Heb 7:28; 8:4; 9:22); (8) law as principle (Rom 3:37; 8:2); (9) law in general (Rom 7:1, 2); (10) law as penalty (Rom 4:15; Gal 3:10); (11) law as contrasted with grace (Gal 3:11; Matt 23:23); (12) the law of Christ (Gal 6:2; James 1:25; 2:12). Aldrich, *Holding Fast Grace*, 41.
(Exod 20:1-17), the civil law (Exod 21:1-24:11), and the ceremonial law (Exod 24:12-31:18).

3. The governing principles of the future kingdom of the Messiah (Matt 5:1-7:29). In the millennial kingdom on the earth, which will be the fulfillment of all God's covenants with Israel, the attitude of a person toward the Mosaic law will determine his or her place in the kingdom.

4. The whole revealed will of God for humans (Rom 7:22, 25; 8:4). Under the new covenant of grace the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit creates a life corresponding to the divine will. The injunctions of grace, however, become a covenant of works when the power of the flesh attempts to fulfill them.

5. Any rule of conduct prescribed by men for their own government (Matt 20:15; Luke 20:22; 2 Tim 2:5). Sometimes the word "law" was used as the equivalent of a force in operation (Rom 7:21; 8:2).

6. A conditional covenant of works. The formula of the covenant of works is "If you will do good, I will bless you." Its scope goes beyond the actual writings of the Mosaic system and the kingdom law when a person attempts to secure the divine favor according to the formula.

7. A principle of dependence on the flesh. The law provides no enablement for its observance of the
natural man. Whatever is undertaken in the strength of the flesh is legal in its nature.

Through observation of the word "law" which has diverse meanings, one can know that, for the Dispensationalists, the dispensational context or the biblical context must mainly determine the meaning intended.

Dispensational writers accentuate the unified character of the Mosaic law. It is an indivisible unit, consisting of different commandments and ordinances. These different parts are interrelated and independent as a unit in a code. Thus the distinction between the moral and the ceremonial law has no meaning in understanding the Pauline epistles. This is the starting point of their understanding of the Mosaic law. Dispensationalists do not distinguish the laws of Moses from the law of the Lord. Even the expressions "the law of the Lord" and "the law of Moses" are used interchangeably.

The Ground of the Law

In dispensational theology the law is an expression of the mind and will of God. The moral law of God refers to those eternal principles that reflect the nature of God. The eternal principles of the law issue from the character of God. Aldrich uses the term "moral law" to depict

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2McClain, Law and Grace, 8-10; Aldrich, Holding Fast to Grace, 47-51; DeHaan, Law or Grace, 17-20.
the eternal principles of righteousness which are a reflection of the character of God. This law has always existed and is the essence of the will of God for every dispensation. Its standards are as high as the glory or character of God (Rom 3:23), and its obligations rest alike upon all created intelligences.\(^1\)

In the *NSRB* the moral law is an expression of the holiness and righteousness of God. God's moral law proceeds from His righteousness.\(^2\) Thus, the character of God containing the elements of His will, mind, holiness, and righteousness becomes the ground of the law.

**The Moral Law and the Law of Christ**

According to these writers, the law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments, was given to Israel alone.\(^3\) It was done away with as a whole at the time of the sacrificial death of Christ, for the dispensation of law extends from the giving of the law at Sinai to the death of Christ in dispensational theology.\(^4\)

If this is so, is the law a worthless, worn-out garment to be discarded in the dispensation of the church? No society exists without law. Throughout history, a certain kind of norm ruling human conduct has been and will be

\(^1\)Aldrich, *Holding Fast to Grace*, 42; Cf. Lightner, "A Dispensational Response to Theonomy," 240.

\(^2\)*NSRB*, 147, n. 1 (Lev 16:5); 1254, n. 1 (2 Cor 3:11).

\(^3\)*NSRB*, 96, n. 1 (Exod 20:1); Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 304.

\(^4\)*NSRB*, 94, n. 1 (Exod 19:1).
operative in the world. Each age has a different code which represents "a different revelation of God's will for a particular time."1 Since the ground of any biblical codes is the revealed will of God,2 the general principles of the law have been inherent in all dispensations under different forms. This argument is well expressed by Ryrie:

The only solution (which I have never seen proposed by anyone else) that seems to do full justice to the plain sense of these various Scriptures distinguishes between a code and the commandments contained therein.3

The NSRB and other dispensational writers assert also this dichotomy of a code and the moral law.4 The code, although it expresses the eternal moral law, is changeable, but the moral law is unchangeable. This moral law, therefore, is not equivalent to the Ten Commandments. Rather, it existed before Moses and continues after the cross with their restatements. Believers are not without any ethical standard or guide. They are under this moral law. It seems that Pentecost's concept of the law,5 which manifests the holiness of God to Israel and is still useful and will

1Ryrie, The Grace of God, 114.

2Ryrie suggests the examples of the Adamic code, the Noachic code, the Abrahamic code, the Mosaic code, and the law of Christ. Basic Theology, 305; see also Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7:226.

3Ryrie, Basic Theology, 305.

4NSRB, p. 1254, n. 2 (2 Cor 3:11); Aldrich, Holding Fast to Grace, 60-64; McClain, Law and Grace, 16.

be permanent, is understood in this dimension of the moral law.

The Christian moral law, therefore, these writers assert, is the law of Christ. The Mosaic law as a changeable code has been replaced by the law of Christ in the church-age. "Torah is replaced by Christ as fulfillment of the law of God."\(^1\) The law of Christ is now governing the Christians (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:20-21). The NSRB states:

God's moral law proceeds from the righteousness of God and can never be abolished. The Mosaic law, as an expression of this moral law, has been "done away" in that it has been superseded by another law, i.e. the standards of grace revealed in the N.T. The believer is now under law to Christ (2 Cor 9:21).\(^2\)

The law of Christ is the Christian code as the moral law itself. It can be defined as the law of love rather than as a concrete corpus of Christian norms.\(^3\) It is identical with "the law of liberty" or "the law of the Spirit." With respect to the meaning of the law of Christ, the NSRB says:

The new law of Christ is the divine love, as wrought into the renewed heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; Heb 10:16), which flows out on the energy of the Spirit, unforced and spontaneous, toward the objects of divine love (2 Cor 5:14-20; 1 Thes 2:7-8). It is, therefore, "the law of liberty" (Jas 1:25; 2:12) in contrast with


\(^2\)NSRB, 1254, n. 2 (2 Cor 3:11).

the external law of Moses. Moses's law demands love (Lev 19:18; Deut 6:5; Luke 10:27); Christ's law is love (Rom 5:5; 1 John 4:7, 19-20), and so takes the place of the external law by fulfilling it (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:14).1

The new commandment (John 13:34; cf. 15:12; 1 John 2:7-11) is especially identical with the law of Christ.2 The adjective kainos ("new") in John 13:34 means newness of form and quality, the antithesis of what is old and worn out.; what is new entolē, is in the singular in contrast to the multiplicity of commands of the old; its content is love, a love which is new in form and quality.3

Regarding the believer's duty under the rule of grace, Nevin concurs with other Dispensationalists and alleges the irrelevance of the Ten Commandments for the church.4 Furthermore, he attempts to establish the standard of life under grace, which is based upon liberty with love. Each believer, as a mature adult, has the right to decide the doubtful things in love. In order to apply this principle to questionable practices, he believes the NT sets forth nine rules:5 (1) the rule of God's glory (1 Cor 10:31)—the Christian must do everything to the glory of God; (2) the rule of accountability (Rom 14:12)—each believer is a steward to God and must judge his own

1NSRB, 1347, n. 1 (2 John 5).
2NSRB, 165, note 2 (1 John 2:3).
3Gannett, "Law in the New testament," 165.
5Ibid., 319-329.
behavior, remembering that God will require a reckoning; (3) the rule of conviction (Rom 14:5)––every Christian should have a strong conviction of his righteousness in doing about any doubtful practice such as the observance of days; (4) the rule of thankfulness (Col 3:17)––the believer should do his work with gratitude; (5) the rule of example (Rom 14:13)––the stronger must not only follow his own conscience but also consider his weaker brother's conscience; (6) the rule of edification (Rom 15:1-2)––each believer must help to make other believers stronger; (7) the rule of mutual respect (Rom 14:3)––there should be no judgment or condemnation between the stronger and the weaker; (8) the rule of testimony (1 Cor 10:32-33)––the believer should witness not only for fellow believers, but also for the unsaved; (9) the rule of peace (Rom 12:18)––every believer should avoid trouble and strife. The first four of these rules deal with the Christian's relationship to God; the next three, with his relationship to fellow Christians; the last two, with his relationship to the unsaved.

The Contents of the Law of Moses

Although Dispensationalists stress the unified character of the Mosaic law, they admit some categories of laws. According to Hannah, the Mosaic law in Exodus is divided into the three parts1: the Decalogue, the Book of

1Hannah, "Exodus," 139.
Covenant with civil law and religious ordinances, and the ceremonial regulations. For Unger they are the civil, criminal, judicial, constitutional, ecclesiastical, and ceremonial laws.\footnote{Merrill F. Unger, "Law of Moses," \textit{Unger's Bible Dictionary} (1959), 647.} But Hilgenberg, following the traditional nomenclature, designates three parts as the Decalogue, the civil law, and the ceremonial law.\footnote{Hilgenberg, "The Law of Moses," 149-192.} In the \textit{NSRB} the three parts of the Mosaic covenant are the Ten Commandments, the judgments, and the ordinances, which are basically identical with the traditional division.\footnote{\textit{NSRB}, 1267, n. 2 (Gal 3:24).}

The Decalogue

According to Dispensationalism, the law constitutes a revelation of the righteousness of God, but it is not the norm for Christian behavior which must be grounded in New Testament command. As already noted regarding the moral law and the law of Christ, the moral law is not equivalent to the Decalogue. Consequently it is unmistakably clear that the designation "the moral law" for the Decalogue is somewhat of a misunderstanding.

The Decalogue was given as the foundation of all subsequent laws. Thus Dispensationalists regard it as "the hub of all of Israel's religious and civil laws,"\footnote{Hannah, "Exodus," \textit{BKC} (OT), 139.} or "the
very heart of the Sinaitic law."\(^1\) According to Robert J. Hilgenberg, who wrote a dissertation "The Law of Moses" at Dallas Theological Seminary, its importance came from six factors: (1) Yahweh's giving it at the beginning of His revelation at Sinai; (2) His utterance by voice without any intermediary; (3) His direct inscription on the stone tablets; (4) the designation of the "testimony" and its placement in the ark of the covenant, the center of Israel's worship; (5) the manner of His manifestation at the giving of the law; and (6) its apodictic nature.\(^2\)

The Ten Commandments were given only to the nation Israel as the principles by which they could determine the course of their behavior. Accordingly, the Commandments were not intended to be "the guidelines for or the direct obligation of the Church."\(^3\)

The first four commandments of the Decalogue governed the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelite. By contrast the remaining six commandments regulated the relationships between the Israelites. These two relationships were originally intended to reinforce the promises of the Abrahamic covenant--their fidelity to Yahweh and the preservation of the descendants of Abraham in the land of Canaan.\(^4\)

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\(^1\)McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 85.  
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 149.  
Hannah regards the Decalogue as an excellent summary of ten divine rules for man's conduct in the area of (1) religion, (2) worship, (3) reverence, (4) time, (5) authority, (6) life, (7) purity, (8) property, (9) tongue, and (10) contentment.\(^1\) The principles of most of the Commandments are restated in the NT as expressions of the moral law. Dispensationalists, therefore, admit a certain value for the Decalogue in the church-age. Regarding the reinstatements, the NSRB says:

> Although the Christian is not under the Mosaic law as a rule of life, some of the law of Moses is restated in the N.T., i.e. nine of the Ten Commandments are included. The Mosaic law still constitutes a revelation of the righteousness of God and remains as a part of Scripture which "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 (2 Tim 3:16-17; cf. Rom 15:4).\(^2\)

Aldrich points out the instances of these reinstatements of the moral principles corresponding to the Ten Commandments:

- The first: 1 Tim 2:5; Acts 14:15; Jas 2:19; the second: Acts 15:29; 1 Cor 8:1-10; 12:2; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 John 5:21; the third: Matt 5:33-37; Jas 5:12; the fifth: Matt 15:3-4; Eph 6:1-3; the sixth: 1 John 3:15; the seventh: Matt 5:27-28; 1 Cor 6:18-20; the eighth: Eph 4:28; the ninth: Col 3:9-10; 1 Cor 9:21; the tenth: Eph 5:3.\(^3\) Only the fourth

\(^1\)Hannah, "Exodus," 139.

\(^2\)NSRB, 1254, n. 2 (2 Cor 3:11).

\(^3\)Aldrich, Holding Fast to Grace, 65-76.
commandment is excluded in the NT expression of these principles. One must keep clearly in mind that, for Dispensationalists, the restatements of these principles which are part of the Christian code are not a continuation of parts of the Mosaic law.¹

The Civil Law

The civil laws were the laws connected with the social and national life of the Israelites, including the private rights of individuals and the legal procedures to protect their rights. They were an application of the Decalogue. Hilgenberg classified the constitutional laws, social laws, economical laws, and criminal laws under the civil law.² The constitutional laws were the regulations relating to the organization of the theocratic government of Israel. The social laws included the laws concerning family life, slavery, theft, false witness, treatment of animals, the waging of war, and the laws protecting and defending the individuals or their possessions. The criminal laws specified the regulations regarding penalties for the violations of the Mosaic law.

The Ceremonial Law

The ceremonial laws were the regulations of the ritual and worship in the sanctuary. The first function of

¹Ryrie, Basic Theology, 305.
these laws was the instruction for the people. All the rites made the Israelites more conscious of their sinfulness and infractions of the Decalogue and other laws. At the same time, they awakened the people to the necessity of cleansing from their defilement. Another function of the ceremonial law was mediation. The Ten Commandments and the other kinds of laws had no provision for sins and transgressions. They could only condemn and punish. The sacrificial system of the OT was a typical foreshadowing of the sacrificial work of Christ to save man from condemnation.¹ Through these sacrifices God gave forgiveness and restored the offender to the forfeited theocratic relationship through the bringing of sacrifices.² The active manifestations of grace consistently accompanies manifestations of the divine presence throughout the sacrificial system.³

The Purpose of the Law

As noted above, the Sinai covenant was gracious, conditional, national, legal, and temporary. These characteristics marked deeply the Mosaic law. According to Dispensationalists, the law had several purposes: revelatory,

¹Walvoord, Jesus Christ Our Lord, 71.
²Ryrie, Dispensationalism today, 128.
³Cf. Woodring, "Grace under the Mosaic Covenant," 341.
regulatory, condemnatory and redemptive, but they assert that only its revelatory purpose was permanent.¹

Revelatory Purpose

The primary purpose of the Mosaic law, Pentecost teaches, was instruction of God's revealed will. God entrusted the writing of this revealed will to Israel. As stated already, the meaning of torah is that of God's instruction of His people that regulated the relationship established by covenant. In this revelatory purpose were contained the following concrete aspects: (1) to reveal the holiness of God, the character of God; (2) to reveal the standard of holiness concerning character and conduct required of those in covenant relationship with God. This revelatory purpose was permanent to any generation of God's people.

Regulatory Purpose

The Mosaic law was given to Israel alone. When Israel entered into a solemn blood-covenant relationship with God, it became a theocratic nation. To live under a pure theocracy required an absolute standard of

righteousness for the entire life of the Israelite, including the family, and social, religious, moral, civil, and political life. Thus the Mosaic law was given: (1) to be the unifying principle for the establishment of the nation as a kingdom of priests and an holy nation; (2) to separate Israel from the nations and to preserve it as a kingdom of priests; (3) to provide a test to whether one was in the kingdom of God. This regulatory aspect of the law was temporary and has been discontinued.  

Condemnatory Purpose

In the third place, the law was to expose sin as an offense of God's standard. This is a reflective result of the revelatory function of the law. Thus (1) the law was given to condemn transgression of the great moral standards: any aberration from the standard of God's holiness is condemned, for it is in this fact that, for Paul, law was added because of transgressions (Gal 3:19); hence (2) the law was given as a schoolmaster (Gal 3:24) "to supervise physical, mental, and spiritual development of the redeemed immature Israelite until he should come to maturity in Christ;"  

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2 Ibid., 230.
law would bring His wrath, and that aspect of the law cannot be permanent.\(^1\)

**Redemptive Purpose**

The last purpose of the law was to bring redemption. As an indivisible unit, the Mosaic law contains the system of sacrifices, the Day of Atonement, and other annual feasts which typify the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Thus the law was given to a redeemed people: (1) to make provision for forgiveness of sins and restoration to covenant relationship; (2) to reveal Jesus Christ as the coming Redeemer King; (3) to make provision for Jewish worship. Thus the redemptive purpose of the law was limited to a special time.

What must be made, then, of the dispensational idea that it was not the purpose of the law to provide salvation? Justification and sanctification have nothing to do with the law in the soteriological sense, for the Mosaic law cannot be a moral standard of the Christian conduct. The only ethical standard is the law of Christ, which provides the ethical principles of the church as based on the divine character which has been the foundation of the law.

\(^1\)Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," *BKC* (NT), 599.
According to Dispensationalists, the dispensation of the law began with the giving of the Decalogue at Sinai and was to end at the cross. Hence, the period of history covered by the Gospels was still under the covenant of the law. Jesus was born, lived, and died on earth under the covenant of the law. The ministry and teaching of Christ, therefore, was interpreted in the context of the law of Moses.

Jesus' Relationship to the Law

For Dispensationalists, Jesus came under the law to relieve man from his subjection to the law and restore to him the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. This was accomplished in seven different ways:

1. The time-setting within the dispensation of the law—Jesus was born under the covenant of the law to redeem those who were under law (Gal 4:4). A reason for Christ's incarnation is redemption "from a slavery to the entire Mosaic system," not "from the curse of the Law" such as the penalty of the law in Gal 3:13, for the curse of the law was transferred from sinners to Christ.

2. The perfect obedience of Christ to the law—the earthly life of Jesus was full of obedience to the law.

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1. NSRB, 998, n. 2 (Matt 5:17).
Through His parents and by His personal behavior, Jesus obeyed the Sinai law (1 Pet 2:21-23; Luke 2:22-24, 41; Mark 1:44, etc.).

(3) The interpreter of the law for the Jews—the teaching of Jesus regarding the law was in sharp conflict with that of the religious leaders of His day, for He cleared the law from their sophistries. He enforced it upon those who professed to obey it (Luke 10:25-35) and confirmed the promises made to the fathers under the Sinai covenant.

(4) The fulfillment of the law—by His holy life and death Jesus fulfilled the types of the law (Heb 9:11-28).

(5) The assumption of the curse of the law—Jesus vicariously took the curse of the law in order that the Abrahamic covenant might avail all who believe (Gal 3:13-14).

(6) The granting to all believers of the adoption of sons—by His redemptive work Jesus secured all believers in Him the full right of sons (Gal 4:1-7).

(7) The mediator of the new covenant—as the mediator of the new covenant by His blood, Jesus established "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), that is, the law of love, and made the believers to live with its precepts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
Dispensationalists, as one can see, teach that because of His redemptive mission, Jesus could approach the law with a unique authority. On the one hand, they, therefore, stress the obedience of Jesus to the law, His fulfillment of the law, and the establishment of the law of love. On the other hand, they maintain that one of the reasons for Jesus' incarnation is the redemption of mankind from subjection to the entire Mosaic system, leading the people to the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant.

The Teaching of Jesus

A special ring of authority appeared in Jesus' teaching in contrast with the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees (Mark 1:22). It had freshness in content (Mark 1:27) and absolute and maximum standards (Matt 5:20-48) in reality.¹ His teaching on the law was performed with divine authority.

The Gospels present Jesus as the King of the kingdom of heaven. Here the kingdom of heaven means "the rule of heaven over the earth,"² "the manifested rule of God on the earth in the mediatorial Davidic kingdom."³ It is "in the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God."⁴

¹Cf. Ryrie, Biblical Theology, 56.
²NSRB, 994, n. 3 (Matt 3:2).
⁴NSRB, 1002, n. 1 (Matt 6:33).
church is not a part of this kingdom.\(^1\) This is the dispensational understanding of the basic theological framework of the kingdom of heaven in the Synoptics.\(^2\) Hence the teaching of Jesus concerning the law is mostly understood within this theological framework.

(1) Teaching the moral principles for the kingdom—when Jesus talks, He talks as the ruler of the kingdom. For that reason what He says in the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to Christians since we are still in the dispensation of grace today. It is the teaching principle or the manifesto of the constitution of the offered kingdom.\(^3\) It embodies the higher and absolute standards of the law. It reaffirms "the Mosaic law of the O.T. theocratic kingdom as the governing code in His coming kingdom on earth" and shows "the perfect standard of righteousness demanded by the law\(^4\) in order to call those who heard it to that inner change. In this sense, it is basically intended for the kingdom. This has not yet

\(^1\)Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 398-399.


\(^4\)NSRB, 997, n. 4 (Matt 5:4).
arrived. Thus the Sermon on the Mount has a twofold application: first, it applies literally to the kingdom; second, Dispensationalists admit that it is profitable to study it, for it has a beautiful moral application to the Christian.¹

(2) Fulfilling the law—by fulfilling the law Jesus revealed the spiritual completeness to which the law and the prophets had pointed. Jesus's fulfillment of the law began from His circumcision on the eighth day (Luke 2:21). This faithfulness to the law continued as He grew into manhood. At the beginning of His public ministry He submitted Himself to the rite of baptism with His emphasis

¹Following Darby's position, Scofield speaks of a twofold application of Matt 5-7, literally to the kingdom, and only by its eternal, moral principles to the Christian. See SRB, 999-1000, n. 2. NSRB also takes the same attitude, only its wording is changed. See p. 997, n. 4 (Matt 5:3). Chafer states: "A secondary application to the Church means that lessons and principles may be drawn from it, but that, as a rule of life, it is addressed to the Jew before the cross and the Jew in the coming kingdom, and is therefore not now in effect." See Systematic Theology, 5:97. According to Vern S. Poythress, this twofold application becomes one of the reasons that Dispensationalists are not pure literalists, and, therefore, they are called "applicatory" Dispensationalists, not "hardline" Dispensationalists. See his Understanding Dispensationalists (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987), 24-31. Curiously, Ryrie states: "If you abandon literal interpretation, whose understanding of the 'underlying meaning' is correct? But if the laws of the Sermon are to be obeyed today they could not be taken literally, for, as Ladd points out, every businessman would go bankrupt giving to those who ask of him. This is the dilemma every interpreter faces. If literal, it cannot be for today; if for today, it cannot be literal. And this is not a dilemma that faces only dispensationalists." Dispensationalism Today, 106-107.
upon fulfillment (Matt 3:15). The statement in Matt 5:17-19 reveals Jesus's full respect for the Mosaic law. It shows the relation of the law of kingdom to the Mosaic law and prophets. Jesus promulgated that He had not come to destroy the Mosaic law or replace it, but to fulfill it.¹ It is wrong to interpret Matt 5:17 as having only the Ten Commandments in view.² Jesus came to reveal much more. He revealed God's ideal for conduct. His fulfillment of the law also means that the law of Moses came to an end with the death of Christ as a dispensation, yet "its moral and spiritual implications were to be fulfilled in later dispensations, including the kingdom."³

(3) Terminating the law of Moses— the dispensational theologians attempt to prove the termination of the law from the teachings of Jesus Christ. They understand the worn-out cloak or the old skin-bottle in the parable of the cloth and wineskin (Matt 9:16-17) as meaning "the law,"⁴ "the old forms of the law,"⁵ "Mosaic economy,"⁶ or

¹See Christ's relation to the law of Moses in NSRB, 998, n. 2 (Matt 5:17).
³Walvoord, Matthew, 48; cf. Aldrich, Holding Fast to Grace, 81.
⁵Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible, 116.
"the legal dispensation,"\(^1\) Therefore, this parable tells us that the old covenant of the law was terminated by the new. Gannett also tries to extract the termination of the old covenant from the connotation of a new commandment\(^2\) and Christ's proclamation on the cross (John 19:30).\(^3\)

(4) Contrasting with the law of Moses—because of His unique approach to the law, the teaching of Jesus regarded it mainly within a polemical framework. He was often charged with false teaching or teaching in opposition to the law because of sharp conflict with that of the religious leaders of His day. The religious leaders were blind to the true meaning and purpose of the law, but Jesus rejected their distorted and encumbered traditions and practices and gave its true meaning. His elucidation of God's true intent of the law is expressed in the antithetical formula, "You have heard that it was said . . . . But I tell you."\(^4\) The law of Moses was superseded by a higher

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\(^3\)Ibid., 167.

\(^4\)Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used this formula six times in Matt: 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44. See Barbieri, "Matthew," *BKC (NT)*, 30. In the understanding of the Matthean section of this formula Walvoord, however, feels that the morality of the kingdom exceeds that of the law of Moses. Furthermore, he understands that the kingdom standards of the Sermon on the Mount are in contrast to the Mosaic law. See Walvoord, *Matthew*, 48-51.
law. According to Nevin, this contrast is well expressed in John 1:17 and Luke 16:16, which tell the beginning of the transition with the ministry of John the Baptist.¹

(5) Asking obedience to the Commandments—in reply­ing to the question of the rich ruler regarding eternal life, Jesus instructed him that if he wanted to enter into life, he should keep the commandments (Matt 19: 16-18). Jesus regarded the law as authoritative. To the young man's question of which commandments, He answered with the second half of the Decalogue concerning murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and honoring one's parents. According to Walvoord, it is significant that Jesus did not mention the tenth commandment and that he added another commandment from Lev 19:18.² Yet the Dallas theologian does not give any explanation of what he means. Rather, Barbieri sees the additional commandment as the summary statement.³ Martin indicates the four command­ments as pertaining to man's relationship with God.⁴

¹Nevin, "Some Major Problems in Dispensational Interpretation," 118-119.

²Walvoord, Matthew, 144. The order of the four commandments in Matthew and Mark is that of Exod 20 (M.T. and LXX) and Deut 5 (M.T. and LXX), Josephus Antiquities 3.5.5, and Didache 2.1. Luke places the commandment concern­ing adultery first of all. John D. Grassmick considers that Mark only adds "Do not defraud" (10:19) which may have a more appropriate supplement akin to that of the eighth and/or ninth commandments. See "Mark," BKC (NT), 150.

³Barbieri, "Matthew," BKC (NT), 64.

