

## THE SPIRIT IN THE PRESENT AGE: PRELIMINARY FULFILLMENT OF THE PREDICTED NEW COVENANT ACCORDING TO PAUL

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Dispensationalists have prided themselves on their realistic appraisal of the covenants mentioned in Holy Writ. In contrast to covenant theology's emphasis on the theological covenants, dispensationalism's focus on the Biblical covenants may be confirmed by thumbing through any one of a whole host of works.<sup>1</sup> In my view, focusing on the Biblical covenants has been one of the key strengths of the dispensational perspective.

Unfortunately this strength has not always been reflected in dispensational thought on the new covenant. Much of dispensationalism's weakness in its formulation was the result of polemical exigencies. Dispensationalism used the Biblical covenants to defend its insistence that there remained in God's plan a future for Israel. For this reason it insisted on an absolute logical dilemma: Either the new covenant was fulfilled in the present era (as covenant theologians argued) so that there was no future fulfillment for Israel, or the new covenant was not fulfilled in the present era so that its fulfillment lay wholly in the future. Dispensationalism was confident that the OT predictions of the new covenant could not be reconciled with fulfillment in the present era. For its part, covenant theology likewise supported the either/or dilemma since it was confident that certain NT texts could not be interpreted otherwise than by viewing the new covenant as fulfilled in the present age.

But recent formulations of dispensational theology ("modified" or "progressive" dispensationalism) have abandoned the dilemma held by both traditional dispensationalism and covenant theology for a both/and view of the fulfillment of the Biblical covenants. With specific reference to the new covenant, this means that within the present interadvent era there is a partial and preliminary fulfillment of the new covenant in anticipation of a complete fulfillment in the *eschaton*. The purpose of this paper is to show that

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<sup>1</sup> In this respect the recent studies by R. L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), and C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993), are no different than those of A. J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), or J. F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959).

within the Pauline corpus the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit among believers demonstrates that the new covenant is currently operative, albeit in a partial and preliminary way. Attention will be chiefly directed to Paul's exposition of his new-covenant ministry in 2 Corinthians 3. If this purpose is achieved, one aspect of progressive dispensationalism's treatment of the Biblical covenants will be confirmed.

#### I. THE OT PREDICTIONS OF THE NEW COVENANT

Although the expression "new covenant" in Jer 31:31 is unique in the OT, it is commonly accepted that the idea of an eschatological covenant between Yahweh and Israel is present in quite a number of OT passages.<sup>2</sup> There are several texts that speak directly of a future covenant. In addition to those passages in which the term "covenant" is specifically used, there are others that do not contain the term but have comparable content.<sup>3</sup>

Pierre Buis has observed common elements in some predictions of an eschatological covenant comparable to those in the Sinaitic covenant and argues that these elements form an identifiable new-covenant form.<sup>4</sup> Whether or not Buis is correct about there being a new-covenant form, there is remarkable consistency in many of the passages describing this future covenant. Six elements (Buis' five plus the historical introduction) make up the content of the predicted covenant: (1) an historical introduction depicting Israel's apostasy and subsequent judgment, (2) God's act of reconstituting Israel back in her land, (3) the covenantal declaration "I will be your God, and you will be my people," (4) a moral transformation of the people, (5) a statement of the perpetual duration of the covenant, and (6) God's determination to bless the nation. These elements are present in several texts as the following chart shows:

<sup>2</sup> In addition to Jeremiah's mention of a new covenant the expression "everlasting covenant" is sometimes a reference to an eschatological covenant (Isa 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 37:26), as are the expressions "covenant of peace" (Isa 54:10; Ezek 34:25; 37:26) and simply the term "covenant" (Isa 42:6; 49:8; 59:21; Ezek 20:37; Hos 2:18) in an eschatological context (see W. C. Kaiser, "The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34," *JETS* 14 [Winter 1971] 14; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* [Nashville: Nelson, 1984] 164-200; R. Schreiber, *Der Neue Bund im Spätjudentum und Urchristentum* [dissertation; Tübingen University, 1954] 24).

<sup>3</sup> Deut 30:1-10; Ezek 11:17-20; Zech 7:9-8:23.

<sup>4</sup> It has been widely recognized that the form of many OT covenants has been influenced by ancient Near Eastern norms (so G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 [September 1954] 50-76; K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971] 24-31; D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* [2d ed.; AnBib 21a; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981] *passim*). P. Buis has noted comparable elements in what he has termed a new-covenant form present in various passages that explicitly or implicitly mention an eschatological covenant ("La nouvelle alliance," *VT* 18 [1968] 1-15).

| <i>Text</i>   | <i>Element</i> |   |   |   |   |   |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|               | 1              | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Deut 30:1–10  | x              | x | o | x | o | x |
| Hos 2:14–23   | x              | x | x | ? | ? | x |
| Jer 24:5–7    | x              | x | x | x | o | x |
| Jer 31:23–40  | x              | x | x | x | ? | ? |
| Jer 32:37–44  | x              | x | x | x | x | x |
| Ezek 11:17–20 | x              | x | x | x | o | o |
| Ezek 34:11–31 | x              | x | x | o | o | x |
| Ezek 36:22–38 | x              | x | x | x | ? | x |
| Ezek 37:15–28 | o              | x | x | x | ? | o |
| Zech 7:9–8:23 | x              | x | o | o | o | x |

x—*element present*    o—*element absent*    ?—*element uncertain*

All of the elements are not contained in every passage, nor are the elements ever presented in a common sequence.

Of particular importance for this article, the element of God's moral transformation (element 4) is present in seven or eight of the ten passages. This element may be the most distinctive aspect of the predicted eschatological covenant and is present in other contexts than the ten in the chart. God's future act of moral renewal finds its necessity in Israel's constant rebellion and utter inability to keep the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, facts emphasized especially in Jeremiah (e.g. 2:19; 5:4, 23; 6:28).<sup>5</sup> Though the nation needs to change, it cannot change itself (13:23; 17:1). The moral renewal is described in widely differing fashions as (1) a circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6; cf. Jer 4:4), (2) the giving of a new heart or changing of the heart (Jer 24:7; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 18:31; 36:26), (3) the putting of a new spirit/God's Spirit within them (Ezek 11:19; 18:31; 36:26–27; 37:14), or (4) the placing/writing of Yahweh's law in/on the hearts of the people (Jer 31:33).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Buis, "nouvelle" 10–11; R. Martin-Achard, "La nouvelle alliance, selon Jérémie," *RTP* 3/12 (1962) 87; H. D. Potter, "The New Covenant of Jeremiah XXXI 31–34," *VT* (July 1983) 350–352; G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) 2.268–270.

