Examples of Practical Application of the Biblical Covenants for Israel within Both the Old and New Testaments

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Introduction

As many scholars have noted over the years, Dispensational theology arises from the consistent use of the literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic (LGH), or, as Snoeberger[1] and D. Gunn[2] have recently termed it, the "originalist" hermeneutic.[3] This hermeneutical method is not an academically derived theory to push an ideology, nor did Christians develop it to advance a theological system. It simply recognizes the normal use of language for communication purposes as designed and utilized by God. As Ryrie noted, "The purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation. That is, God gave man language for the purpose of being able to communicate with him. God created man in His image, which included the power of speech, in order that God might reveal His truth to man and that man might in turn offer worship and prayer to God."[4] Though some in our current culture ridicule it, this hermeneutical approach is a strength of dispensationalism.

A vital principle of the "originalist" hermeneutical methodology and dispensationalism involves progressive revelation, especially regarding the ultimate source of a passage's meaning. Dispensationalism recognizes that God has revealed information over time and, in so doing, holds that a passage's meaning is found in each particular passage. Older revelation is valuable for understanding newer revelation. Newer revelation can expand one's knowledge of an older passage, as revelation builds upon itself. Additionally, newer revelation may indicate that older revelation ceases to be in effect at the time of the newer revelation; the Mosaic Law requirements

[1] Mark A. Snoeberger, "The Originalist Hermeneutic in Biblical and Constitutional Context: Comparison and Contrast," https://biblefacultysummit.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/SnoebergerMarkBiblicalLiteralismAndConstitutionalOriginalism.pdf.

[2] David Gunn wrote a three-part series titled "Why Originalism?" for Baptist Bulletin. https://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/why-originalism/; https://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/why-originalism-part-2/; https://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/why-originalism-part-3/

[3] Regarding his terminology, Snoeberger writes, "The label *originalist* as a descriptor of the traditional dispensational hermeneutical approach may not be a perfect one, but it brings us much closer to an accurately descriptive label for the dispensational hermeneutic than any other label has managed to do." (p. 8)

[4] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1999), 128.

are a good example of this principle. However, a passage's original meaning does not change over time. A passage has a single meaning, whether early in the progress of revelation or later, that is inherent within that passage. For an Old Testament passage, seek its meaning within that passage; for a New Testament passage, seek its meaning within that passage.

A corollary to the belief that a passage's meaning does not change over time is that no passage takes precedence over another regarding meaning. This is especially relevant when comparing older revelation with newer revelation, or the Old Testament with the New Testament. Newer revelation does not dictate the meaning of older revelation; thus, the New Testament does not take interpretive precedence over the Old Testament. Tan states, "Although God reveals Himself and His plan of the ages progressively and everything is not unfolded all at once, this does not mean that revelations anteriorly given have been replaced or contradicted."[5] Regarding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, Stallard writes,

> "..the Old Testament has autonomy for its own interpretation. Its proper interpretation is not based upon a New Testament priority where the New Testament reinterprets or recontextualizes the Old Testament. In other words, the most important factor in interpreting the Old Testament is, in fact, the Old Testament text and not some later New Testament understanding of the Old Testament text. Similarly, the most important fact in explaining the New Testament is, in fact, the New Testament text."[6]

In summary, one should not interpret the Old Testament by the New Testament; nor should one change the meaning of an Old Testament text because of a New Testament passage, especially for theological reasons.

When an interpreter incorrectly prioritizes a New Testament passage or reference over an Old Testament one, the Old Testament's meaning changes. This can also occur when one takes a typological approach to passages not explicitly marked as types in the text. Whatever reason one has for prioritizing the New Testament over the Old, the result is the same: the Old Testament's meaning changes from its original meaning. In other words, the original meaning is no longer the meaning; what an Old Testament audience read or heard would no longer have the same meaning for later readers. This raises some difficult questions. Were people misled? How can one trust a meaning if it could change? Suggesting that a meaning can change over time can cause serious damage. On the other hand, seeing meaning as unchanging over time brings great blessing. Stallard

[5] Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Dallas: Bible Communications, Inc., 2010), 112.