In recapitulation, note that the word "law" in the Scripture conveys not only the legislative body of rules in the narrow sense but also the underlying will or instruction of the covenant of God in the broad sense. Dispensational theologians stress the context of each usage to determine its proper meaning. The Mosaic law, including the Decalogue, was abrogated by the death of Christ. The law of Christ, namely, the law of love, is the Christian moral law which proceeds from the divine character. Dispensationalists admit the restatement of the Decalogue in the NT, but they do not regard it as a continuation of part of the Mosaic law. In a fourfold purpose of the Mosaic law, the regulatory aspect has been discontinued, but the revelatory function is permanent. The other functions are effective only in connection with the revelatory aspect, for it reveals God's character and His standard, it condemns the transgressors of the standard, and it leads His people to Jesus Christ, and His provision for forgiveness. The Abrahamic covenant might avail through Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, who came to redeem man from a slavery to the entire Mosaic system. The Mosaic law was terminated by His fulfillment. The Sermon on the Mount is primarily related to the principles of the kingdom. Dispensational writers understand the kingdom standards in the teachings of Jesus as contrasted with the Mosaic law, not as its original intent.
Paul and the Law of Moses

Even after the crucifixion of Christ, the early church continued to keep the law of Moses as it had done previously. It seems that the Judeo-Christians did not make a complete break with Judaism. They continued to worship at the temple (Acts 3:21; 15:21). As the church engaged in worldwide missionary work, the Jewish church faced the difficult question whether the Gentile converts should observe all things required of the Jew. The Judaizing party in the church insisted on the practices of the Jewish church. They required the Gentile Christians to keep circumcision (Acts 11:1-3), the pledge of allegiance to the Hebrew covenant with God, coming down from Abraham, and to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5). The first general church council made an important decision which was to all effects a great proclamation of emancipation. Yet the work of the Judaizers continued in the church. Consequently, a great dissension arose in the Early Church. Paul wrote some of his epistles to solve the struggle against the Judaism in the church and to establish the proper understanding of the relationship between the ministry of Christ's death and the law of Moses.

In searching for the dispensational understanding of Paul and the law of Moses the discussion is structured as follows: (1) the Church and the law of Moses,
(2) contrasts between the law and grace, (3) salvation and the law of Moses.

The Church and the Law of Moses

According to Dispensationalists, Christ constituted His church as a separate entity besides Israel. The church is defined by the dispensational writers as "the whole number of regenerated persons specifically from Pentecost to the first resurrection united organically to one another and to Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit."\(^1\) As a body of believers, it is "distinct in divine purpose and situation from saints who preceded them in the Old Testament."\(^2\) Dispensationalists cling to the Israel-church antithesis, rejecting the unity of the people of God.

The church has no relationship with the Sinaitic covenant and law.\(^3\) There are two reasons why the church has nothing to do with the Mosaic covenant. The first one suggested is that, as has already been observed,\(^4\) the Sinaitic covenant of law was given to the nation Israel, and the Sermon on the Mount was primarily given to the kingdom people. This means that the Mosaic covenant has no

\(^1\)Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 204.


\(^3\)Strickland, "Preunderstanding and Daniel Fuller's Law-Gospel Continuum," 193.

\(^4\)See 146-149.
direct administration over the church. Dispensationalists support this position by quoting some Pauline passages. Gannett tries to maintain it by the statements of Rom 2:12-14 which tells the contrast between the Jews and the Gentiles who did not possess the law of Moses.¹ Piepgrass also attempts to prove it by the statement of Rom 2:14 and 6:14.²

A second reason for the church having no connection with the Mosaic covenant of law lies in the fact that the law was nailed on the Cross. Dispensational writers attempt to prove the termination of the Mosaic law at Calvary with numerous Pauline texts. Ryrie substantiates this by understanding "the certificate of debt" (Col 2:14) as a symbolic expression of the Mosaic law.³ The "ministration of death, written and engraved in stones" (2 Cor 3:7) refers to "the law and particularly to the Ten Commandments" which were canceled.⁴ As Geisler put it: "In Christ the law is fulfilled (Rom 8:2) and done away with (Gal 3:25; Heb 7:12)."⁵ NSRB states: "Christ having

³The Ryrie Study Bible, 362, note on Col 2:14.
⁴Ibid., 318, note on 2 Cor 3:7; Ryrie, Basic Theology, 304.
⁵Norman L. Geisler, "Colossians," BKC (NT), 678.
come, the believer is no longer under the child-
discipliner." DeHaan stresses it with the statements that
the law "was added to grace . . . till the seed should
come" (Gal 3: 19). Campbell comments on this text that
the dominance of the law has ended, for faith in Christ has
delivered Christians from the custody of the pedagogue. The phrase "the end of the law" (Rom 10:4) means "the end
as a means of obtaining righteousness through obedience to
it." As the result of Christ's crucifixion, God regards
it as though we have paid the penalty. Thus the believers
are dead to the law (Gal 2:19-20).

Under this setting the message of the Apostolic
Church was not the law of Moses but rather the person and
work of the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ. Though
annulled and discontinued in the church age, yet, as
already indicated, it becomes a rich source of truth and of
moral principles applicable to the church age.

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1NSRB, 1267, n. 2 (Gal 3:19).
2DeHaan, Law or Grace, 34.
3Campbell, "Galatians," BKC (NT), 600.
4DeHaan, Law or Grace, 48. By this Nevin means
that the believers are not under the Mosaic law. Some
Major Problems, 283.
5DeHaan, Law or Grace, 91; The Ryrie Study Bible,
334, note on Gal 2:19; Campbell, "Galatians," BKC (NT),
596.
Contrasts between the Law and Grace

Dispensationalists claim the relationship between law and grace as antithetical. They define grace as "the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man,"¹ "the method of divine dealing in salvation and in the believer's life and service,"² or the "unmerited favor" in the general sense.³ As stated by Chafer, it means "what God may be free to do, and indeed what He does, accordingly, for the lost after Christ has died on behalf of them."⁴ It differs from divine mercy, love, and goodness. Mercy is the compassion of God for the miserable. Yet grace is for the guilty. Grace goes before mercy. Grace is an expression of divine love or goodness toward the unlovely or the undeserving.⁵

The contrast between law and grace is an important element connected with the Israel-church antithesis in the framework of the dispensational theology. Law and grace are mutually exclusive. Chafer believes that law and grace are indeed antithetical. He states, "Since law and grace are opposed to each other at every point, it is impossible

¹NSRB, 1124, n. 1 (John 1:17).
²NSRB, 1341, n. 2 (2 Peter 3:18).
⁴Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7:178.
for them to coexist, either as the ground of acceptance before God or as the rule of life.¹ There can be no confusion of the two in salvation.² Concerning the differences between law and grace, the NSRB states:

As a principle, therefore, grace is set in contrast with law (Rom. 11:6), under which God demands righteousness from men, as under grace, He gives righteousness to men (Rom. 3:21-24; 8:3-4; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9). Law is connected with Moses and works; grace, with Christ and faith (Jn. 1:17; Rom. 10:4-10). Under law blessings accompany obedience Dt. 28:1-6); grace bestows blessings as a free gift (Rom. 4:3-5; Eph. 2:8).³

Ryrie regards the expressions "under the law" and "under grace" as an antithesis between the law and grace and construes the antithetical relation between the dispensation of Moses and the dispensation of Christ from those expressions.⁴

The doctrine of the contrasts between the Mosaic law and grace in dispensational theology teaches that the contrasts are related to the dispensational rules of life. Dispensationalists enumerate many contrasting points in the areas of recipients, objects written, purposes, 

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¹Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:234.
²NSRB, 1267-1268, n. 2 (Gal 3:24); Aldrich, Holding Fast to Grace, 37-41; Campbell, "Galatians," 599.
³NSRB, 1124, n. 1 (John 1:17).
⁴Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 115, 119; see also DeHaan, Law or Grace, 130; McClain, Law and Grace, 42-44.
requirements, results, enablements, merit, time, etc.\textsuperscript{1}

Some of these are summarized here:

(1) Recipients—as we already observed, the law was given by Moses to Israel (Rom 9:4); grace and truth came by Jesus to the church (John 1:17).

(2) Objects on which it was written—the law was written on stone tablets and in the book; grace is written in the heart; the first mainly concerns man's external attitudes, while the latter, his internal attitudes.

(3) Purposes—as noted above, the law reveals man's sin and condemns the sinner; grace atones for his sin and redeems him. The law condemns even the best man; grace embraces even the worst.

(4) Requirements—the law has more commands; grace, more admonitions. Grace appeals to gratitude (Rom 12:1-2). The law speaks to man as an immature child; grace, as a mature adult. Through this phenomenon it seems that grace has a higher level of requirements than those of the Mosaic law. The contents of the law are more complex than the teachings of grace.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}DeHaan suggests the nineteen points of contrasts between "the perfect law of God, and the perfect grace of God" in his Law or Grace, 79-80; Nevin categorizes them into eleven areas in "Some Major Problems," 273-278; cf. Dwight L. Moody classifies sixteen items in The Way to God and How to Find It (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1891), 4:54-56.

\textsuperscript{2}Nevin indicates the actual difficulty to count the number of commands and admonitions in "Some Major Problems," 276.
(5) Enablements—as noted in chapter 3, only partial enablement was supplied under the Mosaic law; full enablement is offered under grace.

(6) Merit—the law says, "Do this and live," "Try," or "Pay up what you owe"; grace says, "It is done" or "It is paid." Obligation or demand precedes divine blessings in the law (Deut 28:1-14), yet the order is just the opposite in grace, a free gift (Eph 2:8-9) which gives power to obey.

(7) Results—the law engenders fear and puts man under a curse, bondage, and death; grace brings peace, confidence, blessing, liberty, and eternal life. The law prohibits man from coming to God; grace invites him to come as he is. The law shuts every mouth before God; grace opens the mouth in praise to Him.

(8) Limit of time—the law is temporary, for it was done away with in Christ of Calvary; grace abides forever.

Dispensationalists believe that one of the primary reasons for the confusion of law and grace is due to the failure to define the word "law." As considered above, the connotation of "law," the moral law, must be distinguished from the Mosaic law—especially from the Ten Commandments. If these two are undistinguished, there arises much

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1See pp. 110-115.
confusion over law and grace and, consequently, some degree of legalism.¹

Maintaining the tensions and contrasts of the Mosaic law and grace, Nevin stresses that the moral law and grace do not oppose each other, for they are originating from the attributes of God and there is no hostility among the divine attributes. Law is more closely connected with divine holiness and justice while, on the contrary, grace is more closely united with divine goodness and love. Nevin had to soften the concept of contrasts of the law and grace because of the dispensational emphasis on the existence of the law of Christ, the law of love in the present age.²

Salvation and the Law of Moses

As noted in chapter 3, contemporary dispensational theology admits one way of salvation from sin by divine grace, though limited, under the Mosaic covenant of works and thus salvation of all people in the same manner. Salvation is never by means of law in any dispensation.

In the same manner as covenant theology, dispensational theology understands the word "salvation" as "the great inclusive word of the Gospel, gathering into itself


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justification, sanctification and glorification,"¹ all of which are the work of God for human beings.² In the three tenses of salvation, believers are justified from the curse of the law, set free from the dominion of sin, sanctified, and finally glorified to the image of their Lord. In addition, Dispensationalists believe that there are two distinct aspects of salvation in the Scriptures: individual and national. The individual salvation was presented in the OT usages of yasha' on the basis of faith in God. At the same time, this word conveys national salvation at the second advent of the Messiah.³

Dispensational writers understand the relationship of the Mosaic law to salvation in two aspects. First, the Mosaic law conveys a typological foretelling of the perfect substitutionary sacrifice which Christ would offer (Rom 5:6-8; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Tim 2:6; Gal 3:13; Titus 2:14; cf. 1 Peter 1:19).⁴ It follows that the law was never given as a means of salvation (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:11, 14). The law asked

¹C[yrus] I. Scofield, Scofield Bible Correspondence Course: Twenty-Six Great Words of Scripture (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1960), 5:1344.


³Pentecost, Things to Come, 264-267; Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:24-26; 3:105-107; Ryrie, Basic Theology, 279.

for righteousness, but could not impute it to the unrighteous. It was not by the law that an individual Israelite was saved, but by grace through personal faith (Rom 3:20-22; 9:31). The Israelites lost this basic teaching and tried to secure justification by an incorrect and impossible method (Rom 10:3). Thus, Paul stressed that salvation was outside the works of the law.\(^1\) The establishment of the law (Rom 3:31) is interpreted by Paul as the appointed role of tutoring men to receive faith in Christ (Rom 3:21-28). Justification is by faith.\(^2\) This task of tutoring man to Christ is the lawful use of the law (1 Tim 1:8-11).\(^3\)

The law is not the divine method of sanctification in dispensational theology. Walvoord interprets the "old man," or "old self," (Rom 6:6; Col 3:9-10) as meaning "the former life" of the believer, and the "new self" (Eph 4:24) as meaning "the new manner of life stemming from the new nature."\(^4\) He asserts that the redeemed believers cannot make a holy life apart from the grace of God in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit which lead person to a holy life in the struggle against the old nature to sin so that the new nature acts in righteousness (Rom 7:14-25).

\(^1\)John A. Witmer, "Romans," BKC (NT), 479; Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:18; Piepgrass, 257-258.


\(^3\)A. Duane Litfin, "1 Timothy," BKC (NT), 732.

\(^4\)Ibid., 208.
filling of the Holy Spirit is especially the secret of sanctification.\(^1\) The law is powerless to sanctify the believer but rather it "results in a life of utter defeat and miserable wretchedness," as Gannett concluded in his observation of the relationship of the law with sanctification in Galatians.\(^2\)

**Summary**

It has been my purpose in this chapter to analyze the dispensational understanding of the main features of the Mosaic covenant of law within its own historic context. This included the nature, the purpose and finally the role of the law, character, and relationship to the other covenants in the teachings of Jesus and Paul.

One finds that Dispensationalists presuppose the conditionality, the legality, the temporality in the Sinaitic covenant as the basic differences from the unconditional, promissory, and eternal Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and new covenants. The promise to the Sinaitic covenant was conditioned by the obedience of the people. This Sinaitic covenant was added alongside the Abrahamic covenant which became its source of grace and blessings. Dispensational theology does not regard it as the continuation or enlargement of the Abrahamic covenant.

\(^1\)Walvoord, "The Augustinian-Dispensational Perspective," 209-216.

It was noted that the Palestinian covenant, though it was the repetition of the Sinaitic covenant, was intended to strengthen and expand the land promise of the Abrahamic covenant. The Davidic covenant has no direct relationship with the Sinaitic covenant, yet the Mosaic law will become the ruling code in the future millennial kingdom as the eschatological fulfillment in the Davidic kingdom. Because of the Israel-church antithesis Dispensationalists are in reality expressing a twofold application of the new covenant or two separate new covenants, one for Israel in the future and the other for the present church. The new covenant for the church is not in continuity with the Mosaic covenant but is its replacement. The promise precedes the demand in the new covenant— as in the Abrahamic covenant.

By insisting on the indivisible unity of the Mosaic law, Dispensationalists consistently contend that it was done away at the cross and that, thus, it is meaningless to argue the validity of the Ten Commandments for the church age. They have attempted, however, to avoid the criticism of antinomianism by establishing an hermeneutical approach to the moral law based on the character of God. The law of Christ, the law of love, is the governing standard for the church-age. The restatements of the Decalogue in the NT, except the fourth commandment, does not mean a continuation of part of the Mosaic law. Among various purposes of the
Mosaic law, the revelatory purpose alone is permanent to any generation of God's people, for it reveals the character of God and His standard of holiness regarding character and behavior of those in covenant relationship with Him.

It has been demonstrated that because of the literalistic hermeneutics the dispensational theology interprets the Sermon on the Mount as the embodiment of the higher and absolute standards of the law—primarily for the coming millennial kingdom, not for the church. Jesus Christ fulfilled and terminated the Mosaic law, including the Ten Commandments. In this stream, Dispensationalists believe that in the Pauline epistles the Mosaic law is irrelevant for the church because of its termination at the crucifixion and its contrast with grace. The law only causes the ungodly and sinners to feel their need of the gospel of redeeming grace. It has no vital role in the process of sanctification. Yet Dispensationalists have attempted to soften the harshness of their law-grace dichotomy in connection with the moral law-grace relationship by stressing the law of Christ in the church.
CHAPTER V

CRITIQUE OF THE DISPENSATIONALIST VIEW
OF THE SINAITIC COVENANT

Introduction

The previous chapters have explored how dispensational theology constructed and developed the theology of the Sinaitic covenant and law. After analyzing the Sinaitic covenant and law from the dispensational standpoint, the study focused on dispensational understanding of the teachings of Jesus Christ and Paul, in which the Sinaitic covenant is irrelevant to the present church-age as a compatible economy and from which the moral law is clearly distinguished as the ultimate principle for the church. We now evaluate the basic problems in the teachings of Dispensationalism regarding the Sinaitic covenant, namely, its discontinuity and disunity from the standpoint of the nature of covenant, its conditionality and unconditionality, its grace, and its work-element.

The Unity and Continuity of Covenant

The concept of covenant in the dispensational writings is based on the notion of the dichotomy of the
conditional and the unconditional covenants. As noted in
the nature of a covenant, the Sinaitic covenant is a
exception among the Biblical covenants. It belongs to the
obligatory type, grounded on a bilateral agreement, while
other covenants pertain to the promissory types, estab-
lished by a unilateral contract. Even grace in the
Sinaitic covenant is found in the Abrahamic covenant, not
in itself. Those two covenants are structurally and
thematically different in nature. The Christian believers
are not under the Sinaitic covenant of works. Accordingly,
it is unavoidable for the Dispensationalists to assert a
covenantal disparity in God's dealing with His people from
Mount Sinai.

The covenant of Sinai cannot be regarded as a
continuation of the preceding Abrahamic covenant in dispen-
sational theology. It cannot be an enlargement or particu-
larization of the previous covenant. I have shown that
the main reasons for this assumption lie in the uncondi-
tionality of God's covenant promises to Abraham and the
work-principle of the Sinai covenant. As noted, covenant
theologians have vigorously attacked this dispensational
view and have taught a progressive revelation from one
covenant, the covenant of grace, from which all the
biblical covenants since the Fall have been developed.
Dispensationalists, however, refute this as a spiritual-
izing method of interpreting the Scriptures and emphasize
the literal sense of covenants. Thus, careful attention to the nature and content of the Sinaitic covenant is needed in order to know whether such reasonings are correct.

The Nature of Covenant

Dispensationalists define a covenant concept as a sovereign, unconditional declaration of God, bringing certain relationships of responsibilities between two parties. However, Dispensationalists set apart the Sinaitic covenant as an exception because it is conditional upon human obedience. This introduction of a conditional covenant among unconditional covenants raises very serious problems. If at its core a covenant is unconditional, how can one of the biblical covenants be called conditional? Dispensationalists have tried to solve that problem in different ways. Lincoln, for instance, distinguishes between "a sovereign disposition of God," that is, an unconditional or declarative compact, and "a proposal of God," that is, a conditional or mutual compact. This seems to recognize the existence of two different covenant concepts. In order to avoid the weakness of Lincoln's

1Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 90.
2NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).
view, the NSRB defines a covenant with the phrase "a sovereign pronouncement of God. . . ."¹ This, nevertheless, creates the same problem, for the "sovereign" pronouncement of God is limited by the phrase "If ye will" in the Mosaic covenant. The divine sovereignty does not depend upon man's conditionality for its ultimate fulfillment. In fact, the NSRB further explains the word sovereign as implying that "human failure is never permitted to abrogate the covenant."² If the Sinaitic covenant belongs to a sovereign pronouncement, it has to contain the unconditional aspect. In Piepgrass' definition of God's sovereign purpose, a covenant is narrowed down to a theocratic program³ so none of the NT references concerning the New Covenant, which are related to Israel exclusively and primarily, designate "the church as the instrument of its fulfillment."⁴ Believing Gentiles join with the remnant of Israel as the new people of Israel (Rom 11:16-24). In other words, according to Paul's understanding, the Christian church has its roots in the OT. As Kraus pointed out, we have to reject any intent to narrow down the term berit because it covers a complex state of affairs through a

¹NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).
²Ibid.
⁴Ibid., 222.
fellowship relation between Yahweh and His people.¹ Fensham notes that the concept of covenant becomes one of the most important links between the OT and the NT, and the NT is "the final stage of covenant-making between God and His people."² Attention must also be given to the phenomenon that the OT does not refer to covenants in the plural. The term "covenant" occurs in the singular form throughout the OT.³ These facts would seem to invalidate the dispensational attempt to distinguish two kinds of covenants.

Is the conditionality of the "If ye" of the Sinaitic covenant a unique exception among successive covenants? Or could it be really a part of a polarity that is present in all biblical covenants? The Sinaitic berit is regarded by the biblical writers as a document of considerable historical importance for the cult of Israel, its social and political life, and the successive covenants in ancient Israel.⁴ If the Exodus as the epoch-making event of history reveals the love of Yahweh toward Israel, the


⁴According to George E. Mendenhall, the Abrahamic covenant became the model for later covenant traditions such as the Davidic and Noachic covenants. See his article "Covenant," IDB (1962), 1:717. It is, however, too much to say that the Sinaitic covenant became the centripetal force in the activities of prophets.
Sinaitic covenant is the concrete expression of that love. This covenant creates between God and people a bond which is based on this gracious attitude of God. Of course, the Gentile believers are supposed to share equally in the privileges and responsibilities involved in the Sinaitic covenant relationship (Isa 56:6-7). According to Mendenhall, the Sinaitic covenant, in contrast to the Abraham-David-Noah covenants, shows striking similarities with the pattern of the suzerainty treaties which were conditional documents. From this standpoint, the Sinaitic covenant belongs to the conditional covenant family. It is important here, however, to question whether the Sinaitic covenant is conditional or not. Most scholars of both camps find the conditionality of the Sinaitic covenant in its demand of ethical responsibility.

The question of the rapport between conditionality of the Sinaitic covenant and the unconditionality of the other covenants needs to be examined by grasping its

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1The Gentiles would not come simply as mere observers but as full participants, offering the sacrifices of the Mosaic law alongside the Jews. Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," The Expositor's Bible Commentary, eds. Frank E. Gaebelein and others (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 6:316.

2Ibid., 718-719.

meaning in related texts. At Sinai, on the one hand, Yahweh elected Israel as His covenant partner. This was by His grace alone. This does not differ from His call of Abraham. Yet, on the other hand, Israel's obedience was the condition for blessing in the Sinaitic covenant, not for merit for salvation. Considering this covenant, both Yahweh and Israel have reciprocally bound themselves by certain conditions.¹ This fact is categorically stated in Exod 19:5: "if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." In other words, Yahweh's blessing and Israel's obedience to His will constitutes a definite polarity.

Bright explains the conditionality of the covenant as follows:

[The] covenant could be maintained only so long as the divine Overlord's stipulations were met; its maintenance required obedience and continual renewal by the free moral choice of each generation.²

Eichrodt likewise asserts that the covenant relationship, which has the character of a relationship of grace, in the

¹Cf. Paul Kalluweettil, Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East, Analecta Biblica 88 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 212. In the study of the declaration formulae of the covenants, Kalluweettil concludes that covenant is relational and that any attempt to reduce it to a one-way commitment is, therefore, unwarranted.

post-Mosaic era can be maintained only on certain conditions.¹

We need now to consider the unconditionality of that same covenant. The continuity of the exodus narratives (Exod 3:13-15; 6:1-8) suggests that the covenant at Sinai was actually a particularization of the Abrahamic covenant. Like Abraham's call and election, Israel was called and elected outside the land that would be hers (compare Gen 12:1 with Exod 19:3-4). Like Abraham, Israel would be a great goy (compare Gen 12:2 with Exod 19:6). Like Abraham, God would reach out to bless the whole world through Israel (compare Gen 12:3 with Exod 19:6). These factors point out that the Sinaitic covenant contains an unconditionality like the Abrahamic covenant.

A notion of unconditionality in the Sinaitic covenant can be also observed from the viewpoint of election. Attempting to explain the two aspects of a biblical covenant, Jocz affirms, "The unconditional aspect of the covenant therefore is as indigenous to the Old Testament as is the conditional one."² On the one hand, he admits


the condition that attaches to the Sinaitic covenant and regards obedience to God's will as the *sine qua non* condition of the Sinaitic-covenant relationship. On the other hand, he contends that we need to recognize an aspect of the biblical covenant relationship that demands not a sociological background or a legal custom but rather a theological explanation. To grasp the biblical concept of the covenant, the utter covenantal love and faithfulness of God becomes a very significant factor.

In order to make his position clear, Jocz asks whether God ceases to be Israel's God "when Israel breaks His promises and becomes faithless to the covenant." It is at this point that, according to Jocz, the analogy between the suzerain and the vassal breaks down, "for Yahweh remains the God of the covenant even in the face of Israel's faithlessness." Thus, he asserts: "the idea of a conditionless covenant is an innovation and is of prophetic provenance. Behind it is the supposition of the utter faithfulness of the God of Israel." We cannot agree with

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1Ibid., 23-26. Here Jocz asserts that a conditionless covenant is meaningless in the political setting of ancient society.

2Ibid., 27.

3Ibid., 27.

4Ibid., 27.

5Ibid., 27. Jocz pays attention to the study of the books of prophets to deal with the theological meaning of the Sinaitic covenant. For example, he points out that
Jocz that Israel broke God's promises. Israel cannot break His promises. They can ignore them or spurn them. But Jocz's main point is valid that Israel's faithfulness is concomitant with God's faithfulness. The yes of God is always bound with the yes of man. We must also keep in mind, as Jocz shows, that election and covenant are so intermingled that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other,¹ for the election-love of God is the cause of the covenant.² The election of some does not mean the rejection of others. Rather, it has a universal scope. Just as by choosing Abraham Yahweh had the well-being of "all the families of the earth" in view (Gen 12:3), likewise the election of Israel as a missionary community was intended as a means of spreading the knowledge of God among

"God's infinite patience in wooing back the faithless spouse seems to have no limit." He also calls attention to His "ultimate triumph over the broken relationship" in the book of Hosea (p. 59).