<sup>6</sup> The interpretation of the placing of the law in or writing of the law on the hearts of the people as a moral transformation by God is certainly the prevailing one among scholars (so Martin-Achard, "nouvelle" 90; P. Wells, "La promesse: Lecture de Jérémie 31:31 à 34," *Etudes Evangéliques* 36 [1976] 21; B. W. Anderson, "The New Covenant and the Old," *The Old Testament and the Christian Faith* [New York: Harper, 1963] 236–237; A. Jaubert, *La notion d'alliance dans le Judaïsme aux abords de l'ère chrétienne* [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963]; E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, reprint 1956] 2.437–439; A. Weiser, *Das Buch Jeremia: Kapitel 25, 15–52, 34* [ATD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1980] 287; W. Rudolf, *Jeremia* [HAT; Tübingen: Mohr, 1968] 202–203; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 581; R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973] 137; W. E. Lemke, "Jeremiah 31:31–34," *Int* 37 [April 1983] 184).

The prediction of an eschatological covenant between Yahweh and Israel is not limited to Jeremiah 31 but is a common theme in the OT. One prominent element of this predicted covenant is that of moral transformation, an element that Paul dwells upon in some of his references to the new covenant.

## II. THE CONTEXT OF 2 CORINTHIANS 3

2 Corinthians 3 is perhaps the most prominent reference to the new covenant in the Pauline corpus. Verse 6 states that God “has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (NIV). This mention of the new covenant is set within a discussion of Paul’s own gospel ministry, which begins in 2:14 and continues probably to 6:13. In 2:14–17 the nature of his ministry (as a weak, on-the-way-to-death captive) is compared with a Roman triumphal procession.<sup>7</sup> Here the concept of “adequacy” (ἰκανός, 2:16) is introduced.

Paul continued to develop the theme of adequacy in 3:1–6. This theme is expounded in opposition to some Jewish-Christian missionaries who had called his apostolic adequacy into question.<sup>8</sup> In response to their apparent suggestion that he did not have credentials—letters of recommendation from other churches—Paul appealed to the working of the Spirit in the Corinthian church as evidence of his adequacy. With this Spirit-attested adequacy he could minister with boldness.<sup>9</sup> In the remainder of the chapter the apostle described this Spirit-empowered effectiveness by way of contrast to the ineffective old-covenant ministry of Moses that could not break through the hardheartedness of the Israelites.

Following chap. 3, Paul anticipated two objections to the effectiveness of his apostolic ministry: (1) Why do not all who hear this effective gospel of Christ believe and be saved? (2) Why does not his effective ministry produce life in the weak person of Paul? His response to the first (4:1–6) was to insist that, despite his powerful gospel, unbelievers are blinded by Satan so that they cannot believe. To the second (4:7–5:10) the apostle insisted that

<sup>7</sup> S. J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit* (WUNT 2/19; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986) 22–35.

<sup>8</sup> Much effort has been expended in trying to identify these opponents. The three major positions are (1) Palestinian Jewish-Christian missionaries, (2) Hellenistic Jewish-Christian missionaries, and (3) gnostic Jewish-Christian missionaries. The most likely identification is the second (following G. Friedrich, “Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief,” *Abraham unser Vater* [ed. O. Betz, M. Hengel and P. Schmidt; Leiden: Brill, 1963] 191–196; D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 27–38, 101–110). The reasons for this include the following: (1) They were evidently Jews (cf. 11:22). (2) It is unlikely that anything more than concepts and terms relating to gnosticism was present in the first century (see E. M. Yamautchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973] 26–28, 161–169). (3) The criticisms against Paul are for his untrained speech (10:1–2, 10; 11:6; cf. 2:17), for his preaching without cost (11:7–9, 20–21; 12:13–18) and for his weakness—particularly in not performing many miracles—during his ministry (1:3–12; 4:7–18; 10:3–5; 11:13–15; 11:23–12:12; 13:3–4). (4) There is no hint of the one criticism expected from Palestinian Jewish-Christians: that Paul preached libertinism.

<sup>9</sup> Note the near synonyms *πεποιθῆσις* (3:4), *παρησιᾶ* (3:12), *ἐγκακέω* (4:1, 16) and *θαρρέω* (5:6).

his ministry was eschatologically conditioned: It progressively effects inner (moral) renewal now while the outer person experiences death, and in the future this renewal will be completed both inwardly and outwardly.

### III. 2 CORINTHIANS 3 AND DISPENSATIONALISM

A cursory reading of chap. 3 brings out two important facts. (1) This discussion of the new covenant is extensive—in fact, the most extensive in the Pauline corpus. The comparison between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant is not found only in v. 6. On the contrary, the allusions to Exod 31:18; Jer 31:33 (38:33 LXX); Ezek 36:26 in 2 Cor 3:3 show that the comparison between the two covenants is already in Paul's mind. The comparison continues in the antitheses Paul formulates in vv. 7–11: death versus Spirit, condemnation versus righteousness, passing away versus remaining. The contrast between Paul's ministry and Moses' in vv. 12–18 continues the comparison between the two covenants. (2) The subject under discussion is not primarily the new covenant but the character of Paul's ministry of proclaiming the gospel. This observation is noteworthy because he intended not merely to describe OT predictions or an eschatological kingdom but to explain the present character of his own apostolic ministry.

Historically, dispensationalists have been uncomfortable with this connection between Paul's gospel ministry and the predicted new covenant. As stated before, if the new covenant is being fulfilled in the present era then future fulfillment (it was thought) is rendered unnecessary. Two approaches to this problem of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3 have generally been taken, at least until recently.<sup>10</sup> The first approach affirms that Paul indeed spoke of the new covenant predicted in the OT but denies that this covenant had significant connection with his own gospel ministry. Believers today may receive some of the blessings of the covenant, but the covenant per se is not contracted with them.<sup>11</sup> The second approach affirms that Paul's ministry was based upon a new covenant—not, however, the new covenant predicted

<sup>10</sup> R. J. Decker ("The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant: Part Two," *BSac* 152 [October-December 1995] 431–447) provides an excellent description of the three views on the new covenant extant among dispensationalists. In terms of 2 Corinthians 3, however, the basic interpretive approaches seem to be two: Either affirm that Paul spoke of Jeremiah's new covenant and deny its direct connection with his ministry, or affirm the connection of the new covenant with his ministry but deny that this is the same new covenant as predicted in Jeremiah. Only with progressive dispensationalism has this basic dilemma been superseded by affirming both a real connection (albeit that of partial fulfillment) between Paul's ministry and this new covenant and an identity of this new covenant with that predicted in the OT.

