

## **“A Critique of Progressive Covenantalism from a Traditional Dispensational Perspective”**

The 2022 Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics  
Southern California Seminary, El Cajon, California  
September 14-15, 2022

Gary Gromacki, Th.M., D.Min., Ph.D.  
Department Chair and Professor of Bible and Theology  
Director of the Ph.D. in Bible and Theology Program  
Calvary University in Kansas City, Missouri

### **Introduction**

Progressive Covenantalism (PC) is a relative newcomer to biblical-theological systems that attempt to explain the metanarrative of the Bible. Progressive Covenantalism comes out of New Covenant Theology (NCT) which comes out of Covenant Theology (CT).

### **Covenant Theology**

Covenant Theology (CT) focuses on the theological covenants (covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace). Berkhof wrote that the covenant of redemption was an agreement between the Father and Son in eternity past where the Father gave the Son to die for the elect. In CT God made the covenant of works with Adam promising eternal life for perfect obedience and death as the punishment for sin. Adam as the representative head of the human race sinned against God and his sin is then charged to the whole human race. God then made the covenant of grace with Adam and the human race which God promised salvation to the elect through faith in Jesus Christ. CT sees the first mention of the covenant of grace in the protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15. CT views the biblical covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New) as expressions of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace unfolds in redemptive history through promises God makes to Abraham (Gen.12,17), to Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24), to Israel on the plains of Moab (Deut.29:13), to David (2 Sam.7:14) and the prophecy to Jeremiah of a New Covenant (Jer.31) which is applied to the church by Christ, the covenant mediator.<sup>1</sup>

CT interprets the Old Testament by the New Testament which results in an artificial typological interpretation. CT holds to one people of God who are saved

---

<sup>1</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 277; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987). R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology? Understanding the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

by grace through faith in Christ. CT believes that the Church began in the Old Testament (either with salvation of Adam or call of Abraham). CT views Israel as the church in the OT and the Church as “the new Israel.” The promises given to Israel in the biblical covenants are fulfilled by Christ and the Church.

CT holds to different views on the fulfillment of the land promise in the Abrahamic covenant. Riddlebarger claims that the land promise was fulfilled when Joshua led Israel to conquer Canaan.<sup>2</sup> Allis claims that the land promise was fulfilled in the time of David/Solomon.<sup>3</sup> Hoekema taught that the church made up of OT and NT saints will inherit the world (expanded land promise) in the eternal state.<sup>4</sup>

CT views infant baptism as performing a similar function as physical circumcision in the OT. Physical circumcision identified Jews with the believing community. In the same way infant baptism practiced by believing parents identifies the infants with the one people of God. CT teaches that the moral law (the ten commandments of the Mosaic Covenant) is for the church today. CT is linked with amillennial eschatology (which states that there is no future for Israel and no 1000 year kingdom on this planet).

### **New Covenant Theology**

In 2002 Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel wrote a book called *New Covenant Theology* in which they tried to find middle ground between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. NCT asserts that the Mosaic law (moral, civil and ceremonial law) has found its fulfillment in Christ (Romans 10:4) and his death on the cross. The Mosaic law then has been replaced with the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2) in the New Covenant.

New Covenant Theology (Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel) rejects the theological covenants of Covenant Theology.<sup>5</sup> Like Covenant Theology, NCT accepts the priority of the New Testament over the Old Testament. But unlike Covenant Theology, NCT rejects infant baptism and emphasizes believer’s baptism. Also NCT rejects the distinction between the visible and invisible church as taught by CT.

---

<sup>2</sup> Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 46.

<sup>3</sup> Oswald Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 57-58.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 211.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002)

Michael Vlach (a traditional dispensationalist) summarizes the distinctive views of New Covenant Theology: “New Covenant theology has arisen as an alternative to Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. It differs from Covenant Theology in denying the covenants of works, grace and redemption, and in asserting the temporary nature of the Mosaic Law. It differs from Dispensationalism and agrees with Covenant Theology in endorsing a hermeneutical approach to the OT and the NT that abandons the historical-grammatical understanding of certain OT passages. In agreement with Covenant Theology, NCT accepts supersessionist views regarding Israel and the church. The eight specific differences between New Covenant Theology (NCT) and Covenant Theology (CT) include NCT’s denial of the Covenant of Redemption, its denial of the Covenant of Works, its denial of the Covenant of Grace, its affirmation of the unity of the Mosaic Law, its affirmation of the expiration of the Mosaic Law, its teaching that Christians are under only the Law of Christ, the rejection of infant baptism, and its affirmation that the church began at Pentecost. NCT agrees with CT hermeneutically in accepting the NT logical priority over the OT and a typological interpretation of the two testaments, in holding that the NT church is the only true people of God, and in exhibiting a vagueness about the nature of the future kingdom.”<sup>6</sup>

New Covenant Theology (NCT) holds to a double fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Steve Lehrer writes: “The Abrahamic Covenant contains both the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant is the physical fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise and the New Covenant is the spiritual fulfillment.”<sup>7</sup> Tom Wells argues that the OT writers saw the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant for Israel and the NT writers saw the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant for the church (Joshua 21:43-45; Hebrews 11:8-9, 39-40).<sup>8</sup>