²According to Norman H. Snaith's distinction between 'ahabah and hesed, 'ahabah is unconditional love and hesed is always conditioned by the word covenant. Yahweh's 'ahabah for Israel is "the very basis and the only cause of the existence of the covenant between God and Israel" and His election-love, while His hesed as His covenant-love is the means of its continuance. The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 95.
the heathen nations (Exod 19:5-6; Isa 49:6; 56:3-8; 60:3). The Sinaitic covenant shows election and covenant as a unit. Exod 19:3-6, which obviously functions as an introduction to the events at Sinai, describes that Yahweh elected ancient Israel as His instrument for the salvation of the world. Because of this divine election as manifested in the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenants, which have a universal scope, it is meaningless to assume a rigid dichotomy between the Jews and the church as shown in dispensational theology. According to Jocz, "Election is the inseparable concomitant of the covenant as the conditionless and the irrevocableness of God to be present to His people." The covenant proves the changeless redemptive aim of God for Israel, the elect. Von Rad expresses the same idea:

The obedience which Deuteronomy demands is in no sense the prerequisite of election. The order is rather the


2Ibid., 42-43. The covenant separated from election cannot be but the conditional covenant in Jocz's position. Thus Jocz (p. 40) criticizes Wright, who divorced election from the covenant. Cf. G. Ernest Wright, "The Faith of Israel," IB (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 1: 335, n. 14. Furthermore, on the one hand, Jocz admits Rowley's statement that the purpose of election is service, but, on the other hand, he demurs to his assertion "When the service is withheld, the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails." Jocz thinks that Rowley's theological inconsistency derives from his indecision regarding the covenant relationship and his misconstruing the biblical nature of God. Cf. Harold Henry Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 52.
reverse. . . . Rather, all the commandments are simply a grand explanation of the command to love Yahweh and to cling to Him alone (Deut 4:4f). And this love is Israel's return of the divine love bestowed upon her.¹

Election stems from God's sovereign initiative, and it is part of His sovereignty that He does not fail when man refuses obedience. "The root idea of the covenant is the priority of God over all that he created."² If covenant is only conditional, then election depends upon man's merit. In this sense there was no fault with the Sinaitic covenant, with the covenant-making God, with the Decalogue, or with the promises, but with the people (cf. Jer 31:32).³

We come therefore to the conclusion that there is a polarity in the covenant: the unconditionality based upon the electing love and grace of Yahweh and the conditional-ity depending on the response of the covenantal love. The one is related to divine nature and the other to human nature. The dialectic between these two aspects forms the inherent dynamics of the OT. The Sinaitic covenant is not exceptional in presenting a tension between these two elements. The concept of covenant is based upon the principle of God's gracious condescension toward His people

³Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, 232.
and the deliverance of His people as shown in Exod 3:6-8; 19:4 and 20:1-2. Yahweh remains the protector and guide of His people in spite of Israel's faithlessness. This is the theological motif behind Exod 32 and 33.¹ Thus Exod 34:6 describes God as ḥesed we'emet: "abundant in goodness (faithfulness) and truth." According to Glück, ḥesed is subordinated to bērit. As the result of a bērit relationship, Yahweh's ḥesed means His covenantal loyalty or relationship toward His followers.² Snaith also sees the ḥesed of God as His covenant-love for Israel.³ The original use of this word is to denote that "attitude of loyalty and faithfulness which both parties to a covenant should observe toward each other."⁴ Thus it signifies a mutual relation of duties. This fact means that it denotes a firm adherence to the conditions of the covenant.⁵

Kaiser, who considers the "If" condition in the

¹Jocz, The Covenant, 28.


³Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament, 98. On the other hand, 'ahabah is God's election-love, an unconditional love (p. 135).


context of Exod 19:5 as Israel's distinctive position, namely, its mediatorial role and status, affirms that the conditionality of the Sinaitic covenant could hardly effect "her election, salvation, or present and future inheritance of the ancient promise."¹ Likewise with respect to the seeming incompatibility between unconditionality and conditionality, Freedman states:

A covenant of divine commitment involving an unconditional and irrevocable promise to his people on the part of God, and a covenant of human obligation in which the continuity of the relationship depends upon the behavior of the human party. Can covenant bond be broken—and at the same time persist? Can God sever a relationship as a result of covenant violations—and nevertheless maintain it in perpetuity? The Bible seems to answer in the affirmative.²

Yet dispensational theology has emphasized only the dimension of the conditionality of the Sinai covenant, considering the dimension of Yahweh's love and grace as belonging to the Abrahamic covenant. It maintains that "God is able to make [the Abrahamic] promises and keep them regardless of what men may do."³ Such reasoning is based on the unchangeability of the divine promises.⁴ However,

¹Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, 111.
³Walvoord, Israel in Prophecy, 41. Cf. 42: "The ultimate [literal] fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham, however, was never in jeopardy."
⁴As a further clarification, I believe that God never fails to fulfill His promises which He has given in His Word. The Scriptures repeatedly affirm that what God says "will stand forever" (Isa 40:8; cf. Rom 11:29; 1 Pet
it seems to be an artificial theological device which confuses the unchangeability of the divine promise with the unconditionality of the covenants. For the fact that God guarantees the fulfillment of His promises does not mean that these promises have no conditions attached to them. It appears, therefore, that the Dispensationalist theologians' understanding of the covenant is flawed at its roots by a confusion between a polarity and a dichotomy.

The Conditionality in the Promissory Covenants

The question now arises: Was the covenant of Sinai the only conditional covenant, as alleged by dispensational theology? This is closely related to the question whether obedience on the part of recipients is a necessary corollary in the so-called promissory covenants.

The Conditionality in the Abrahamic Covenant

One of the most important aspects stressed by dispensational theology is the unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant. It is, in fact, true that the

1:25) and He will accomplish all that He has purposed to do (Isa 14:27; 46:10-11; 55:11; Ps 33:11). Though He had made the Jews His elect people, God did not depend upon them for the fulfilling of His purposes. The divine promises of the covenants will be ultimately fulfilled through the new spiritual Israel who are in Christ.

1NSRB, 19, n. 1 (Gen 12:1); see also Walvoord's ten reasons for being convinced that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional in chapter 4 (pp. 154-156).
fulfillment of the promises of the covenants depends upon the sovereign intention of God. But the duty of obedience as a faith response is also linked with the promise in the Abrahamic covenant.¹

Dispensationalists emphasize that the Abrahamic covenant has no stipulations. It seems to be completely unconditional, because God has all of the responsibility. Even some non-Dispensationalist scholars follow this way of thinking. Begrich suggests that the original idea of covenant was not to designate a relationship of two parties with mutual claims and duties but rather a one-sided relationship. Stressing the unconditionality of covenant, he infers that the receiver of the assurance was by no means obligated to corresponding behavior but remained completely passive.² In a much more radical tone than Begrich, Jepsen considers the term bethî as the designation of an action and emphasizes strongly the characteristic of


²Begrich, "Berit: Ein Beitrag zur Erfassung einer alttestamentlichen Denkform," 1-11. M. Weinfeld states: "God swears to Abraham to give the land to his descendants, and similarly promise to David to establish without imposing any obligations on them. Although their loyalty to God is presupposed, it does not occur as a condition for keeping the promise." Despite presuming loyalty to God for royal grant and denying any conditionality for keeping the promise, he further states, "Abraham is promised the land because he obeyed God and followed his mandate (Gen 26:5; cf 22:16-18), similarly David was given the grace of kingship because he served God in truth, righteousness, and loyalty." See "bethî," TDOT (1975), 2:270-271.
assurance or promise, seeing the imperative of covenant only in the shadow of the one-sided assurance of God.¹ It should, however, be noticed that the presentations of Begrich and Jepsen are based upon the documentary theory of the older and newer Sinai traditions.

For many reasons one may raise serious objections to the idea of the pure conditionality of the Abrahamic covenant. Several passages can be found which seem to indicate the very condition of obedience as a necessary corollary on the part of Abraham. The first instance is found in Gen 12:1-3. Here the imperative "Leave your country ..." (Gen 12:1, NIV)² is understood that God assumed Abraham's obedience.³ Even Walvoord and Pentecost curiously admit the one condition, the act of obedience, as the basis of the subsequent covenants, upon which the specific promises are depended. They assert that after this one act of obedience, God instituted an irrevocable,  


²Hereafter NIV is used unless specified otherwise.

³McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise, 64. Here McComiskey further states, "The obedience of Abraham was thus a necessary corollary to the 'making' of the covenant" and "God reaffirms his intent to carry out the stipulations [Gen 26:5] of the promise" (pp. 64). The writer of Hebrews declares that Abraham obeyed by faith the command of God (Heb 11:8). See also Arthur W. Pink, The Divine Covenants (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 105. Cf. Cox, Biblical Studies in Final Things, 54.
unconditional program. But they fail to recognize that succeeding confirmations were necessary because of Abraham's moments of lapse. The covenant was bound, therefore, with his obedience. Also they confuse a life of general obedience regulated by faith, with individual acts of disobedience within that life. The reason that God could still confirm His promises in case of Abraham's disobedience rested on his repentance, faith, and renewed obedience. We can discern that a condition is implied in the narrative of Gen 12. Two imperfect tenses which picture the event in progress or incomplete action, that is, "I will make of you into a great nation" (Gen 12:2a) and "I will bless you" (vs. 2b), follow to the command of departure in a chain of consecutive form. After a cohortative, "I will make your name great," that appears in vs. 2c, another imperative, "You shall be thou a blessing" (vs. 2d, NKJV), occurs as the concluding part of the verse. Then vs. 3 which begins with another cohortative, "I will bless those who bless you" (vs. 3a) is connected with the

1Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 149; Pentecost, Things to Come, 74.

2The cohortative expresses the direction of the will to an action and thus self-encouragement, a resolution, or a wish. Especially the cohortative imperfect conveys the concentration of the will upon the action described. E. Kautzsch, Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 130, 319-321.

3A cohortative is found in the Masoretic Text for the phrase "I will bless." But an ordinary imperfect is used in the Hebrew Pentateuch of the Samaritans in place of
imperfect "and whoever curses you I will curse" (vs. 3b), and it ends with the consecutive perfect "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (vs. 3c, NKJV) which becomes the consummation of the promises that the preceding verses have announced.\(^1\) The Abrahamic covenant in Gen 12:1-3 thus consists of two imperatives, three imperfects, two cohortative imperfects (according to the Masoretic Text), and a consecutive perfect. Since an objection is raised against the unconditionality of this covenant on the ground of the imperatives, Rogers admits to a certain conditional element in the interpretation of the passages regarding the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1; 17:1; 17:9-14). Yet he believes that the emphasis is on the cohortative imperfects of the divine intention or purpose (Gen 12:2-3; 17:2) which are followed by the imperatives (Gen 12:1; 17:1),\(^2\) and that the preceding imperative does not thereby have any kind of conditional factor. Such that tense. Alexander Sperber, A Historical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew: A Presentation of Problems with Suggestions to Their Solution (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1966), 279.


reasoning seems to overcome a logical inconsistency which the Dispensationalists have traditionally understood in the divine command in Gen 12:1 as the condition of the Abraham covenant. Yet in verse two the cohortative is directly followed by two imperfects and precedes an imperative. Only the imperative in vs. 2 precedes the cohortative in vs. 3.\(^1\) Accordingly, it would be difficult to see that the covenant-stipulation is not related to the promise in the text.\(^2\)

Another case which would imply a condition is found in Gen 17:1-2 (RSV):\(^3\) "I am God Almighty; Walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceeding." The sequence of the verbal tenses and moods shows two imperatives followed by a cohortative imperfect and an imperfect. Here the text clearly shows a stipulation of condition, which, if fulfilled, would render Abraham perfect and insure the blessings of the covenant to him. The essence of this imperative is to walk as if conscious of God's constant supervision, as shown in the phrase "before me."

\(^1\)In Gen 12:1-3 the grammatical construction follows the order of imperative-imperfect-imperfect-cohortative imperfect-imperfct (MT) or imperfect (SP)-imperfect-perfect.

\(^2\)It is noticeable that Kautzsch does not enumerate any grammatical construction from Gen 12:1-3 and 17:1-2 as an instance which regards the divine command to Abraham as a condition from the perspective of the cohortative.

\(^3\)See Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, 93.
McComiskey sees that the obedience of Abraham was an undeniable inference from the "making" of the covenant. The basis of this interpretation lies in that the word nātan "to make" (literally "to give") means "to establish" in this text.¹ Rogers, however, refutes the text as an imposition of a covenantal stipulation upon Abraham, for (1) the covenant was already given to Abraham before this event (Gen 12:1-4; 15), (2) the grammatical construction is the same as that found in Gen 12:1-3 which emphasizes what God will do, and (3) the word nātan does not mean "to set up a covenant," but rather "to put into force" or "to make operative."² Rogers is probably weak in suggesting that Gen 17:1-2 has the same sequence of the grammatical construction as 12:1-3, for the grammatical construction of Gen 17:1-2 follows the sequence of imperative ("Walk before me")-imperative ("Be blameless")-cohortative imperfect ("I will make my covenant between me and thee")-imperfect ("I will multiply thee exceedingly"). Rogers' and Ryrie's arguments for the unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant are lacking in the presentations of this detail sequence of the grammatical tenses.³

Third, circumcision can be regarded as a condition to the promise in Gen 17:9-14. Here the phrase "Thou shalt

¹McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise, 64.
³Ibid.; Ryrie, Basic Theology, 455.
keep my covenant" clearly manifests the conditionality of the covenant.1 Yahweh made the rite of circumcision, a token of love for and obedience to Him. It is a new stipulation or command2 to sanctify its receivers.3 Abraham fell on his face in worship, which seems to be a pledge that Abraham wanted to continue in the covenant relationship with Yahweh. Leupold thus understands the word "covenant" in vs. 10 as "covenant-condition" and circumcision as a perpetual reminder of the obligations.4 In vs. 14 the penalty is declared to the one who might refuse to receive this circumcision; and vs. 23 informs us of Abraham's obedience toward this command. The text itself clearly specifies that Abraham and his descendants are to keep the covenant and, therefore, by implication, refutes the interpretation of Abraham's covenant as an

1See Pink, The Divine Covenants, 134.

2Dumbrell, Covenant and Creation, 75; John Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 293. McComiskey calls the Abrahamic covenant of Gen 17 the "covenant of circumcision" and regards it as an administrative covenant which is distinguished from the Abrahamic covenant of Gen 15. See The Covenants of Promise, 61-62.


4Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, 520-521.
unconditional covenant. The biblical evidence for this conditionality is more fully discussed in Hasel's interpretation from the terms šāmar "to keep" and pārār "broken" in the text. The word "keep" in the statement "Keep my covenant" (Gen 17:9) is used as "the typical term" in the OT, not only for the keeping of a subsequent conditional covenant but also for the keeping of the commandments (i.e. Deut 4:2; 5:12; 29:9; Exod 31:13-16; etc.). The keeping of the covenant was not limited to Abraham. His descendants also "shall keep the way of the Lord," so that "the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen 18:18-19). The so-called twin conditions of "obeying my voice" and "keeping my covenant which seem to be synonymous are clearly associated with the Abrahamic covenant in Exod 6:1-8. As Fuller indicates, Abraham had to train his posterity to keep the way of the Lord. Walvoord and Strickland's distinction of the individual conditionality

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1By this circumcision, Abraham's descendants were pledged to fulfill the conditions of the covenant made with Abraham. One should remember that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.

2Kalluveettil, Declaration and Covenant, 157, n. 149.


4Fuller, Gospel and Law, 137. Fuller states: "The obedience needed by its beneficiaries in order to enjoy the blessings" (p. 142).

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from the collective unconditionality in this text and their connection of obedience with individual blessing in vs. 19 appear totally arbitrary. The term "broken" is also "a typical term for the idea of the breaking of the covenant" (Lev 26:15; Deut 31:16, 20; Isa 24:5; etc.). In short, these two typical terms are reciprocally the contrasting concepts which can be either kept or broken by the respective human partners. This means that the Abrahamic covenant is conditional and bilateral. Considering certain specific obligations, Kline also affirms that the statement in Gen 17 shows a covenant of the suzerainty type.

Fourth, Abraham would receive fulfillment of the promise because he obeyed God and followed His charge, commandments, statutes, and laws (Gen 22:16-18; 26:3-5). The life of Abraham was that of constant obedience, not of an incidental act. Even though the covenant was initiated

1Walvoord, Millennial Kingdom, 143; Strickland, "A Critical Analysis of Daniel Fuller's Gospel and Law Concept," 204-205.


3Kline, By Oath Consigned, 39-43. Here Kline understood circumcision as the symbol of the oath-curse and oath-allegiance. Failing to notice this point, Strickland argues as if Kline gives full support to the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant. "A Critical Analysis of Daniel Fuller's Gospel and Law Concept," 219. Kline presents an instance of similarity between the Sinaitic and the Abrahamic covenants as follows: "The somewhat earlier covenant revelation to Abraham recorded in Genesis 15 contains a Decalogue-like combination of titulature and history: 'I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees'" (vs. 7). By Oath Consigned, 40.
and established by God with Abraham on the condition of his faith, his faith was expressed in obedience.\(^1\) The duty of obedience was especially emphasized in God's appraisal of his willingness to sacrifice his son (Gen 22:18) and of his keeping of God's mandates (Gen 26:5).\(^2\) But, as Hasel observes, the fulfillment of the promise would not occur as a result of Abraham's obedience; his obedience "kept the promise in operation."\(^3\)

Among his ten reasons for the unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant,\(^4\) Walvoord asserts that none of its repetitions show any condition upon the future faithfulness of Abraham's seed. There appears to be recognition of a conditional element for Israel, as appears from Jeremiah's address: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will let you dwell in this place" (Jer 7:3, RSV); "If you truly amend your ways and your doings, . . . then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever" (7:5-7, RSV). Here the land indicates "all the land of Canaan" which was promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:7-8). The fulfillment

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\(^2\)Weinfeld also explains: "Abraham was promised the land because he obeyed God and his mandate (Gen 26:5; cf. 22:16-18)." See "Berith," 270-271.

\(^3\)Hasel, "God's Plan for Ancient Israel," 10-11.

\(^4\)Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 150-152.
of the promise to them, therefore, rests on the conditions of faith and obedience.

Walvoord also discusses the continuity of the unconditional promise for the nation Israel, even in its apostasy or disobedience. It is, however, in the NT that the condition of faith and obedience becomes more important than ethnic characteristics. John the Baptist warned that God was not dependent on Israelites to be children of Abraham and that God was able to raise them up from stones (Matt 3:8-9). Here John recognized one condition of fruit-bearing.\(^1\) Jesus, though admitting the Jewish ethnic descent from Abraham, linked kinship to moral conduct rather than to physical descent, because of their murderous plot (John 8:37-44). All people who become sons of God through faith in Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles, thereby become "Abraham's seed" (Gal 3:29) or "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16).\(^2\) These are reckoned as Abraham's offspring, with whom the everlasting covenant shall be continued, and who will finally inherit the land. One of the unchanging


\(^2\)LaRondelle persuasively touches the problem of Ryrie's grammatical understanding of kai in Gal 6:16, which Ryrie interprets as the recognition of two classes in his The Basis of the Premillennial Faith, 69. Under the presupposition that "whenever the grammatical syntax is inconclusive, the historical context may illuminate the particular meaning of a term," LaRondelle states that "the Israel of God" is clearly synonymous with Paul's earlier expression for all Christians. The Israel of God in Prophecy, 108-110.
elements in the promise would be, in fact, a people who have nothing to do with their former ethnic and geographic limitations. If so, it seems best to consider that the ethnic and geographic factors in the Abrahamic covenant can be interpreted from the standpoint of the conditional elements.

Another weakness in Walvoord's reasoning is the emphasis on the making of the Abrahamic covenant by "a divinely ordered ritual symbolizing the shedding of blood and passing between the parts of the sacrifice (Gen 15:7-21; Jer 34:18)." Yet we also find the accompanying phenomena of the divine epiphany such as the smoke and fire (Exod 19:18) and the shedding of blood (Exod 24:6-8) in the establishment of the conditional Sinaitic covenant. Kaiser recognizes some similarities of the divine epiphany between the two covenants.¹ Even though the language of Jer 34:18-19, which Walvoord regards as a confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant by an unqualified oath of God, reflects unmistakably the language of Genesis 15, the fact of the leaders' and people's response by "passing between the pieces" would convey much more the covenant-making ceremony in the Sinaitic covenant rather than the Abrahamic

¹Kaiser states, "Likewise the indications of a divine epiphany and the aspects of awe and dread that surrounded Abraham's reception of the covenant in Genesis 15:17 similarly greeted Israel when the covenant was delivered from Sinai in Exodus 19:18." Toward an Old Testament Theology, 59-60.
covenant, for the response of the people itself belongs to the making of a covenant established by Moses.\(^1\)

It has been shown that we cannot reject or weaken the conditionality in the Abrahamic covenant. Besides, it seems to be important that the command form in the covenant frequently occurs in both as an imperative and a prohibition which precedes promise and blessing.\(^2\) While admitting the connection between the imperatives and the cohortatives in the Abrahamic covenant, Kaiser, on the one hand, separates the promise from the conditionality and, on the other hand, asserts the intimate connection. Consequently, he concludes that the conditionality is not tied to the promise but "to the participants who would benefit from these abiding promises," and that the connection between promise and obedience is ultimately undeniable.\(^3\) In other


\(^{2}\)See Gen 12:1; 13:14; 15:1; 15:9; 17:1; 22:2; 26:2; cf. 26:24; 31:3; 35:11.

\(^{3}\)Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, 94. Kaiser makes his position clear in his other work that both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants also required obedience, but man does not earn or remove the divine blessing through it. See his Toward Old Testament Ethics (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1983), 76. After indicating the context of a gracious, divine initiative of the Sinaitic covenant, Wenham also asserts: "Obedience to the law is not the source of blessing, but it augments a blessing already given." See Gordon Wenham, "Grace and Law in the Old
words, the element of the conditionality is not linked with the abiding promise but with the participants. The divine word of the universal promises to the seed (Christ and His followers) of the land and the great blessing which are based on God's gracious provision belongs to the unconditional aspect. Yet the participants are conditioned to these promises. The two aspects of conditionality and unconditionality are so tightly combined as one unit of covenant that the implied conditional aspect may not be discerned from God's intention and His assurance of the promise, and that a dynamic relationship between them is often neglected.\(^1\) As indicated by Eichrodt, the ultimate reason of this phenomenon lies in that "covenant and commandment belong essentially together."\(^2\)

The Conditionality in the Other covenants

As noted in chapter 4, Dispensationalists see the Palestinian covenant as an amplification and enlargement of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, and, therefore,

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this amplification must be eternal and unconditional. By way of exception, they identify one conditional time element "when . . . then" (Deut 30:1-3), which does not affect the unconditionality of the covenant.

Yet they acknowledge God's love and man's obedience as the prominent concepts of the entire Book of Deuteronomy.1 The concept of love and the promise of the land, according to Hutchison, belong only to the Abrahamic covenant in the book.2 Man's obedience to God's standard belongs to the covenant at Sinai. Thus the Palestinian covenant reflects the two covenant programs. Gaebelein and Deere concur with the fact that Deuteronomy presents a renewal of the Sinaitic covenant.3 Kaufman and Walton suggest that the Deuteronomic law expands the Decalogue with the intent of the law.4 The Palestinian covenant, therefore, reflects the Mosaic covenant. The covenant consists of a series of blessings and curses as recorded in

1NSRB, 217.


Deut 28. If Israel obeyed the divine law, they would receive the promised blessings. If they disobeyed, the threatened curses would come upon them.\(^1\) Although Dispensationalists admit the conditional elements in the covenant, they assert that one conditional element (of "when . . . then" in Deut 30:1-3) does not affect the unconditionality of the covenant. This seems very questionable when we compare the accounts written in Deut 28-30 and Lev 26, which enumerate the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. Even the promise of the land is conditional. Israel would be scattered in case of disobedience, but God would gather them to their land in case of repentance and obedience. Of course, Deut 30:1-3 does use the term "if." Yet the text must be understood as a prophecy of both the falling away and then returning again of Israel on the basis of God's foreknowledge. Even though it would be His intention that Israel return to Him again, they might still be rejected by exercising their right to choose (Deut 30:19).

When it comes to the covenant made with David, on the one hand, Dispensationalists allege its irrevocable character while, on the other hand, they admit a conditionality in it as expressed in 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Kgs 2:4; 8:25; 9:4-5 and Ezek 16:59. Even Unger considers chastisement of

\(^1\)McCarthy says that Deuteronomy is a formula similar to the Hittite example of covenant making. *Treaty and Covenant*, 197.
2 Sam 7:14 as a condition. Solomon illustrates this conditional aspect "as applied to the kings who followed him." But, according to Dispensationalists, the conditional aspect of the pledge which was recognized by David and the "if"-clauses relating to the Davidic covenant do not affect the transmission of the promise even to the racial descendants. They do not take into consideration Ezekiel, who declared the termination of the Davidic crown, in saying, "A ruin, ruin, I will make it; there shall not be even a trace of it until he comes whose right it is; and to him I will give it" (21:26-27). The fate of the nation hinged on the king's loyalty to God (1 Kgs 6:12-13; 9:4-7). As observed by A. Gileadi, M. Weinfeld, P. J. Calderone, and F. C. Fensham, the Davidic covenant reflects the prominent aspects of the ancient suzerainty treaties.

Historically the Davidic royal line, which ceased to reign

1 Unger, Great Neglected Bible Prophecies, 50.
2 NSRB, 365-366, n. 2 (2 Sam 7:16).
3 Ryrie, Basic Theology, 459. Here Ryrie quotes from Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, 157; see also Gaebelein, Gaebelein's Concise Commentary, 264.
as king at the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., was never restored. Since that time, only one king from the line of David was crowned at Jerusalem. The perpetuity of the Davidic line finds its complete fulfillment in Christ (Luke 1:31-33; Rev 5:5; 22:16). Accordingly, we find two aspects of the Davidic covenant in dispensational theology. The unconditional aspect is related to the coming of the king from the line of David; the conditional aspect, to the participants, the people of God.

Finally, in the new covenant of the Book of Jeremiah, God refers to a seemingly unconditional promise of the permanent continuation of the nation of Israel (Jer 31:35), as claimed by Dispensationalists. We need to consider, however, that the statements of the covenant reflect the renewal of the Sinaitic covenant, namely, the basic continuity of the old covenant made at Sinai.1 Dumbrell observes that the covenant at Sinai is clearly the model

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1 The language of the new covenant in Jer 31 is similar to that of the Sinaitic covenant by the following points which show its continuity: The same covenanting God; the moral law; the same promise of divine fellowship; the same promise of making a covenanted people; the same forgiveness of sins. See Hasel, *Covenant in Blood*, 100-103. W. C. Kaiser states: "The single plan of God was the one promise-plan contained in a long succession of covenants beginning with Eve (Gen 3:15), Shem (Gen 9:27), Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), continuing with Moses (Exod 6:2-8) and David (2 Sam 7:12-19), and concluding with the renewal of that covenant for the new age to come in Jer 31:31-34." *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 82-83. Cf. Leopold Sabourin, *The Bible and Christ*, 38-39.
for the new covenant\textsuperscript{1} and the context of Israel's eschatological hopes (Isa 2:2-4; 40-45; Ezek 40-48, etc.).\textsuperscript{2} The "new" in the "new covenant," Kaiser and Knight argue, implies the sense of "renewed" or "restored" in reference to quality, not in point of time, so that the 'new' covenant of the NT is the fulfillment and completion in new dimensions of freshness and potency of the covenant which God made with Israel at Sinai.\textsuperscript{3} The new covenant is


\textsuperscript{2}Idem, "The Prospect of Unconditionality in the Sinaitic Covenant," 142-143.

