

## Sacraments Reimagined: Fulfillment, Continuity and the New Israel

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“Father Abraham has many sons,  
And many sons has Father Abraham.  
I am one of them and so are you,  
So let’s all praise the Lord.”

### Introduction

Many children in different churches have grown up singing this song. Many have enjoyed the singing, and perhaps more have loved the fun hand motions that go with it as well. How many have questioned its meaning? The majority of those who have sung this song have a Gentile heritage, yet they sing this song claiming Abraham as their father. The song actually speaks of a relationship that theologians have debated over many centuries. The classic answer, that we are Abraham’s “spiritual” heirs, might satisfy the armchair theologian, but asking a Jew might elicit another response altogether.

The relationship between the Church and Israel over two millennia runs from cordiality in modern times, to persecution and outright bloodshed in the earlier times. Still, the NT speaks of another relationship. Paul says, “I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew” (Rom. 11:1–2 NIV), and elsewhere, “There is *neither Jew nor Gentile*, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are *all one* in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28 NIV). So one must ask the question that others have asked before: What is the relationship between the Church and Israel? What continuity exists between the two bodies and the story of God’s dealing with them?

For centuries, the Church has held a view of supersessionism, or replacement theology. Generally speaking, this understanding sees a Church that replaces Israel as the people of God for various reasons. The Roman Catholic Church has taught this understanding with different levels of emphasis over many centuries. Only recently has Roman Catholic teaching markedly softened its tone on this understanding.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic

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<sup>1</sup>Gaia, Piangiani, “Vatican Says Catholics Should Not Try to Convert Jews,” *New York Times* December 10, 2015). Accessed December 13, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/11/world/europe/vatican-says-catholics-should-not-try-to-convert-jews.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/11/world/europe/vatican-says-catholics-should-not-try-to-convert-jews.html?_r=0); Johannes Willebrands, Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, March 6, 1982. Accessed December 9,

understandings of the relationships between Israel and the Church, while carrying many similar themes to the Protestant systems, find foundation in a different set of hermeneutical principles, and therefore I will not consider them in any detail.

Arriving with the Protestant reformation, additional views concerning the issue of the relationship between Israel and the Church developed. In general, Luther continued to advocate the classic Roman Catholic supersessionist views with the Lutheran side of Protestantism. However, in Switzerland, the reformers developed a different system known as Covenant Theology. Covenant Theology advocates an understanding of continuity between both the Old and New Testaments, yet sees a separation in covenant understanding from Old to New Testament.

The most recent understanding in theories of continuity, Dispensationalism, developed in England and the United States during the nineteenth century. This understanding sees the most discontinuity between the Testaments, and advocates almost no current relationship between Israel and the Church. Instead, it sees God dealing separately with the two bodies until the end of the age. This system has gained in popularity and become one of the more dominant views of Protestants in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Each of these understandings carries both strengths and weaknesses with regard to Scripture, systematic theology, and how one might consider eschatology. Dispensationalism, both in its traditional and progressive forms, carries with it a strong tendency toward Biblicism, a desire to interpret prophecy in an extremely systematic fashion, and some contend that it presents two ways of salvation.<sup>3</sup> Covenant Theology, even in its newer progressive form, continues to abrogate much of the OT in favor of the New, which while aiming to bring together “one people,” actually alienates much of the Church from its Israelite heritage by nullifying promises made by God to Israel.<sup>4</sup> Discussion between advocates of both systems tends to focus on comparing interpretations of Scriptural passages, and subsequently very little progress has come to actually bring about a better system for the church.

In light of this stalemate, I propose an alternative understanding to shift the topic of discussion. This proposal can lead the Church into new paths of conversation not centered on hermeneutics, away from the dichotomy of replacement or separation, and toward voices not previously considered. The theories of continuity between Israel and the Church, usually argued from the perspective of Scripture, are better seen through the lens of sacrament, and so viewed, present a covenant fulfilled and an expanded People of God. By focusing on the sacraments, the topics then center on practice and practitioner. That is, sacrament deals with the relational aspects of God to his people, and his people to one another. Ultimately, this leads us to Christ and his place in the sacrament as he redeems humankind. Even so, before considering the depth of this proposal, we should first investigate a brief history of the relationship between Israel and the Church, as well as take a more detailed look at the current systems of continuity previously mentioned to provide a context for discussion.

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2015. [Http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_198220306\\_jews-judaism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_198220306_jews-judaism_en.html).

<sup>2</sup>Chad Brand, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad Brand (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 235–36.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 292–98.

## I. Israel-Church Relations through History

The majority of the original followers of Jesus were Jewish. In the earliest days of the Church, Christianity was not a separate religion from Judaism. Reading the NT from the perspective of a Jew makes it clear that the early followers of Jesus Christ considered themselves as a reform movement within Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Jesus taught his disciples to keep the Jewish Law as an honest imitation of himself. Christ's own words say that he did not come to "abolish" the Law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (cf. Matt. 5:17). In fact, on the day of Pentecost, the 3,000 souls added included Jews from the whole Mediterranean basin (cf. Acts 2:5).