[6] Michael Stallard, "Prolegomena" in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Hurst, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2025), 60.

highlights the beneficial ramification of this principle after referencing Amos 9:15, writing, "This understanding for the original audience provides stable and permanent meaning for all generations."[7] This is exactly what one would expect from the ultimate Author of the Scriptures.

One of the most prominent, if not the most prominent, areas of theology impacted, and thus damaged, by failing to recognize progressive revelation and the stability of meaning over time is the relationship between Israel and the church. Dispensationalism believes that God has a plan for ethnic Israel, and at no point does the church replace or fulfill Israel. God has distinct plans for Israel and the church. However, when one prioritizes the New Testament in such a way that it changes the meaning of an Old Testament passage, then God's plans for Israel and the church are conflated, with the result that the church stands in the place of Israel, destroying Israel's future role.

One particular subarea where recognizing the unchanging nature of meaning matters concerns the Biblical covenants, especially the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants.[8] Scripture's explicit covenants form the framework for God's plan for human history. Olander writes, "These covenants are the vehicles in which God rests His complete redemptive, prophetic, and kingdom program. Unless there is a thorough knowledge and acceptance of God's biblical covenants, confusion results in the outworking of His total and unified kingdom program as revealed in Scripture."[9] Misinterpreting these crucial covenants affects one's understanding of the Bible as a whole; one way to misinterpret is to fail to adhere to a passage's original meaning by prioritizing later revelation over earlier revelation. This is crucial for the Biblical covenants because they are agreements between God and a particular party. Changing the party or the terms because of a later revelation does not fulfill the original agreement; it destroys it. Sadly, this is what occurs when Israel is replaced as the original party by the church due to one prioritizing a New Testament passage over an Old Testament one. It also destroys the distinction between Israel and the church, and thus Israel's future in God's plan. However, as Cone writes, "...the covenants literally demand the distinction."[10] Dispensationalism recognizes that each passage has a single, unchanging meaning and thus continues to view Israel as the original recipient of the covenant

[7] Stallard, 61.

[8] The other Biblical covenants include the Noahic, Priestly, and Mosaic.

[9] David E. Olander, "The Biblical Covenants with Israel." *Conservative Theological Journal* 09:28 (Dec. 2005): 315.

[10] Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena on Biblical Hermeneutics and Method*, 2nd ed. (Hurst, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2012, 186.

agreements. At the same time, dispensationalism recognizes that God has a beautiful plan for the church. Thus, dispensational theology distinguishes Israel from the church and highlights that both have a special future in God's plan.

A helpful practice for demonstrating progressive revelation and the stability of the original passage meaning is to examine how later Biblical writers or speakers understood the Biblical covenants. Did they see different meanings arise over time, or did they understand them in a way that recognized the original meaning? One could examine many passages for this exercise, but this paper will examine three: Psalms 105 and 106, Zacharias' prophecy in Luke 1:67-79, and Peter's speech in Acts 3:12-26. How they handle and draw applications for their particular situation from the Biblical covenants illustrates how they should be understood.

Psalms 105-106

Psalms 105 and 106 present a poetic historical account of Israel's early history, though in two different ways. Ross highlights the difference when he writes, "Psalm 105 tells of God's faithful love in Israel's history, but Psalm 106 delineates Israel's failures in that period of time."[11] Both, however, reference the Abrahamic covenant, giving modern readers insight into how a later generation understood God's earlier promises.

Deciding on a specific classification for Psalm 105 is challenging. The Psalm opens with the Hebrew hiphil imperative יָדָה, translated "give thanks."[12] So one may classify this as a "Thanksgiving Psalm." However, the Psalm is one of several Psalms that conclude with the phrase, הַלְלוּ־יָהּ; "Praise the LORD!" Additionally, the Psalm opens with ten imperatives and one imperfect jussive verb exhorting the audience to worship and focus on the LORD (cf. vv. 1-5). Thus, according to the Psalm's text, it is safe to classify it as a "Praise" or "Thanksgiving Psalm," which introduces a practical ramification for this paper's topic, as discussed below.

Identifying the Psalm's author and date is likewise challenging. The Psalm includes no superscription or reference indicating authorship. However, 1 Chronicles 16, which discusses the day the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem, includes a portion that parallels this Psalm, as well as portions of Psalms 96 and 106. 1 Chronicles 16:7 states, "Then on that day David

[11] Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 3 (90-150)* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 261.