\textsuperscript{3}Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, 234. Kaiser points out the meaning of the rootages of "new" in the Near Eastern languages. The Akkadian edeshu means "to restore" ruined temples, altars, or cities; Hebrew hds is connected with the new moon, and Ugaritic hdt conveys "to renew the moon." George A. F. Knight, Law and Grace: Must a Christian Keep the Law of Moses? (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 56-57. Knight observes that the word "new" in Jeremiah and in Hebrews conveys the notion of "renew" rather than the meaning of "completely different." He further shows some instances of the usage of the word: "It (the Hebrew word) is used in the OT of restoring temples, of rebuilding cities, and such like--always, be it noted, of renewing that which is already there (cf. Ps. 51:10; 104:30; Isa. 61:4; Lam. 5:21; 2 Chron. 15:8; 24:4; and in another form of the verb, Ps. 103:5). It is the same word in essence as the word for 'new moon.' The moon renews itself every month. But it is the same moon that does so; the new moon is not a 'new' moon, one that is different from the moon that appeared the month before." See p. 57; see also Hasel, Covenant in Blood, 107; Edward Heppenstall, "Law and Covenant at Sinai," AUS 2 (1964): 25. Jocz also states: "The 'New' covenant is therefore not a different covenant, but the original covenant established once and for all." See Jakob Jocz, A Theology of Election: Israel and the Church (New York: MacMillan Co., 1958), 117. Jocz also believes that the difference between the "old" and the "new" covenants is in degree and not in kind.
unlike the Sinaitic covenant not only in its tenor. Bright states that "neither in its form nor in its content does it differ from the old."\textsuperscript{1} The law of God as revealed at Sinai especially becomes a pivotal point which will be written on the heart in the new covenant (Jer 31:33). As Robertson put it:

While the substance of the law will be the same, the mode of its administration will be different. The form may change, but the essence of the new covenant of Jeremiah's prophecy relates directly to the law-covenant made at Sinai.\textsuperscript{2}

If obedience to the law was a condition under the Sinaitic covenant, it is, therefore, natural that obedience to the internalized law is a condition under the new covenant. In fact, the phrase "I will write it" is a "direct allusion to the Decalogue, the only document that God wrote with His

Therefore, "the 'new' is only different from the old in the sense of completion" and "Hebrews does not warrant a radical break between the 'old' and the 'new' (The Covenant, 244).


\textsuperscript{2}Robertson, The Christ of Covenants, 41; see also Jacques Doukhan, Drinking at the Sources: An Appeal to the Jew and the Christian to Note Their Common Beginnings, trans. Walter R. Beach and Robert M. Johnston (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1981), 75. Here Doukhan states, "The New Covenant that Jeremiah foresees, far from abolishing the old, on the contrary, actually extends it. . . . The law now was to be assimilated, lived, accepted from within. . . . The New Covenant is a deepening internalizing of the Old."
own hand."¹ Even though this condition should be perfectly fulfilled, the returned people of God from the exile still failed to accomplish a true spiritual revival as expressed in this "new covenant" experience and turned down their religious privileges by rejecting Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Jer 31:35, indeed, utters the surety and permanence of natural law and order as a guarantee of the surety and permanence of the new covenant.

It is also clear that the new covenant is fulfilled in the church in spite of Dispensational denials. In his studies of the religious-theological use of the name "Israel," LaRondelle points out:

The privilege of belonging to the new covenant community is made contingent, not on ethnic or political conditions, but on a personal, spiritual connection with God, "or better, on God's attitude to man." God's purpose, according to Jeremiah, is not a Jewish state as such, "but a people that obeys Yahweh, a community which serves Him and is wholly oriented toward Him."²


In his argument on the concept of a new covenant as found in Jer 31:31-34, Paul is defending his and his associates' ministry of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6) which was ratified by Christ in His sacrifice on the cross (Luke 22:20). Paul's defense of his ministry of the new covenant implicitly conveys the idea that the Gentile churches, including the church in the area of Corinth, were under the ministers of the new covenant. The writer of Hebrews applies the new covenant promise to the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the church (Heb 8:8-12).  

1Dispensationalists contend that there are two covenants, one in Jeremiah which relates to Israel and another in certain New Testament references which is for the church. They deny any direct relationship between Jeremiah's new covenant and the church. But "when the Jews turned down their religious privilege, 'the kingdom of God' was taken from them (Matt 21:33-43). The Christian church is the inheritor of those spiritual privileges and responsibilities that once belonged to literal Israel." See "Hebrews," SDABC, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1953-1957), 7:446. 

2The new covenant is here uttered as being made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, which are used to denote the people of God in general. See Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), 177; Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 225.
It is, therefore, obvious that the "new" covenant primarily signifies a messianic concept, "the new order introduced by Jesus." In this sense the promise of the new covenant was related to the conditionality of believing the Messiah by ethnic Israel. Meanwhile, the unchangeable law of God is internalized to His worshiping community through His grace. His grace as the unconditional source is continually poured to His people. In short, the new covenant also has two aspects—the conditional and the unconditional.

A covenant text without having any appended conditions is nevertheless subject to the very same conditions that are explicit in other texts. Certain implicit conditions are to be considered in the cultural context of covenant establishment. Criticizing Begrich, who regards the unconditional covenant as a pure form of the covenant, McCarthy asserts:

All covenants, all contracts, have their conditions. They must be defined somehow or other. These definitions are their conditions or stipulations which may often be assumed, things which are simply so well known in a culture that they need not be stated explicitly. It is, therefore, not biblical for us to conclude that OT covenant statements in which no conditions are explicitly expressed must be considered as a denial of the existence of a certain condition. Attention should be given to the grace of God as the unconditional foundation of the

1Jocz, The Covenant, 243-244.

2McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, 3.
covenant. McCarthy observes this point: "The idea that God alone grants the covenant and that [the] covenant is essentially his grace may well be retained."\(^1\) Nevertheless, man's response to God's gift is not excluded. The unconditionality and the conditionality of a covenant have different functions in their dynamic relation. They are not conflicting or contrasting to each other. Rather, they are complementary to each other. The first is related to the beginning of the covenant by the grace of God, while the latter belongs to the participants and fulfillment of covenant. As a continuation, enlargement, particularization of God's earlier covenants, the Sinaitic covenant stresses the conditionality.\(^2\)

Let us recapitulate the facts: The dispensational theory of two kinds of covenants manifests the absence of an adequate consideration of the grounds of God's electing love and grace in the Sinaitic covenant. Dispensationalists see that as an exceptional phenomenon in the plan of salvation. They overlook the theological motif of Yahweh's electing love and grace behind Exod 19, 32, and 33, and Yahweh's covenantal loyalty toward His people in chap. 34. The dispensational rejection of conditionality in the promissory covenants is the result of confusion between the

\(^1\)Ibid.

divine promises and the faith of obedience of the participants. All the covenants contain the unconditional aspects which are closely tied to the divine electing love or promises such as the coming of the King and the conditional aspects which are mainly related to the participants and their obedience of faith. Dispensationalists fail to see the new covenant as the fulfillment and completion of the grace and faith response of the Sinaitic covenant.

**Grace in the Sinaitic Covenant**

Grace is a major issue in the dispensational understanding of the Sinaitic covenant. Dispensational theology finds a contrasting relationship between the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenants. It postulates the thesis that requirements precede the promise in the Mosaic covenant. It explains that the source of grace and blessing in the Sinaitic covenant was found in the Abrahamic covenant, and that the display of grace under Mount Sinai became dim with "the conditional Mosaic covenant of works."

Some of these conclusions are not borne out by the study of the documents. God's faithfulness to the covenant promises made to the patriarchs is the origin of the Exodus and the Sinaitic covenant (Exod 2:24-25; 6:1-8; 19:4-6; Deut 7:7-9). In this sense the Sinaitic covenant is closely tied with the Abrahamic covenant like a cause-effect relationship. The Sinaitic covenant was an outgrowth and
renewal of the Abrahamic covenant. Dumbrell understands it within the Abrahamic framework and indicates some common ground between these two covenants. The application of their terms is found even in a message which was primarily written to Gentile Christians (1 Pet 2:9). In this sense, the Sinaitic covenant with Israel prefigures the Christian church in its corporate character in succession to Israel's mission toward the nations. As we have seen, Jer 34:18-19, combining the language of Gen 15 and the people's response to the Sinaitic covenant, becomes an example of the unity of two covenants. With a new generation there

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2 Dumbrell, Covenant and Creation, 80-126. For instance, Dumbrell considers the introduction of the name of Yahweh associated with the Sinaitic covenant in Exod 18:3-6 as assuring continuity of the older promises.

3 Dispensationalists see that 1 Pet is addressed to Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout five areas in the northeastern part of Asia Minor, not excluding Gentile believers in the areas. See NSRB, 1332; Gaebelien, Gaebelien's Concise Commentary, 1143; Roger M. Raymer, "1 Peter," BKC (NT), 838. But, through 1 Pet 1:14-18; 2:10; and 4:3-4, the epistle shows that the majority of believers in the churches in these areas were Gentiles, while Hebrew Christians were in the minority. According to the immediate context (1 Pet 2:10), the message of 1 Peter 2:9 seems to be given to believers who formerly were not of the people of God and were converted idolaters.

4 See Pink, The Divine Covenants, 183-201.

5 Walter Vogels stresses Israel's mission toward the nations in the concept of the Sinaitic covenant in God's Universal Covenant: A Biblical Study (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), 46-50.
was a need of covenantal renewal, the so-called Palestinian covenant, "because the Mosaic covenant initiated a continuing relationship."¹ This means that there are also continuity and unity between the Sinaitic and the Palestinian covenants. Robertson has shown that the allusions of the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and Davidic covenants are combined into a single divine ordering with a prophetic word concerning Israel's future covenant expectation in Ezek 37:24-26.² Of course, it is undeniable that there is diversity among the divine covenants. Yet it is certain that unity in the diversity characterizes the covenants in the Bible.

The dispensational conclusion that requirements precede the promises in the Sinaitic covenant fails to see the broad and immediate contexts of the covenant. The deliverance from Egypt which preceded the covenant is

¹Lowery, "Covenant Implications for Old Testament Exposition," 146.

²Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants, 42. Robertson here cites a remarkable passage as follows: "My servant David will be king over them, and they will have one shepherd [an allusion to the Davidic covenant], and they will walk in my ordinances, and keep my statutes, and observe them [an allusion to the Mosaic covenant]. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob my servant, in which your fathers lived [an allusion to the Abrahamic covenant] . . . and I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them [an allusion to the new covenant] (Ezek 37:24-26)." Then he concludes: "All three ancient covenants combining into a single divine ordering. By the new covenant, all the promises of God find their consumation."
referred to more than forty times in the OT.\textsuperscript{1} As Bavinck shows, after the Fall eternal life comes first and then good works follow as the fruit of faith in the covenant of grace.\textsuperscript{2} The metaphor of the eagle's wings (Exod 19:4) assures us that the indicative of God's deliverance of His people from Egypt precedes the imperative of His law in the Sinaitic covenant. Strictly speaking, the order is reversed in the Abrahamic covenant, for the word of God begins with a command, and then His promise follows it. The historical prologue of the Sinaitic covenant expressed in Exod 20:2 describes God, the absolute suzerain, as the ruler and supplier of the people's need. It means that deliverance by the divine grace from Egypt was to provide the motive for obedience to God's law as expressed in Exod 20:3-17 and in the covenant code. In the Deuteronomic Sabbath commandment (5:12-15), Moses refers to Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, which they ought to remember. Israel had to observe the Sabbath day in remembrance of this redemptive event of God. The grace of God

\textsuperscript{1}Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6; 7:8; Josh 24:6, 17; Judg 2:1, 12; 6:13; 1 Sam 8:8; 10:18; 12:6, 8; 2 Sam 7:6, 23; 1 Kgs 8:16, 21, 51, 53; 9:9; 12:28; 2 Kgs 17:7, 36; 2 Chr 6:5; 7:22; Neh 9:18; Ps 81:10; Jer 2:6; 7:22; 11:4, 7; 16:14; 23:7; 32:21; 34:13; Ezek 20:6, 9, 10; Dan 9:15; Hos 11:1; 12:13; Amos 2:10; 3:1; 9:7; Mic 6:4. See Raven, \textit{The History of the Religion of Israel}, 63.

\textsuperscript{2}Bavinck, \textit{Our Reasonable Faith}, 272 (see page 61 in chapter 3).
empowers Israel to obey His Ten Commandments.\textsuperscript{1} God never intended that His people had to make themselves acceptable by their own efforts to obey. To be sure, the promise precedes the demand in the Sinaitic covenant, for the grace of God always anticipates the wants of man. 

Dispensationalists understand that grace under the Sinaitic covenant as found in the Abrahamic covenant and that it was like a dark negative in "the conditional Mosaic covenant of works."\textsuperscript{2} However, the crucial point is that grace comes from Yahweh, the God of the Abrahamic covenant, not from the Abrahamic covenant itself. The failure to recognize this is a major shortcoming of Dispensationalism.

Israel believed that the grace of Yahweh abounded for it in both Exodus events and the Sinaitic covenant.\textsuperscript{3} There is, indeed, a sense in which the OT in the Exodus-


\textsuperscript{2}John H. Gerstner points out a problem of the dispensational position that "before the cross man was saved in prospect of Christ's atoning sacrifice" (\textit{NSRB}, 3, n. 3). Assuming "an infinite difference between being saved by Christ's sacrifice and being saved in 'prospect' of it," he criticizes that Dispensationalists explicitly reject Christ as the Savior of all dispensations. \textit{A Primer on Dispensationalism} (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1982), 23, 28.

Sinai events portrays the richness of the grace of God no less than in the call of Abraham and in the establishment of a covenant with him. As Keil and Delitzsch write, the covenant which Yahweh had made with the patriarch Abraham was established with the people of Israel.¹ Fensham has pointed out the importance of the relationship of promise and expectation in the covenants of Abraham and Sinai. All the major promises to Abraham, such as possession of the land of Canaan, much posterity, and the continual relationship between God and Abraham's descendants are emphasized in the Exodus narratives. It was because the descendants of Abraham had increased to so many that they were considered dangerous by the Egyptians (Exod 1:7-10). God's enduring relationship with Abraham's descendants is seen in His concern over the suffering of the people of God (Exod 2:23-25). The only unfulfilled promise is the promise of the land of Canaan and this is again promised to Israel (Exod 3:17; 6:8).² Thus, while there is more emphasis on human obligation in the Sinaitic covenant than in the Abrahamic covenant, this is rather a phenomenon of the covenantal development. There are definite elements of continuity as well.

²Fensham, "Covenant, Promise, and Expectation in the Bible," 308-310.
Instances of the abounding display of the divine grace in the exodus event and the Sinaitic covenant are easy to provide. First, the exercise of divine grace is reflected in Yahweh's determination to save His people. God caused the Egyptians to be favorably disposed to His people by providing them with all kinds of gifts at the time of Exodus (Exod 3:21-22; 11:3; 12:36). As a party of the covenant, Yahweh led His redeemed people in His ḫesed, covenant-faithfulness (Exod 15:13). In fact, ḫesed is the content of every covenant as well as every covenantal relationship. Although the connotation of ḫesed of God is not to be identified with His grace, ḫesed is based upon the grace of God. For the relationship between God and His people has been established by the grace of its election.

In this sense the exodus event intertwines with covenantal

1See Clements, Abraham and David, 83. Here Clements points out: "The most significant and original of the features which characterized the Sinai covenant was its assertion of a direct covenant relationship between a community of people and Yahweh as its God. Yahweh was not simply a witness to the covenant, but a party to it."

2Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, 82.

3Ibid., 73-74. H.-J. Zobel also considers that the word ḫesed conveys "a relational concept." See "ẖesed," TDOT (1986), 5:49.

4Glueck, Hesed in the Bible, 102. Glueck states that the common usage of hesed never means an arbitrary demonstration of grace, kindness, favor, or love (p. 55.)

5Ibid., 87.
love-grace. Israelite faith at Sinai was from the beginning grounded in a divine redemption.

Second, the foundation of the Sinaitic covenant was the gracious act of God, who delivered His people from their bondage in Egypt (Exod 19:4; 20:2).\(^1\) Regarding the opening formula of "The Ten Words," Rylaarsdam comments as follows:

The law becomes the instrument of a mutual relationship in which faith responds to love. This transforms the law into a form for expressing gratitude. The law, as the outcome of the covenant relationship, is thus itself a form of grace.\(^2\)

Of course, the gift of tōrāh was not aimed at Yahweh's salvation of Israel. It was for the preservation of their relationship with Him who had already saved them from Egypt. Moreover, Yahweh's visitations of ḥesed to those who love Him and keep His commandments extend to thousands of generations, while His chastisement to the iniquity of the fathers go to the third and fourth generations (Exod 20:5-6). In the revelation of His character to Moses on Mount Sinai, Yahweh proclaimed not only His law but also His grace. Exod 34:6-7 (NKJV) states:

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And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness (hesed) and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

The text itself shows that great stress is placed upon mercy. This fact proves that the Sinaitic covenant cannot be regarded as a covenant of law or works. Mercy and justice, grace and obedience are intertwined in it as into one complementary framework. Moreover, we see that grace is the soil in which the Sinaitic covenant is rooted and must become fruitful.

To see a covenant as establishing "a relationship of responsibility" in the NSRB is an acceptable approach, for it binds God and His people intimately to one another. In this respect, dispensational thinkers surpassed both Murray and Kline, who defined the covenant basically as an "administration." Yet the concept of "a relationship of responsibility" is not consistent with the unconditionality in their definition of covenants, for, theoretically, there is no room for man's responsibility in it.

2NSRB, 5, n. 1 (Gen 2:16).
3See p. 70.
4The theory of Kline's two types of covenants according to the party of oath (see p. 72) ignores the fact that both God and His people bind themselves by solemn oath
To sum up, Dispensational understanding of grace under the Sinaitic covenant as belonging to the Abrahamic covenant fails to notice that the source of grace is the Yahweh of the Abrahamic covenant, not the covenant itself, and that the numerous passages related to the Exodus and Sinaitic covenant reflect His motive of grace which would empower His people to obey the law such as the Ten Commandments.

The Problem of the Work-Element

The question now arises, How should the element of works in the Sinaitic covenant be understood? Dispensationalists regard the Mosaic covenant as one of works which existed for a limited time only. They equate the work-element with the requirement of law which preceded the promise. Thus the Christian is not under this conditional covenant of works.\(^1\) As already discussed, the covenant theologians understand the work-principle from the standpoint of the creation event and the Adam-Christ typology.\(^2\) Thus the covenant of works was not abrogated after the Fall, but its obligations were met by the Mediator.\(^3\) The work-principle in the Sinaitic covenant is

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\(^1\)NSRB, 95, nn. 1-2 (Exod 19:5).
\(^2\)For the discussion, see pp. 56-75.
\(^3\)Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 218.
a reflection of the original covenant of works and its covenantal obligation is the demand of faith in the state of grace.\(^1\) One could plausibly infer that the conditional aspect of covenants presupposes the existence of the work-element even under the covenant of grace. We already pointed this out in the Abrahamic covenant which contains a conditional aspect.

Yahweh initiated His relationship with His people and laid down His provisions. In this respect, man has nothing to do with the formulation of the conditions of the bond between himself and God. Law is the Godward basis of His covenant. However, man has a part in carrying out His provisions. Obedience is the manward basis of God's covenants. Because of the Fall, the old covenant with man was rendered obsolete. Yet the gracious Yahweh had prepared for a way of restoration. The assisting grace of God through faith in Christ is the essential element in bringing about this harmony in those who are willing to obey the divine arrangement. Man's impotence is removed by Christ's power. The Holy Spirit bestows the ability and the disposition for man to comply with the divine law (Ezek 36:26-27; 1 John 3:24). Thus man's response, the work-element, is in every part of the new covenant.

\(^1\)Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in the Reformed Theology," 244-255.
In their discussion of the allegorical interpretation of Gal 4:24-27, Dispensationalists in their dogmatic contrast of law and grace regard the Sinaitic covenant as inferior to the Abrahamic covenant. Paul made Ishmael and Isaac types of the old and new covenants, of "bondage" and "freedom." Ishmael was born "after the flesh" from his slave mother. His birth represents lack of faith in God's manifested will and man's attempt to accomplish the divine purpose. Isaac was born through the promise and empowering of God, after Abraham and Sarah realized their absolute inability and surrendered to God. Isaac was born in this new relationship of the wholly self-yielding life to the divine purpose.

Paul points out that his allusion to the Abraham-Hagar-Ishmael relationship has a counterpart at Sinai (Gal 4:24-25). Yahweh sought to reeducate the people of Israel, who had been kept in bondage. They were to grow into a holy and royal nation of priests for the blessing of mankind. In order to fulfill the divine promises they would need to surrender to God continually and obey His laws whole-heartedly. Nothing was wrong with the positive answer of the people to God and the ratification of this old covenant between Yahweh and Israel at Sinai. They should have known their impotence, however, in this covenant relationship, for they were not able to maintain it by their own power. God here repeated the same
essential point which He had shown in His covenant with Abraham, but the people of Israel were not conscious of their inability to carry out any of the conditions. In New Testament times, some Jewish Christians who were in bondage to the Mosaic law, because of their legalistic attitude, even perverted the Abrahamic covenant by imposing circumcision, the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, upon Christian Gentiles. Consequently, they distorted the gracious nature of both the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinaitic covenant into the works of the law. In so doing, Paul points out the theological meaning of the OT narratives. He compared the historical situation of present Jerusalem (Judaism) with the status of Ishmael.¹

The writer of Hebrews gives us a true assessment of Israel's failure: "Because finding fault with them, He says: 'Behold the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah'" (Heb 8:8, NKJV). According to this text, the problem was "with them," with Israel, who were representatives of God's people at that time and not with

the covenant (cf. Jer 31:32). The people of God were impotent, "because," as Scripture states, "they continued not in My covenant."¹ The failure came out of their inability to obey God's requirements, not out of the covenant. Even English admits this fact.²

The phrase "Jerusalem which now is" (Gal 4:25, KJV) evidently refers to the contemporary state of the Israelite nation represented by its capital city. In the eyes of Paul, the first-century Jewish religious leaders and rulers were in a work relationship with God. They were repeating the failure of Hagar-Ishmael by relying upon their own efforts to comply with the divine requirements and by voiding the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in them (Gal 2:20-21).³ In fact, Paul did not condemn "the doing of the law, but human reliance on works of the law and boasting in

¹It should be carefully noted that each word and phrase indicates or implies a perversion of God's covenant by man.

²See p. 175.

one's own righteousness (Gal 3:10; Rom 2:17). At this juncture, Paul appeals to the Galatians: "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now" (Gal 4:28-29, KJV).

Hillers explains:

Paul is not really talking about covenant but is presenting a new drama of ideas: faith and works, law and gospel, are the main actors, and covenant comes in only to swell a scene or two. It is relatively easy to remark that in identifying the Sinai covenant as "law," Paul scarcely does justice to its full content; but it is equally obvious that such an academic point is not really the issue.2

Paul contrasts those who live by law and those who live by faith in the allegory of Hagar-Ishmael and Sarah-Isaac. He does not mean covenant in the normal sense of the word as defining the God-man relationship.3 Paul refers to believers who enter into the covenant promise of salvation

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3 It must be cautioned, therefore, that we should not take the duo diathēkai (Gal 4:24) for granted as referring to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, or the new and Mosaic covenants. For Paul, the principle of God's dealing with His people is always the same, manifested in His promise to Abraham which is not changed even by the later coming of the law. Once gracious, God is always gracious. The interpretation that sees the duo diathēkai as the Abrahamic and the Sinaïtic covenants depends mainly on the face-value of the narrative. It is certain that there is no evidence elsewhere in the Pauline epistles in which Paul has expressly pointed out the Sinaïtic covenant as diametrically opposed to the Abrahamic covenant.
by faith in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy that dia tés epangelias in vs. 23 has become kata pneuma in vs. 29. This reminds us that the Holy Spirit plays a central role in Paul's concept of covenant. Isaac who "was born after the Spirit" is a symbol of all Spirit-born. The dominion of the Spirit is the sine qua non of the new-formed relationship with God. Where the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the believers, the law of God is manifested in holiness, obedience, and sanctification. The Judaizers had not recognized the letter of the law in the hearts of the Corinthian believers as Paul had (cf. 2 Cor 3:3-8). The new covenant is,


Walter C. Kaiser explains the word gramma in 2 Cor 3:6 as conveying the meaning of "the outward form merely, not the spiritual import nor the content of that law." Thus he interprets 2 Cor 3:9-11 as follows: "What Paul is contrasting is not the content of the Law, but rather the ministry of the one through whom the law came. . . . rather than 'the letter' equaling the law in the Old Testament, and 'the Spirit' equaling the New Testament, we find here that Paul is talking about the outward, formal, ostensible parts of both Testaments, versus the internal, living, vitalizing ability of both Testaments which is able to make alive!" See The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 50-51.
therefore, a Spirit-provided, Spirit-directed, Spirit-maintained association between the believer and God.\(^1\) The Holy Spirit empowers the repentant one to obey all the divine demands and to grow up into the full measure of the stature of Christ, which, in his fallen state, he had been incapable of obeying (cf. Rom 8:1-11). This was the point that Israel as the people of God failed to experience at Sinai.\(^2\) The Galatian churches made the same mistake because of the Judaizers.\(^3\) As Robertson recently pointed out, Paul contends, in the discussion of Galatians, that the law was isolated from promise and grace by the Judaizers' misunderstanding of the gospel.\(^4\) In fact, the faultiness in the relationship of the old covenant was not in the covenant itself but with man who could not fulfill


\(^2\)Because of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon the people of the old covenant (Num 24:2, etc.), Helmut Thielicke asserts that He is a Spirit of promise both in the old covenant and the new. See The Evangelical Faith, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 190.


\(^4\)Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants, 59-61.
its requirements without divine enablement.\textsuperscript{1} The Sinaitic covenant itself contains not only the grace of forgiveness and redemption\textsuperscript{2} but also the grace for obedience.

From the above discussion it seems clear that the dispensational view of the Sinaitic covenant as the covenant of works results from a misunderstanding of its work-element, which must be comprehended as the preservation of the relationship with Yahweh who saved His people. Paul did not condemn the obedience of the law, but human reliance on works for merit, the perversion of the law.

The conditionality of a covenant becomes a stumbling block in establishing the comprehensive concept of the distinctive characteristics of the biblical covenants in dispensational theology.

\textbf{Summary}

It has been my purpose in this chapter to evaluate some main positions of the Sinaitic covenant as understood in dispensational theology. This contained the problem of the disunity and of the unconditionality of various

\textsuperscript{1}Piepgrass, "A Study of New Testament References to Old Testament Covenants," 211. Piepgrass here regards the promises in the Sinaitic covenant as legal, conditional, carnal, and typical. His discussion on divine enablement is related only to the new covenant. Therefore, there is no room for graciousness in the Sinaitic covenant.