<sup>11</sup> J[ohn] N[elson] D[arby] (*Notes on the Epistles to the Corinthians* [London: G. Morrish, n.d.] 183–184) wrote: "New testament" (ver. 6) is the 'new covenant,' which we find also in Jeremiah; it is new in contrast with the old. . . . God's part of that covenant has been done, and Israel would not take it up: so we now are getting the blessings of it, without its being made with us. . . . God gives the blessings to others, and announces them by His ministers. But the covenant itself is not made with anybody. It cannot, in any sense, be a new covenant with us, because we have no old one."

in Jeremiah 31, but a different one made by God with the Church.<sup>12</sup> These alternative explanations, being mutually exclusive of each other, were nevertheless how dispensationalists handled the problem of 2 Corinthians 3 until the development of progressive dispensationalism.<sup>13</sup> The fact that these two explanations are mutually exclusive continues to determine the interpretation of many dispensationalists.<sup>14</sup> Against the two explanations I would like to argue that Paul's mention of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3 (1) referred to the very same eschatological covenant predicted in the OT (vis-à-vis the "two new covenants" view) and (2) described the character of his gospel-proclaiming mission because that predicted new covenant was operative in the apostolic ministry of Paul (vis-à-vis the view that the new covenant will be fulfilled only in the future).

<sup>12</sup> For instance L. S. Chafer wrote of 2 Cor 3:6 that the letter/Spirit contrast is a contrast between "two dispensations" with two "methods of divine rule" and used it to show that the "blessing of the indwelling Spirit is an essential characteristic of this age" (*Systematic Theology* [Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1947–48] 4.190). Elsewhere in the same work, however, he explained (7.98–99): "To suppose that these two covenants—one for Israel and one for the Church—are the same is to assume that there is a latitude of common interest between God's purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church. Israel's covenant, however, is new only because it replaces the Mosaic, but the Church's covenant is new because it introduces that which is God's mysterious and unrelated purpose."

<sup>13</sup> There are exceptions, of course. E. Sauer (*The Triumph of the Crucified* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951] 91–94) treats 2 Corinthians 3 similarly as progressive dispensationalists do today. Sauer argued "that the church cannot be separated from the ground of the OT promise. . . . Believers from the peoples are exactly as the believers from Israel, partakers of the saving benefits of the new covenant" (p. 91).

<sup>14</sup> J. R. Master, "The New Covenant" (*Issues in Dispensationalism* [ed. W. R. Willis, J. R. Master and C. C. Ryrie; Chicago: Moody, 1994] 93–110), and C. C. Ryrie, "Progressive Dispensationalism" (*Dispensationalism* [Chicago: Moody, 1995] 161–181), continue to recognize the salience of these alternative interpretations. Master maintains: "The text *does not say that the new covenant is now being fulfilled*, only that Paul and others are the ministers (*diakonous*) of the covenant. The idea of being a 'servant of' does not seem to point to the necessity of or even the implication that they are 'fulfillers'" (p. 101; italics mine). Similarly Ryrie states: "Second, the eschatological promises contained the new covenant, *which will be fulfilled in the Millennium*. After all, the new covenant tells us about many of the conditions in the millennial kingdom as well as promises about Israel and her future" (p. 173; italics mine). Both authors argue that the new covenant mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 will be fulfilled only in the future, not today. But both seem to concede the weakness of their position by presenting a fallback position: If it can be shown that Paul teaches that the new covenant is currently operative, then maybe there are two new covenants. Referring to the anarthrous construction καινῆς διαθήκης, Master appears to open the door to the two-new-covenant view by asking: "Is it a reference to the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34?" (p. 101). He then goes on to argue: "Of course, from a dispensational perspective, Paul was ministering in some sense 'a' new covenant in that every new dispensation is related to a new covenant" (p. 102). Ryrie is more explicit: "The reference to 'new covenant' is without the definite article. The text does not say that we are ministers of 'the new covenant' but of 'a new covenant.' . . . This may not be significant at all, or it may indicate that Paul is focusing on a new covenant made with the church, which, of course, is based on the death of Christ as is also the future new covenant made with Israel. If so, there are two new covenants" (p. 174). Master and Ryrie insist that the new covenant mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 is not operative today but will be fulfilled only in the future. Yet both seem to concede the weakness of this position by stating the rationale for the two-new-covenants view that had been abandoned by almost all of its proponents (including Ryrie; see Decker, "Relationship" 433–434).

## IV. 2 CORINTHIANS 3 AND THE PREDICTED NEW COVENANT

Besides dispensational proponents of two new covenants, few modern scholars have denied that Paul intended to refer to the new covenant predicted by the OT in 2 Corinthians 3—and for good reason.<sup>15</sup>

1. *Paul appealed to the OT predictions of the eschatological covenant.* In v. 3, for instance, he alluded to three OT texts, two of which refer to that covenant. The expression “written . . . on tablets of human hearts” (ἐγγεγραμμένη . . . ἐν πλαξίν καρδίας σαρκίνας) is usually regarded as an allusion to Jer 31:33 (38:33, LXX: ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν γράψω αὐτούς).<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:3 also reflects either Ezek 11:19 or 36:26 (both are passages that refer to the eschatological covenant between God and Israel), most probably the latter.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the specific mention in 2 Cor 3:6 of a new covenant confirms that Paul had the eschatological covenant predicted by the OT prophets in view in chap. 3. It can hardly be conceived that Paul would make three allusions to OT predictions of the new covenant and yet have in mind a new covenant different from that mentioned in the texts he cites.<sup>18</sup>

2. *Throughout much of chap. 3 the apostle compared the function of the new covenant with that of the old Mosaic covenant.* In v. 3 there is a definite allusion to the writing of the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone. The OT text Paul had in mind might have been either Exod 31:18,

<sup>15</sup> C. Wolff (*Jeremia im Frühjudentum und Urchristentum* [TU 118; Berlin: Akademie, 1976] 134–142) denies that the eschatological covenant predicted in Jeremiah 31 is in view in 2 Corinthians 3. He is followed by L. Gaston (*Paul and the Torah* [Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987] 154, 236 n. 17) and H. Räisänen (*Paul and the Law* [WUNT 29; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983] 240–245). Wolff not only denies the influence of Jer 31:31–34 on 2 Corinthians 3 but also on the whole of the Pauline corpus.