Afterward, the Apostles continued this teaching in their early proclamation of the Gospel. The book of Acts records that the believers met daily in the Temple (Acts 2:42–47), and congregated in the various synagogues. Even when the Gentiles began to enter the faith, they still understood themselves to be a part of the larger picture of Judaism. Though Gentiles who joined were offered certain exemptions (cf. Acts 15), they had the faith of the House of Israel as expressed through the teachings of Israel's Messiah. The leaders of the new community were Jews and the framework of faith was Jewish.<sup>6</sup>

Most scholars agree that from very early on the non-believing Jewish and Jewish Christian leaders endeavored to distinguish clearly between the two communities with barriers of social relations. This way, those who crossed these barriers could be obvious and distinct.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the "very fact that religious leadership on both sides found it necessary to enjoin sharp borders again and again is itself eloquent testimony that the border was far from sharp in real life."<sup>8</sup> The fact is that there were communities of Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire because there were Jews in what we term 'the Diaspora' all across the Roman Empire. Many were extremely integrated with their non-Christian brethren, and others were integrated with their Gentile brethren.<sup>9</sup>

We know that Jewish communities existed in much of the Roman Empire and especially in modern-day Turkey. In all the journeys of Paul, as recorded in Acts, we see him encountering Jews in synagogues, and many of them became believers. In this heartland of Hellenistic Judaism, evidence also exists that many of the believers in the churches were of Jewish origin. Greek writings preserved from these churches point strongly to the existence of Jewish Christians into the second century. One of the most Jewish of early Christian writings, the *Didache*, provides teaching and instruction to help Gentiles enter the Church. The text itself provides a good picture of what a Christian community that still practiced Jewish Law looked like: Sabbath observance, Passover Observance, and a Jewish context for hermeneutics.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>D. Thomas Lancaster, *Restoration: Returning the Torah of God to the Disciples of Jesus* (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2005), 14.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 14–15.

<sup>7</sup>Oskar Skarsaune and Hvalvik Reidar, ed., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 7.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>10</sup>Matt A. Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 257–58.

On the basis of the available evidence, it seems that churches into the end of the second century still carried strong Jewish influence in the body. This shows clearly in the writings of Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch and other church fathers of that period. Justin Martyr and Ignatius of Antioch in particular encouraged the Christians to abandon Jewish practices that were still tenaciously held by some believers.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, for the typical community of Jews during the first to the third centuries, “there was no physical separation of ‘Jewish Christianity’ from ‘Gentile Christianity.’” Jewish believers, Jewish non-believers, and Gentile believers lived in one community striving to hold one fellowship together, even to the point of fact that Jewish nonbelievers held high regard for Jewish Christian martyrs during this time, seeing them still a part of the Jewish community.<sup>12</sup>

The adoption of Christianity by Rome and the subsequent “Christianization” of the Empire changed forever the links that existed between Christian and Jew and completely altered their relationship from one of cooperation and shared heritage to one of animosity and fear. The real break between Christianity and Judaism occurred in A.D. 325 and immediately after.

The Council of Nicaea convened that year, completing the Romanization of the Church with Constantine’s statement, “Let us have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish rabble.”<sup>13</sup> Historians refer to these events as the “Parting of the Ways.” At this council the Church stopped reckoning the date of Easter by the Jewish calendar, and the Church forbade all Christians from keeping the Jewish law. The Council at Antioch in A.D. 341 forbade believers from keeping the Passover. The Council at Laodicea in A.D. 363 also forbade observing the biblical Sabbath. From this point forward, the Church functioned as a Gentile body and interpreted its Scriptures and life from a Gentile mind-set. By this time, any cooperation with, or conversion to, Christianity would have been viewed as both religious *and* national defection by a Jew.<sup>14</sup>

By the Middle Ages, the Church regarded Jews as a rogue religion and persecution of Jews began, all in the name of supersession. Indeed, debate of the question of supersession received little attention, with most considering it a postulate for discussion. One could view this time period as the beginning of the uprooting of Paul’s ‘olive tree’ stump to which he refers in Romans 11. Most Christians understood God to have rejected Israel due to their rejection of Christ, and their participation in his death. Artwork in this time frame, such as those personifying Israel, depicted a dejected and overcome nation. Nonetheless, the Church coupled this belief with one that saw Jews someday experiencing conversion to Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

With these views of a rejected Israel in need of conversion, the Church took up the task in the form of the Inquisition and the practice of *anusim*, or forced conversion. The practices included mass baptisms, forced church attendance, and abandonment of Jewish culture. In these events, not only did the Church think of Israel as separate and conquered, but they treated it as such. What we see is the opposite of Judaizing (cf. Gal. 2), but instead a type of ‘Gentilizing.’ Jews of today still consider this practice, which happened across much of

<sup>11</sup>Lancaster, *Restoration*, 18–19.

<sup>12</sup>Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 767, 780.

<sup>13</sup>Cited in Lancaster, *Restoration*, 20.

<sup>14</sup>Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 777.

<sup>15</sup>Michael J. Vlach, *Edition Israelogie (Edis)*. Vol. 2, *The Church as a Replacement of Israel: an Analysis of Supersessionism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), 56–59.