\textsuperscript{2}For example, the sacrificial system and tabernacle in Exod 25-30 convey perfect forgiveness and redemption.
covenants, the issue of grace, and of the work-element in the Sinaitic covenant.

We have found that dispensational theology emphasizes only the aspect of conditionality in the Sinaitic covenant, without giving adequate attention to Yahweh's electing love and His covenantal loyalty toward His people. Election, covenant, and law belong together. If Dispensationalists define covenant as "a sovereign pronouncement of God," more theological consideration should be given to God's sovereign initiative of the Sinaitic covenant, in which He manifested His grace throughout the Exodus event and the succeeding process of establishing the covenant.

We noted that dispensational theology, in its dogmatic assumption of unconditionality, failed to recognize the element of conditionality in the so-called promissory covenants. The conditional aspect of the Sinaitic covenant was identical with the intent of the conditional statements of the Abrahamic, the Palestinian, and the new covenants. Conditionality and unconditionality from different perspectives are closely linked in God's covenant as one unit, so that the element of conditionality is not expressed as explicitly in the promissory covenant as in the obligatory covenant. Conditionality and unconditionality have different functions in their dynamic complementary relationship. The element of conditionality should not be confused with the abiding promise of covenants, for it is tied to the
participants. Conditionality and divine promises can go together in a covenant. God did not fail to keep His promises even in case of failure of national Israel. The biblical covenants reveal unity and continuity through amplification and enlargement with each new covenant adding new dimensions of freshness, while maintaining the potency of the previous one.

We discovered that dispensational theology failed to see that the indicative of God's deliverance of His people and His promises precedes the imperative of His law. It regards the covenant at Sinai as one of works because it separates the law from grace without giving careful consideration to the Yahweh's covenantal love and grace within the Sinaitic covenant. Israel's obedience to the law, on which dispensational thinkers base their assertion of a covenant of works, was originally intended as the preservation of Israel's relationship with Yahweh who had already saved His people. Man is empowered to keep His commandments by the assisting grace of God through faith. Paul indicated that one of the main reasons for Israel's failure came from the lack of a Spirit-provided, Spirit-directed, Spirit-maintained relationship in the old covenantal life (Gal 4:21-31). He urged Christians to reject the perversion of the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenants for their merit.
CHAPTER VI

CRITIQUE OF THE DISPENSATIONALIST VIEW OF THE LAW

Introduction

As we have seen, in dispensational theology the law of Moses, including the Decalogue, was wholly done away with by the death of Jesus Christ and, instead, the law of Christ, the law of love, rules Christians as the moral law. My purpose in this section is to evaluate the basic features of Dispensationalism regarding the concept of law, the law of Christ, the abrogation of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount as the future millennial kingdom, and the antithetical contrast of the law and grace.

The Law of Moses for the Church

The Dispensationalist Concept of Law

Dispensationalists understand the Mosaic law in the framework of the traditional threefold category, such as moral law, ceremonial law, and civil law. Yet they use a sort of domino-theory approach to support its idea of the limited duration of the validity of the Mosaic law. For them that law is a monolith that cannot be broken. Moral,
ceremonial, and civil laws stand and fall together. If an aspect becomes obsolete, all must be discarded. Since in the NT the ceremonial is clearly set aside, then, they claim, the rest of the law must also be discarded.

In the first place, Dispensational scholars do not attach much importance, it seems, to the fact that the NT speaks both in positive and negative terms of the law. Far from discarding the law, Jesus' words clearly delineated how to keep it in a better way. The famous passages of the Sermon on the Mount—"you have heard . . . but I say unto you" (Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)—amplify and internalize the law. Jesus here corrects the contemporary, prevailing, legalistic interpretations of the laws, setting aside the spirit of love. He who keeps Jesus' law keeps Moses' law more carefully. As Gerstner observes, Christ was not demanding "a new way of obedience," but "the old way" for eternal life. Likewise, Paul, while denying that salvation can be earned through an effort to obey the law, continually appeals to its moral validity (Rom 3:20; 7:7, 12, 14; 1 Cor 7:19; etc.). Thus the NT makes a distinction between some aspects of the law that the cross has made obsolete (for example, Eph 2:15; Col 2:14, 17) and others which the cross has magnified (Rom 3:31; Jas 2:10, 12, 25).


In other words, the distinction between the moral law of God—the Decalogue—and the ceremonial law can be distinguished through the study of the context and usage of the law in the NT. The moral law reveals God's righteousness; the ceremonial law reflects the mercy of God and His electing love and typifies the Messiah's redemptive work from sin.\(^1\) If this distinction is denied, then the domino theory cannot but be applied to the Pentateuch as a whole. Several recent studies point out that Jesus Christ and Paul had a twofold attitude toward the law, sometimes saying that it is bad and has been abolished in Christ and, at other times, that it is good and has remained valid, as shown by Davies\(^2\) and Gaston.\(^3\) It is unreasonable for us to interpret a double (positive and negative) concept of

\(^1\)Hilgenberg considers the fellowship with Yahweh and the provision of forgiveness through the love and mercy of Yahweh as the basic functions of the ceremonial law. See "The Law of Moses," 178-179.


\(^3\)Lloyd Gaston, "Paul and Torah," Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity, ed. Alan T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 62. Here Gaston provides a most perceptive analysis of Paul's attitude toward the law by examining the apparent tension between negative and positive texts in the epistles.
tōrāḥ-nomos as rejecting the raison d'être of the law in the church-age.

In the second place, Dispensationalists try to establish the basic meaning of the law in the ethical or the juristic sense as "a system of rules or principles for conduct." They somehow restrict the law to the concept of works. Since, according to them, the law given at Sinai was part of a covenant of works, it has nothing in common with grace or love. Curiously, they try to establish the concept of the moral law, the law of love as the theoretical ground to avoid antinomianism. The moral law, for them, is purely an expression of the holiness and righteousness of God. Dispensational understanding of the Sinaitic covenant, therefore, presupposes that the biblical law can be defined as having nothing to do with divine love, the source of the law.

This Dispensationalist's love-law dialectic seems strange in view of the fact that God constantly proclaims that the gift of the law is an expression of His love. Some biblical passages show that the nature of the law of God is characterized by love (Rom 13:8-10; Matt 22:34-40; 23:23; Mark 12:29-34; Luke 10:27-28; 11:42; Gal 5:14; cf. Lev 19:18, 34; Deut 6:5; 10:12). Thus, Christ gives love as the moving power of obedience to the law (John 14:15). Love is a requirement of the law. Likewise, the law of
Moses issued from the love of God. Fairbairn summarized this point:

So that, whatever of awful grandeur and majesty attended the revelation of the law from Sinai, as uttered amid thrilling sounds and sights that flashed amazement on the eyes of beholders, it still had its foundation in love, and came from God expressly in the character of their most gracious and faithful Redeemer, as well as their righteous Lord.¹

God's love is the basis of the entire divine government. This principle permeates the structure of the universe and interpenetrates every relationship. It designs, regulates, and maintains all the laws which govern animate and inanimate things—in chemistry, physics, mathematics, astronomy, anatomy, and in moral, ethical, and social matters. In other words, the laws of chemistry, physics, mathematics, astronomy, and physiology guarantee survival and happiness to God's creatures just as much as religious and ethical laws. To be a living being and a self, man must live in the context of certain relationships. His physical being can break the law of nature only at great risk, as science discovers more clearly every day. Physical law, far from threatening life, makes it possible. Thus, the laws of nature are an expression of God's grace and of His loving desire. They provide for man's strength and enjoyment. As a self, man must always live in relationship with other selves. The moral laws are the rules that make social life

¹Patrick Fairbairn, The Revelation of Law in Scripture (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1869), 86.
possible. As psychology and sociology have clearly demonstrated, "man was not made to live alone." If or when he cannot experience relationships, he is sick and his capacity for happiness is greatly threatened. God's moral law deals with more than infraction. It is a sovereign prescription for smooth interaction and for mutual enrichment. By defining relationships that cannot be altered without frightening consequences, God reveals His love for man and His gracious purpose for him.

Man must also have relationships with an ultimate. Somehow, man must "serve" some sovereign, be it money, beauty, power, or God. Secular man is discovering more and more that material ultimates can stimulate and titillate but not satisfy lastingly. The law identifies the real ultimate and how to relate with Him. Witness after witness attest to the fact that the discovery of that relationship is also the discovery of meaning and happiness in life. The bond between God and man is just as fundamental as the bond between man and nature or between self and others. The law is, therefore, a gift of divine love. It is also, as Jesus told a doctor of the law, the paradigm of loving God and loving one's neighbor. From every direction we can see law and love bonded together. Ferch says, "God's commandments are nothing but codified love."\(^1\) In short,

all the relationships are defined by laws in each of various areas. To love is to establish relationships which are defined by law; to keep the law, therefore, is to love. In His kingdom God displayed love in every corner, setting up interrelationships between every part and person, and between every other part and person.

Since the essence of a covenant is a relationship, we may say that law is the definition of this relationship. As Dumbrell noted, the law at Sinai was the relationship in operation.\(^1\) The Sinaitic covenant grounded in a redemption faith begins with the message of grace as a signal of love. Augsburger indicated that law is a bond between God and man.\(^2\) In other words, God provided the exposition of His love in law. In this respect, the moral law is the law of love which molds all human conduct and regulates every relationship. It talks the imperative, because the law of love dictates.

Love is a demand of the law. The relationship between love and law is not antithetical.\(^3\) Therefore, when love wastes away, then rules or regulations pointing out how love should be portrayed become even more necessary. The farther man stays away apart from God, the more into

\(^1\)Dumbrell, The End of the Beginning, 91.
\(^3\)Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 255.
detail the merciful Yahweh has to go to meet man's fallen situation and explain to him how he should obey. As Philo expounded, the particular laws present in detail what the Decalogue presents as the major topics.\(^1\) Thus, additional precepts such as mišpāṭîm (judgments)\(^2\) and ḥuqqîm (statutes)\(^3\) were given as implications of the Decalogue.

\(^1\)See *On the Decalogue* and the four books of *De Specialibus Legibus* in Philo with an English Translation by F. H. Colson, ed. T. E. Page et al. (London: William Heinemann, 1937-1938), 7:6-95, 100-607; 8:7-155. The four Books of *De Specialibus Legibus* are a systematic review of Mosaic legislation to show how the individual statutes of that legislation are all logical and proper results of the application of the Decalogue to various aspects of life. Book One is primarily concerned with the first two commandments of the Decalogue: worship, the temple, the priests and Levites, the high priest, and the sacrificial system. Book Two discusses the third, fourth, and fifth commandments: the oath, the Sabbath, and the generic law of all Jewish festivals of the calendar. It is with Book Three, where the second half of the Decalogue is considered, that civil law is more systematically discussed: the application of the sixth commandment. Book Four deals with the remaining commandments. In short, Philo holds that the Decalogue's uniqueness lies in its all-inclusiveness, pure goodness, and immediate divine origin, and it is in effect an epitome of the special laws. See Geza Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies*, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1975), 8:170.

\(^2\)These refer primarily to the legal decisions, the case laws concerning moral issues between individuals. They are in the casuistic form for the guidance of rulers. Many of these decisions became an established law which had authority as shown in Exod 21-23. See Gottfried Quell, "The Concept of Law in the OT," *TDNT* (1964), 2:176; Melvin Grove Kyle, *The Problem of the Pentateuch* (Oberlin: Bibliotheca Sacra Co., 1920), 17-19; Charles H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954), 29-30.

\(^3\)ḥoq means a "statutory regulation" or "direction" given. The prominent usage of this word in Israel's law was in reference to those laws regulating ceremonial laws. But not all ḥuqqîm are ceremonial laws. They are rules of conduct in apodictic form, in which the appeal is to the
All these laws, regulating human relationships to each other and God, are illustrations of the implications of the moral law of love. These important facets of law do not appear clearly in Dispensationalism. If the authors who defend this viewpoint had really taken it into consideration, they could not make these distinctions between the Sinaitic law and the law of Christ.

The Dispensational Dichotomy of Pure Law and Law as Code

Dispensationalists distinguish pure law from law as a code. They identify the law of love as pure law and the Ten Commandments as a code. They reject the validity of the Ten Commandments for the church age. As indicated already, they consider liberty with love as the standard of life under grace. Accordi ---------------------------------

The answer to this question rests on whether the ground of the law and the law itself can be separated or not. The law of Moses must be interpreted within the context of the Sinaitic covenant. As noted earlier, the ground of the law is the love of God. His hesed, that is, covenantal love, mercy, loving kindness, or loyal love, conscience and to God. See Kyle, The Problem of the Pentateuch, 20-22; Dodd, The Bible and Greeks, 27-28.

1 See 120-123, 186-189.
extends to thousands of those who love Him. Thus love becomes the "end" or "goal" of the commandment (1 Tim 1:5). In fact, the law of God requires no mere external obedience. The obligation of Israel to love God is mentioned repeatedly, often in connection with keeping the commandments (Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20). All the commandments of God are based upon the one principle of love (cf. Rom 13:10). As is well known, Jesus Christ summarized the Mosaic law in two principles—the commandment to love God (Deut 6:4-5) and neighbor (Lev 19:18) and united them in His teaching (Matt 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-32; cf. Luke 10:25-28). This summary of the law, in fact, rests upon the Ten Commandments and sums up its fundamental contents.¹ The Jews believed that the Decalogue had been written on two stone tablets. On the first tablet were the four commandments pertaining primarily to the love-relationship between Israel and God. On the second were found the six concerned with the basic love-relationships between human beings.²


²According to Josephus, Jews arranged and numbered the ten commands of the Decalogue as most Protestants do today. See Josephus, The Works of Flavius. Antiquities of the Jews, 102 {iii, 5, 5}. Origen mentioned the division of the Decalogue, in which the first four belong to the first tablet and the last six to the second. On discussion of the numbering of the Ten Commandments, see Bo Reicke, Die zehn Worte in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Zählung und Bedeutung der Gebote in den verschiedenen Konfessionen,
Thus, "the fundamental principle upon which the constitution was established was love."¹ The unity of these two spheres is ultimately based on the character of God. The components are distinguishable but not separable from Him. They are expressions of God and as such have their inner unity exclusively in God Himself.

Love leads to the keeping of the commandments of God. This fact is well expressed in the statements of Jesus Christ: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV) and "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10, KJV). Here the NSRB itself views love and law in correlation as follows: "The Lord correlates love for Him with obedience

to Him. To love Christ means to care enough about Him to keep His commandments."¹ Yet it adds an obscure reference: "We cannot keep His commandments unless we search the Scriptures to find out what they are."² If Dispensationalists identify His commandments or the "new commandment" with the divine love and the meaning of the law of Christ with love,³ it would be a tautology in John 14:15, 21. According to this tautology, vs. 15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," would eventually mean "If ye love me, keep my love." Yet "Christ's commandments" cannot be identical with "love." There is in this text a clear distinction between love and the law that it fulfills. As Murray observed,

The message of John has escaped us if we have failed to note John's emphasis upon the keeping of the commandments of God. . . . the witness of our Lord and the testimony of John are to the effect that there is indispensable complementation.⁴

Henry points out that love without specific content is merely "an abstract and ethereal law that lacks definition."⁵ Realizing this fact, Dispensationalists,

¹NSRB, 1147, n. 3 (John 14:21).
²Ibid.
³NSRB, 1347, n. 1 (2 John 5); 165, n. 2 (1 John 2:3). Here the NSRB says: "Moses' law demands love (Lev 19:18; Dt 6:5; Lk 10:27); Christ's law is love (Rom 5:5; 1 Jn 4:7, 19-20)." Yet it overlooks the imperative of love in Jesus' teaching (Matt 5:44; John 15:12; etc.).
⁴Murray, Principles of Conduct, 183.
⁵Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 254.
such as Nevin, set forth nine rules as the self-instructing and self-directing function of love for the standard of life under grace.\(^1\) They seem to be a sort of codification as the rules of the road for Christian life and in this sense contradictory to the dispensational rejection of the Decalogue. Dispensationalists regard the Gospel as Christian rule, but the Gospel is a message of grace, and by itself it is no rule of conduct.\(^2\)

The real issue is not the distinction between love and law, but the divorce of the law from the spirit of the law. Jesus Christ and His Apostles often refer to that distortion. We cannot keep the law without understanding the spirit of the law and possessing that spirit of love in our hearts. Divine love is the active, motivating principle of the fulfillment of the law. The love of God empowers us to carry out the commands of the law. Fulfillment of the law is impossible without the driving power of divine love in us. If love does not impel to the fulfillment of the law, it is not the love of which the Scripture speaks. "Love itself is exercised in obedience to a commandment--'Thou shalt love.'"\(^3\) The dispensational separation between love and law is only an attempt "to develop the ethic of love in abstraction from the

\(^1\)See pp. 190-191.


\(^3\)Ibid., 23.
denotation and connotation of the law of which our Lord and the apostle spoke."\(^1\)

There is another problem in the notion that love is its own law and monitor. If the assertion that to reject the Decalogue and to love is itself the commandment for the new-born Christian, love must be regarded as an autonomous, self-acting agency which of itself defines its own norm of conduct and devises the ways and means of its self-realization. We are faced then with the difficulty of why the law is written upon the renewed heart by the grace of God in the "new covenant" (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10; 10:16).\(^2\) Since the statement "I will write it" is a direct allusion to the Decalogue,\(^3\) love cannot be an alternative to it. The law is indispensable even to the reborn believer. The state of this renewed man stands parallel to the original state of Adam, who was created in the image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Eph 4:24). God gave His mandates to man even before the fall, so all the more to the renewed man. The concrete principles of the Ten Commandments become the criteria of the Christian behavior which love dictates. The law thus serves as a

\(^1\)Ibid., 24.

\(^2\)Already noted above is the concept that "new" in the new covenant means "renewed" or "restored."

\(^3\)See p. 257.
standard of obedience, a reminder to the regenerate believers of their call to sanctification.¹

Through our observation, it is clear that the Mosaic law or the Decalogue is inseparable from love, the essence of law, in the Scriptures. In this sense, the dispensational dichotomy of the moral law and law as code is blind to the divine ground of law. Divine love, the source of the law, is so closely interwoven with the Decalogue, that any attempt to separate the spirit or the source of law from law itself destroys its very meaning and role. Love cannot replace law, for it is an imperative, not an indicative. An imperative without specific content cannot be a norm and cannot define the norm of behavior.

Dispensationalists define the law of Christ as divine love. They place much emphasis upon the fact that Paul talks about the law of Christ and place it in adversary relationship with Moses' law. The law of Christ has taken the place of the external law of Moses which demands love.² What did Paul mean by his expression "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2)? Did Paul exclude the Ten Commandments from this expression as Dispensationalists contend? The answer to these problems requires an investigation of the meaning of the expression in its immediate context.

¹Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 356-357.
²NSRB, 1347, n. 1 (2 John 5).
The Law of Christ

A number of scholars have proposed solutions to the question posed by the appearance of this expression. The most prominent of these scholars are Schoeps, W. D. Davies, Dodd, Räisänen, and Stoike. The first two scholars, on the basis of the Rabbinic sources, consider "the law of Christ" as an eschatological or messianic Torah given through the Messiah.1 Dodd sees the expression "the law of Christ" as parallel to "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ" (Rom 8:2).2 He states in another work:

The law of Christ is not a specialized code of regulations for a society with optional membership. It is based upon the revelation of the nature of the eternal God, and it affirms the principles upon which His world is built and which men ignore at their peril.3

In short, Dodd refers to the verba Christi, which now replaces the Mosaic law.4 His view has been criticized as


2Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, 37.


4He contends that "to fulfill the law of Christ" connotes "the intention to carry out, in a different setting and in altered circumstances, it is true, the precepts which Jesus was believed to have given to His disciples, and which they handed down to the church. This is to be ennomous christou." "It is evident (in this place, at least) that the Torah is not conceived as being identical, or equivalent, or at any rate co-extensive, with the Law of
unsubstantiated by Heikki Räisänen. Davies also regards the law of Christ as a collection of sayings of Christ.\(^1\)

For Räisänen, the law of Christ refers simply to "the way of life characteristic of the church of Christ."\(^2\) According to him, there are two other views on the meaning of "the law of Christ": the interpretations that this law of Christ is identical with the Mosaic law or "the law of faith" (Rom 3:27) and "the law of Spirit" (Rom 8:2) with the tōrāh.\(^3\) Another interpretation is that Paul took over this expression from his opponents.\(^4\) On the other hand, some see it God, which is either a different, or a more inclusive, law than the law of Moses." See "ENNOMOS CHRISTOU," Studia Paulina (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1953), 102-103, 98.


\(^2\)Heikki Räisänen, Paul and the Law, WUNT 29 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983), 78-82. Here he points out that Dodd's view of the object of the statement "bear each other's burdens" is artificial and that it would be difficult to find any extant word of Christ which would fit the context.

\(^3\)Ibid., 77-78.

as Paul's own expression. Among these interpretative options concerning the meaning of the phrase "the law of Christ," the last option seems most probable in comparison with other similar Pauline expressions such as "the law to Christ" (1 Cor 9:21) and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2).

Yet there still remains a question of its content. Paul's formula must be understood in its immediate context. The sentence of Gal 6:2 must be read as a unity. It says: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Obviously the term *baros* in the phrase "Bear ye one another's burdens" is related to the preceding verse, according to the progression of the context (Gal 5:13–6:10, the paraenesis). Paul appeals to the entire congregation to "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25). In Gal 5:26 provocation and envy are expressions of a spirit of self-conceit. It is the opposite of love, since love is caring for one another to the same extent as one cares about oneself (5:14). "Love thy neighbour" in this verse is the theme of this section. In the following verse (6:1), Paul asks those who would claim to be spiritual (pneumatikoi) or

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2 It should be also be noted that the word *baros* has a broad range of meaning, such as "bodily weight," "suffering," "moral lapses, temptations and guilt," "force," "violence," "affliction," etc. Cf. Gottlob Schrenk, "Baros," in *TDNT* (1964), 1:553–561.
who had not given up the true gospel in the Galatian churches to keep their responsibilities in mind and to remove those problems, faults, and even sins (6:2). The statement that the law is fulfilled by love for one another (5:14) is the basis for the specific exhortation to bear one another's burdens.\(^1\) Here Paul is emphasizing the spirit of law. By connecting the nomos of love with Christ, he points out that this spirit of law must be renewed with the coming of Christ. Thus, it is strange, in this context, to interpret "the law of Christ" as replacing the law with love. Likewise, Stoike concludes from his historical research and exegetical consideration that Paul is not formulating a new law for the Christian church in the expression "the law of Christ," but, by picking it (the law of Christ) up from the debate taking place between himself and his opponents, he is attempting to dilute any legalistic implications which might be inherent within the term nomos.\(^2\)

Considering the traditional argument that Paul's opponents in Galatians were certain Judaizers\(^3\) who


\(^3\)Since Ferdinand C. Baur, who understood Paul's opponents as Judaizers who were supported by the apostles at Jerusalem, in his Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi (Stuttgart: Becher & Müller, 1845), 253, 257, the identity of the adversaries in the epistle have been traditionally assumed as the Jewish Christians. Yet some scholars modify
distorted the role of the law and tried to impose upon the Gentile converts the ceremonial law, it is not strange that Paul defines the real epitome of the commandments, love, by the expression "the law of Christ." This interpretation corresponds to the immediate context—from the single command of love (5:14) to the prohibition of challenging this traditional view. For examples, J. B. Lightfoot rejected Baur's contention that the opponents were under the auspices of the church leaders of Jerusalem. See St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (London: Macmillan, 1865); George Howard, Paul: Crisis in Galatia. A Study in Early Christian Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 2-3; John W. Drane, Paul: Libertine or Legalist? A Study in the Theology of the Major Pauline Epistles (London: SPCK, 1975), 34. Johannes Munck modifies Baur's theory and proposes Gentile Christians in Paul and the Salvation of Mankind, trans. F. Clarke (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959), 87. Lloyd Gaston observes that many of Paul's opponents were Jewish Christians and some might have been non-Christian Jews. Paul and the Torah (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 137. W. G. Kümmel regarded the opponents as "Jewish Christians who preached first of all circumcision, but the fulfillment of the law as well" in his Introduction to the New Testament, trans. H. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 300. Franz Mussner agrees with Kümmel in Der Galaterbrief (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 25. The modified view of traditional theory is probably right; that is, Judaizing Christians arose within the church at Jerusalem without the support of the apostles and spread out in the Galatian area, urging the believers to obey the OT law for God's favor. According to John Gale Hawkins, Paul's opponents are not Judaizing Gentile Christians but Jewish Christian Judaizers, who have come into Paul's churches trying to induce the Gentile Christians to adopt the law of Moses. See "The Opponents of Paul in Galatia" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1971). Wilhelm Lütgert agrees that there were Jewish Christians as opponents in Galatia. Furthermore, he is convinced that antinomians were even more threatening and that seems to be the object of most of the Epistle. Gesetz und Geist: Eine Untersuchung zur Vorgeschichte des Galaterbriefes, Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie, vol. 22, bk. 6, ed. D. Schlatter and W. Lütgert (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1919), 5.
and envying each other (5:26). To be sure, love is "the content of the law of Christ."¹ In this sense, the law based on love has a positive value in this epistle.²

Schrenk argues that by "the burdens," Gal 6:2 refers to "moral lapses, temptations and guilt," in the broad sense, to "the total task of love."³ This verse, therefore, implies a certain derailment of some Christians from the moral standards or lack of fruit in their character. Thus Paul points out that God guarantees the fruit of love in believers by the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Accordingly, love would be meaningless without moral guidelines. Tôrāh, commandments, and love are also meaningless without Christ, for Christ in the expression "the law of Christ" is the hermeneutical center of the Tôrāh.⁴ The true nature of love's relationship to law is not contradictory but complementary and mutually indispensable in Christ. In this sense, it is clear that the category of the law was not abrogated with Christ's advent,

²Fletcher criticizes Stoike's statement: "Indeed the law does not have any positive value as it is described in this epistle" ("The Law of Christ," 248-249). Fletcher, "The Singular Argument," 202.
but rather has been maintained in Christ, ennomos Christou (1 Cor 9:21). Nixon understands the law of Christ as a fulfillment of the Mosaic law in the sense of giving full meaning to it, extending it from the part to the whole, and from the act to the motive.\(^1\) Paul, to be sure, affirms the continuity between the Mosaic law and "the law of Christ."\(^2\) He does not suggest any concept of "pure law" with the expression "the law of Christ."