<sup>16</sup> Wolff argues that Paul did not have the LXX of Jer 38:3 in mind but rather Prov 3:3 (according to Alexandrinus); 7:3. The similarity is certainly there; the LXX at Prov 7:3 reads ἐπίγραφον δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ πλάτος τῆς καρδίας σου (“and write on the tablet of your heart”). Three reasons, however, preclude such a conclusion: (1) The expression καινῆς διαθήκης in 2 Cor 3:6 suggests that Paul had Jeremiah in mind also in 3:3. (2) His appeal to another eschatological covenant text—Ezek 36:26—makes it highly probable that Paul had Jeremiah rather than Proverbs in mind. (3) 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 focuses on the events surrounding the second giving of the law in Exodus 32–34 in order to compare the nature of the new covenant with that of the old. Prov 3:3; 7:3 are concerned not with covenant making but with the necessity of the student/son to retain the commandments of wisdom in his heart. Therefore the conceptual context favors Jeremiah as opposed to Proverbs.

<sup>17</sup> In both of these texts, God promises to place a new heart (a heart of flesh instead of stone) and a new spirit in the nation. In 36:27, however, the “new spirit” to be placed in Israel is identified to be the Spirit of God.

<sup>18</sup> Paul’s reference to Jer 38:31 (LXX) in v. 6 emphasizes that he had the predicted eschatological covenant in mind. If he had something else in mind other than what the Corinthian believers could have understood from the OT, he would have explained it to his readers (cf. J.-F. Collange, *Enigmes de la deuxième épître de Paul aux Corinthiens* [SNTSMS 18; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972] 62; W. C. van Unnik, “La conception paulinienne de la nouvelle alliance,” *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W. C. van Unnik*, Part One: *Evangelia-Paulina-Acta* [NovTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1973] 176–177).

32:15 or Deut 9:10.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of which passage was cited, the comparison is between the old covenant written on stone and the new covenant written on the hearts of the people. In 2 Cor 3:6 the contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant takes the form of an antithesis between “letter” and “Spirit.” “Letter” represents the Mosaic law, which demands obedience without supplying the ability to obey and which therefore can only condemn and kill.<sup>20</sup> Linda Belleville describes it well:

*Letter* and *Spirit* are therefore descriptive terms, setting forth the quality or nature of their respective covenants. What is qualitatively better about the new covenant is that it is not a *letter* covenant—that is, an external code—but a *Spirit* covenant—that is, an internal power. A covenant that is *letter* in nature *kills* because it makes external demands without giving the inward power for obedience, while a covenant that is *Spirit* in character gives *life* because it works internally to produce a change of nature.<sup>21</sup>

The reference to the giving of the law is repeated again in v. 7, where Paul described the “letter” ministry as that “engraved in letters on stone.” In fact this very comparison of the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant is evident in Jeremiah 31. The need for the new covenant arises out of the fact that Israel did not and could not keep the old covenant. If Paul contrasted the old Mosaic covenant with a new covenant, it strongly suggests that the new covenant he had in mind was the one Jeremiah predicted.

John Master seeks to evade the cogency of this comparison between the old and new covenants by suggesting that the comparison is in fact not a comparison with the Mosaic law at all. Rather, the comparison is with “a ministry based on works” or “the misuse of the law based on a misunderstanding of the law and not the law itself.”<sup>22</sup> But there are substantial

<sup>19</sup> It is inconsequential which passage Paul cited. In neither of the cases did he follow the text closely. He pulled three terms from one of those texts: *πλάζ* (“tablet”), *λίθινος* (“stony”) and *γράφω* (“write”).

<sup>20</sup> This interpretation is the preponderant one among commentators on the passage (see M. E. Isaacs, *The Concept of the Spirit* [London: Heythrop, 1976] 113; H. Schlier, *Grundzüge einer paulinischen Theologie* [Freiburg: Herder, 1978] 85; E. F. Scott, *The Spirit in the New Testament* [London: Hodder and Stoughton] 163; H. J. Schoeps, *Paul* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961] 212; E. Kamlah, “Buchstabe und Geist,” *EvT* 14 [1954] 278; S. Westerholm, “Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics,” *NTS* 30 [April 1984] 240–241; van Unnik, “conception” 185; S. Lyonnet, “La circoncision du coeur, celle qui relève de l’Esprit et non la lettre’ [Rom. 2:29],” *L’Evangile, hier et aujourd’hui* [Genève: Labor et Fides, 1968] 90; A. Feuillet, “Les attaches bibliques des antithèses pauliniennes dans la première partie de l’Épître aux Romains (1–8),” *Melanges Bibliques en hommage au R. P. Béda Rigaux* [ed. A. Descamps and A. de Halleux; Gembloux: Duculot, 1970] 342; I. C. Souza, *The New Covenant in the Second Letter to the Corinthians* [Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1978] 134; P. E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962] 85; R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* [ed. E. Dinkler; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985] 71; C. Hodge, *An Exposition on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1980] 55–56; J. Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964] 42; H. Ridderbos, *Paul* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 217–219).

<sup>21</sup> L. L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996) 94–95.

<sup>22</sup> See Master, “New Covenant” 100–101. With this interpretation he agrees with Collange (*Enigmes* 64); C. K. Barrett (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [HNTC; New York: Harper,

reasons to reject the view that Paul used γράμμα to represent a misuse/misunderstanding of the law. (1) The comparison between the ministries of Paul mediating the gospel and of Moses mediating the law imply that real covenants are being compared. One is not simply a "misunderstanding." (2) The references to the tablets of stone in vv. 3, 7 point definitively to the giving of the "Ten Words" on Sinai. Therefore it is the law itself, not a misunderstanding of the law, that is under discussion. (3) The explanation in v. 7 clarifies that γράμμα is the Mosaic law per se: It is a "ministry of death engraved in letters [γράμμασιν] on stone."<sup>23</sup> (4) It is scarcely probable that Paul would have imputed glory to a misunderstanding of the law.<sup>24</sup> (5) Since there is no polemic against self-righteousness or the works of the law in the context, interpreting γράμμα as a legalistic misuse of the law is not contextually valid. (6) The statement that γράμμα has a killing and condemning function is comparable to other Pauline statements (Rom 7:5, 7–13; Gal 3:21–24) that attribute to the law the role of bringing death and condemnation. But this killing and condemning function of the law is a function of the law per se, not a misunderstanding of it.<sup>25</sup>