## **Progressive Covenantalism**

In 2005 Dr. Dan Liroy wrote a paper called “Progressive Covenantalism as an Integrating Motif of Scripture.”<sup>9</sup> Liroy wrote: “Progressive covenantalism is a new working model for comprehending the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The goal is to articulate a consistent understanding of how to put together seemingly heterogeneous portions of Scripture. This integrating motif

---

<sup>6</sup> Michael Vlach, “New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 18.1 (Fall 2007), 201.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Wells, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Dan Liroy, “Progressive Covenantalism as an Integrating Motif of Scripture” The Biblical Studies Foundation (Summer 2005) ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)). Liroy claims he got the idea of PC from Michael Patton and Rhome Dyck of The Theology Program.

asserts that God’s progressive revelation of His covenants is an extension of the kingdom blessings He first introduced in creation. Affiliated claims are that the various covenants revealed in Scripture are interrelated and build on one another, that the people of God throughout the history of salvation are united, and that they equally share in His eschatological promises.”<sup>10</sup>

Gentry and Wellum<sup>11</sup> have written several books explaining and defending Progressive Covenantalism. Their first book *Kingdom Through Covenant* was published in 2012.<sup>12</sup> The second revision of their book was published in 2018.<sup>13</sup>

Gentry and Wellum explain Progressive Covenantalism in this way: “Even though it is a new term, it nicely captures our basic proposal. Progressive seeks to underscore the progress or the unfolding of God’s revelation from old to new and covenantalism expresses that God’s plan across redemptive-history unfolds through covenants as all of the covenants are terminated, culminated and fulfilled in Christ and the arrival of the promised new covenant age. In identifying our proposal as progressive covenantalism or a species of new covenant theology, we are stressing two points. First, it is a *via media* between dispensational and covenant theology. It neither completely fits nor totally disagrees with either system. Second, it stresses the unity of God’s plan which is discovered as we trace God’s redemptive work through the biblical covenants.”<sup>14</sup>

Progressive Covenantalism (Gentry and Wellum) also rejects the theological covenants of Covenant Theology. Progressive Covenantalism focuses their study on the biblical covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New). Like CT and NCT, PC holds to one people of God. PC rejects infant baptism (view of CT) and holds to believer’s baptism. PC also rejects the distinction between the visible and invisible church as taught by CT.

The book *Kingdom Through Covenant* is divided into three sections: (1) Prolegomena – Wellum discusses the importance of covenants in biblical and systematic theology, explains the covenants in Dispensationalism and Covenant

---

<sup>10</sup> Lioy, “Progressive Covenantalism as an Integrating Motif of Scripture,” 1.

<sup>11</sup> Today Progressive Covenantalism is being taught by two professors from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky: Dr. Peter Gentry and Dr. Stephen Wellum. Peter Gentry earned a Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. He is the Donald L. Williams Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and director of the Hexapla Institute. Stephen Wellum earned a Ph.D. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is professor of Christian Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and editor of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Second edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 24.

Theology, and his hermeneutic. (2) Exposition of the Biblical Covenants – Gentry starts with the covenant with Noah and then refers to the covenant with Creation in Genesis 1-3. Then Gentry explains the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant (Exodus/Sinai in one chapter and Deuteronomy/Moab in the next chapter) before he explains the Davidic covenant. Gentry spends four chapters examining the New Covenant (Introduction and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel’s Seventy Weeks). (3) Theological Summary and Integration: Wellum then focuses on his theme: Kingdom through Covenant in the four final chapters. He attempts to prove that all of the covenants find their fulfillment in Christ and the New covenant. He reveals the theological implications of Progressive Covenantalism in his final two chapters for Christology, the Christian Life, Ecclesiology and Eschatology. The appendix has a detailed lexical analysis of *berit* (the Hebrew word for covenant).<sup>15</sup>

In 2015 Gentry and Wellum wrote the book *God’s Kingdom Through God’s Covenants*. This book is a shortened version of the book *Kingdom Through Covenant*. In 2016 Wellum and Parker edited the book *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*.<sup>16</sup>

In 2022 Parker and Lucas edited the book *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*.<sup>17</sup> This book presents these four different theological views and includes critiques by each author: Covenant Theology (Michael Horton), Progressive Covenantalism (Stephen Wellum), Progressive Dispensationalism (Darrell Bock) and Traditional Dispensationalism (Mark Snoeberger).