Europe during the Middle Ages, but especially on the Iberian Peninsula, a dark scourge on their history.<sup>16</sup>

This persecution of Jews continued through the Renaissance and into the nineteenth century with alternating strength. During this time, the concept of the ‘Jewish Question’ developed, i.e., what do we do with Jews who refuse to assimilate into the general Gentile, Christian culture? With the continued union of Christian Church with State, difficulties arose as to the status of Jews who would not convert. Various ‘solutions’ arose, including those which proposed complete and ultimate assimilation,<sup>17</sup> or the establishment of a Jewish homeland (Zionism),<sup>18</sup> and the ultimate cruelty of Nazism’s ‘final solution’: extermination of the Jewish race.

Also in the nineteenth century, a new system of theology developed, termed Dispensationalism. Begun by the work of John N. Darby, a disaffected member of the Church of Ireland, the system focused on an extremely literal reading of the Scripture inspired by Darby’s interpretation of 2 Timothy 2:15. This system, which we will consider more fully presently, understood the Jews and their covenant to continue outside of the Church, and the promises to Israel as literal and tied to the physical land of Israel. This system exploded in popularity, especially in the United States, because of its Biblicism meshing nicely with the goals of Fundamentalists during the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies of the early twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> Uniting the teachings of Dispensationalism with the desires of Zionism, and in the aftermath of the genocide of the Nazi Holocaust, one could argue that its final outcome generated the modern State of Israel in 1948.

As Dispensationalism gained in popularity, another movement began as well: Messianic Judaism. In the latter part of the twentieth century, a large group of Jews began embracing Jesus, but refused to jettison their Jewish cultural identity. They began to question the required ‘Gentilization’ that the Church had foisted on previous converts, and they began to read the Scriptures through Jewish eyes. While some of them embraced the idea of Dispensationalism, many read Paul’s writings (esp. Romans and Galatians), and saw a Church that could include both Jews and Gentiles working together. The movement challenged Gentiles to see the Jewish roots of their own faith and to understand a church that can be both Jewish and Gentile.<sup>20</sup>

Even in our modern world, the relationship between the Church and Israel is extremely muddled. In an attempt to clarify this condition, David Stern summarizes the relationship with eight approaches that the church has taken, and currently takes, to understand how to see Israel: Opposition, Separatism, Tolerance, Syncretism, Assimilation, Compromise,

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<sup>16</sup>Ashley Perry, “Kol Nidre and the Bnei Anusim: The Inquisition and Expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula left an indelible mark on Jewish history, perhaps like no other event.” *Jerusalem Post* (September 22, 2015). Accessed December 9, 2015. <http://www.jpost.com/Not-Just-News/Kol-Nidre-and-the-Bnei-Anusim-417879>.

<sup>17</sup>Goldwin Smith, “The Jewish Question,” in *Essays on Questions of the Day* (New York: Macmillan, 1894).

<sup>18</sup>Theodore Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (Leipzig: M. Breitenstein’s Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896).

<sup>19</sup>Brand, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*, 7–8.

<sup>20</sup>David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past* (Clarksville, MD.: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), 6–64; David J. Rudolph, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 30–33.

Evangelism, and Reconciliation.<sup>21</sup> Scanning across the short history presented here, one may see each of these approaches represented, and many of them continue to compete with one another. The majority of them have roots in the systems of theology developed by the Church to understand its relationship to Israel. Because the Church's understanding is so interconnected to these systems, a more in-depth look at them is required.

## II. Theological Systems of Continuity

Protestant scholars usually describe the relationship between Israel and the Church in one of four ways, *viz.*: Dispensational Theology, Progressive Dispensational Theology, Progressive Covenantal Theology, and Covenantal Theology. These fall on a spectrum beginning with complete separation of the two groups (Dispensational), moving toward replacement of Israel by the Church (Covenantal). Furthermore, they also follow a movement from an extremely exegetical, Biblicist framework, to a more theological understanding.

Dispensationalism developed out of literal readings of the Scripture to advocate a type of grammatical-historical interpretation. Beginning with John N. Darby in the early 1800's, the movement focused heavily on a literal interpretation of the promises made to Abraham, the Patriarchs, Moses and Israel, with respect to land and monarchy. Even today, the Dispensationalist view quite literally understands the ideas of ethnic Israel as the chosen people. The system teaches that while Israel might have broken God's covenants, God still chooses them. Taking an extreme literal reading of the Epistles, Dispensationalism teaches that at some future time, Jewish people will return in massive numbers to God through Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> This leaves the question, what then of the Gentiles?

In the current time, referred to as the "Church Age," God has turned to the Gentiles for his work in the world. Putting the work with Israel 'on pause,' or in a parenthetical type mode, the Church operates to convert and convict other Gentiles to join the cause of Christ. This age, or dispensation, focused on the Gentiles, will end with the rapture of the Gentile church, with God returning to his work with Israel during a time of persecution known as the Tribulation. At the close of that time, Christ will establish a restored Davidic monarchy: the Millennial Kingdom. Not until the end of that time frame does God reunite the Gentile Church with the restored Israel.<sup>23</sup>

The theological picture painted by Dispensationalism shows a very sharp separation and distinction between the Church and Israel. Robert Saucy, in his evaluation of Robert Thomas' explanation of Dispensationalism states, ". . . the Old Testament identity of Israel and promises given to that nation remain valid throughout the Scriptures. Thus, *the church is not Israel.*"<sup>24</sup> This system sees no continuity with Jewish faith or practice to the Church between the Testaments. It separates the dealings of God and people into distinct dispensations corresponding to the various covenants of Scripture. It envisions an Israel that, under the restoration, will continue its OT practices and systems.