3. *Paul contrasted not only the new covenant with the old but also his own ministry of proclaiming the gospel message with Moses' ministry of mediating the law to the nation of Israel.* For instance, his claim that God had made him an "adequate" (ικάνωσεν) minister of the new covenant (v. 6) is in direct contrast with Moses' denial of his own adequacy (ικανός) in Exod 4:10 (LXX).<sup>26</sup> The contrast between Paul's boldness and Moses' lack of boldness (2 Cor 3:12–13) supports the notion that the new covenant Paul referred to is that predicted in the OT. Indeed the whole purpose of bringing the veil of Moses into discussion is to contrast Moses' mediation of a law that had a glory fatal to hardhearted Israelites and Paul's mediation of the gospel that, through the Spirit, transformed hardhearted people by taking away the veil.

#### V. PAUL'S NEW-COVENANT MINISTRY

Paul's discussion of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3 is in fact a discussion of that same new covenant predicted in the OT. Most dispensationalists have agreed that Jeremiah's new covenant is under discussion in this

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1973] 112–113); W. B. Wallis ("The Pauline Conception of the Old Covenant," *Presbyterion* 4 [Fall 1978] 75); C. E. B. Cranfield ("St. Paul and the Law," *New Testament Issues* [ed. R. Batey; New York: Harper, 1970] 156); R. Rayburn ("The Contrast between the Old and New Covenants in the New Testament" [dissertation; University of Aberdeen, 1978] 337–351).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 213.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Westerholm, "Letter" 240–241.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance F. Thielman, *Paul and the Law* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994) 110–116, 270 n. 52.

<sup>26</sup> See C. K. Stockhausen, *Moses' Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant* (AnBib 116; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989) 84; S. J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel* (WUNT 81; Tübingen: Mohr, 1995) 39–47.

passage. Traditional dispensationalists have usually argued, however, that Paul's ministry is related to the predicted new covenant only peripherally or analogically.<sup>27</sup> There is no present fulfillment or inauguration of the new covenant at all. In contradistinction to this thesis of traditional dispensationalism, 2 Corinthians 3 presents formidable reasons to regard the new covenant as partially fulfilled or inaugurated in the gospel-proclaiming ministry of Paul.

1. *The apostle identified himself (with his coworkers?) as those whom God had made adequate "servants of [the] new covenant" (v. 6).* Charles Ryrie and John Master deny emphatically that the expression διακόνους καινῆς means that the new covenant predicted in the OT could in any way be fulfilled or function in the ministry of Paul.<sup>28</sup> Both suggest that the expression describes the "character" or "style" of Paul's ministry without affirming that the new covenant was really operative.<sup>29</sup> But their contention contradicts the reason the apostle described his ministry as a new-covenant ministry. Paul could be bold in his proclamation of the gospel because of his confidence that the Holy Spirit had in fact worked in the hearts of his hearers just as the new-covenant passages of the OT had predicted. His bold "style" was simply characteristic of new-covenant ministry.

Master makes much of the fact that καινῆς διαθήκης is anarthrous, arguing that this emphasizes its "quality" more than its "identity."<sup>30</sup> If Paul did have the text of Jer 38:31 LXX specifically in mind, however, διαθήκην καινήν also appears there without the article. In fact most of the appearances of διαθήκη for the eschatological covenant in the LXX are anarthrous.<sup>31</sup> What

<sup>27</sup> Ryrie, for instance, speaks of blessings that the Church receives similar to those promised to Israel ("Progressive" 172–173). R. N. Glass ("The New Covenant: A Response to Progressive Dispensationalism" [unpublished paper] 33) writes that Paul's "language [in 2 Corinthians 3] is analogical, and the point of the comparison is the ministry of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>28</sup> Ryrie, "Progressive" 173–174; Master, "New Covenant" 100–102.

<sup>29</sup> On this point Master ("New Covenant" 100, 110 n. 13) quotes N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 176, and Ryrie ("Progressive" 173, 180 n. 30) cites Master quoting Wright. While Wright does contend (in the paragraph Master quotes) that Paul has defended "the particular style or character of that ministry," Wright argues that Paul defended it by appealing to this new covenant, which "operates by means of the Spirit's work in the hearts of his hearers." A more complete quotation of Wright follows: "If the main thrust of the argument is thus a defence of Paul's ministry, both in that he does not need 'letters of recommendation' and in his paradoxical apostolic boldness and confidence, the main weapon with which he begins his thrust is the concept of the new covenant. Though mentioned explicitly only in 3.6, this is clearly in mind in the language of 3.3, with its echoes of Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31; and it dominates the subsequent discussion (3.7ff.). Paul's 'sufficiency,' which comes from God, consists in this: *that he is a minister of the new covenant, which operates by means of the Spirit's work in the hearts of his hearers*" (*Climax* 176; italics mine). In other words, the reason Paul can use the idea of the new covenant to describe his style of ministry is because he believes that the new covenant is currently operative, working through the gospel by the Spirit to change hearts. Rather than arguing that the new covenant is not operative, it argues that the new covenant is operative.

<sup>30</sup> Master, "New Covenant" 101.

<sup>31</sup> Hosea 2:18 (2:20 LXX); Isa 42:6; 49:8; 55:3; 61:8; Jer 31:31 (38:31 LXX); 32:40 (39:40 LXX); Ezek 34:25; 37:26 (twice) all have διαθήκη without the article. Only in Isa 54:10; 59:21; Ezek 16:60 does διαθήκη appear for the eschatological covenant with the article.

is more at issue is the relationship between the genitive *καινῆς διαθήκης* and the noun *διακόνους* that it modifies. Paul's use of genitive nouns and pronouns to modify *διάκονος* elsewhere indicates that this is probably an objective genitive.<sup>32</sup> If so, then the apostle's expression "servants of [the] new covenant" means that his activity of preaching the gospel serves or benefits the new covenant.