## **A TD Critique of PC’s Hermeneutics**

PC – Wellum gives the following Hermeneutical Assumptions for Reading Scripture and Doing Theology:

PC1. “Scripture is interpreted according to its own claim to be God’s Word written through the agency of human authors...a canonical reading is necessary to discover God’s ultimate intent. We can even speak about the fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) of Scripture if understood along the lines of G.K. Beale...For this reason, the NT’s

---

<sup>15</sup> All quotes in this paper will be taken from the second edition of *Kingdom Through Covenant*.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Wellum and Brent Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Brent Parker and Richard Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

interpretation of the OT is definitive, since later texts bring greater clarity and understanding. The NT shows us how the OT is fulfilled in Christ. The NT's interpretation of the OT may expand the OT author's meaning in the sense of seeing new implications and applications."<sup>18</sup>

PC2. "Scripture is interpreted according to what it is, namely, a progressive revelation."<sup>19</sup>

PC3. "Scripture is interpreted according to three horizons or contexts...First, **the textual or immediate context** starts with any text in its context, which we interpret by grammatical/literary/historical exegesis. Second, **the epochal context** reads the text by locating it in God's unfolding plan...there is a unity in his plan but also development, which preserves the balance between continuity and discontinuity in Scripture. Also, locating texts in God's unfolding plan helps illuminate inter-biblical links between earlier and later revelation...God's plan unfolds and reaches its *telos* in Christ."<sup>20</sup> Wellum explains the third horizon or context: "Our interpretation of Scripture, however, does not end here. We must also read texts in terms of what comes after them, namely, **the canonical context**. Scripture is God's unified revelation so texts must be interpreted canonically, which entails a grammatical/literary-historical-canonical method of interpretation."<sup>21</sup>

PC4. "Theological conclusions are made from Scripture by reading the entire canon in context and unpacking the progression of the covenants."<sup>22</sup>

TD – Traditional Dispensationalists emphasize the need for consistent grammatical/historical interpretation of the Bible.<sup>23</sup> The Old Testament texts must be interpreted in their historical/grammatical context.

PC1, PC3 and PC4 show that PC emphasizes the canonical context over the historical context. The canonical context is looking at the context of a given verse or text of scripture in light of the whole canon of Scripture. So PC can say that

---

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism" in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies* edited by Brent Parker and Richard Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Elliott Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990); Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Victor Books, 1991); Mal Couch, ed. *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000).

since the NT does not refer to the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant that the land promise was fulfilled in the past or it is typological of the future new heavens and new earth. PC argues that the church will inherit the world in the eternal state (Romans 4:13).

TD recognizes that the historical context (i.e. the chronological order of the books of the Bible) is more important than the canonical context.<sup>24</sup> Not all of the books of the Bible are placed in chronological order. TD places more emphasis on antecedent scripture in textual interpretation than on the canonical context.

TD like PC2 recognizes the importance of progressive revelation. But TD does not read New Testament truths (the church) back into Old Testament texts (that relate to Israel). CT consistently violates this hermeneutical principle. PC recognize this hermeneutical violation (CT is out of bounds) but PC practices a similar NT priority hermeneutic. TD believe that the New Testament never changes the meaning of the Old Testament promises given to Israel in the biblical covenants. PC sees changes in God's covenant promises made with Israel arguing for this change from the NT. TD rejects this view and argues that God will fulfill his covenant promises to Israel.

It is interesting to see that Gentry did not follow progressive revelation in beginning his detailed explanation of the biblical covenants. Gentry began his study with the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9) rather than with the Creation Covenant (Genesis 1-2). Then he argues in *Kingdom Through Covenant* that the Noahic Covenant is a restatement of the Creation Covenant.

### **A TD Critique of PC's view of the Biblical Covenants**

PC believes that “the covenants form the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture.”<sup>25</sup> Gentry and Wellum explain in detail the following biblical covenants in their book *Kingdom Through Covenant*: Noahic covenant, Creation covenant, Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic covenant, Davidic covenant, and New covenant.

Should the biblical covenants be classified as unconditional or conditional?

---

<sup>24</sup> See my unpublished research paper “An Evaluation of the Dispensations as Part of the Development of a Dispensational Philosophy of History in the Progress of Revelation” given at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics (September 15, 2021) ([dispensationalcouncil.org/2021-developing-a-dispensational-worldview/](http://dispensationalcouncil.org/2021-developing-a-dispensational-worldview/)). In the research paper I present a possible chronology of events related to the seven dispensations in a biblical view of history and future events. I also present a possible chronological order of writing of all 66 books of the Bible to help Bible students understand the biblical historical context for each book of the Bible.

<sup>25</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 24.

PC says No. Wellum writes “First, we will argue that dividing up the biblical covenants in categories of unconditional versus conditional is incorrect. Instead, the Old Testament covenants blend both aspects.”<sup>26</sup>

TD believe that the biblical covenants can be categorized as either unconditional (covenant of grant type) or conditional type (suzerain-vassal treaty). TD believe that the Abrahamic, Davidic, Land and New covenants are unconditional covenants that God made with Israel. God will fulfill his covenant promises for Israel in the future millennial kingdom. TD believe that the Mosaic covenant was a conditional covenant that God made with Israel.

Are all of the biblical covenants organically related to one another?