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<sup>21</sup>Stern, *Messianic Judaism*, 76–82.

<sup>22</sup>Brand, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*, 87–88.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 94–142.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 143, *emph. mine.*

On the other hand, we find Covenantal Theology, which stems directly out of the Protestant Reformation and the works of Calvin and Zwingli, teaching a metanarrative of covenant stretching through Scripture, with a people of God constant throughout. This position is founded on the Church Fathers, especially Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine who were responsible for carrying forward the results of the “Parting of the Ways,” to a theological conclusion with regard to Israel-Church relationships. Tertullian, in his *An Answer to the Jews*, described the Jews as a “contumacious people,” from whom God had revoked his covenant. Continuing in this vein, Origen advocated a developed “replacement theology,” which understood the Church as a “new Israel,” and a new people of God. Augustine and Chrysostom completed this spiritualized vision of the “new Israel” in their fourth and fifth century writings.<sup>25</sup>

In their quest to return to a more Biblical understanding of soteriology, the Reformers (namely the Helvetic branch) built on these foundations, using ideas of God’s history of salvation seen through the entirety of Scripture. They developed an understanding of biblical covenants as a way of God bringing salvation to his elect throughout history. They identified two separate covenants: the first a covenant of works, and the second a covenant of grace. Simply put, the covenantal structure uses a system of “headship,” following Paul’s discussions in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. The first covenant has Adam as its head, and justification through obedience to God’s command. The second covenant has Christ as a head (the perfect Adam), prefigured in Genesis, and to whom all subsequent OT covenants point. This covenantal structure received codification in many Reformed confessions of faith, notably in the Westminster Confession.<sup>26</sup>

Covenant theologians see the Church as the Spiritual Israel with Christ at its head. It has very supersessionist or replacement type themes. Accordingly, while it advocates continuity between the Old and New Testaments in faith, it teaches a Church that replaced OT understandings with spiritualized NT faith *and* practice. The Westminster Confession of Faith supports this viewpoint when it says:

This [second] covenant was differently administered in the time of law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews. . . . Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance was exhibited, the ordinances with which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. . . . There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one in the same, under different dispensations.

Though subtle, there is no doubt this is a type of replacement theology. This new age of Grace proposes a people and a practice that abolishes the old covenant practices and signs, and replaces them with those of the New Covenant.

Falling midway between the opposing sides of these systems, Progressive Dispensationalism and Progressive Covenantalism each represent a more nuanced approach to the question. Both of the “progressive” theologies compromise some of the more extreme pieces in order to meet in the middle. While traditional Covenantal Theology teaches replacement, the progressive version tries to present a metanarrative of Scripture that better separates

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 1–5; Lancaster, *Restoration*, 18–21.

<sup>26</sup>Brand, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*, 18–22.

Israel and the Church while still providing a cohesive understanding of the Scriptural covenants. Alternately, while traditional Dispensationalism enjoins sharp lines between Church and Israel and sees no link between their dispensations, the progressive version presents less of a parenthetical mode to Israel's current dispensation and shows God continuing to work with both Israel and Church. They further argue that each dispensation contains links with the others to show a more cohesive narrative.<sup>27</sup>

These four systems comprise the majority view of the Protestant Church as to the relationship between and continuity of Church and Israel, with none of them providing a compelling solution to the question of continuity. Proposing a fifth view, David Stern argues from the Messianic Jewish perspective, with a system called Olive Tree Theology. In his treatise on Messianic Judaism, he presents a framework based on Paul's olive tree discussion found in Romans 11. Calling the separation of the Church and the Jewish people "completely out of God's will, a terrible mistake [and] the worst schism in history," he calls for the correction of the mistake stemming from the 'Parting of the Ways.'<sup>28</sup>

Using a similar discussion of history to that which I have presented here, he argues that both the Church and Israel hold a common heritage of faith that was lost in the early history of the Church. He sees a Church that complements a Messianic Israel and works together to provide a witness of Christ to the world. Advocating for two expressions of Christianity, a Jewish one and a Gentile one, he holds the distinctions of Dispensationalism with regard to Scriptural promises. Nonetheless, looking toward Covenantalism, he sees a shared redemption of both communities without eschatological divisions<sup>29</sup>

While admirable and compelling, this system still creates a final picture of divided people of God rather than an expanded one. It still separates Church from Israel by distinguishing between Gentile and Jew with regard to promises.<sup>30</sup> In some respects, it paints a view of Church much like that of the Judaizers with whom Paul differs in the Antioch incident described in Galatians 2 (Jew here, Gentile over there). Secondly, like the current Protestant systems, it relies heavily on hermeneutics, rather than faith and practice. While Scripture functions as the foundation for faith and practice, relying too much on hermeneutics focuses discussion on textual one-upmanship and not on a compelling theological narrative.