[12] Unless noted otherwise, the translation used throughout this paper is the New American Standard Bible translation, 1995.

first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the LORD." What follows is a poetic section that, with slight changes, parallels the previously mentioned Psalms. Thus, David might have written Psalm 105, or a later psalmist might have composed it based on David's original words.

Regarding dating, Psalm 105 suggests no specific time. If David composed the entire Psalm, the date would have been between BC 1041 and 971.[13] However, Cohen dates it much later, after the Babylonian captivity. He writes, "It was probably composed after the return from captivity, when the minds of the people were appropriately directed to the early history of the nation and God's part in it. If He had then enlarged a small clan into a great people, He was capable of developing the remnant of Israel into a mighty nation."[14] Because the Psalm includes Israel's wilderness wanderings, it could not have been written before then. Thus, a date could range from the entrance to the Promised Land to after the Babylonian exile. Whatever the date within that range, the author clearly wrote it later than the original giving of the Abrahamic covenant, another important practical ramification for this paper's topic, as discussed below.

Who was the immediate audience of this Psalm? Verse 6 indicates that it was the nation of Israel. The Psalmist refers to the audience as the "seed of Abraham," and the "sons of Jacob." Ross writes, "The call for praise is addressed to the descendants of Abraham through Jacob, that is, the people of Israel (v. 6)."[15] One should note the phrase בְּחִיר, "His chosen ones," in apposition to "sons of Jacob" in verse 6. Israel is a special nation in God's covenant plan; they are a "chosen" people. Deuteronomy 7:6 makes clear that God chose Israel by His own decision: "...the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Psalm 135:4 reiterates this same truth.

Psalm 105's content is straightforward. After listing numerous imperatives to praise God in verses 1-5 and identifying the audience in verses 6 and 7, the psalmist then states that God "has remembered His covenant forever" (v. 8a). He further describes this covenant in verses 8b-11. This covenant undergirds the next section (vv. 12-41), historical poetry that focuses on the patriarchs and the wilderness wanderings. The Psalm concludes by returning to the covenant (vv.

[13] According to Eugene Merrill (*Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987, 31), David was born in BC 1041 and died in BC 971.

[14] Abraham Cohen, Ed., *The Psalms: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), 344.

[15] Ross, 264.

42-45b) and a call to "Praise the LORD!" (v. 45c). Thus, the covenant is a major theme in Psalm 105's structure.

The Psalmist's reference to the covenant is key for this paper's hermeneutical discussion (vv. 8-11, 42-45b). The covenant first appears in verse 8a when the Psalmist writes, "He has remembered His covenant forever." Contextually (v. 7), the subject of the verb "remembered" (זָכַר) is the LORD; the LORD "remembered." This act of remembering does not indicate that God "forgot" His covenant and then "remembered" it later. HALOT defines the Hebrew term זָכַר as "to remember, to call to mind..."[16] Ross adds, "To remember something means to act on it, to be loyal to it—here to be faithful to his covenant promises."[17] Thus, the LORD, anthropomorphically speaking, focused His attention on the covenant to carry out the previously stipulated provisions. Added to this declaration of God's remembering is a time aspect. Two prepositional phrases indicate the covenant's perpetual nature. The first, "forever" (לְעוֹלָם), modifies the first colon of the verse, while the second, "to a thousand generations" (לְאֶלֶף דּוֹר), modifies the second colon, which states, "The word which He commanded" (v. 8b). In verse 10, the psalmist actually returns to the time element when he calls the covenant "an everlasting covenant" (בְּרִית עוֹלָם). Thus, the first colon in verse 8 references the Hebrew term עוֹלָם ("forever"), and the last colon in verse 10 repeats it ("everlasting"). In the Psalmist's thinking, the covenant was not temporary or short-lived, but a blessing that would endure for an extended period of time. The covenant's perpetual nature is why he could, many years after it was given, use it to exhort Israel to praise God.