To establish the hypothetical theory of pure law belongs to the metaphysical analogy or ideological inquiry. It seems to be as difficult as seeking the concept of the natural law in the philosophy of law or moral philosophy.\(^3\)

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\(^3\)Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274) distinguished between four different kinds of law: the eternal, the natural, the divine, and the human law. The eternal law, lex aeterna, is the divine reason and wisdom directing all movements and actions in the universe. In its eternity it is known only to God. Yet though no ordinary man is capable of knowing the eternal law in its whole truth, he can have a partial notion of it by means of the faculty of reason, with which God has endowed him. This participation of the rational creature in the cosmic law is called natural law, lex naturalis. It is incomplete and inferior to the dictates of divine reason, but it enables man to know at least some of the principles of the lex aeterna. Accordingly, man has a natural inclination to do good and to avoid evil and the natural inclination forms part of the natural law. The divine law, lex divina, is the law revealed by God through the Scripture and recorded in it. The natural law, as a
To seek certain natural laws, moral philosophers start from a view of human nature arrived at by scientific and/or philosophical reflection. They assert that human nature provides the basis of moral duties and obligations. The goal of the notion of natural law has been to seek a higher moral claim on man. Dispensationalists do not give us enough scientific, philosophical, or theological ground for the possibility of pure law. What is worse, they destroy the biblical statements such as the Decalogue for this work. For them, the higher norm is not a set of rules man must follow under threat of punishment, but simply pure law (love), the dynamic-ordering principle of the Christian being. In this sense, Dispensationalists are concerned with pure law in the abstract and seek to separate the meaning of law from the code itself. Yet separating their concept of pure law from the literal statement of the Decalogue goes beyond biblical study. It is also doubtful whether the basic principle of love without the more specific requirements can operate for its purpose. In the development of jurisprudential thoughts, the theory of pure

body of general and abstract principles, is supplemented by this divine law as to how men should conduct their lives. The human law, lex humana, is "an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated." Thus, Aquinas incorporates some postulate of reason into his definition of law. See Aquinas, Summa Theologica 2.1.93.2; 2.1.91.2, 3; 2.1.94.2, 3; 2.1.90.1, 4.

law is a theory of the positive law, of the code itself.\footnote{According to Hans Kelsen, the pure theory of law concerns itself with the positive law exclusively. It endeavors to answer the cognitive question, "What is the law?" but not the normative question, "What ought it to be?" Thus, based on the principles of methodological purity of jurisprudential cognition, it seeks to free the science of law from the intrusion of foreign and extraneous society, such as psychology, sociology, and ethics. For Kelsen, law is concerned not with the facts of human behavior but with norms, which are rules or standards of conduct forming part of a unified system. See Hans Kelsen, \textit{Pure Theory of Law}, trans. Max Knight (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).} Dispensationalists' analytical methodology to separate the ground of law from the so-called code is foreign to the life and thought of Bible times, in which the collective consciousness was more dominant in the minds of people. As divine love springs from the deity Himself, so does the law of God. Love is not an independent reality. The law of God is the visible message of this love. Divine love has to be demonstrated through man's love. Indeed, love is not emotion but Christian attitude in action.\footnote{Cf. George E. Ladd, \textit{A Theology of the New Testament} (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 524.} Love as an emotion is more or less momentary or spasmodic. Emotion is an effect of an attitude. It is only love as an attitude that is continuous or lasting. Love is a total response—dynamic of whole being. It takes the form of the imperative. Thus, it is related to eternal principles. In a discussion of the human possibility of a pure or disinterested love, Adams argues that all human love has a degree
of self-regard.¹ For a Christian as the new man in Christ, there is still a duality, a confrontation of God's will and one's wishes. The Christian still experiences a distinction between what one ought to do and what one wants to do. He/she, therefore, still needs the basic guidelines for the proper realization of love toward God and man. The law relationship to love is not exclusive but inclusive mutually.

Althaus's concept of "command" is similar to the concept of pure law. He attempted to make a distinction between "command (Gebot)" and "law (Gesetz)" as of fundamental importance for a proper understanding of God's dealings with mankind and each man.² The command is supralapsarian, but the law infralapsarian. The will of God or love belong to the dimension of the command.³ Although love contains an imperative, it is not an imperative of "ought" but an imperative of "is."⁴ Christian


³Ibid., 12-14.

⁴Ibid., 33.
life is free from the law which condemns man, but not from
the command given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
His explanation of the command is nothing else but the
ground of the law. His distinction of the command and the
law is too arbitrary.\(^1\) The term entolē is sometimes used
as the subordinate concept of the law,\(^2\) and sometimes as
the designation of a corpus of decrees and commandments,
even as designation of the law as a whole in the case of
the parallel word to mîṣvāh in Deuteronomy.\(^3\) Entolē (or
entolai) in the Johannine writings is related especially to
the essential spirit or love of the law of God. John often
links the keeping of His commandments with love.\(^4\) If the
concept of that entolē would presuppose the abolishment of
the law in Jesus, it is so radicalized into love that it is
emptied of all structure and content. Rather, we note, as

\(^1\)For instance, presuming a strict terminological
and theological distinction between law and commandment in
the Johannine literature, he asserts that the law was given
only to the Jews by Moses and that the commandments, to His
Son and through Him. See ibid., 5-7. In fact, John uses
the term nomos as having various connotations in the
fourth Gospel. Cf. W. D. Davies, "Law in the NT," IDB

\(^2\)In John 7:19, 23, nomos is used as a specific
commandment.

\(^3\)Schnabel, Law and Wisdom, 34. Misvah is
literally a command. It can be applied to any sort of
command, including those commands which are not of
permanent obligation and can be fulfilled once for all.
They could be casuistic or apodictic.

\(^4\)If the commandments in the Johannine writings are
regarded as identical with love, then tautology would be
unavoidable in John 14:21, etc. See p. 288.
Schrenk stated, that the new factor concerning the "new entolé" in the Gospel of John is its new christological foundation.¹

The Decalogue as the Moral Law

Dispensationalists see the Ten Commandments as a code, a set of rules or restrictions imposed on Israel alone. Therefore, they reject them as the moral law for the church. Yet they take the principles of the Ten Commandments which are restated in the NT as part of the Christian code, with the reservation that it is not a continuation of part of the Mosaic law. Can this be substantiated by the NT?

This dispensational position is based on the premise that the Sinaitic covenant belongs to the covenant of works. We have already discussed the invalidity of this premise. The law was not a covenant of works in the sense that Israel's salvation depended upon obedience to it. Accordingly, the NSRB's insistence that the nature of the law is not grace² has lost its basis. The law was not

¹Gottlob Schrenk, "entellomai, entole," TDNT (1964), 2:553. Dale Patrick states, "The love commandment is hardly new in the sense of having never been uttered before; rather, it is new in the sense of being ever fresh and vital, the beginning of new life. It is also new in its basis of love for one another as an imitation of and a response to Jesus's love and identification of his community as his." See Old Testament Law (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 214-215.

²NSRB, 96, n. 1 (Exod 20:1).
given as a burden. Rather, it was Yahweh's gift to Israel. "The law is the sign of grace." While it may be the secular jurists' opinion to divorce grace from the meaning of law, it is not a biblical perspective. As we have noted, the moral law as expressed in the Ten Commandments is an expression of the same grace as the good news of the gospel.

Based on the secular understanding of law, McClain, a co-editor of the NSRB, argues that the divine law cannot be separated from its sanctions. A law without penalty, according to him, is meaningless. Since Christ removed the condemnation, the penalty of the law at the cross, the divine law devoid of its penalty could no longer exist in the Christian era. In the first place, McClain does not take into consideration the fact that the Ten Commandments generally do not specify any penalty. That was done in


2McClain quotes John Austin's three elements of law--command, obligation, and sanction, and Daniel Webster's statement "A law without a penalty is simply good advice" for his argument. See McClain, Law and Grace, 10-12.

3Ibid.

4It is a common fact that there are no penalty stipulations in the constitutional law.
related casuistic laws which state the offense more clearly and determine the proper penalty. In the second place, he failed to distinguish Christ's bearing of the condemnation as His penal substitution from the continuity of the law. Christ bore the curse that humans should have borne (Gal 3:13). Yet this fact cannot be the denial of the law itself, for the cause of this problem is sin, not the law. Christ takes the consequences of the transgression of the law, the wrath of God, the curse of sin, upon Himself (cf. Rom 8:3-4). Moreover, the affirmative passages of the law (Matt 5:17-19; Rom 3:20, 31; 7:7; 1 John 3:4; 5:4; etc.) lead most commentators to uphold the continuity of the Decalogue even after the crucifixion.

Aldrich has a view similar to McCJain's position. Yet Aldrich's is slightly different. According to him, the eternal moral laws were "embodied in a code of legislation by Moses with fitting penalties for every violation." And "under grace the same moral principles appear but in a setting of grace that might be paraphrased" as gracious suggestions for believers.¹ He, however, criticized the writers who spoke of the Decalogue as the "inexorable law of God" and urged him to separate its moral principles from the code,² for vindicating the Decalogue as unalterable would give the Seventh-day Adventists the advantage in the

¹Aldrich, Holding Fast to Grace, 76.
²Ibid., 69-70.
debate. Thus, he advises the supporters of the Decalogue to see it as a temporary institution. This appeal is curious when one considers the Decalogue as a true reflection of the nature of God Himself. It is a form of the moral law.¹ The Ten Commandments are the foundation of New Testament religion.² God codified a vertical moral norm, representing His character and the principles of His government, for the standard of man's right relationship (I-Thou relationship) with, and conduct toward, God³ and embodied a horizontal moral norm for the standard of human relationship.⁴ Admittedly, the moral law is the basis of the Ten Commandments, and the Decalogue itself means "the preservation of the Divine Voice."⁵ Then, the question arises, Did God give the Decalogue solely to Israel and the moral law, its abstracted kernel, to the church, excluding the Decalogue itself?

In connection with this question one needs to consider the philosophical term "moral law" and its

¹Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology, 114.


³The first four commandments of the Decalogue teach a vertical moral norm.

⁴The last six commandments of the Decalogue provide a horizontal moral norm.

relationship to the Decalogue. In a teleological sense the moral law is regarded as a rule for the attainment of good which every man seeks. It is commanded because it is good. This was the characteristic of Greek theories. On the other hand, in a juridical sense, it is the ultimate authoritative law of morality, or the law of the highest norm. In this system it is good because it is commanded. This became predominant in Christian times.¹ Moral law, thus, is the norm of morality, as the declaration of God's will which directs and binds all men, in every age and place, to their supreme duty to Him. Theologically "the Decalogue represents itself as moral law."² It should be distinguished from the ancient Greek and the modern theories of the natural moral law. Its apodictic form is without parallel in ancient oriental law except in the stipulations of the suzerainty treaties and "its content is

¹Norman Wilde, "Moral Law," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, (1916), 8:833. From the standpoint of the rational concept, Immanuel Kant, following the juridical concept of moral law in general, sees it as the idea of law which expresses the necessity of an action done from duty. See Edward Caird, The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1909), 2:159-168.

permeated with the spirit of the religion of Yahweh."¹
Because the Decalogue contains the essential principles of moral law, Dispensationalists attempt to separate the latter from the first and emphasize the permanent obligation of believers to the moral law. Yet it is an uncalled-for interpretation based on a philosophical premise. The thrust of the statements of Jesus Christ and Paul indicates clearly that they understand the Decalogue itself as the moral law by quoting from the Ten Words and by holding them up as the perfect code (Mark 10:19; 12:28; Rom 13:9).

Fairbairn equates the moral law with the Ten Commandments, a brief but comprehensive precept, and he states that the moral law always has two aspects—command and prohibition—like the Ten Commandments.² Even a Dispensationalist such as Hilgenberg admitted the Decalogue as being the moral law. Yet a problem arises when he rejects it as the guideline or direct obligation for the church.³ Without the moral law as the specified norm for his conduct, man is ethically and spiritually lost in an unstable life style.


²Fairbairn, The Revelation of Law, 87, 94; Kaiser also admits the moral law of the Ten Commandments and the double sides of command and prohibition in his Toward an Old Testament Theology, 114-115; Campbell equates the Decalogue with the moral law in Israel and the New Covenant, 43.

The Decalogue
for All Ages

Seven major reasons state why the Decalogue as moral law was not designed for Israel only, but that all mankind must be considered. At the same time, these reasons form the essential objections against the Dispensationalist argument for the temporariness of the Decalogue.

1. The first reason is its pre-existence before Sinai. The dynamic relationship of love and law was not promulgated at Sinai for the first time. Deep-rooted in the concept of natural law, Luther states that

we also want to discuss the Ten Commandments. For perhaps the Jews will also call the Ten Commandments the law of Moses, since they were given on Mount Sinai in the presence of none but Jews or children of Abraham, etc. You must reply: If the Ten Commandments are to be regarded as Moses' law, than Moses came far too late, and he also addressed himself to far too few people, because the Ten Commandments had spread over the whole world not only before Moses but even before Abraham and all the patriarchs. For even if a Moses had never appeared and Abraham had never been born, the Ten Commandments would have had to rule in all men from the very beginning, as they indeed did and still do.1

In an explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, Stump states:

The Ten Commandments are called the Moral Law, or more briefly the Law, and sometimes the Decalogue or the Ten Words. . . . The law of God was originally written in man's heart at creation. We call that law in the heart, Conscience.2

1Martin Luther, "Against the Sabbatarians," Luther's Work, 47:89.

2Joseph Stump, An Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism: A Handbook for the Catechical Class (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication House, 1907), 39. See also

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Fairbairn explains that the original standing of our first ancestors was under the bonds of moral obligation, and that they had the innate apprehension of all natural knowledge and power to remain under that system. The idea that the law was written is supported by explaining that when the Gentiles, having no revealed code of moral conduct such as the Jews possessed, did by nature the things contained in the law, the principles of the moral law, they showed the work of the law written in their hearts (Rom 2:14-15). "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4; cf. Rom 4:15; 3:20; 7:7). If so, we can deduce that there was law at the time of Adam's transgression. The transgression of Adam and Eve certainly covers the evil deeds of coveting and stealing the forbidden fruit. Cain's murder of his brother was a violation of a commandment. Kaiser specifies the existence of all Ten Commandments in the Genesis period in the unwritten form—in fact, written on hearts instead of stone: The first—"Get rid of the foreign gods" (35:2); the second—"Why did you steal my gods?" (31:39); the third—"I want you to swear by the Lord" (24:3); the fourth—"God blessed the seventh day and made it holy"

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Epitome of Rev. Dr. Erick Pontoppidan's Explanation of Martin Luther's Small Catechism, trans. Edmund Belfour (Chicago: John Anderson Publishing Co., 1907), 9. It states: "In the creation He wrote it [the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments] in men's hearts, and hence it is called the Law of nature."

(2:3); the fifth—"The days of mourning my father are near" (24:41); the sixth—"Where is your brother Abel?" (4:9); the seventh—"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (39:9); the eighth—"Why have you stolen my silver cup?" (44:4-7); the ninth—"[Joseph] came to me to make sport of me . . . but . . . he ran" (39:17); the tenth—"You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken: she is a married woman" (12:18; 20:3).¹

2. The second reason to believe in the permanence of the Decalogue is that it is quoted by Jesus and Paul in the NT. When the Pharisees complained that the disciples transgressed the traditions of the elders by eating with unwashed hands, Jesus Christ pointed out that His opponents virtually broke the fifth commandment (Mark 7:1-13). In reply to the question of the rich young ruler regarding the commandments he should keep, Jesus enumerated the horizontal moral norms for the ideal human relationship from the second table of the Decalogue (Mark 10:17-30).² Dispensationalists would reject these cases as proper evidences by arguing from the fact that they were related to the Jews who should obey the law. But Isa 56:5-6 clearly says the Sabbath observance is important both for the Jews and for

¹Kaiser, Toward the Old Testament Ethics, 82.

Gentile believers. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul mentions several commands of the second table of the Decalogue as fulfilled by love, the foundation of law (Rom 13:8-10). Here it is evident that a high place is given to the Decalogue.\(^1\) The specific illustration of the commandments here prevents making man stand on Nevin’s ethical relativism or subjectivism.\(^2\) If Witmer, a Dallas theologian, is correct, the recipients of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans were mostly Gentile believers with a small minority of Jews.\(^3\) The list of vices in Col 3:5-6, which refers to “fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desire, and covetousness (which is idolatry),” is based on the seventh (fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection) and the tenth (evil desire, covetousness) commandments interpreted in relation to the second commandment (idolatory).\(^4\) Paul also reiterated the importance of the fifth commandment,


\(^{2}\)For he suggested the right to decide the doubtful thing in love. See p. 190.


"the first commandment with a promise,"¹ in Eph (6:2) which teaches that Jewish and Gentile believers are one in Christ.² Eph 4:25-30 may summarize the seventh to the tenth commandments.³ Tuttle even admits that all Paul's examples are taken from the Decalogue.⁴ Thus, it is clear that Paul addressed the Decalogue even to Gentile believers, without drawing any distinction between them and Jewish believers.⁵ Another relevant paraphrased passage is 1 Tim 1:9-10, where the Apostle specifically follows the order of the Decalogue and transforms it into a Hellenistic

¹Harold W. Hoehner interprets the meaning of the phrase "the first" as being of primary importance for children. See his "Ephesians," BKC (NT), 642.

²The recipients of the Epistle are generally known as the churches in Asia and the Ephesians. As "aliens" and "strangers," they had no hope in the Messiah and were without the knowledge of the true God (Eph 2:12). But they became one with Jews (2:14) and were equally heirs to the promises for Jews. Unity is the theme of the Epistle (4:4).


⁵Regarding Paul's direct and indirect references to the commandments, see Myers, Grace and Torah, 76. Here Myers states that Paul is still "in the awe of the torah," pointing out his condemnation of images (Rom 1:23), the list of evils (Rom 1:29) among which are covetousness, murder, deceit, disobedience to parents, etc., and the illustration in one of arguments in support of his view of the law by referring to the commandments (Rom 2:22-23).
vice list (*Lasterkataloge*), presenting it as sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of God.¹

3. A third reason for the validity of the Decalogue in the church-age is that it is often restated in the NT. We have already observed some instances of these restatements in the second reason. Besides, James supports the priority of the moral law over the ceremonial law and equates "law" with the Decalogue, for he quotes the seventh and sixth commandment (2:8-11).² Vokes states on this matter: "The New Testament reflects the contemporary Jewish evaluation of the place of the Decalogue."³ Dispensationists contend that this phenomenon of its restatements in the NT means only conveyance of the moral principles which were abstracted from it. For instance, Aldrich asserts that they are simply gracious suggestions for believers.⁴ His logic is based on the premise of a dichotomy between the moral law and the Decalogue, which was unfamiliar to the NT writers. Thus, it seems to be an


³Ibid., 152.

⁴Aldrich, *Holding Fast to Grace*, 76.
ad hoc argument to disregard the solemnity of the moral law, the Decalogue. Actually, it is more reasonable for us to see the reiterative phenomena of the Decalogue as showing its continuation, its reinforcement, its reaffirmations or the illustrations of its binding importance for the church. Aldrich's assertion that the fourth commandment (Sabbath) is not reinstated in the NT is contrary to the examples of Jesus' and Paul's observance of it (Mark 2:27-28; Luke 4:16; Act 13:14, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4).¹ As Gerstner shows, in Mark 2:27-28, Christ actually affirmed that the Sabbath was established for mankind and for all time and that He actually bound His followers more tightly to the Sabbath.²

4. A fourth reason to support the continuous validity of the Decalogue for the church is that it was regarded as a higher form of law in the churches of the second century. These phenomena are found in some instances of the historical documents and the writings of the period. It is suggested that the Decalogue can be found in Pliny's letter on the Christians to Trajan (c. 112), which reports that the Christians in Bithynia "bound themselves by a solemn oath . . . never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it

¹Aldrich, Holding Fast to Grace, 68.

5. The fifth reason for seeing the continuity of the Decalogue in the church-age is inferred from the relationship between the new covenant and the law. As discussed in chapter 3, the new covenant was promised because of Israel's failure to meet the divine requirements. In this new covenant, God would put His laws in the minds of the people and write them on their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31-34). The promise of Jeremiah was reiterated in Hebrews (8:8-10). God's words show that the divine law was not to be merely an external standard of righteousness when it was given at Sinai. The act of faith was the crucial factor. The status and significance of the law are never depreciated in the new covenant. The law must be "a spring of action to guide and control human

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2Aristides, Apology 15,3-5.

3Grant, "The Decalogue in Early Christianity," 10.

4Ibid., 11-17.
conduct."¹ This is clearly shown by the fact that the Ten Commandments are the basis for both the old covenant and the new covenant. According to Jocz, the old covenant hinted at what now becomes a fact in the messianic age."² Kaiser also observes that the new covenant began with the old promises made to Abraham, Moses, and David and that its renewal perpetuated the previous promises all the more.³ In fact, the new covenant alludes to the changelessness of the law of the old covenant by writing it on the hearts instead of stone tablets.⁴ The Spirit is involved in the shaping of the law of God in the hearts of His people (Ezek 36:26-27; Rom 8:2; cf. 1 John 3:23-24). The Holy Spirit utilizes the divine law, which was impotent without Him, to grant to the believer the promised life of the law (Rom 8:4). The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of that life (Rom 8:2) which brings back to the law of God the power of life meant for it (Rom 7:10 with 2 Cor 3:6, 17).

6. The next reason for the perpetuity of the Decalogue is related to its unique origin as a document written


²Jocz, The Covenant, 244. Jocz emphasizes cohesion as a basic theological principle and points out that there can be no cohesion when there is a rift in revelation (see p. 245).


by God Himself, and its unique place in the sanctuary. The Decalogue is the kernel of the whole complex Mosaic legislation. Fairbairn observed that the Decalogue held a peculiar prominence in the Mosaic legislation because of being not only the first in order, and in themselves a regularly constructed whole, but the part which is represented as having been spoken directly from heaven in the audience of all the people, amid the most striking indications of the Divine presence and glory—the part, moreover, which was engraved—and, in this enduring form, the sole contents of that sacred chest or ark which became the center of the whole of the religious institutions of Judaism—the symbolic basis of God's throne in Israel.¹

Due to its pre-eminent importance, it could be emphatically rendered as "The Law, to which subsequent enactments stood in a dependent or ancillary relation."² This means that the commandments of the Law are fundamental to OT ethics.³


²Ibid., 83.

³For instance, the Psalmists emphasize the permanent value of the Law as structuring the whole of history and life. Prophets often uttered the moral truth of the Decalogue and connected national survival with moral rectitude to the law. They charged leaders as well as the people with violating and neglecting the law. Hosea related the knowledge of Yahweh to the law and rebuked Israel sternly (4:6). He declared, "They . . . trespassed against my law" (8:1). See Benton, "Spiritual and Moral Conditions of the Covenant People," 111-112; cf. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, 276-277. According to Shea, the clause "He shall confirm the covenant" (Dan 9:27) means "He would strengthen a covenant that already existed." Here Shea specifies the covenant as the Sinai covenant because of the verbal usage employed. Thus, the Messianic mission during the seventieth week was to strengthen the law of the Sinaitic covenant. See William Shea, "The Prophecy of
Hannah and McClain, dispensational writers, commented that the Decalogue is "the hub of all of Israel's religious and civil laws,"\(^1\) or "the very heart of the Sinaitic law."\(^2\) Yet it has more than this meaning. The facts of God's promulgation by voice, His direct inscription with His finger, and its placement in the ark of the covenant infer that it should be distinguished from the other parts of the Mosaic law. As Pink suggested, this distinction would mean its binding force on all men beyond the Israelites.\(^3\) Moreover, the ark of the covenant in the typical earthly sanctuary was the depository of the Decalogue.\(^4\) The Decalogue is designated as "two tables of testimony" (Exod 31:18), "the tables of the covenant" or "two tables of the covenant" (Deut 9:9, 11, 15). To contain the "testimony"


\(^1\)Hannah, "Exodus," BKC (OT), 139.

\(^2\)McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, 85.

\(^3\)Pink, The Law and the Saint, 11.

\(^4\)The term "ark" occurs about 200 times in the OT for the ark of the covenant. There are more than 22 designations of the ark, including "the ark of God," "the ark of testimony," and "the ark of the covenant." See G. Henton Davies, "Ark of the Covenant," ISBE (1962), 1:222. It was believed by all Jewish authorities that the ark was not in the second temple. This is a reason why the second temple was regarded as inferior to the first. The ark was a token of Yahweh's presence among His people. See Ford C. Ottman, The Unfolding of the Ages in the Revelation of John (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1967), 277-278.
was the chief purpose of the ark. Therefore, Kennedy and Ottman practically call it as "the ark of the Decalogue" or "the ark of the law."¹ The ark of the covenant and the Decalogue are connected so closely that the ark of the covenant without the Decalogue is meaningless. The Israelites could hardly think of this ark without becoming immediately conscious of the Decalogue (cf. Heb 9:4; Deut 10:2).

7. The last reason to consider the immutability of the Decalogue is that it exists until the last days in the book of Revelation. At the time of the seventh trumpet, the heavenly temple is opened and "the ark of his testament" is seen (Rev 11:15, 19) as the focal point of the vision. The ark which contains the law of the covenant tells us of the covenant-keeping God.² It also implies that "the law of God's covenant shall appear and issue forth over all the earth."³ If then, John's vision of the ark in the heavenly sanctuary argues eloquently that the Decalogue is to be continual until the last days of the


world and to be connected with the destiny of believers.¹ It is thus unwarranted to suppose that the Decalogue was abrogated in the church-age because of its incorporation or indivisibility with the Mosaic legislation. Dispensationalists, in fact, are on the track of antinomianism.²

The Law and the Sermon on the Mount

Most Dispensationalists take the position that the Sermon on the Mount is primarily reserved for Christ's messianic kingdom, which is yet to come. They insist that its interpretation belongs to the kingdom, while not excluding a present application to Christians.³ It is an official declaration of the ethical principles on which His messianic kingdom shall be founded. The original purpose of the Sermon was not for the age of the church, and the redeemed of the present age are not under the law as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, yet the NSRB admits that its teachings are applicable and profitable to the church in a secondary sense.⁴

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²Cf. Gerstner, A Primer on Dispensationalism, 30-31.
⁴NSRB, 997, n. 4 (Matt 5:3).
Once again Dispensationalist interpretation seems inadequate for at least four reasons:

1. No one disagrees when Dispensationalists interpret the Sermon on the Mount as the moral principles of the kingdom. But serious questions can be raised when they interpret the kingdom of heaven as one which is not yet to come or as the millennial kingdom in the eschatological context. It is to be noted that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven seem to be quite interchangeable in

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2See NSRB, 994, n. 3 (Matt 3:2). See also Walvoord, Matthew, 45-46; Ryrie, Basic Theology, 255-256; Unger, "Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven," Unger's Bible Dictionary (1960), 632; Chafer, The Bible Major Themes, 191.
the Gospels. In the discussion of the nature of His kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets forth its true character in contrast to that of the false ideas about the Messiah's kingdom in His days. The Sermon is often filled with the present tense of imperatives such as "rejoice," "swear not," "go," "give," and "take heed." Christ actually stresses the present validity of His teachings. For the believer who lives under grace, the blessings are present. He nowhere tells that His teachings were mainly related to the future. One must, therefore, conclude that Jesus referred not so much to His future kingdom of glory as to the present kingdom of divine grace.