### III. Proposing a New View

Therefore, instead of these systems, I offer a unified system, termed 'Fulfillment Continuity,' that focuses on Christ through his institution of the Christian sacraments. Like Covenantal Theology, it sees one people of God redeemed by a Christ prefigured in the OT. Like Dispensationalism, it upholds the promises to the nation of Israel. Unlike both of them, however, it sees a united people with a united redemption (who are profoundly Jewish).

"Christianity is Jewish," argues Edith Schaeffer in her book with this title. She makes the case that the world's largest religion, Christianity, is actually not a new religion at all but the continuation of an ancient faith from which it was never intended to be separated:

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Stern, *Messianic Judaism*, 47.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 47–59.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 56.

Judaism. The chosen people of God carried the Word of God forward to the birth of the Messiah and the salvation of the whole world. The faith of ancient Judaism brought the world redemption and offered reconciliation to humans in Jesus Christ. Moreover, the picture in Scripture is that Christianity should be the continuation of Judaism in its completed form, and that Gentiles would be brought into the family as coheirs with the Jews of God's eternal salvation.<sup>31</sup>

This completed form of faith finds perfect exposition in the sacraments, where Christ's sacrifice is displayed in a unifying form. Taking the sacraments of the Old Covenant, Christ united them together with his atoning death to present them, in fulfilled form, to the people of God. As with Covenantal Theology, the Old Covenant sacraments prefigure Christ; nevertheless, these sacraments actually continue in fulfilled form to mark those of the New Covenant. Further, because Christ died for all people, both Jew and Gentile (cf. John 3:16; Gal. 3:28), the sacraments of the New Covenant carry forth to all people, as a united people of God, a completed Israel.

As stated at the outset, sacraments involve relationship: relationship between God and his people, and his people among one another. Therefore, to see the relationship between Church and Israel, we should investigate how the sacraments of Israel relate to those of the Church. Sacraments carried from Old Covenant to New Covenant, instituted by Christ and made manifest in his atoning death, function as the unification of the people of God. Therefore, we must consider the topic of sacrament and its movement from Old Covenant to New Covenant.

#### IV. Sacraments Defined

Traditionally, the Church has defined sacrament in three ways. Each definition provides a different way to see an aspect of God and his relationship to people. The first definition of sacrament signifies an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given. This classic definition comes down from the ancient Church. In this way, sacrament fits neatly within the bounds of the means of grace. It becomes a vehicle by which the grace of God extends to the people of God.

The second definition of a sacrament is as a sign and a seal to provide a guarantee. John Calvin in his *Institutes* termed it as, "an outward sign by which the Lord seals to our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we, in turn, attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men."<sup>32</sup> Through the physical element, God speaks to the soul to assure the receiver that he or she has not only received the grace God wishes to bestow, but also has a position in the great redeemed people of God.

Through this, a sacrament takes on a third characteristic or definition: a mark of the covenant. "Has God ever tried to go and take for himself a nation?" (Deut. 4:34a). In this sense, a sacrament demarcates those who are a part of the redeemed, covenantal community. These people, whom God has made, distinguish themselves by certain signs. These

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<sup>31</sup>Edith Schaeffer, *Christianity is Jewish* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1975), 11–12.

<sup>32</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 1559 ed. 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1277.

*sacrementum*, in the Latin sense, denote the allegiance of the bearer to the body which the sacrament represents.

Beyond the definitions, it is important to note that sacraments must have certain hallmarks. As A. A. Hodge describes them:

(1) A sacrament is an ordinance immediately instituted by Christ. (2) A sacrament always consists of two elements: (a) an outward and visible sign, and (b) an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified. (3) The sign in every sacrament is sacramentally united to the grace which it signifies; and out of this union the scriptural usage has arisen of ascribing to the sign whatever is true of that which the sign signifies. (4) The sacraments were designed to represent, seal, and apply the benefits of Christ and the new covenant to believers. (5) They were designed to be pledges of our fidelity to Christ, binding us to his service, and at the same time badges of our profession, visibly marking the body of professors and distinguishing them from the world.<sup>33</sup>

These hallmarks encapsulate the classic definitions and describe a unique institutional rite.

Along with definitions and hallmarks, sacraments carry with them a particular vision of time. The sacrament looks backward to the history of God's salvific acts. It looks to the present time, as the community comes together for the rite itself. It looks toward the future and God's completion of the redemptive act. We see the memorial in Christ's words at the Last Supper, "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19 NIV), and we see the futuristic tone in his words, "I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29 NIV). Accordingly, with definitions, hallmarks, and temporal understandings of sacrament in hand, we can proceed to the evaluation of the Old Covenant and its concepts of sacrament.