PC says Yes. Wellum writes: “God’s one eternal plan is unveiled through a *plurality* of covenants (e.g. Gal.4:24; Eph.2:12; Heb.8:7-13), and it is important to let each covenant contribute to the unfolding of that *one* plan. For this reason, progressive covenantalism does not deny the theological concept of the covenant of grace if one merely means the one plan of God. However, it contends that covenant theology too quickly subsumes the biblical covenants under the larger category of the covenant of grace, which results in a failure to account for both the continuity of God’s plan over time and significant covenantal differences, especially in the new covenant. Starting in creation and culminating in Christ, the covenants unveil God’s eternal plan for us and the creation, and it is crucial to let each biblical covenant contribute its part to God’s unified plan”<sup>27</sup>

TD believes that all of the biblical covenants are not organically related to each other. The Noahic covenant (Genesis 9) was made with Noah and his descendants and the animals. The Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15) was made with Abraham and then reiterated to Isaac and Jacob and to Israel (the twelve tribes of Israel). The Mosaic covenant is not organically related to the Abrahamic covenant. Paul makes the point in Galatians 3:15-18 that the Mosaic Law which came 430 years after the Abrahamic Covenant promise cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God. The Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional, unilateral covenant of grant. The Mosaic covenant (Exodus 20f) is a conditional suzerain-vassal type of covenant. The promises of the Abrahamic covenant (land, seed, and blessing) are distinct from the laws of the Mosaic covenant. The nation of Israel would experience the blessing of the Lord in the promised land as they obeyed the Mosaic

---

<sup>26</sup> Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 149.

<sup>27</sup> Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 82.



covenant. But their history shows that Israel disobeyed the Mosaic covenant and experienced God's cursings in the land (famine, invasion from foreign nations) and then the deportations from the land (Israel taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 B.C and Judah taken into Babylonian captivity in 605, 597 and 586 B.C.). The Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-16) focuses on the seed promise of the Abrahamic covenant. Matthew emphasized that Jesus is the Son of Abraham and the Son of David (Matthew 1:1). As the Jewish Messiah Jesus will fulfill the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants for Israel in the future millennial kingdom. Israel will inherit all of the land promised to them in the Abrahamic covenant and King Jesus will sit on the Davidic throne and rule Israel and the world from Jerusalem for 1000 years.

### **A TD Critique of PC's View of the Creation Covenant**

PC views the Creation covenant as a foundational covenant. Wellum writes "In Genesis 6:17-18 and 9:8-17, God "establishes" (Gen.6:18; 9:9, 11, 17) a covenant with Noah, which implies a preexisting covenant relationship that can only be found in Adam and rooted in creation. Later Scripture confirms this point."<sup>28</sup>

Gentry gives these arguments for a Creation covenant in Genesis 1-2: (1) God identifies himself with his covenant name Yahweh (Gen.2:4, 5, 7, 8; Ex. 3:13-15). (2) God creates Adam as God's image bearer and son (Luke 3:38) – which are covenantal terms. (3) The new covenant headship of Christ as the last Adam makes little sense without the covenant headship of the first Adam (Romans 5).

TD Critique: Should Genesis 1-2 be viewed as a creation covenant? Gentry and Wellum admit that the word covenant is not used in Genesis 1-2. In Genesis 1:28-30 Elohim (the Creator God) gives commands to the man and woman after He created them. God blessed them (the man and his wife) and God said to them (plural pronoun). These commands are sometimes called "the cultural mandate." Are these commands found in Genesis 1 and 2 a creation covenant?

*Procreation: Be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28).*

*Geographical Distribution: Fill the earth (Genesis 1:28).*

*Stewardship of the earth: Subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28).*

*Rulership: Have dominion over the fish, the birds and the animals (Genesis 1:28)*

*Diet for humans and animals: Eat vegetables and fruit (Genesis 1:29-30).*

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 89.

*Restriction: Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17)*

PC claims that the creation covenant will ultimately be fulfilled by Jesus (the Last Adam) in his future kingdom in the new heavens and new earth. TD claims that King Jesus will return a second time to establish his kingdom on the earth which will be for 1000 years on this planet and then forever in the new heavens and new earth (Rev.20-21). Referring to Psalm 8, the writer to the Hebrews wrote that God has put all in subjection to Christ “but now we do not yet see all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:8). Paul wrote about an intermediate kingdom where all things are placed under the authority of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

### **A TD Critique of PC’s View of the Noahic Covenant**

PC: In *Kingdom Through Covenant* Gentry and Wellum explain the Noahic covenant (Genesis 8:21-9:11) before the creation covenant. Gentry and Wellum believe that the Noahic covenant is a restatement of the creation covenant. Noah is the new Adam. God gave Noah and his family the same command He gave to Adam and Eve: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1). Adam sinned and fell. Noah sinned as well.

TD: The Noahic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. God made a promise that He would never again destroy the world with a global flood (Gen.8:21). Even if man sins against God, God will never break this promise. It is an unconditional, unilateral covenant. The sign of the Noahic covenant is the rainbow.