What "covenant" does the psalmist speak of in verse 8? In verse 9a, he writes that it is the Abrahamic Covenant: "*The covenant* which He made with Abraham" (literally in the Hebrew text, אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אֶת־אַבְרָהָם, "which He cut with Abraham"). Additionally, he notes that the covenant is also with Isaac (v. 9b), Jacob (v. 10a), and Israel (v. 10b).[18] The psalmist uses three different verbs within verses 8-10 to describe God's action in the giving of the covenant: "commanded" (צָוָה), "made" (כָּרַת), and "confirmed" (עָמַד). The last verb, "confirmed" (עָמַד), is in the Hiphil stem, which highlights the causative nature of God's work. According to the psalmist, this covenant is

[16] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Brill, 2000), 270, Accordance Bible Software.

[17] Ross, 265.

[18] Some might argue that the mention of "Israel" in 10b is a second reference to Jacob.

clearly God's work. The original context for God establishing the Abrahamic covenant is Genesis. God gives the covenant to Abraham in Genesis 12 and expands upon it in Genesis 15 and 17. He then passes the covenant down to Isaac in Genesis 26:3-4 and to Jacob in 28:13-14. The psalmist's understanding of the covenant would have been rooted in these pivotal chapters, which were written many years before he composed Psalm 105.

Psalm 105 details historical examples of the covenant provisions, beginning in verse 11, which says, "To you I will give the land of Canaan As the portion of your inheritance." This refers to the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. Near the end, the Psalm returns to this land promise in verse 44, stating, "He gave them also the lands of the nations." The Psalm notes other provisions throughout its historical section. God blessed Israel's fathers with protection from the nations and kingdoms of the earth (vv. 14-15) and blessed the wilderness generations with physical sustenance during their wanderings (vv. 39-41). He cursed the hostile Egyptians through the ten plagues (vv. 27-36). Though starting very small (v. 12), Israel became a numerous and mighty nation because of God (v. 24). *The Moody Bible Commentary* summarizes well the important role the Abrahamic covenant plays in this psalm. "This psalm focuses on God's faithfulness in upholding the three promises/provisions of the Abrahamic covenant: possession of the Holy Land, a numerous people, and multi-faceted blessings."[19] The psalmist clearly connects God's provisions directly to the covenant. Verse 42 begins with the explanatory particle "for" (כִּי). "For He remembered His holy word *With* Abraham His servant." Cohen believes this verse emphasizes how the covenant mentioned at the beginning of the psalm relates to the historical section. He writes, "After his historical survey, the Psalmist reverts to his earlier theme of verses 8ff., to show how the promise had been fulfilled."[20] The psalmist clearly understood that the blessings Israel received were directly tied back to God's covenant with Abraham.

Psalm 106 is similar to Psalm 105 in many ways. Like Psalm 105, Psalm 106 is anonymous. Also, like the previous psalm, 106 exhorts the audience to "Praise the LORD" [הַלְלוּיָהּ] (v. 1, 48) and "give thanks" [הוֹדוּ] (v. 1), indicating that it is a psalm of praise or thanksgiving. Parts of this psalm (vv. 1, 47-48) are also parallel to 1 Chronicles 16, which raises questions about the dating

[19] *The Moody Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary on the Whole Bible by the Faculty of Moody Bible Institute*, Michael Rydelnik & Michael Vanlaningham, Gen. Eds. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 844-845.
[20] Cohen, 350.

of the psalm. The mention of the "covenant" also appears in Psalm 106:45. Additionally, Israel's early history comprises much of Psalm 106's content, as does Psalm 105.

However, key differences exist between Psalm 105 and 106. Near the end of Psalm 106, the psalmist prays for the LORD to "save" and "gather" the Israelites "from among the nations" (v. 47). The text of Psalm 105 lacks significant details regarding the date of its composition; verse 47 of Psalm 106, on the other hand, appears to reveal a time of captivity. Though it mentions the "covenant" (v. 45), it has fewer references than Psalm 105. However, Psalm 106 references a covenant, though it does not explicitly name it as a covenant, besides the Abrahamic covenant (vv. 30-31): the priestly covenant. The focus regarding the Psalm's historical content changes as Psalm 106 centers on Israel's sin. This shift raises an important hermeneutical ramification, which this paper will explore below.