1For instance, in Matthew, Jesus begins His public ministry with the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (4:17), but in Mark He announces that the kingdom of God has come near (1:15). The Matthean synonymous usage is found in a Lukan parallel regarding the Sermon on the Mount. The two expressions of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are parallel in Matt 5:3 and Luke 6:20. Also compare Matt 10:6-7 with Luke 9:2 and Matt 13:11 with Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10, etc. For a detailed discussion, see Ladd, Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God, 107-108. Of course, the NSRB admits the similarity or the synonymous use between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, with reservation of distinction of those two expressions. See 994, n. 3 (Matt 3:2). The Sermon on the Mount, for Dispensationalists, belongs to the ethic of the kingdom of heaven.

2. The Sermon must be seen in the contemporary context as a section of the Gospel of Matthew, not a simple compendium of Christ's ethical teaching.1 Davies suggests that the Sermon was written to solve the relationship between the law of Moses and the teaching of Jesus for the Palestinian church. He observes that the Sermon presents the "Messianic Torah" of Jesus which shows "a new interpretation of the Old Law" that is "authoritative in a new way (7:28)."2 Dealing with the emerging Gnosticism and sectarian Essenism, Davies especially compares the Sermon with contemporary developments in Pharisaism that culminated at Jamnia. The existence of an external, liturgical form of prayer among the society of Jamnia led the Matthean Church to have a parallel movement. The Sermon was, therefore, written as "the Christian answer to Jamnia. . . . a kind of Christian, mishnaic counterpart to the formulation taking place there."3 This suggestion does not encompass all the known facts about the Sermon. According


2W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount, 107.

3Ibid., 315. Likewise, Georg Strecker believes that the Sermon comes as an epiphany through the mountain setting (Matt 5:1) and represents Jesus' normative interpretation of the law that comes as the "Messianic Torah" of or the entrance requirements for the kingdom, respectively. See his Die Bergpredigt: Ein exegetischer Kommentar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984), 27, 57, 181-185.
to Scripture, Jesus had already spoken the Sermon on the Mount long before Jamnia and He repeated parts of it upon various occasions later in His ministry.¹ But I admit that Matthew perhaps faced the similar setting that Davies described and that there exists the possibility of the Sermon in Matthew being a compilation of sermons or sayings of the Lord. From this fact, Joachim Jeremias concludes that the Sermon is "a grouping together of separate sayings of Jesus which were originally spoken on different occasions."² Walvoord refutes the idea of a collection of Jesus' various sayings but admits its repetitions many times in explaining the Lukan Sermon.³ The gospels were written in the church-age in response to needs and not as mere story-telling.⁴ In the context of Matthew's gospel, Davies attempts to seek an appropriate setting of the Sermon such as Jewish Messianic expectations, contemporary Judaism, the early church, and the ministry of Jesus.⁵ The

¹Notice the fact that the Sermon is scattered throughout the Gospel of Luke.


³Matthew, 43.


Sermon sets forth the character of Christianity in contrast to that of the Judaism of Jesus' day.¹ This historical exegesis concurs with the idea that the Sermon was written for applicability and practicability to the church. It is impossible to apply the sermon exclusively to the millennial age in which the Lord's earthly rule is established, because the world of the Sermon is a real and sinful world.²

3. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are found in the other books of the NT, in which the Gentiles were also regarded as the audience of the message. The dispensational argument that the hearers of the Sermon were only Jewish believers³ does not take this into consideration. In Luke the addressees of the Sermon were three groups of people—the apostles, the wider group of Christ's disciples who had committed themselves to Him, and the

¹After discussing the ethical teaching of Jesus in the context of the contemporary Jewish religious and ethical teachings, Bennett Harvie Branscomb concludes that Jesus ignored and rejected some specific precepts of the law when they conflicted with the basic moral principles of the Torah and that He prepared the way for the religion of Israel to become universal and international in character by freeing the ethical teaching from its ethnic features. See his Jesus and the Law of Moses (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1930), 264, 271.

²In the Sermon we face the world of the weak and poor, tax collectors, unjust rulers, hypocrites, thieves, and false teachers and prophets.

still wider group of people who were not committed to Him (6:17-20). People came even from Tyre and Sidon, which seems to be a symbol of heathenism (cf. 10:13-14). The disciples and the crowds, including the heathen, were regarded as the audience of the Sermon. If one lists the teachings of the Sermon and reads the Epistles, one finds the same ethics in both.

4. The principles of the Sermon on the Mount appear to be a reaffirming by Christ of Israel's covenant according to His messianic role in the prophecy of Dan 9:27: "He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven, . . ." Here the use of the verb "to confirm" implies that this covenant was already in existence. Isa 42:21 also refers to Christ's magnifying the tórah. Shea suggests that Christ amplified and strengthened some commandments from the old covenant instead of abrogating them. Furthermore, He added to them His new commandments (Matt 6:19-7:11). Shea comments on the relationship between the Sinaitic covenant and the Sermon as follows:

This kind of presentation is thoroughly covenantal in character. Various NT scholars have noted the rela-


2In the Lukan Sermon it is noticeable that the address varies constantly between the second person plural and singular.

3For instance, compare Matt 5:14 with Eph 5:8; Matt 5:43 with Rom 12:20; Matt 7:1 with Rom 14:13, etc.
tionship between Moses' covenant on Mount Sinai and Jesus' covenant on the Mount of Blessing. This exposition of the covenant by Jesus at the beginning of His ministry provides the most direct connection between His time and the circumstances predicted here in [Daniel] 9:27.1

In this sense, the Sermon on the Mount is related to the law.2 However, the teachings of Christ in the Sermon are not intended to renew a legal yoke upon His followers. Jesus Christ tells it with the specific purpose of removing misconceptions and distortions of the law and the kingdom among His people. He was not the opponent of Mosaic law, but He was in strong opposition to the externalism of Pharisaism and to the legalistic interpretation of the law.3 The sight of great multitudes of people filled His heart with sympathy, a desire to help them in their needs (cf. Matt 9:36; 14:14; etc.). So also here in Matt 5:1. Jesus imparted comfort and encouragement

1Shea, "The Prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27," 96. William D. Davies regards the Sermon as the Messianic Torah, that is, as the normative interpretation of the law. Yet Jesus inaugurated a new Torah which transcends and, in some respect, even annulled the Old Law. Christian Origins and Judaism (London: Darton, Langman & Todd, 1962), 34. Davies did not connect the Sermon with the messianic prophecy as Shea did.

2After discussing three attempts of perfectionistic, salvation-tutoring and interim-ethical solutions that regard the Sermon as law, Jeremias refutes the idea that the Sermon is not law, but gospel. See his The Sermon on the Mount, 1-35.

to the distressed people and His followers for new life and growth in His grace.¹ The audience was composed largely of peasants and fishermen including the Gentiles. In Matthew the context suggests that a crowd was present, but the teaching on the nature of His kingdom was intended for His disciples who had left everything and had followed Him (4:21-22).² In the Lukan text, the Sermon appears after the appointment and ordination of the Twelve (6:12-49). It is noticeable that Jesus demands decision and commitment as the way of discipleship in the concluding part of the Sermon (Matt 7:13-27). Guelich calls attention to discipleship as follows:

The Sermon, above all, summons the "disciple" to a new relationship with God and others that issues in conduct befitting the age of salvation . . . made possible in this age through the presence of God's eschatological rule in Jesus Messiah, Son of God.³

It is natural, therefore, in the Sermon that grace is presupposed prior to the command just as in the Sinaitic covenant.


³Guelich, "Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount," 129.
Dispensationalists admit that Jesus paid full respect to the Mosaic law and declared that He had not come to destroy it or replace it, but to fulfill it. Moreover, they understand that Christ set forth "the perfect standard of righteousness demanded by the law." But this cannot be fulfilled in this church-age. The lessons and principles of the Sermon are applicable only to the church in a secondary sense. Its primary fulfillment is expected only in the future Messianic kingdom. This dualistic approach comes from Dispensationalists' adherence to literalism. They are so caught in dogmatic literalism that they underestimate or ignore the christological and ecclesiological fulfillments of Israel's covenant. Thus, they throw the literally impossible obedience to the laws of the Sermon in the present time to the millennial age. Responsible exegesis, however, recognizes that the foundation principles of the kingdom of God in the Sermon are intended for all peoples and all times, because the messages of the

1Ryrie, Basic Theology, 88; Walvoord, Matthew, 48.
2NSRB, 997, n. 4 (Matt 5:3).
3Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 107-108.
4LaRondelle emphasizes the christological-ecclesiological interpretation of Israel's covenants as one of the most important results of the gospel hermeneutic. The Israel of God in Prophecy, 219.
Sermon are related to the poor, the mourner, the weak, and the persecuted in their ordinary lives. In short, the "secondary" application of Dispensationalism must be the primary one.

In Matt 5:17-19, Matthew the evangelist expresses the high view of the Tôrâh, the belief in the validity of the commandments for the age of the church. Because Yahweh's gift is perfect, the Tôrâh of the Messiah could not be but perfect and unchangeable. It is impossible that its primary application would ever cease or be forgotten for many centuries in history. Many facts confirm the validity of this view.

The phrase "I have come" in vs. 17 seems to express the connotative meaning of "divine sending," with Messianic overtones. Presenting Himself as the authoritative declarer of truth in the setting of the Sermon, in the role of an eschatological teacher, Jesus said He did not come

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1The expressions "I have come" or "the Son of Man came" from the mouth of Jesus Christ followed by a statement of purpose are most characteristic of Matthew and the Gospel of John: i.e., Matt 9:13; 10:34-35; 18:11; 20:28; John 5:43; 7:28; 9:39; 10:10; 12:46-47; 16:28.

2There were similar expectations of the messianic teachers or eschatological revealer of truth such as "the Elect One" who shall arise in contemporary Judaism (1 Enoch 51:1-3) and "the Teacher of Righteousness" who "expounds the law aright" of the Qumran community in "Habakkuk Commentary" 1:4, The Dead Sea Scriptures, ed. & trans. T. H. Gaster (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 318. These expectations would contribute to leading Jesus's followers and the readers of Matthew's Gospel to perceive Messianic, eschatological significance in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, Jesus was perceived by the
to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them. Here the phrase "the law and prophets" seems to be an idiomatic expression meaning "Scriptures" without confusing the two ideas "law" and "prophet." The key expression in vs. 17 is the verb plérōsai, "to fulfill." Its meaning in this verse has been variously interpreted with five possible meanings—

1. to do, to carry out;
2. to establish, to validate;
3. to fulfill prophecy;
4. to people as a prophet in the Gospels (Matt 13:57; 16:14; 21:11, 46; Mark 6:4; Luke 7:16; John 4:19; 6:14, etc.). This recalls Moses' and Isaiah's prophecies (Deut 18:15; Isa 42:4). The proper attitude to a prophet is to listen to his teachings.


reveal the true meaning, to give concise and final interpretation;\textsuperscript{1} or (5) to bring to full expression, to complete.\textsuperscript{2} As Anderson stated, these are not mutually exclusive and all may apply.\textsuperscript{3} But, considering the usages of "the law and the prophets"\textsuperscript{4} and pléroo,\textsuperscript{5} and the

\textsuperscript{1}Blair, Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, 118. Robert Banks admits that the most widespread interpretation of plérosai is "setting out the true meaning (spirit, intention, basic principles) of the law so as to 'express (complete, perfect)' its full significance." Yet he thinks this a misunderstanding of the term. See "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," JBL 93 (February 1974): 229.

\textsuperscript{2}W. D. Davies argues for this idea, since Matthew imparts the meaning that Jesus has fulfilled the old law in bringing what amounts to new demands, and thus He expanded the law to its full dimension by radicalizing it. See his Christian Origins and Judaism, 33, 45. Branscomb rejects this meaning on the reasons that it weakens the balanced contrast within the two clauses in vs. 17, does not harmonize with the following vs. 18, and would involve Jesus adding to the Torah, which, for him, is difficult to see. Jesus and Law of Moses, 227.


\textsuperscript{4}For examples, the Golden Rule (Matt 7:12) can be neither a completing of the law and the prophets, nor an adding to it so as to make up for any lack. Jesus shows that the two love commandments (Matt 22:37–40) are embodied in the law and the prophets.

\textsuperscript{5}This term occurs sixteen times in Matthew, twelve of which are in the passive voice involving the fulfillment of types and prophecies, and twice with the meaning of "to fill up" completely a specific measure or an object. The remaining cases, both in the same active form, are in Matt 5:17 and 3:15. In the phrase to "fulfill all righteousness (3:15), Jesus clearly intends "to perform," "to carry out." This seems to be the basic meaning of its use in 5:17.
antitheses of Matt 5:21-48, it is unmistakably clear that it is not used here to mean to change, annul, or radically reinterpret the law, because this would lead to a contradiction of what Jesus said.

Moreover, since "heaven and earth," one of the key expressions in vs. 18, conveys the predominant view of "never" or until the end of the present age and the inauguration of the eschatological Messianic age, the law would be unshakably validated for the present church-age. Jesus' attitude toward the law was that of profound reverence, of a moral and spiritual conformity to it, and a completion of its vital principles in a new spiritual economy. His teaching is concerned with the continued,

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1Jesus' antitheses can be understood "to reveal the true meaning," "to show deepest intent." It does not necessarily convey that Jesus issues a precept on a new Torah, but indicates a principle already implicit in "the law and the prophets."


unchanged authority of the unmodified OT law during the church-age.

The Dispensationalist-kingdom approach in understanding of the Sermon of the Mount is based on the distinction between Israel and the church, and between grace and law. Yet one must be careful to remember that the Gospel of Matthew was written in the church-age. The Sermon on the Mount anticipates the coming of the kingdom. There, however, is not the "slightest hint that it is an ethic for the kingdom only."\(^1\) It teaches believers regarding a time of future entrance into the kingdom (Matt 5:20; 7:21), future rewards (Matt 5:12, 19, 46; Matt 6:1-6, 18), necessity of prayer for the coming of the kingdom (Matt 6:10), a time of judgment before the establishment of the kingdom (Matt 7:19-23), a time of persecution and false prophets prior to the kingdom (Matt 5:11-12; 7:15-18). Therefore, it is pertinent for today, and the Christians must find its primary and full interpretation and application in their daily lives. It is meaningless to distinguish between the primary and secondary applications or between interpretation and application.

**The Deeper Harmony of Law and Grace**

Dispensationalists postulate a functional contrast between law and grace. Thus, according to them, the law is

\(^1\)Martin, "Dispensational Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount," 40.
no longer obligatory. Is their argument for this anti­
thetic relationship a full reflection of the biblical
understanding?

Many articles and books have dealt with the rela­
tion between law and gospel.\(^1\) It is significant to con­
sider the fact that both law and grace originate from the
same holy God. As already noted, Dispensationalist grace
is an expression of divine love.\(^2\) As observed earlier, the
seemingly restrictive law is a most perfect expression of
His love for His people. Like God, "the law of God is
perfect" (Ps 19:7). "The law is holy, and the commandments
are holy and righteous and good" (Rom 7:12). Thus, the law

\(^1\) Forde deals with the development of the law-gospel
debate through nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologi­
cal literature and suggests that the law-gospel debate
would be resolved somewhat by an appreciation of the
eschatological proclamation of the Bible. The Law-Gospel
Debate, 233. The book Gesetz und Evangelium: Beiträge zur
gegenwärtigen theologischen Diskussion, eds. Ernst Kinder
and Klaus Haendler (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buch­
gesellschaft, 1968) contains eighteen articles. Karl
Barth, in his essay entitled "Evangelium und Gesetz"
(1935), regards law as the form of the gospel, the form of
the eschatological address (1-41). He stresses the unity
between gospel and law. Forde considers that the modern
dialogue and debate on the issue began with this essay.
Werner Elert, one of Barth's outspoken opponents, criti­
cizes Barth's assertion that God's word to us is itself
grace, regardless of what God says. To Elert this is a
fundamental error which could only result in a weakening of
both the law and the gospel. See his Law and Gospel,
Social Ethics series 16, trans. Edward H. Schroeder
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 1-48. See also Helmut
Thielicke, Theological Ethics, vol. 1, Foundation, ed.
94-125.

\(^2\) See 214; NSRB, 1124, n. 1 (John 1:17).
of Yahweh is the written transcript of His character\(^1\) and is explained in terms of love by Jesus and the NT writers. Since law and grace have the same source, one must infer that the dispensational presentation of the law's relationship to grace presupposes a mutually contradictory element in God's nature. Dumbrell observes that law in Exod 19-20 "operated fully within the context of grace."\(^2\) Even Hilgenberg, a Dispensationalist, shows that the problem at Sinai was not the law.\(^3\) Clearly, grace preceded the law in the context of the Sinaitic covenant. The narration concerning the foundational events, which began with the Exodus and climaxed in the Sinaitic covenant, does not show an antithetical relationship of law and grace but their perfect harmony. The mercy seat on the top of the tables of the law in the ark of the covenant testifies to a harmonious coexistence of grace and law.\(^4\) Kreider makes this observation:

\(^1\)John Calvin considers the law as an expression of the will of God (\textit{Inst.}, 1.17.2) or the character of God (\textit{Inst.}, 2.8.51). Similarly, John Wesley regards the law of God as "a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature." \textit{The Works of Rev. John Wesley}, ed. John Emory (New York: Hunt & Eaton, n.d.), 1:309.


\(^3\)Hilgenberg, "The Law of Moses," 259.

\(^4\)Karl Barth states, "The law is in the gospel as the tablets from Sinai were in the ark" in "Gospel and Law," \textit{Community, State and Church: Three Essays} (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1960), 80.
The law was a miraculous fusion of two things that some people today see as irreconcilable—God's radical grace and a socially radical lifestyle. God's "holy nation" would be a . . . community living by grace.¹

This agrees with Motyer, who regards law and grace as the two pillars of true biblical religion.² O. Palmer Robertson sees the law of God itself as the embodiment of His grace.³ Since grace preceded the law in the context of the Sinaitic covenant, the law given through Moses was not a system of merit whereby Israel sought to earn divine favor but a pattern of life given to the redeemed so that they might know how to live for His glory. The law at Sinai was a framework for their holy living.⁴ Obedience to the law was to the participants in the covenant a condition for receiving the divine promises and the fruit of faith, even in the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants.⁵

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⁴Kreider, Journey towards Holiness, 69; Myers states that the gift of Torah was for "the maintenance of their relationship" with Yahweh in Grace and Torah, 16.

⁵See Toews, "Some Theses toward a Theology of Law in the New Testament," 46; Kaiser, Toward Old Testament Ethics, 78; see also in this chapter the conditionality of the so-called promissory covenants.

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The antithesis in biblical theology between law and gospel is generally the result of a questionable reading of Pauline texts. Daniel P. Fuller argues that Paul understood a continuum between gospel and law, a balance of grace and law. He chose two Pauline texts (Rom 10:5-8; Gal 3:10-12) as the center of critique and as the basis of his hermeneutical contention, for covenant theology and Dispensationalism find the basis of the antithetical model of law and gospel from these texts. Law is not a mere norm under both Testaments. As Daniel Augsburger concluded in his dissertation, every command in the Bible should be understood as "a Father's long-suffering and His patient instruction" and as an evidence of the Father's concern for man's happiness. Augsburger further gives us an impressive insight:

The law does not stand as a barrier between man and God but as a bond. Law kills, it is true, but accidentally; not because of its own nature but because of the nature of sinful men. Biblical language on the law, therefore, must always be understood in function of the people to whom it is applied. . . . For the Christian

1 Fuller regards covenant theology and Dispensationalism as having common inability to portray the unity of the Bible message in dealing with law and gospel. According to him, covenant theology generally affirms unity of law and gospel but nevertheless contrasts Mosaic law, as a second way of salvation, with the way of faith promised in the old covenant and fulfilled in the new covenant. On the contrary, Dispensationalism rejects the unity of law and gospel and postulates a soteriological dualism—an earthly way of salvation for Jews and a heavenly salvation for Christians. See Gospel and Law, 18-64.

2 Augsburger, Calvin and the Mosaic Law, 466-467.
it is "the whole law," a covenant that includes command, promise and grace.\(^1\)

Although grace in the Scriptures is the way of salvation possible for us, it cannot be fully comprehended without the understanding of its proper relationship to the law. The right relationship between law and grace is essential to a true appreciation of the gospel, as we are reminded by Murray:

We are compelled therefore to recognize that the subject of law and grace is not simply concerned with the antithesis that there is between law and grace, but also with law as that which makes grace necessary and with grace as establishing and confirming law. It is not only the doctrine of grace that must be jealously guarded against distortion by the works of the law, but it is also the doctrine of the law that must be preserved against the distortions of a spurious concept of grace.\(^2\)

Grace is God's method of salvation. The law is related to the standard of righteousness (cf. Ps 119:172). It must be kept not as a means of salvation but as the fruit of conversion (cf. Ps 40:8; Heb 8:10). Obedience to the law is a matter of maintaining the covenant relationship with God (cf. Lev 18:2-4; Deut 4:13-14, 40; 12:28; John 14:15, etc.). There has never been a time when men were saved by law. Every command in the Scriptures may be considered a concealed promise of blessing (Lev 26:3-10; Deut 28:1-12). Yahweh's demands are His enablings. William M. Arnett illustrates this from the necessity of the new birth (John

\(^1\)Ibid., 467.

\(^2\)Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 182.
3:7), the divine provision that follows (John 3:14), the command to pursue holiness or sanctification (Heb 12:14), and the redemptive provision (Heb 13:12) for the realization of holiness in heart and life.1

The proper function of law has always been to convince of sin (Rom 3:20), bringing man to a sense of his utter helplessness and, consequently, of the personal need of a Savior (cf. Rom 3:28; Gal 2:21; 3:21, 24). While upholding this use of the law, the NT also maintains the so-called third use of the law2 as a standard of right and wrong and of God's righteousness. Law and grace form a dynamic unity. Kubo explains:

It is not enough to see that law is opposed to grace as a method of salvation; we must also understand that law makes grace necessary, and grace upholds and establishes the law.3


2The threefold use of the law includes the "usus elenchticus (theologicus)" which condemns man for his unrighteousness, "usus politicus," which restrains wickedness, and "usus in renatis." For Luther and Melanchthon "the usus elenchticus" is the second use of the law, with "the usus politicus" being first. They believed that this use of the law was the proper and principal use of the law. "Usus in renatis" means the use of the law for those who are regenerated. This third use of the law is the principal function of the law for Calvin (Inst 2.7.12). See I. John Hesselink, "Luther and Calvin on Law and Gospel in Their Galatians Commentaries," RR 37 (Winter 1984): 69-70. Regarding Calvin's threefold use of the law, see Augsburger, "Calvin and the Mosaic Law," 96-100; I. John Hesselink, "Calvin's Concept and Use of the Law," (Th.D. dissertation, Basel University, 1961).

The relationship of law and grace is complementary and synthetic, not antithetical or antagonistic.\(^1\) They are like the two sides of the same coin or "the two halves of a perfect sphere."\(^2\) The sinner apart from Christ stands under the condemnation of the law. When the repentant sinner comes to Christ, God forgives him by His grace. Law in this sense makes grace indispensable. Grace is needed also to obey the law. Faith in the love of God is the basis of justification, and faith that works by love establishes the law and becomes the motive for sanctification. After basing his position on the unity of the people of God in such a way that there remains no distinct place and purpose between the nation of Israel and the church, and in the fact that the term "Israel" is used for the total people of God including Jews and Gentiles, Heppenstall observes: "The Bible knows of no distinction between law and grace in the matter of the saved."\(^3\) For Calvin, law and gospel have unity of substance but are distinguished by their forms. Thus, he states: "Where the whole law is concerned the

\(^1\)This is parallel to the fact that the Old and the New Testaments are wholly complementary, not antithetical or antagonistic.

\(^2\)Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant*, 40.

gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation."\(^1\)

For Wesley there is the fundamental and perfect harmony and agreement between law and gospel as two sides of the same coin. There is no adversary relation between them, neither does one supersede the other. He states:

> There is, therefore, the closest connection that can be conceived, between the law and the gospel. On the one hand, the law continually makes way for, and points us to, the gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the law. The law, for instance, requires us to love God, to love our neighbour, to be meek, humble, or holy. We feel that we are not sufficient for these things; yea, that "with man this is impossible." But we see a promise of God, to give us that love, and to make us humble, meek, and holy. We lay hold of this gospel, of these glad tidings; it is done unto us according to our faith; and "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us," through faith which is in Christ Jesus.\(^2\)

Concerning the spiritual unity of law and grace, Timothy L. Smith also asserts that "the law is to be kept by divine grace . . . fulfilled by the love of God . . . that can only be poured into our hearts by the hallowing Spirit."\(^3\)

The inseparable correlation exists between law and gospel. The gospel is embodied in the law, and the law is unfolded in the gospel. The gospel is the fragrant blossom and fruit which it bears, and the law is its root. No man can rightly present one without the other.

\(^1\)Calvin, *Inst.* 2.9.4.


Paul considers the law and its ethical demand under God's saving work through the Spirit. In the Pauline paraenesis an imperative is hidden within the gracious indicative of salvation. Paul's understanding of the law is patterned after the framework in which Yahweh placed His grace as a foreword to the law in the Sinaitic covenant. As Kaiser pointed out, "grace is always the soil in which the law must take root."1 From this perspective "the law regains its original divine intention and becomes a promise of the new, eschatological obedience."2 Perhaps Barth is correct in suggesting that "the law is nothing else than the necessary form of the gospel."3 The promises and the commandments are essential to the Christian life. Thus, Bright declares that to accept the one aspect, ignoring the other aspect, would be to sink into complacency or a self-righteous legalism.4 It is, therefore, difficult to believe the dispensational antithetical position.5

1Kaiser, Toward Old Testament Ethics, 78.
3Barth, Community, State and Church, 80.
4Bright, Covenant and Promise, 198.
5Luther's dialectical manner on this matter differs from the dispensational view, for the Lutherans do not reject the Decalogue. Cf. LW, 26.327; Walther, The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel; Rudolf Karl Bultmann admits a dialectic or paradoxical character of the law—freedom from its demand and obligation to it in Theology of the New Testament, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York:...
Problematic Texts

Now we need to examine some problematic texts which Dispensationalists use as their argument for the antithetical relationship between law and grace.