- (1) God promised to never again destroy the world with a global flood (Genesis 8:21).
- (2) God promised seasons and temperature changes while the world exists (Genesis 8:22).
- (3) God blessed Noah and his sons and told them to have children and fill the earth (Gen 9:1).
- (4) God permitted man to eat meat, but not blood (Gen 9:2-4).<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Why did God forbid people from eating blood? The life is in the blood. The law given to Noah and his family and humans thereafter formed the basis of the Mosaic legislation in Leviticus 17:14. The Israelites were required to eat kosher food. They were to drain the blood from their meat before they ate it. In doing this they were showing respect for life because of the principle of the life being in the blood. The Jerusalem Council also stated that Gentile Christians should abstain from eating blood so as not to be a stumbling block to Jews (Acts 15:28-29).

- (5) God established capital punishment for murder (Gen 9:5-6).<sup>30</sup>
- (6) God told Noah and his family to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 9:7).
- (7) God established his covenant with Noah, his descendants and the animals (Genesis 9:8-11a).
- (8) God restated his promise to never destroy the world again with a global flood (Genesis 9:11b).

### **A TD Critique of PC's View of the Abrahamic Covenant**

PC: Wellum writes: "It is best to view the Abrahamic covenant as the means by which God will fulfill his promises for humanity, especially in light of Genesis 3:15 (cf. Gal.3:16)...The Abrahamic covenant functions as a subset of the 'covenant with creation,' yet narrowed through one family/nation....Within the Abrahamic narrative there is a hint that over time the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant will occur in two stages: first, in the nation of Israel who will live in the Promised Land and serve as a kingdom of priests under the Mosaic covenant (Ex 19:4-6; Deut 4:5-8). Second, in Christ, Abraham's royal, singular seed will bless all nations (Gen 17:4-6; cf. 22:17b-18; 49:8, 10; Is 9:6). Even in Genesis, Abraham's "fatherhood" is expanded "beyond ethnic Israelites to include the nations. This seems to entail not only the promise of a global inheritance but also an expansion of the Promised Land to include the planet and its numerous people (Gen 1:28; Mt 5:5; Rom 4:13; cf. Eph.6:2-3; Heb 11:13-16)."<sup>31</sup>

PC views the land promise as being fulfilled in two stages: (1) in the nation of Israel who live in the Promised Land and (2) in the future eternal state as the promised land is expanded to include all of planet earth (the view of Hoekema in his book *The Bible and the Future*).

TD: In my article "The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant" I give arguments to show that the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant has never been fulfilled by Israel in the past. If the land promise was fulfilled in the days of Joshua or

---

<sup>30</sup> Is capital punishment for today? In the Noahic covenant God instituted capital punishment because man is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6). God required a life for a life because He views life as sacred. In the Mosaic Law, God differentiated between premeditated murder and accidental killing. Premeditated murder was punishable by death. But if a man killed someone by accident, he could flee to a city of refuge where his case would then be tried. He would stay there until the death of the high priest. Does the New Testament do away with capital punishment? Romans 13 says that the government has the power to execute capital punishment on evil doers. Premeditated murder is a crime. Capital punishment is a punishment for that crime. Romans 13 shows that God has not abrogated the Noahic covenant.

<sup>31</sup> Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism" in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 92-93.

David/Solomon, then why do the prophets (i.e. Ezekiel) speak of another day when the land promise will be fulfilled.

PC views Jesus as Abraham's true Seed (Gal.3:16) who constitutes all those in faith-union with him, the true children of Abraham, and inheritors of all the Abrahamic promises (Rom 2:25-29; 4:9-22; Gal 3:6-9; Heb 2:14-18; Rev 5:9-10).

TD recognizes different nuances of the seed of Abraham. Paul emphasizes in Galatians that Jesus is the Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). Gentile Christians are called "Abraham's seed" (Galatians 3:29). The Church is not the inheritor of all of the Abrahamic covenant promises (land, seed and blessing) as PC claims. The Church does not inherit the promised land of the Abrahamic Covenant. Israel will inherit all of their promised land in the future millennial kingdom. Today saved Jews (physical-spiritual seed of Abraham) and saved Gentiles (spiritual seed of Abraham) make up the Church (all saved people from Pentecost until the pre-tribulation Rapture).

After the Rapture God will work through saved Jews (the 144,000 Jewish witnesses sealed by God – Revelation 7 and the two Jewish witnesses – Revelation 11). Many Gentiles will be saved as a result of their witness (Revelation 7:9-17). When Christ returns a second time there will be a sheep/goat judgment of Gentile survivors of the tribulation period (Matthew 25:31-46). The sheep are Gentile tribulation saints who will enter the millennial kingdom in their physical bodies. The goats are Gentiles who will be sent to hell (they will be excluded from the millennial kingdom) because they did not demonstrate their salvation by ministering to the Jews in the tribulation period.