## V. Old Covenant Sacraments

Technically speaking, sacraments do not exist within the Old Covenant, and the concept of sacraments comes from the church fathers in the early work to systematize the Christian faith. Nevertheless, God used physical things in the OT to communicate in sacramental ways. In many places, God "binds his people into a covenant relationship, [with] physical, concrete, material signs of [this] relationship to his people."<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, God expressed his desire to relate to his people in these physical ways. Sacrament is relationship. The tabernacle, sacrificial system, cleansing rituals, *et cetera* all functioned as a means for God to commune with his people.<sup>35</sup> These sacramental signs served as covenantal markers to define the people of God, remind them of their relationship to him and each other, and focus them on their duty to live as a peculiar people among the nations (cf. Deut. 14:2; Isa. 42:6). While not classically termed sacraments, Calvin does draw that direct relation in the *Institutes*. "He calls them sacraments because they were instituted by

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<sup>33</sup>As cited in H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1940), 3:156–57.

<sup>34</sup>Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 38.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 37–41.

God, they were accompanied by God's word of promise and they pointed to Christ, who is the substance of the sacraments."<sup>36</sup> In that vein, let us more properly evaluate certain rites of the OT with regard to the definitions and hallmarks previously mentioned. This evaluation will aid in defining their meaning as carried forward into the New Covenant.

The OT rites of circumcision, Passover, *Yom Kippur* and associated sacrificial system, and the story of the bronze serpent not only point ahead to Christ, but also principally form the foundations of the New Covenant Sacraments. Therefore, evaluation of these in light of Dr. Hodge's hallmarks and/or definitions is appropriate as we seek to form the link between the Covenants.

Circumcision, the seminal ceremonial act of the Old Covenant, with its physical component, certainly fits the definition of a "mark of the covenant." God immediately institutes the ordinance (Gen. 17:10), and confirms it to Moses (Lev. 12:3). The sign consists of both necessary elements: a physical sign (the cutting of the foreskin), and the inward grace, "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deut. 30:6 NIV). Through this verse we also see the grace united to the sign, and the usage shows their linkage. Lastly, Scripture speaks over and over again of how circumcision applies the benefits of God's Old Covenant to the Israelites, and made them distinct over all the nations.

Another example of national identity, the Passover, is a feast that carries multiple examples of sacramental import. God instituted it on the eve of the Exodus from Egypt (Exod. 12). Multiple elements of the feast consist of outward and visible signs (e.g., blood, lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread). Each one of these elements speaks to the grace of deliverance given to the people from their bondage in Egypt. Usage in the Scriptures multiple times links deliverance and remembrance of that deliverance with these particular elements, specifically unleavened bread. The blood itself applied the benefits of the redemption to each household of the nation in that by the sign of the blood, God passed over the houses. Finally, the festival of Passover continued to serve as a unique and peculiar act in the nation, so much so that foreigners could not partake (cf. Exod. 12:48).

Like Passover, the festival of *Yom Kippur*, as well the sacrificial system with physical burnt offerings, drink offerings, grain offerings, and wave offerings speaks to deliverance, in this case from sin and uncleanness. God ordained each distinct rite with certain purposes. The Scriptures link these elements of sacrifice directly to the presentation of a nation holy and blameless before God. "They were not mere signs, empty rituals. By God's word and promise, the sacrificial rituals performed what they signified."<sup>37</sup>

The last Old Covenant sacrament, perhaps overlooked by many who have investigated this subject, figures into the discussion because the Lord references it. The strange story of the bronze serpent in Numbers fits the sacramental definition, certainly as a means of grace. God instituted it for the salvation of the people (Num. 21:8). The serpent on the pole served as the outward sign, and the grace came through the healing which God provided for the people. The serpent became such a sign for the people that it functioned almost in idol-like fashion. It applied the benefits of God's grace directly to the people with just a glance, and they carried it with them for many years to follow (cf. 2 Kings 18:4).

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>37</sup>Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 41.

Each one of these Old Covenant rites fits the definition and hallmarks of sacrament presented. Moreover, each one prefigures the Messiah who is promised and the redemption he brings. Calvin called these ‘sacraments,’ because they directly point to the Messiah and serve as foretastes of his coming. As it says in Hebrews, “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (10:1 NIV), and again, “They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven” (8:5 NIV). So moving from the shadows, we come to the light that is Christ, and how the New Covenant sacraments function with respect to the Old.

## VI. New Covenant Sacraments

The Protestant movement recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist. Standing on the hallmarks and definitions we have used, Christ instituted both of these ordinances. Both contain a sign (water, and bread with cup), and each sign represents an inward and spiritual grace of cleansing and forgiveness. For each sign, Scripture unites the benefits of Christ’s redemption directly to their administration. Finally, the Church and Scripture have known them as badges of profession of faith, with especially baptism functioning as the mark of the covenant.