How did his ministry serve/benefit the new covenant? It did so because when Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Corinthians, Christ had, so to speak, written on their hearts with the ink of the Spirit in fulfillment of Ezek 36:26–27 (2 Cor 3:3). By means of Paul's preaching, the new covenant was coming into fruition. His proclamation of the gospel served the new covenant because by believing it the Corinthian believers received the Spirit promised in the new covenant. Paul's proclamation of the gospel served the new covenant because the veil of hardheartedness was removed through the gospel by the Spirit as promised in the new covenant (2 Cor 3:13–18; cf. Deut 30:6; Jer 24:7; Ezek 11:18–20; 36:26–27). In short, Paul's proclamation of the gospel served the new covenant because in that ministry the new covenant was presently operative.

2. *Paul's appeal to the new covenant is not just an appeal to the language or imagery of a new covenant but to the essential nature of the OT prediction.* That is why he alluded to two of the new-covenant passages in the OT: Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. He wanted to use the idea of "writing on the heart" (Jer 31:33) since he had already used the image of the Corinthian church as a "letter of commendation" in 2 Cor 3:2–3a. This concept of writing on the heart represented the element of moral transformation in Jeremiah 31. But the apostle also appealed to Ezekiel because he insisted that the Holy Spirit was the effective agent of that transformation. In Paul's thought the indwelling Spirit distinguished believers from unbelievers (cf. Rom 8:1–27; Gal 3:1–5). Since the Corinthian believers had received the Spirit through Paul's missionary efforts (an assumption they were unlikely to contest), his ministry was certainly an authentic operation of the

<sup>32</sup> The approximately 19 occurrences of a genitive noun or pronoun modifying *διάκονος* in the NT (15 of those in the Pauline corpus) argue against the thesis that *καινῆς διαθήκης* describes only a quality in Paul's ministry. Of the 19 occurrences all but four of the genitives are personal. In all of these the genitive relationship is clearly objective. The action of serving inferred in the noun is directed to the person or persons indicated by the genitive. For example, Phoebe's mention as a "servant of the church" (Rom 16:1) means that the church receives her action of service; Paul's self-description as one of the "servants of God" shows that God is the recipient of his service. The four instances when an impersonal genitive modifies *διάκονος* (all in Paul, including the text in question) are less clear but still likely objective genitives. His rhetorical question in Gal 2:17—"Is therefore Christ the servant of sin?"—is one example. The point of the question is not whether Christ himself is characterized by sin but whether Christ's ministry served or produced sin. In 2 Cor 11:15 Satan's "servants" masquerade as "servants of righteousness." Similarly the point is not that they are servants characterized by righteousness but they are servants who serve or produce righteousness (cf. Paul's characterization of his own ministry [2 Cor 3:9] as a "ministry of righteousness"). Finally, in Col 1:23 Paul describes himself as a "servant" of the gospel. The object or recipient of his service is the gospel message. In light of this usage it is unlikely that *καινῆς διαθήκης* in 2 Cor 3:6 can be anything but an objective genitive.

predicted new covenant. The extended exposition of Exodus 34 in 2 Cor 3:7–18 further confirms this thesis. That exposition was intended to show the ineffectual ministry of the Mosaic law in the face of hardhearted people in contrast to the effective new-covenant ministry of the gospel, which could “take away the veil” of hardheartedness (3:14–16).

3. *The new covenant should be considered operative in the ministry of Paul because it replaced or superseded the ministry of the old covenant, which was passing.* In vv 7–11 the apostle contrasted his own ministry of proclaiming the gospel with Moses’ ministry of mediating the law with a set of three antitheses: (1) death (brought on by the γράμμα, v. 6) versus Spirit (which creates life), (2) condemnation versus righteousness, and (3) that which is done away with versus that which remains. Within these antitheses Paul twice used participles of the verb καταργέω “to render ineffective” or “to make inoperative.”<sup>33</sup> In v. 7 the feminine participle modifies δόξα, “glory,” while in v. 11 it is neuter and functions as a substantive with no clear antecedent. The reason for Paul’s choice of this term to describe both the glory on Moses’ face (v. 7) and the operation of the old covenant itself (v. 11) is found in the last contrast: the new-covenant ministry of the Spirit remains, while the old-covenant ministry of the letter is being rendered inoperative.<sup>34</sup> This contrast is a redemptive-historical contrast between the era of the law and the interadvent era.<sup>35</sup> But Paul could hardly argue that the new covenant, “that which remains” (v. 11), was superior to the old covenant, “that which is being rendered inoperative,” unless the new covenant were already operative in the ministry of Paul.<sup>36</sup>

4. *The ministry of the Holy Spirit within the Corinthian church demonstrates that the new covenant is operative.* Paul’s purpose for contrasting the new covenant with the old was to highlight the character of his gospel ministry. Perhaps the most important aspect of that ministry was its mediation of the power of the Spirit. In the Corinthian correspondence and else-

<sup>33</sup> The primary significance of καταργέω outside of the Pauline corpus seems to be the idea of being/rendering idle, inoperative, ineffective (LSJ [9th ed.] 908; MM 331). Despite the insistence of G. Delling (“ἀργός,” *TDNT* 1.452), the four appearances of the verb in the LXX (2 Esdr 4:21, 23; 5:5; 6:8) do not mean “destroy” but are consistent with the idea “render inoperative.” The use of the verb by Paul himself is more ambiguous. Many of the occurrences of the verb are in a context in which the meaning “destroy” is possible. But all of his uses of the term can be explained with the meaning “being/rendering idle, inoperative, ineffective” (see C. K. Barrett, *From First Adam to Last* [New York: Scribner’s, 1962] 51; A. J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements* [Kampen: Kok, 1964] 81).

<sup>34</sup> H. Windisch (*Der Zweite Korintherbrief* [MeyerK; 9th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1924] 117) argues that Paul’s real concern can be seen not in the comparison of two glories but in the comparison of the two covenants.

<sup>35</sup> Following A. Plummer, *Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978) 92; V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB 32A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1984) 229; R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40; Waco: Word, 1986) 64–65; Bultmann, *Second Letter* 83–84; Barrett, *Second Epistle* 118; Hughes, *Second Epistle* 105–106; Calvin, *Second Epistle* 46; D. W. Oostendorp, *Another Jesus* (Kampen: Kok, 1967) 37–38; Belleville, *2 Corinthians* 101.