John 1:17

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (NIV). This is one of the texts which Dispensationalists mention to prove the antithetical relationship between law and gospel.¹ From this text the NSRB asserts that "grace is set in contrast to law."² This text, however, can be interpreted from the covenant background, particularly the content of Exod 33-34. The phrase plérēs karitos kai alētheias in vs. 14 can be considered equivalent to the phrase rab ḥesed wē'emet in Exod 34:6.³ Hooker bases the reason of this echo on "an

¹See pp. 98, 212-214.
²NSRB, 1124, n. 1 (John 1:17).
³Antony Hanson, "John 1:14-18 and Exodus XXXIV," NTS 23 (1976): 90-101. Hanson here sums up the history of the interpretation by connecting the parallel passages between John and Exodus; see also Charles H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Univer-
immediate and obvious link between the logos and the idea of tórah, God's word which was itself symbolized by light and life."¹ That context suggests that the divine revelation, full of grace and truth, has been continuous since the revelation of God at Sinai, culminating in the revelation in the incarnate logos. John, therefore, does not intend to contrast the Sinai event with the incarnation of the Word but to establish a continuity. He is not transforming a written document but making manifest the grace that was at the root of the law. Rather, he contrasts "the enduring love shown in the law with the supreme example of enduring love shown in Jesus."² Furthermore, he resolves the tension between Israel's commission given at Sinai and the experiences of their failure to establish their own righteousness based on works in the subsequent ages. The law remained law for the Jews. Thus, he shows the contrast between the Logos and the Rabbinical speculation concerning the Torah, between the traditional Jewish perverted view of law and the law


stemming from Sinai in the Johannine prologue. It was God who had spoken the law through Moses. Now He appeared in person to affirm the same great eternal truths and to restore them to their original feature from its perversion by man. As Dumbrell argues, the underlying context of our Johannine text does not intend to show the contrast of law and grace, but rather the parallel between the Sinaitic theophany for Israel in Exod 19-20 and the divine reappearance in Jesus.

Romans 6:14

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (KJV). Dispensationalists also contend for an antithetical contrast between law and grace in the phrases "under the law" and "under grace" (Rom 6:14), so that the believers are not under the law as a rule of life and free from its domination. They fail, however, to give enough attention to the first part of the verse, which says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you." Paul is here contrasting

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2Ibid., 36-37.

3McClain, Law and Grace, 42-49; DeHaan, Law or Grace, 130; Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 115, 119.

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existence under the dominion of sin with life under grace.\(^1\) Law cannot put an end to sin. Its role is to reveal it. Living "under the law" in this verse clearly equals a life in which the dominion of sin is continually revealed by the law.\(^2\) Consequently, "under the law" cannot mean living in obedience to law as a rule of life. Rather, it means that Christians are not under the law as a way of salvation.\(^3\) This "under the law" experience is possible for all men in all ages. It does not belong to a specific period of limited revelation before Christ (see Gal 4:21; Rom 7:1-12), as Dispensationalists argued. This understanding is in harmony with the immediate following verse, saying, "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid" (vs. 15). Paul rejects the life of indulgence in grace since grace gives no licence to sin.

Romans 10:4-5

"For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified. Moses writes that the man who..."


\(^2\)For Murray, to be 'under law' is to be under the dominion of sin or in bondage to sin; to be 'under grace' is to be liberated from that dominion. Principles of Conduct, 184-187.

who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it" (RSV). Dispensationalists understand the phrase "the end of the law" as conveying the meaning of the termination of the law. They find in Rom 10:4-5 a reason of the contrast between law and grace.

Rom 10:4 has received considerable attention. Some commentators such as Heinrich A. W. Meyer and Ernest Käsemann understand Christ as the termination or abolition of the law. It is to be noted, however, that the attempt to connect telos nomou with the termination of the law in this text is not convincing for everyone. Some writers,

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2Witmer, "Romans," 480; DeHaan, Galatians, 61-62, 79; Gaebelein, Gaebelein's Concise Commentary, 916.


5Käsemann, Commentary on Romans, 283. Here he interprets that law and gospel are mutually exclusive antithesis.

for instance, Karl Barth¹⁴, F. Godet,¹⁵ and C. E. B. Cranfield,¹⁶ claim that Paul refers to the Christ as the "goal" of the law.⁴ Some even take Rom 10:4 to refer to the end of legalism or Jewish misuse of the law.⁵ Longenecker considers nomos as the end of the law in its connection with righteousness.⁶ Because of the Jews' perversion of the law as the means of establishing their righteousness by their own attempts at legalistic obedience


³Cranfield, The Epistle to the Romans, 2:516-519.


(cf. Rom 9:31-32), Christ came to bring this misuse to an end. Christ was the teleological fulfillment of the law. The Jews missed the central fact of the law. Paul's use of telos nomou here refers to the "goal" or "purpose" of the law as revelation, just as the word "end" of our faith in 1 Pet 1:9. In this sense, the dispensational view of "cessation" of the law in this text is disconnected from the immediate context.

In his comprehensive study of the meaning of the word telos in Rom 10:4, Badenas shows that the early church and the Reformers understood this text as conveying a prophetic as well as purposive signification, but, after the Reformation era, the terminal, temporal, and antinomian interpretations have prevailed with the rise of liberal theology and biblical criticism. Furthermore, he suggests that telos generally indicates purpose or outcome, not termination when it is used with a genitive, and that it, therefore, designates the object or fulfillment of law in the passage. In this teleological relationship between Christ and the law, he considers the word telos as the culminating point in the immediate context of the text within the larger context of Rom 9-11. One main concern of

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1 Fuller, Gospel and Law, 86-87.


3 Ibid., 121-230.
Paul in the text, Badenas thinks, is to prove that the Torah leads to the gospel.¹

Fuller understands that the law of Moses itself always had demanded faith with obedience, and that the statement of Rom 10:4 is directed against Jewish misuse of the law as connoted in Phil 3:9, whereas "law" is used to represent the common misinterpretation of Moses by the Jews. He, therefore, eliminates the use of Rom 10:5-8 as an objection to the view of law-gospel continuum. According to him, Paul is not using the term "law" to represent the legalistic misunderstanding of the law in Rom 10:5, which is quoted from Lev 18:5, but rather "the intended meaning which the word had in its original context." Therefore, the "righteousness of law" and "righteousness of faith" phrases are, in fact, identical in the passage and they show the continuum.²

Criticizing Fuller's position, Strickland recently pointed out that Fuller did not investigate the linguistic data for an accurate understanding of Paul's use of telos and that some scholarly works support the concept of "cessation" of that word.³ Yet, as noted already, Badenas gives a helpful answer to this question in his study of the

¹Ibid., 231-378.
²Fuller, Gospel and Law, 66-88.
use of telos in biblical and cognitive literature.\textsuperscript{1} As appears from Kaiser's address, Paul quotes Lev 18:5 and Deut 30:11-14 in order to show Christ, the center of the law, to the Jew who perverted the law.\textsuperscript{2} These two Mosaic passages are not antithetical, for "the contrast is still between 'their own righteousness' and the righteousness of God which Moses describes in Leviticus and Deuteronomy and which Paul here is describing and preaching."\textsuperscript{3} Thus, we cannot but regard the dispensational attempt to seek the temporality of the law from this text as overlooking the correct meaning of telos and the biblical context.

Galatians 3:10-12

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. . . . "Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them." Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live"; but the law does not rest on faith, for "He who does them shall live by them" (RSV).

Based on this text, Dispensationalists often assert the contrast between the Mosaic law and gospel, the cessation of the Mosaic law in the church-age,\textsuperscript{4} or the mutual


\textsuperscript{2}Kaiser, "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul," 26-27.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{4}Strickland, "Preunderstanding and Daniel Fuller's Law-Gospel Continuum,:" 193; idem, "A Critical Analysis of Daniel Fuller's Gospel and Law Concept," 163; DeHaan,
exclusion between law and faith. They understand in this
text that one who tries to achieve righteousness by obeying
the law is destined to failure and is under the curse of
God because an uninterrupted, unbroken obedience to the
entire law of God is impossible.

Of course, Paul is discussing in Gal 3 the useless
experience of the Galatians in trying to keep the law as a
method of salvation. It is Paul's purpose to show that
both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith in Christ who has
been historically revealed as the Savior. Paul, however,
does not contrast the righteousness of law and the
righteousness of faith, for they came from the same God
and, therefore, they are in a continuum. Rather, he
presents the antithesis between faith and the Pharisaic
misunderstanding of the law. This is implicitly expressed
in the expressions of "they who are of faith" (3:9) and
"for as many as are of the works of the law" (3:10), which
designates legalism. If so, Paul is drawing upon the

Galatians, 99-106.

1Campbell, "Galatians," 598.

2Strickland, "Preunderstanding and Daniel Fuller's
Law-Gospel Continuum," 188; DeHaan, Galatians, 104-105.

3Fuller, Gospel and Law, 88-89; Cranfield, "St.

(1964): 55; Daniel P. Fuller, "Paul and 'the Works of the
955.
Jewish way of understanding Deut 27:26. This seems to be the focus in the text. Fuller claims that the reason for the curse in Gal 3:10 is a legalistic adherence to the law.\(^1\) Thus, Paul here does not directly intend to refute the idea of the law which can be kept by the enabling grace. Schreiner's criticism of this matter is considerable.\(^2\) As found in his conclusion, Paul is discussing that "the perfect obedience to the law is impossible in Gal 3:10-14."\(^3\) The law cannot enable the sinner to attain to the standard of righteousness that it exalts. We, however, need to consider the fact that Paul proves to the Judaizers\(^4\) that his teaching regarding the law is simply an affirmation of what the law says of itself. Paul is talking about the great principles of the gospel in facing a false gospel. The law was not intended to be an end in itself, as the false teachers claimed. Rather, we might infer that Paul does not intend to deny the permanent validity of the Decalogue in Gal 3:19.\(^5\) It was designed to

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\(^1\) Fuller, "Paul and the Works of the Law," 32-33. Fuller points out that Paul sometimes used the Greek of a Rabbinical phrase for "the works of the law" to designate legalism, and that he also used the word "law" to represent the legalistic misunderstanding of the law (pp. 28-29, n. 2).


\(^3\) Ibid., 160.

\(^4\) See p. 295, n. 3.

\(^5\) Grant, "The Decalogue in Early Christianity," 5.
help God's people understand and appropriate the provisions of the covenant of divine grace. The text does not intend to indicate the Mosaic law in contrast to faith as Strickland contends.\(^1\) Strickland criticizes Fuller for his forgetting the fact that the Mosaic law was given to a covenant nation.\(^2\) And he rejects Fuller's argument that Paul deals with the legalists' misinterpreting or abusing the passage, for Fuller allows himself to succumb to the temptation to follow the example of a legalist, and he did not show how the Judaizers abused the passage. Furthermore, the Pauline word law in the text does not differ from that of the cited OT passages.\(^3\) Yet his argument disregards the immediate context. Gal 3:1 and 3 show that the Galatians were already under the influence of the false teachers, followed the "works of the law" (vss. 2, 5) "by the flesh" (vs. 3), and finally belonged to the works of the law (vs. 10). Gal 3:11-12 can be also understood in this legalistic attitude. The real intention of the text is not confined only to the revelatory sense of the law. Thus, Dispensationalists' underestimation of the contemporary legalism in understanding of the text is not


\(^3\) Ibid., 161-162.
harmonized with the context. Strickland does not fully deal with this background of the Judaizing opponents to the logic of Paul’s reasoning in this passage. The legalistic misunderstanding and misuse of the law provides the most proper key to grasp his use of the word nomos.¹

Summary

It has been my goal in this chapter to evaluate some main positions on the Mosaic law as understood in dispensational theology. This contained the problem of the proper understanding of the concept of law, the moral law of the Decalogue, the meaning of the reinforcement of the law in the Sermon on the Mount for the church, and the question of the antithesis of law and grace.

While dispensational theology attempts to establish the basic meaning of the law by analyzing the sevenfold usages of the term, we observed that it manifests an inadequate theological interpretation by adopting the domino theory, through which even the Decalogue was abolished in the NT era. Moreover, this theology uplifts the love-command as the exclusive standard, as the moral law of the Christian life apart from the Decalogue and without the dynamic relationship between love—the ground of the law—and the law. In Scriptures, however, to love is to establish a relationship that is defined by divine

law, and God's law is an expression of His covenantal love-relationship. It is in essence codified love. The Decalogue is so closely interwoven with divine love that any attempt to separate love from it destroys its true meaning and introduces an ethical vacuum. The NT supports the Decalogue as the abiding moral law and testifies to its permanence for the church. Dispensational attempts to abstract a pure law from the law as code are foreign to the NT.

We have also attempted to show that the dispensational interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, primarily in the context of the future millennial kingdom, cannot be harmonized with the Matthean grammatical structure and its theological intention, which was to set forth the character of Christianity in contrast to that of contemporary Judaism, to offer the christological interpretation of the Mosaic law, and to request a commitment as the way of discipleship.

Finally we have found that the dispensational antithesis of law and grace is a result of misunderstanding God's attributes. It is, rather, more biblical to see the relationship of law and grace as a complementary and synthetic relationship. The Mosaic law, as the law of Yahweh, does not merely instruct its hearers, but reveals the way for liberating, consoling, fortifying and enabling them to accept and to fulfill it.
CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to grasp and to assess the dispensational theology in the area of the Sinaitic covenant and law. It is now my purpose to take a retrospective view of the previous chapters and then to set forth certain conclusions regarding the significance of this study.

In the first chapter we consider the basic dispensational problems related to the Sinaitic covenant, the goal, methodology, and justification of this dissertation. I have used the views of normative Dispensationalists to understand and to evaluate the definitive features of their interpretations on the issue. In order to better meet my goal, it was important to clarify the differences of the old and the new positions and a brief historical confrontation between dispensational and covenant theologies on the Mosaic covenant.

In the second chapter we briefly explore the growth of Dispensationalism. The first section offers the meaning of Dispensationalism as a system of biblical interpretation that divides the history of God's dealing into various periods which are distinguished by different ways
of the Divine relating with humans. Dispensationalists put their stress on the distinctions or discontinuities within the historical program of God. The second section of the chapter surveys the history of the movement from its origin among the Plymouth Brethren in England in the early nineteenth century to its modern development in North America. The great awakening of premillennial eschatological concern, the rise of antiliberalism, and the pessimistic view of the future history of the world contributed to the rise of Dispensationalism. The Bible and the prophetic conference movements became the decisive forces for its development in North America. Especially the SRB became a great aid in strengthening and popularizing its system. In the context of this historical background, normative Dispensationalism appeared as the main stream of dispensational theology characterized by the compartmentalization of Scripture between Israel and the church and the start of the dispensation of the church on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. A negative attitude toward the Sinaitic covenant and law has prevailed throughout the development of dispensational theology.

Since Dispensationalism rejected any relevance of the Sinaitic covenant and law for the church, it aroused a heated controversy with covenant theology. In the third chapter, therefore, we discuss some features of the modern debates and some basic differences of its old and newer
positions on the Sinaitic covenant and law. The first section of chapter 3 lays out the hermeneutics of the Sinaitic covenant according to some covenant theologians in order to clarify the divergences between dispensational and covenant theologies. Most covenant theologians considered the Sinaitic covenant as the covenant of grace accompanied with the manifestation of a work-element which is subservient to the covenant. Because of the fundamentally gracious character of each covenant of God, covenant theologians saw the Sinaitic covenant as a continuation and expansion of the previous covenant of grace and rejected the dispensational view that the Sinaitic covenant was the covenant of works.

The second section of chapter 3 surveys the debates of Dispensationalism with covenant theology on the Sinaitic covenant. Their controversies were based on the differences in their theological schemas, whether the ground of God's relation with Israel and the church and with law and grace is the expression of the same divine purpose. The Sinaitic covenant was understood in covenant theology as a covenant of grace and an expression of His one purpose, while in dispensational theology it is viewed as a covenant of works, a totally different expression of His intention. Consequently, the law of Moses in Dispensationalism is valid only in the kingdom-age, while in covenant theology it is also applicable to the church.
Since the 1950s, most Dispensationalists have admitted that some of the early statements about the Sinaitic covenant were overstated, and they recognized the existence of grace under the Sinaitic covenant and the role of law in the church-age in a limited sense.

The third section of chapter 3 examines the old and new interpretations of the Sinaitic covenant in recent dispensational theology. The Sinaitic covenant in the old position was a covenant of meritorious works in which divine salvation was conditioned strictly on human faithfulness without any divine enablement such as grace and a universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the old position offered a dual plan of salvation— one for Israel as a nation through the unconditional Abrahamic covenant and the other for individual Israelites through legal obedience. It emphasized the abolishment of the law of Moses, including the Decalogue. Yet the new position admits the divine enablement from the Abrahamic covenant under the Sinaitic covenant and elaborates the same way of salvation in all ages with the reservation of the changeability of the content of faith; and it stresses the existence of the moral law contained in the code.

Chapter 4 describes the dispensational thinking about the fundamental features of the Sinaitic covenant and law. The chapter begins with a theological survey of the basic meaning of covenant from Dispensationalists'
perspective. It is observed that the essence of covenant is the concept of "bond," "fetter," or a relationship in the usage of the term. Along with this relationship, Dispensationalists emphasize God's sovereign pronouncement, the theocratic programs in the progressive revelation, and the division between the conditionality and the unconditionalality. Literality, eternality, unconditionality, and nationality constitute the essential nature of the covenants. In contrast, they said, the Sinaitic covenant was exceptional, for its main features are conditionality, temporality, and legality.

The second section of chapter 4 offers God's faithfulness in keeping the covenant by the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant, the character and the structure of the Sinaitic covenant, and its relationships to the other covenants. One notices that Dispensationalists have understood the Sinaitic covenant as having the form of the suzerainty treaties, following Mendenhall's structural analysis. One may also observe that according to those writers the conditional Mosaic covenant was only added alongside the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, which became its source of grace and blessings, and that conditionality became its distinctive keynote in contrast with other national covenants. Even the Palestinian covenant, which was, in fact, the repetition of the Sinaitic covenant, was seen as a fulfillment of the land
promise of the Abrahamic covenant. Although the Sinaitic covenant had no direct relationship with the Davidic covenant, the Mosaic law will become the ruling code in the future millennial kingdom which is its eschatological fulfillment. The new covenant of the church is not in continuity with the Sinaitic covenant, but its replacement. The command precedes the promise in the Sinaitic covenant, while the order is reversed in the other national covenants. Thus we find that the basic understanding of covenants in dispensational theology lies in the dichotomy of the conditional and the unconditional covenants, that is, the disunity and discontinuity of the covenants.

The third section of chapter 4 offers a description of the dispensational view of the law of Moses in the teachings of Jesus and Paul. We notice that law is to be understood in relation to the concepts of covenant and covenant community. Yet Dispensationalists have sought its basic meaning in the ethical or juristic sense. They have tried to find its contextual meaning by analyzing the biblical usages of the term "law" and emphasizing an indivisible unit of the law of Moses. Because of this inseparable unit, they contend that the Mosaic law, including the Decalogue, was done away with at the cross and became meaningless for the church-age.

Chapter 4 further discusses dispensational theology's concept of the law of Christ, the law of love,
as the governing standard for Christians and their attempt to establish a standard of life under grace, which is based on liberty with love. The restatements of the Decalogue in the NT must not be considered as a continuation of part of the Mosaic law. Dispensationalists only admit the value of the principles contained in the Decalogue. The regulatory role of the Mosaic law in their theology has been discontinued, but the revelatory role of the law are still maintained when their assertion of the functions of the law is carefully examined.

The research shows that dispensational theology saw the aim of Jesus' incarnation as intended to redeem from a slavery to the entire Mosaic system and to cause people to return to the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant through Him. Dispensationalists believe that Jesus Christ fulfilled and terminated the Mosaic law, including the Decalogue. Even the Sermon on the Mount, His most important body of instruction, is interpreted as the embodiment of the higher and absolute standards of the law, primarily for the coming millennial kingdom, not for the church.

According to the dispensational understanding of the Pauline teaching, based on the antithetical relation between the dispensation of Moses and the dispensation of Christ, the law was terminated at the crucifixion, and is, therefore, irrelevant to the church. It is contrasted to grace on the points of the recipients, the objects written,
the requirements, the purposes, the results, the enablements, the merit, and the time. The law only causes sinners to feel their need of the gospel of redeeming grace, yet it has no vital role in the divine method of sanctification.

The primary purpose of chapter 5 is to evaluate the dispensational position on the Sinaitic covenant, which was described in chapter 4. The first section of chapter 5 examines whether the problem of dispensational disunity and discontinuity of covenants has validity or not. The biblical covenants reveal unity and continuity, although they were amplified with the new dimensions of situations. The dispensational dichotomy of covenants, representing two dispensations, manifests a lack of understanding of God's electing love and grace in the Sinaitic covenant. The fundamental mistake is to regard it as a juridical relationship, excluding its faith and love relationship. Unconditionality and conditionality of the covenant are two aspects of the same covenant. The first is based upon the divine electing love, while the latter is the response of participants toward it. These aspects are found in the Sinaitic covenant and in the so-called promissory covenants. Election, covenant, and law go together in the Sinaitic covenant. The divine electing love, the sovereign initiative, was at the origin of the covenant. We must conclude that dispensational theology has failed to
admit the element of conditionality in the promissory covenants and to see the biblical covenant as the enlargement of a previous one and its completion in new dimensions of freshness and potency.

The second section brings out the richness of divine grace displayed in the Sinaitic covenant and in its background, which shows the invalidity of the dispensational assertions that the Sinaitic covenant belonged to the covenant of works and that the manifestation of grace in the covenant was nothing but that of the Abrahamic covenant. In fact, the source and basis of the divine grace and blessings in the Sinaitic covenant was Yahweh of the Abrahamic covenant. Yahweh became the source and basis of both the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenants, in which the divine promises and grace preceded the requirements of the participants. The order is God first, ethics second.

The third section of chapter 5 indicates that the work aspect in the Sinaitic covenant must be understood as a way of preservation of the relationship with Yahweh who saved His people, not as a requirement of a covenant of works. The Mosaic law was embedded in grace. Grace would empower the people of God to obey the law, the demand of faith. Paul condemned only human reliance on works for merit, not the obedience to the law. He indicated that the main reason of Israel's failure came from the lack of a
Spirit-provided, Spirit-directed, Spirit-maintained relationship in the Sinaitic covenant.

The purpose of chapter 6 is to evaluate the dispensational assertion on the law of Moses, which was described in chapter 4. The first section of chapter 5 examines whether the law of Moses was wholly abolished and, therefore, has nothing to do with the church. Because of a failure to connect properly the negative references to the law in the NT with the misuse of the law at the time of the Apostles, dispensational theology has interpreted these statements as the evidences of the abrogation of the law. Its understanding of the meaning of the law, which was limited to legal or ethical aspect, they claim, destroyed the real nature of the tōrāh. The NT itself supports the perpetuity and the continuous validity of the Decalogue in the church-age. As a substitute for the standard of the Christian conduct and in order to void the criticism of antinomianism, Dispensationalists uplifted the love-command (the law of Christ) based on the dichotomy of the moral law (pure law) and law as code (the Decalogue). Yet the law is the expression of the covenantal love-relationship and represents codified love. Throughout the NT the Decalogue is inseparable from love, becomes the moral law for the church, and is distinguished from the ceremonial law. Love needs its moral guidelines, specified external norms of commandments, in order to avert the
ethical relativism or subjectivism in the highly sophisticated diversity of social relations and cultural contexts. However, Christ must be the hermeneutical center and foundation of the law, as suggested in the phrase "the law of Christ."

The second section of chapter 6 reveals the inadequacy of the dispensational interpretation that the ethical conduct required in the Sermon on the Mount is primarily reserved for the millennial kingdom. This idea left the track of the Gospel writers, whose intention was to find in those words the character of Christianity to be contrasted with that of contemporary Judaism, and a true christological interpretation of the Mosaic law, and the demand of commitment.

The third section of chapter 6 indicates problem of the dispensational antithesis of law and grace. The order of salvation and then Israel's obedience out of gratitude was manifested in the Decalogue of the Sinaitic covenant. The law was laid in the ark under the mercy-seat in the sanctuary, which showed the harmonious relationship between law and grace. The biblical statements of seeming contrast of law and gospel must be understood from the angle of the perverted concept of the law, the Jewish speculation about the tôrâh, or of the usus elenchticus, the pedagogical function of the law.

What then should be the conclusion regarding the
Sinaitic covenant and law of dispensational theology? If the present study has presented an accurate interpretation of the dispensational position of the Sinaitic covenant and law, I have reached a twofold conviction. First, I have shown the way in which Dispensationalists interpreted and systematized the Sinaitic covenant in their theology. Second, I have critically evaluated it.

In fact, the debates between covenant theology and older Dispensationalism have shown two opposite points of view in understanding of the biblical covenants. The covenant theologians generally regarded the Sinaitic covenant as an enlargement of the previous covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, while the classical Dispensationalists saw an antithetical relationship between the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic covenants.

Dispensationalism is in constant adjustment from the old rigid form as represented by the modern Dispensationalists. Like non-Dispensationalists, dispensational theologians maintain the unity of the way of salvation, but they firmly believe in the distinctiveness of the two people of God with two inheritances and the two destinies. A few contemporary dispensational theologians attempt to soften the traditional dichotomy between the so-called unconditional and the conditional covenants, considering the complementary relationship between them, with reservation that each one is distinctively different from the
other. This trend is not readily available in published form. Therefore, further discussion on the complementary relationship between the unconditional and the conditional covenants cannot be adequately carried out. Rather, the position that sees the Sinaitic covenant as a covenant of works is still dominant in published material on Dispensationalism, as represented in the NSRB.

The major problem is whether the Sinaitic covenant alone has conditionality among the universal and general covenants. In light of the conditionality in the Abrahamic covenant, the divinely elected love and grace of the Sinaitic covenant, and the continuity of the promises between the two covenants, it seems best to view the biblical covenants from the perspective that conditionality and unconditionality exist in the so-called promissory covenants as well as in the obligatory covenants. There are no contradictory principles in the biblical covenants. Divine grace and obedience to the law are perfectly combined in the Sinaitic covenant. One must recognize conditionality and unconditionality in the promissory covenants. Without consideration of this fact, the distinction between the promissory covenants and the obligatory covenants is meaningless, and the true complementary relationship of these covenants cannot be biblically understood.

The dispensational assertion that the regulatory
aspects of the Decalogue is not binding upon the church, but, instead, that the NT believers are under the law of Christ (the law of love) destroys the true nature of the law which is an expression of God's covenantal love-relationship.

The study has led me to conclude that it is a basic mistake of dispensational theology to regard the Sinaitic covenant as a covenant of works, which is fundamentally different from other promissory covenants. As a matter of fact, the covenant with Israel at Sinai was none other than the one which shows continuity with the covenant God made with Abraham. It was based upon divine grace and covenantal love which demanded the response of faith from participants. As I have tried to demonstrate, obedience to the law is nothing but the way of preservation of the covenant in Christ, not the way of human merit before God.
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