Additionally, many scholars have argued that Christ, himself, with his bodily presence and atoning sacrifice, constitutes an ultimate additional sacrament of the New Covenant. Arguing this point, in his book *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, Fr. E. Schillebeeckx writes, “Because the saving acts of the man Jesus are performed by a divine person, they have the power to save, but because this power to save appears to us in visible form, the saving activity of Jesus is *sacramental*. . . . The man Jesus, as the personal visible realization of the divine grace of redemption, is *the sacrament*, the primordial sacrament.”<sup>38</sup>

The physical sign of Christ’s body in human encounter serves as a sign, and his atonement causes grace. Therefore, Jesus is properly sacrament. Echoing Schillebeeckx, Vander Zee carries the argument further, “Christ is the quintessential sacrament, the visible sign of the invisible grace of God. The sacraments Christ instituted are a means God uses to unite us with him and seal all the promises of his grace to us. It is a divinely ordered way for us to share in the reality accomplished for us in Christ.”<sup>39</sup>

In other words, Christ has united us to himself, the ultimate sacrament, through these certain rites he established. How has he accomplished that? Is what he established something completely new, or an extension of the old? To these pressing questions, we now turn in order to see a new vision for the people of God.

## VII. Messianic Visions in Old Sacraments

The letter of Hebrews spoke of shadows and types as a way to prefigure the Messiah inside of the Old Covenant. Consequently, in each Old Covenant sacrament, we should see these

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<sup>38</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 15 (emph. his).

<sup>39</sup>Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 51.

shadows and types fulfilled into true visions. Consider circumcision first, and look toward its fulfillment in baptism. Looking back to Deuteronomy, and God's command to circumcise the heart in order to write the Law there (10:12–13), paired with the Prophet Jeremiah who called for that in the New Covenant (31:31–33), Paul sees Christ uniting the one with the other (cf. Col. 2:11–12). Only now, the context expands to all believers with the usage of water and the elimination of the gender component. Christ has used another *Jewish* act, proselyte baptism, for the expanded function.

In Passover, Christ appears in every symbol, and many have written on the subject.<sup>40</sup> Paul calls him the “Passover lamb” (1 Cor. 5:7). Christ links his body and blood with the unleavened bread and wine of the feast (Matt. 26:26–27). As the bread is broken, so we see his broken body. He calls the wine the ‘blood of the new covenant.’ In the symbol of the bitter herbs, we see the bitterness of Christ's suffering and death. In the redemption of slavery from Egypt, we see redemption from spiritual slavery (Rom. 6). In essence, Christ has completed the feast.

Especially in *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the vision of Christ shines clearly. The central point of the second argument in Hebrews expounds the many ways that Christ completes the meanings of the sacrificial system. Vander Zee writes, “*Yom Kippur* . . . becomes the standard by which the New Testament . . . establishes the meaning of Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the blood that was shed for the remission of our sins.”<sup>41</sup>

Finally, it is Christ who connects his sacrifice on the cross with the bronze serpent of Moses. In his evening discussion with Nicodemus, Christ uses the figure of that serpent as a prefigure of how he intended to save, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (John 3:14 NIV).

Subsequently, Christ takes each one of these Old Covenant sacraments, and provides them with their final and completed meaning. Instead of abolishing them, he takes each *Jewish* rite and provides it with the fullness that God had always intended it to have. This corresponds to the argument of the writer of Hebrews. “Hebrews claims for itself the image of a *liturgy*, a symbolic action in the sacred sphere: more particularly, a *covenant-renewal rite*, of which the book's words comprise a long prophetic exhortation . . . a reinterpretation of the symbolism of the old covenant, through a *reapplication* of its symbols in the light of Christ.”<sup>42</sup>

So concluded Dunnill in his analysis of the letter with regard to communion, and by extension I conclude it with regard to the remainder of the sacraments. The early Jewish believers did not understand the Old Covenant abolished, and they did not see the sacraments instituted by Christ as *replacements* of the sacraments so long celebrated. In Paul's discussion of the Eucharist, he references a *specific* bread and cup, “For whenever you eat *this* bread and drink *this* cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26, NIV). The implication is that the early believers continued to understand the Eucharist in the framework of Passover.

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<sup>40</sup>Cf. Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Times: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Celebrating the Biblical Holy Days*, new ed. (Clarksville, MD.: Lederer Publications, 2007), 25–38.

<sup>41</sup>Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 40.

<sup>42</sup>John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 261–62 (emph. mine).

### VIII. United Visions, Unified People

Instead of an abrogation of previous things, Christ's atonement on the cross unites an old partial vision of God's salvation with a new and full understanding of God's salvific aims. Christ's death unites the atonement sacrifice of *Yom Kippur* with the redemptive sacrifice of the Passover, and provides a new framework for understanding the salvific acts of God. Christ links circumcision and baptism with the great redemption of a people through the Red Sea.<sup>43</sup> In summary, Christ links the sacraments of the Old Covenant with those of the New Covenant and directs the People of God to continue in practice things they have always known in part, but now see in his fullness.

Advancing the theme further, Christ extends the vision from ethnic Israel to the entire world. Because Christ's death extends to the whole world, so then the sacraments of Israel, re-envisioned by Christ's sacrifice, now extend to the whole world. Again, in reference to the bronze serpent, "so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14b NIV), Christ says *everyone* who believes. Later in John, again referencing the "lifting up," Christ says he will "draw all people" to himself (John 12:32).