### **A TD Critique of PC's View of the Mosaic Covenant**

PC: Wellum writes: "Scripture views the old covenant as temporary in God's plan, and thus when Christ comes, it is fulfilled as an entire covenant package, and Christians are no longer under it as a covenant" (Gal 3:15-4:7)...It is through Israel that God fulfills his promise (Gen 3:15) to undo Adam's sin. Further proof of this truth is that Israel, as a nation, is called God's son (Ex 4:22-23). The 'Father-son' relationship harkens back to Adam and forward to the Davidic kings, tying the covenants together. Israel, as a nation, is called to serve as God's son-priest-image....Scripture does not partition the law covenant into moral, civil and

ceremonial laws; rather, it is a unit that governed Israel's life, and now, in Christ, it is fulfilled."<sup>32</sup>

TD: The Mosaic covenant is a conditional (suzerain-vassal treaty type) given to Israel by Yahweh. I agree with Wellum that Israel failed in their mission to be a light to the Gentile nations as the nation struggled with idolatry. I also agree with Wellum that the Mosaic law cannot be separated into moral, civil and ceremonial laws. So as a TD I believe that the church today is not under the Mosaic law. Paul himself wrote "for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4).

Dr. Bill Barrick argues that the Mosaic Law is a unit and has found its fulfillment in Christ and his death on the cross: "The Mosaic Law is one of six covenants that God made with Israel...The theological context of the Mosaic Covenant is Israel's election by grace and the redemptive context God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The content of the covenant follows the pattern of the ancient suzerain treaty. The covenant was the most conditional of all the covenants, and like all the covenants it promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The covenant addressed itself to Israel and Israel alone with its divinely authoritative rules that stipulated standards of righteousness. No one can justly separate the moral, civil, and ceremonial parts of the Law from each other; it is a unit. The Law has no authority over Christians because it has been fulfilled by the death of Christ."<sup>33</sup>

The book of Deuteronomy is not a second law for Israel but a restatement of the Mosaic Law for the post-Exodus generation of Israel. In the book of Deuteronomy Israel was promised blessings (Deut.28:1-14) in the promised land for obedience to the Mosaic covenant and judgments (Deut.28:15-68) for disobedience (famine, invasion by foreign nations and ultimately deportation from the land). The LORD promised Israel that they would return to the LORD as they were dispersed among the nations (Deut.30:1-2) and the LORD would bring them back from captivity and gather the nation from all the nations (Deut.30:3-5). There is a future unconditional promise made by God to Israel to bring Israel back to the land. God promised to circumcise their hearts so that they would love the LORD their God with all their heart and soul (Deut.30:6).

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>33</sup> William Barrick, "The Mosaic Covenant," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10/2 (Fall 1999), 213-232.

All Israel will be saved at the end of the tribulation period (Rom.11:26-27). The righteous remnant of Jews who physically survive the tribulation period will enter the millennial kingdom and inherit the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus even promised that the apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the coming kingdom (Matthew 19:28). How could Jesus fulfill that promise if the land promise has been fulfilled in Christ and there are no future tribes of Israel for the apostles to judge?

### **A TD Critique of PC's View of the Davidic Covenant**

PC: Wellum writes: “The Davidic covenant is the epitome of the OT covenants; it brings the previous covenants to a climax in the king. There are two main parts in it: (1) God’s promises about the establishment of David’s house forever (2 Sam 7:12-16), and (2) the promises concerning the ‘Father-son’ relationship between God and the Davidic king (2 Sam 7:14; cf. Ps 2; 89:26-27)...The sonship applied to corporate Israel (Ex 4:22-23; cf. Hos 11:1) is now applied to the individual Davidic king, who, in himself is ‘true Israel.’ He becomes the administrator/mediator of the covenant...the Davidic king fulfills the role of Adam; it is through him that God’s rule is affected in the world (2 Sam 7:19b).”<sup>34</sup>

TD: The Davidic Covenant is an unconditional covenant (covenant of grant type) as the Lord promised David that one of his sons would sit on the throne of David and rule Israel forever (2 Samuel 7). Jesus is the physical descendant of David through Mary (a physical descendant of David – see Luke 3 genealogy). Jesus has the legal right to rule Israel as king through Joseph (also a physical descendant of David through Solomon – see Matthew 1 genealogy). Jesus is the Davidic king but he is not currently seated on the Davidic throne. TD are the only group of theologians to hold to this view. Progressive dispensationalists, progressive covenantalists, and covenant theologians all believe that King Jesus is currently seated on the Davidic throne in heaven ruling the church in an already-not yet Davidic kingdom. Only traditional dispensationalists and progressive dispensationalists believe that King Jesus will come a second time to sit on the Davidic throne in Jerusalem to rule the world for 1000 years (a literal future millennium).

In the Davidic Covenant God promised David a house (dynasty), throne (right to rule) and a kingdom (nation to rule).<sup>35</sup> The Davidic covenant is related to the

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>35</sup> See Michael Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10.2 (Fall 1999), 233-250.

Abrahamic covenant in that it explains the seed promise. The covenant is eternal as indicated by the word “forever” in 2 Samuel 7:13. Psalm 89 indicates that it was a covenant and oath that God made with David and his descendants. In the Davidic covenant some promises were made to David that were fulfilled during David’s lifetime. God promised to make David’s name great (2 Sam.7:9). God promised that David and Israel would experience rest from his enemies (2 Sam.7:11). The Davidic covenant contains some conditional aspects of blessing. The Davidic king who disobeyed would be removed from the throne as a discipline by God but this does not mean that the Davidic descendants would lose their right to rule.