<sup>36</sup> M. Carrez (“Présence et fonctionnement de l’Ancien Testament dans l’annonce de l’Évangile,” *RSR* 63 [July–September 1975] 326) argues that the operation of the new covenant during the interadvent era is indicated by the present verbs in vv. 4, 6.

where Paul contrasted the gospel that mediates the power and Spirit of God (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 10:4; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13; 2 Thess 2:13–15) with the words or wisdom of men having neither power nor the Spirit (1 Cor 1:18; 2:4–5, 13; 4:19–20). His new-covenant ministry was characterized as being effective in bringing life through the Spirit (2 Cor 3:6). The Corinthian church itself was Paul's best example, since Christ had (through Paul's message) written on their hearts "with the Spirit of the living God" (3:3). This connection of the Spirit was the purpose for citing both Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. Jeremiah 31 alone would have sufficed as a citation of the moral-renewal element of the predicted new covenant, but Ezekiel 36 was also needed to incorporate the added idea that this new-covenant renewal was accomplished through the power of the Spirit. Moses' "letter" style of ministry was ineffective except to bring death; Paul's "Spirit" style of ministry was effective in bringing moral transformation and thus new life.

This contrast is exemplified in Paul's exposition of Exodus 34 in 2 Cor 3:12–18. The reason for Moses' veil was that "their minds were hardened" (2 Cor 3:14). In the context of Exodus 32–34 Moses' veil was occasioned by the sinfulness of the people, which made the glory of God on Moses' face not only unbearable but fatally threatening.<sup>37</sup> The glory of the law, which could not change the hearts of the sinful people, therefore needed to be veiled lest some die and Moses' ministry of mediation be hindered. But the ministry of the new covenant is not like that. Since through the gospel the Spirit works to remove "the veil" (i.e. the hardness of their minds), Paul's service of the new covenant can be effective in transforming believers so that they, like Moses, are transformed to reflect the glory of God through the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). The apostle's assumption, then, was that his gospel-proclaiming ministry was an operation of the new covenant whereby the Spirit transformed believers to reflect the glory of God.<sup>38</sup> The present working of the Spirit indicates the present operation of the new covenant.

<sup>37</sup> Hafemann (*Paul, Moses 347–362*) rightly assails the common interpretation of 2 Cor 3:13 that the reason for the veil was to hide the fading of the glory on Moses' face (and thereby protect his reputation). After the sin with the golden calf, Yahweh's presence among the people was a threat (Exod 33:3, 5). Indeed, even Moses himself could not look at the full display of God's glory according to 33:18–20. Paul used the wording of 33:20 (LXX), "You cannot look on my face, for no one can look on my face and live," in his explanation of the inability of Israel in 2 Cor 3:7: "The sons of Israel were unable to gaze upon the face of Moses because of the glory of his face." As Moses was unable to look at the glorious face of God and live, Paul stated that the Israelites feared to look on the face of Moses lest they die. See Oostendorp (*Another Jesus 249*); cf. also Stockhausen (*Moses' Veil 97 n. 21, 125–126 n. 66*), who considers this view before discarding it.

<sup>38</sup> Both Master ("New Covenant" 102, 105–107) and Ryrie ("Progressive" 170–171) try to mitigate this argument by minimizing the spiritual transformation of Christians today and equating the transforming ministry of the Spirit in the interadvent era with that in the OT. There are reasons, however, to see an intensification of the moral transforming work of the Spirit in this age: (1) The moral characteristics produced in the Christian are far higher than in the OT believer. This can be observed in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. (2) The moral qualifications for leadership in the churches are far higher than for leadership in Israel. Master ("New Covenant" 105) cites the life of David, who was said to be a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam 13:14). Nevertheless, comparing the life of David with the qualifications for leadership in 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1 leads to the conclusion that David would be unqualified to be either an elder or a deacon according to Paul.

Confirming this assessment of 2 Corinthians 3, one other Pauline text specifically relates the new covenant to the present operation of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Thess 4:8–9 Paul referred to Ezek 37:14; Jer 31:33–34.<sup>39</sup> Notice that the presence of the Spirit is the aspect of the new-covenant predictions that is being fulfilled, just as in 2 Corinthians 3. Again, this is the element of moral transformation predicted in the OT and partially fulfilled in the present age. In 1 Thess 4:9 Paul concedes that the love evident among the Thessalonian believers is something produced by God. But his citation of Jeremiah 31 indicates that in his mind this love is the result of the moral transformation described in the new covenant.

#### VI. THE SPIRIT AS PRELIMINARY FULFILLMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

In 2 Corinthians 3 the Spirit's work of moral transformation demonstrated that the new covenant, the same new covenant predicted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was operative in and through the preaching of Paul. The predicted new covenant, however, contained far more than the promise of moral renewal through the Spirit. Promises of material prosperity in the context of Israel being reconstituted in the land are part of the new-covenant prediction. If the Spirit's work demonstrates the present operation of the new covenant, the other elements of the predicted new covenant demonstrate that this operation must be partial and preliminary. But this is exactly how the apostle depicts the role of the Spirit.

1. *Some of the Pauline vocabulary for the Spirit indicates that he was considered a partial fulfillment of what was expected to come in the future.* The apostle expressed this idea with such phrases as “down payment of our inheritance” (ἀρραβῶν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν; Eph 1:14; cf. 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5), “the firstfruits of the Spirit” (τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος; Rom 8:23) and “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ; Eph 1:13; cf. 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22).<sup>40</sup> All of these phrases

<sup>39</sup> The clause τὸν καὶ διδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον εἰς ὑμᾶς, “who also gives us his Holy Spirit” (assuming the καὶ is retained with  $\kappa$ , D\* *et al.*), is taken from the LXX of Ezek 37:14. Paul added τὸ ἅγιον (not present in the LXX text) and changed the form of the verb (future indicative to present or aorist participle, depending on which variant is accepted) and the possessive adjective (from first to third person). The allusion to Jer 31:33–34 is conceptual, not verbal. The idea is present in Jeremiah since the new covenant included the elimination of the need for formal instruction. See L. Hartman, “Bundesideologie in und hinter einigen paulinischen Texten, *Die Paulinische Literatur und Theologie* (ed. S. Pedersen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1980) 108; T. J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality in Paul* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981) 19–21, 33; W. Pfls-ter, *Das Leben im Geist nach Paulus* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1963) 15.