So we come to the final conclusion. Christ has taken Jewish sacraments and expanded them to include all people: the nations of the world. Christ has taken an existing people of God, Israel, and expanded them to include all people. Subsequently, just as the New Covenant sacraments do not *replace* the Old Covenant sacraments, but instead fulfill their meaning, so then the Church does not *replace* Israel, but Israel expands to become the Church, the 'called-out' people from Israel and the nations. Israel has fulfilled its calling to be a "light for the Gentiles," and through them, God's salvation can "reach to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6 NIV).

What of Israel as a nation peculiar and distinct? That continues. God has called a people out by marks of a covenant to be a priesthood, holy and blameless. Nonetheless, this people is now defined not by a mark of ethnicity, but by a mark of Christ (cf. Gal. 2). Whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, it is one people in Christ Jesus. The marks of the covenant no longer carry an ethnic and exclusive understanding, and similarly the redemptive acts of God become the redemptive acts for all people.

### IX. Jewish Sacraments for New Covenant People

So we return to the vision of Paul's olive tree, but now from the perspective of sacrament. The redemptive history of the Jewish people has, through Christ's unifying sacrifice for all people, become the redemptive history for all people. He has done this by uniting his sacrifice for all people to the redemptive vision presented in the Old Covenant sacraments of Passover and *Yom Kippur*, and renewing that vision for all people. In his article on this subject, Scott Bader-Saye crystalizes this understanding of linking all people back to a Jewish understanding of sacrament, while keeping a forward eye to the redeemed people of God:

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<sup>43</sup>Robert S. Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments; the Relation of the Atonement to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 351.

The Eucharist enacts a pattern of Christ's presence in our midst and thus shapes how we understand the biblical words which witness to him. In this practice the written Word becomes the sacramental Word; the Word read becomes the Word consumed. By re-Judaizing this sacrament and reclaiming its Jewish elements, Christians will come to see what it means to be Jews with Jews or, in Paul's terms, to be grafted into Israel.<sup>44</sup>

Bader-Saye's words indeed push the Church to accept its Jewish heritage as seen through the lens of a Jewish sacrament. He further points out that by recovering the meaning of the Eucharist as Jews, we link the Church not just to the sacrifice of Christ, but to the full story of God's redemptive history. "The Eucharist [and by extension, the other sacraments] is a summation of narrative theology, since it is precisely the practice whereby the community is engrafted into the story. God's story becomes our own story; we become participants in the ongoing drama of God's reign."<sup>45</sup>

So we have come to the proper relationship via the sacrament. Christians should unite themselves to God's redemptive history, and consequently to the nation of Israel. Sacraments become the vehicle that helps the Church do this. The sacraments are Jewish sacraments displaying the covenant God has made with Jews and extended to Gentiles. In baptism, we are made a part of the Jewish Body of Christ, and in the Eucharist we participate in the Jewish Body of Christ. "Jesus's body becomes part of part of the flesh of both Jew and Gentile gathered at the table . . . the [sacrament] can therefore be understood as the place where God's *corporeal* election of Israel is extended to the Gentiles. By participating in Christ through the [sacrament], they are made to participate in the covenant God made with Jewish flesh."<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, if united to Israel's covenant, the Church unites to Israel's mission: to be a light to the world. Christ's words then take on new depth, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16). The words immediately following this statement by Christ are those of his mission not to abrogate the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. The context of supersession melts away when the mission of Israel becomes the mission of the Church.

What is this mission? Paul calls it reconciliation, "God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:18–19a NIV). To whom does Christ, and subsequently we extend this ministry of reconciliation? Paul expands it further:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>44</sup>Scott Bader-Saye, "Post Holocaust Hermeneutics: Scripture, Sacrament, and the Jewish Body of Christ," *CrossCurrents* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2000/2001): 466.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 467.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 470, *emph. his.*

For he himself is our peace, who has made *the two groups one* and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in *himself one new humanity out of the two*, thus making peace, and in *one* body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are *no longer foreigners and strangers*, but fellow citizens *with* God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the *whole building* is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Eph. 2:11–22 NIV)

With these thoughts in mind, what of the existing structures of continuity in the Church? An Israel expanded to be the Church, and renewed with Christ as the head, presents continuity un-envisioned in Dispensationalism. The unification of Church and Israel as a Jewish body changes conversation from one of parenthetical dispensations to one of common destiny and mission. Perhaps a reminder to the Dispensationalist that Jesus' body is a Jewish body and the Word is a Jewish word, would change their Biblicist focus to one of a Jewish context. Reading the scriptures from the eye of a Jew certainly forces a new way of seeing God's covenantal relationship to his people. To the Covenantal theologian, while the theological approach of this system might resonate, noting the absence of *replacement* of the Old Covenant sacrament will help to remove the desire to supersede the people of Israel with the Church.

"If the Lord's [sacraments] deliver to us a Christ who is Jewish and calls us to enter into the story of Israel's liberation, then we dare not support a [vision of the Church] that replaces Israel . . . or relegates Judaism to a second-rate religion in order to advance [Christianity]."<sup>47</sup> Instead, drawing deeply from Paul's Olive Tree, and holding tightly to the Christ of the sacrament, we join triumphantly in the mission of Israel, the Israel of Christ, to bring light to the nations and a message of reconciliation.

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<sup>47</sup> Bader-Saye, "Post Holocaust Hermeneutics," 472.