The throne of David has been vacant since the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. We currently live in the times of the Gentiles. In the past, the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans conquered Jerusalem and ruled Israel. Though Israel today is an independent nation state it will be conquered by another Gentile ruler (the Antichrist) who will rule the world from Jerusalem during the last three and a half years of the future tribulation period.<sup>36</sup>

Jesus Christ is the rightful heir to the Davidic throne (Luke 1:31-33). Jesus Christ is the physical descendant of David who has the legal right to rule Israel (Mt.1; Lk.3). Jesus is the Messiah but he is not currently sitting on the throne of David. He is currently seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Eph.1:19-23). If Christ’s reign has begun, it is not a reign of peace, since there are still wars and rumors of wars in our world (current Russia vs. Ukraine war). The Davidic kingdom is still future and will be established on the earth after the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth at the end of the future tribulation period (Dan.7:13-14; Matthew 19:28; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 20:1-6).

### **A TD Critique of PC’s View of the New Covenant**

PC: Wellum writes: “Within the OT, the new covenant is viewed as national (Jer 31:31-40; 33:6-16; Ezek 36:24-38; 37:11-28) and international. It will include Jews and Gentiles, and its scope is universal, thus fulfilling the Abrahamic promise. Isaiah projects the ultimate fulfillment of the divine promises in the new covenant onto an ‘ideal Israel,’ that is a community tied to the servant of Yahweh located in a rejuvenated new creation (Is 65:17; 66:22). This ‘ideal Israel’ picks up the promises to Abraham and is the ultimate fulfillment of the covenants that God established with Adam, the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and David’s son.”<sup>37</sup> (p.96-97)

<sup>36</sup> See Gary Gromacki, “The Times of the Gentiles,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21.1 (Spring 2017), 5-49.

<sup>37</sup> Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 96-97.

TD: Gentry and Wellum view the church as “ideal Israel” which supersedes Israel and inherits all of the promises of the New Covenant. The problem with this view is that the unconditional Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New covenants were made with Israel in the Old Testament and not the church. Gentry and Wellum recognize that Israel and the Church are different groups but they fail to see that these unconditional covenant promises made with Israel cannot be changed to apply to just the Church. God is faithful to His covenants which He has made with Israel. Romans 9-11 emphasizes that God is not finished with Israel.

TD view the New Covenant as an unconditional covenant of grace given to Israel (Jeremiah 31). The Lord promised to forgive Israel’s sins and give them His Holy Spirit. I believe that the New Covenant was inaugurated by Jesus and his death on the cross. Jesus shed his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Today, the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant are given to the church through Christ. The sign of the New Covenant is the cup of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:28) and not believer’s baptism as claimed by PC. Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Traditional dispensationalists differ on their views of the New Covenant. I believe that the church currently receives the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant as the church is in Christ. Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant. The apostle Paul contrasts his New Covenant ministry with the ministry of the old covenant which was associated with Moses (2 Cor.3:7, 13, 15). The writer to the Hebrews contrasts the New Covenant with the old covenant (the Mosaic covenant) as he shows the superiority of Jesus Christ and his priesthood (after the order of Melchizedek) over that of the Levitical priests (after the order of Aaron).

Paul Benware writes, “The church then is a partaker of the spiritual blessings of the new covenant, enjoying regeneration, the forgiveness of sin, and the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The church is primarily Gentile in its makeup—those who have been graciously grafted in by God until their number is completed. Multitudes of Gentiles experience the wonderful blessings of the new covenant. But the church is not national Israel, the people with whom God made this covenant. The church does not and cannot fulfill the new covenant. Its fulfillment awaits the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. When He returns at the Second Coming, all the spiritual and material blessings promised Israel will be received.”<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 73.



At the second coming of Christ to earth the nation of Israel will believe in Jesus as their Messiah and the New covenant will be applied to the nation of Israel. “All Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).<sup>39</sup> The New Covenant will be fulfilled for Israel when the nation repents at the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth after the seven tribulation period.

### **Conclusion: Which Biblical/Systematic Theology has the Best Metanarrative of the Bible?**

PC claims that it is best to think of God’s one plan unfolding through a plurality of biblical covenants, starting with Adam and culminating in Christ and the New Covenant. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel and David all failed in their covenant responsibilities but Christ obeyed and through his finished work on the cross instituted a New Covenant. The land promise given to Abraham is typological and will be fulfilled by Jesus and the Church in the future eternal state (in the new heavens and new earth).

TD claims that it is best to view the metanarrative of the Bible as a sequential series of dispensations (Innocence, Conscience, Human government, Promise, Law, Grace and Kingdom).<sup>40</sup> Each dispensation involves a test, man’s failure and God’s judgment. re related to the dispensations. The unconditional biblical covenants that God made with Israel will be fulfilled for Israel in the future millennial kingdom. Israel will inherit all of the land promised to them in the Abrahamic Covenant. King Jesus will sit on the throne of David and rule Israel and the world for 1000 years on this planet and then forever in the new heavens and new earth in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. Israel will be forgiven of their sins and they will be given the Holy Spirit as a result of their national repentance at the second coming of Messiah Jesus. The New Covenant blessings enjoyed by the Church today in the dispensation of grace will be given to the nation of Israel at the second coming of Christ to earth and Christ and Israel will be a source of blessing to the nations in the future millennial kingdom.