<sup>40</sup> The term κληρονομία (“inheritance”) or its cognates is often used for the blessings of the future age of salvation. This usage is present in Paul (Eph 5:5; 1 Cor 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal 5:21) and in the rest of the NT (Matt 5:5; 19:29; 25:34, 46; Mark 10:17; Luke 10:25; 18:18; Heb 1:14; 1 Pet 3:7, 9) as well as outside of the NT in terms approximating the meaning of κληρονομία (*Jub.* 22:14; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 16:1; 44:12–13; 4 *Ezra* 7:96; *Pss. Sol.* 3:11–12; 14:9–10; 15:10; *m. Abot* 5:19; *Mek. Beshallah* 7 [to Exod 14:26–31]). The terms ἀρραβῶν, ἀπαρχὴν and σφραγίζω designate the Spirit as a partial

indicate that the Holy Spirit's presence in the believer is a partial and preliminary reception of what the believer will receive in the future. In addition, the apostle described the present state of the believer, having received in part the blessings expected in the future, as that of "groaning" (στενάζω) in two passages: 2 Cor 5:4 and Rom 8:23.<sup>41</sup>

2. *The extended passage 2 Cor 4:7-5:10 exhibits the character of the Spirit's work as a partial and preliminary reception of what the believer expects in the future.* Paul asserted that believers have a "treasure" (4:7). If this treasure refers to the gospel, included in its scope are the effects of the gospel on the one who believes it. This fact can be seen in that Paul considers the gospel to be "a power." But where is the power located? In "clay vessels"—that is, in believers' "mortal bodies" (4:7, 11). It is hidden and unseen within bodies that carry around "the dying of Jesus" (4:10) and are "outwardly . . . wasting away" (4:16). Because believers have received only a part of the eschatological blessings they must avert their eyes from the seen and fix them on the unseen (4:18). Paul's prescription for believers is found in 5:1-5. While they groan they remember that they have the Spirit as the "down payment" of their future blessings. Clearly, for Paul the Spirit is a partial and preliminary reception of future blessings.

3. *Romans 8 presents the picture of the Holy Spirit's work in believers such that his presence is both the assurance and confirmation of all future blessings.* In vv. 8-10, after depicting the absolute difference between the new life in Christ and the old death outside of Christ, Paul conceded that the body was yet dead because of sin. This admission, however, gave way to a hope for the completion of this new life when the God who gave the agent of this eschatological life—the Holy Spirit—would complete the new life by raising the believer from the dead. Paul's reaction was to "groan" with the rest of creation awaiting the full realization of future hope, which was not yet seen (vv. 18-25). Again, the Spirit is the presence of partial blessings expected in the future. He is the "firstfruits" of future salvation.

#### VII. ESCHATOLOGICAL RESERVATION IN THE NEW COVENANT

Paul recognized that the work of the Holy Spirit within those who believed his gospel represented the operation of the new covenant predicted in the OT. But the work of the Spirit is presented as only a partial and prelim-

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reception of what will come completely in the future; see for instance F. F. Bruce, "Christ and the Spirit in Paul," *BJRL* 59 (Spring 1977) 283; C. K. Barrett, "New Testament Eschatology: I. Jewish and Pauline Eschatology," *SJT* 6 (1953) 145; N. Q. Hamilton, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957) 28-29; B. Rigaux *et al.*, "L'anticipation du salut eschatologique par l'Esprit," *Foi et salut selon S. Paul* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970) 119-120; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 311.

<sup>41</sup> So G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1979) 59; A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 58.

inary inauguration of eschatological blessings. Partial realization, far from

making Paul and his listeners satisfied, intensified their expectation for the full and complete inauguration of the new covenant.

1. *Even though the apostle presents the moral transformation of the believer through the Spirit as an operation of the new covenant, that transformation itself is incomplete.* In summing up the transforming new covenant work of the Spirit in 2 Cor 3:18 Paul emphasized the incomplete nature of this moral transformation. The present-tense verb μεταμορφούμεθα, “being transformed,” and the qualifying phrase ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, “from glory to glory” (“with ever-increasing glory,” NIV), indicate that the process of transformation is ongoing. Unlike the glory of the old covenant that eventually passed, the glory of the new covenant reflected on the “unveiled” faces of believers will grow ever stronger.<sup>42</sup>

2. *There is every indication that Paul expected a future for Israel in conformity with the OT predictions and covenants.* The “hardness of their minds” attributed to unbelieving Israel in 2 Cor 3:14 means that they are outside of the Spirit and the new covenant at the present time. The language of 3:14 is similar to Paul’s description of Israel’s hardness in Rom 11:7–8, 25. Although in 2 Corinthians the agent of Israel’s hardening is unstated, in Rom 11:7–8 the agent is God himself.<sup>43</sup> Both Rom 11:8 and 2 Cor 3:14 contain the critical phrase “until the present time” with but slight alteration of the wording.<sup>44</sup> For the apostle this hardness was evident in Moses’ day and in Isaiah’s day up to his own time, and it was this hardness that explained Israel’s rejection of the gospel. The hardening was “partial,” however, and would continue “until the full number of the Gentiles” had come in (Rom 11:25). Its purpose was to allow the blessings of the new covenant to go out to the Gentiles. This is what Paul meant by his statement that Gentiles share in the Jews’ spiritual blessings (15:27). But Israel is not forgotten. The divine hardening is temporary, and the blessings to the Gentiles—the blessings that the Jews would have received—are designed to make Israel envious (11:11–15). Eventually all the predicted benefits of the new covenant will be extended. Partial inauguration of the new cove-

<sup>42</sup> So Belleville, *2 Corinthians* 112–113.

<sup>43</sup> In Rom 11:7–8 the aorist passive of παρόω is also used, but the following OT citation (a conflation of Deut 29:3 LXX and Isa 29:10) makes it clear that God has given the Israelites over to the “spirit of stupor”; see F. Mussner, *Tractate on the Jews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 138.

<sup>44</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:14 has ἄχρι γὰρ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας while Rom 11:8 substitutes ἕως for ἄχρι. The ideas in the two passages are remarkably similar, however.

nant only serves to show that the remaining elements most certainly will be fulfilled.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to argue that the OT predictions of the new covenant, rather than being fulfilled either in the future or the present age, are actually fulfilled in both. The present operation of this new covenant, as seen in 2 Corinthians 3, is demonstrated in the working of the Holy Spirit. But this operation is only partial and preliminary. At least one element—the element of moral renewal—is operative in the interadvent era. Partial fulfillment of the new covenant, instead of arguing against future complete fulfillment, actually demands it. This progressive dispensational perspective on the new covenant does not diminish but enhances the future expectation that all the elements of the predicted new covenant will be fulfilled.