---

<sup>39</sup> Larry Pettegrew, “The New Covenant” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10.2 (Fall 1999), 251-270.

<sup>40</sup> See my paper that I gave last year at The 2021 Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics: “An Evaluation of the Dispensations as Part of the Development of a Dispensational Philosophy of History in the Progress of Revelation.”

## ANNOTATED CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fruchtenbaum, Arnold. *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*. Ariel Ministries, 1989. (this detailed book explains how the unconditional biblical covenants made with Israel in the OT will be fulfilled for Israel in the future millennial kingdom)

Wells, Tom and Fred Zaspel. *New Covenant Theology*. Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002.

Riddlebarger, Kim. *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.

Lioy, Dan. "Progressive Covenantalism as an Integrating Motif of Scripture" Summer 2005. The Biblical Studies Foundation ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)). (the earliest published paper on progressive covenantalism that I have found)

Vlach, Michael. "New Covenant Theology Compared with Covenantalism" *Master's Seminary Journal* 18/1 (Fall 2007): 201-219. (an evaluation of new covenant theology with covenant theology = covenantalism by a traditional dispensationalist)

Mangum, R. Todd. *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift: The Fissuring of American Theology from 1936 to 1944*. Paternoster, 2007. (historical survey of the debate)

Gentry, Peter and Stephen Wellum. *Kingdom Through Covenant*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. (a detailed explanation of progressive covenantalism)

Horton, Michael. "Kingdom Through Covenant: A Review by Michael Horton" (September 13, 2012) (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/kingdom-covenant-michael-horton>) (a critique of progressive covenantalism by a covenant theologian)

Long, Gary. *New Covenant Theology*. CreateSpace, 2013.

Vlach, Michael. "Have They Found a Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *Masters Seminary Journal* 24/1 (Spring 2013): 5-24. (a critique of progressive covenantalism by a traditional dispensationalist)

Brack, Jonathan. "Questioning the Progress in Progressive Covenantalism: A Review of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76.1 (Spring 2014): 189-217. (a critique of progressive covenantalism by a covenant theologian)

Gromacki, Gary. "The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 18.2 (Fall 2014), 77-119. (paper presented at The Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics)

Bock, Darrell and Mitch Glaser, eds. *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2014. (progressive dispensational view)

Gentry, Peter and Stephen Wellum. *God's Kingdom Through God's Covenants*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. (a shorter book by Gentry and Wellum explaining progressive covenantalism)

Blaising, Craig. "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response*" *Master's Seminary Journal* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 111-127. (a critique of Progressive Covenantalism by a Progressive Dispensationalist)

Grisanti, Michael. "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant: An Old Testament Perspective*," *Master's Seminary Journal* 26/1 (Spring 2015): 129-137. (a critique of progressive covenantalism by a traditional dispensationalist)

Bingham, D. Jeffrey and Glenn R. Kreider, eds. *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015.

Wellum, Stephen and Brent Parker, eds. *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2016. (articles written by progressive covenantalists – Jason DeRouchie, Brent Parker, Jason Meyer, John Meade, Thomas Schreiner, Christopher Cowan, Stephen Wellum, Richard Lucas, Oren Martin)

Johnson, Elliott. *A Dispensational Biblical Theology*. Allen, TX: Bold Grace Ministries, 2016. (a comprehensive biblical theology written by a traditional dispensationalist and a Dallas Cowboys fan)

Bingham, D. Jeffrey and Glenn R. Kreider, eds. *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical and Practical Approaches*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016.

Woods, Andy. *The Coming Kingdom: What is the Kingdom and How is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church?* Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016. (a detailed study of the kingdom which is viewed as a reference to the future millennial kingdom = the Davidic kingdom – written by a traditional dispensationalist)

Gromacki, Gary. “The Times of the Gentiles,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21.1 (Spring 2017), 5-49.

Vlach, Michael. *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God*. Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2017. (written by a traditional dispensationalist)

Gentry, Peter and Stephen Wellum. *Kingdom Through Covenant*. Second edition. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. (this is the key book defining and defending progressive covenantalism)

Gentry, Peter and Stephen Wellum. “The Middle Ground Between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology” July 17, 2018 ([crossway.org/articles/the-middle-ground-between-dispensationalism-and-covenant-theology/](https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-middle-ground-between-dispensationalism-and-covenant-theology/))

Parker, Brent and Richard Lucas, eds. *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. (an excellent summary of these different biblical-theological systems: traditional dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism, progressive covenantalism, and covenant theology)

Wellum, Stephen. “Progressive Covenantalism and New Covenant Theology” No Date. (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/progressive-covenantalism-and-new-covenant-theology/>)