As noted above, Psalm 106 does not indicate who wrote the psalm. Because of the psalm's similarity to Psalm 105, a single author might have written both. Cohen writes, "Agreement is general that this Psalm is a sequel to the preceding, composed by the same Psalmist."[21] Regarding the dating, the psalmist's prayer for God to deliver the people from foreign captivity (v. 47) suggests that this is an exilic Psalm, written while Judah was in Babylon. However, other historical situations are possible. Since the psalm's historical poetry covers the period from the Exodus through Israel's wilderness wanderings, it must have occurred after that period, and thus after the original giving of the Abrahamic covenant.

Regarding the content of Psalm 106, the first section (verses 1-3) exhorts to worship the LORD. Then it quickly transitions to a petition for the LORD to bless the psalmist with His remembrance and visitation (vv. 4-5) and a confession of the nation's sin (v. 6). After the confession, the historical section begins and runs through most of the rest of the psalm (vv. 7-46), which is followed by a conclusion of further petition and praise (vv. 47-48). The confession of the nation's sin undergirds the historical section's focus. In verse 6, the psalmist writes, "We have sinned like our fathers, We have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly." Three perfect, first-person common plural verbs compose this confession: "sinned" (חָטָא), "committed iniquity" (עָוָה), and "behaved wickedly" (רָשַׁע). The last two verbs stand alone, but the first takes the

[21] Cohen, 351.

prepositional phrase "like our fathers" (עִם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ) as a modifier. The focus, then, in a poetic way, is on Israel's sins and the resulting discipline from God.

Near the end of the historical section, the term "covenant" occurs. The psalmist writes, "And He remembered His covenant for their sake, And relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness" (v. 45). Here, it is said that God "remembered" (זָכַר), the same word in verses 8 and 42 of the previous psalm, "His covenant" (בְּרִיתוֹ), and this was "for their sake" (לָהֶם). This is the only direct use of the term "covenant" in this psalm, although it indirectly mentions a different covenant, discussed below. Unlike Psalm 105, this psalm does not mention Abraham directly. So the question arises: which covenant does the psalmist reference? The immediate context of verse 45 suggests a background in the time of the Judges. Thus, either the Abrahamic or the Mosaic covenant is likely, since both were in operation at the time of the Judges. VanGemeren seems to favor the Abrahamic covenant. He comments, "His 'great love' (ḥesed) is grounded in the 'covenant' with the patriarchs (v.45)."[22] *The Moody Bible Commentary* believes the Abrahamic covenant is in view. "Even in exile, the Lord **looked upon their distress…heard their cry…remembered His covenant** (with Abraham)..."[23] Ross does not specify which covenant the psalmist refers to. However, he points out the similarity between Psalm 106:44-45 and Exodus 2:24,[24] which, in this author's view, supports the idea that it is indeed the Abrahamic covenant. Though one might argue for the Mosaic covenant, the language's similarity to Exodus appears to tip the scales toward the Abrahamic covenant.

The psalmist also indirectly mentions a covenant infrequently discussed[25] in Scripture: the Priestly covenant. This covenant's historical background is Israel's wilderness wanderings. In Numbers 25, Moses records that Israel engaged in idolatry with the Moabites and their false god, "Baal of Peor." Those committing idolatry were to be killed in judgment at the command of the LORD, which Moses relayed to the judges of Israel. Immediately after this command by Moses, an Israelite appears with a Midianite woman, with whom he likely had sexual relations. In reaction to this sin against the LORD, Phinehas, grandson of Aaron the high priest, killed both the Israelite and the Midianite woman. God blessed Phinehas' devotion by forming a covenant with him (Num.

[22] Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, Frank E. Gæbelein, Gen. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 680.

[23] *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 846.

[24] Ross, 292.

[25] Though infrequently mentioned, the Priestly Covenant plays a foundational role in God's eschatological plan. For a brief example, see https://www.foi.org/2026/08/06/the-messiah-and-his-millennial-priests/.

25:10-13). The LORD stated that this covenant was for Phinehas "and his descendants after him," and describes it as "a covenant of a perpetual priesthood" (v. 13). Though the focus of this covenant is one of priesthood, one should note the inclusion of "descendants" (זֶרַע) and the duration as "perpetual" (עוֹלָם). Psalm 106 poetically summarizes this event in Numbers with four verses, the last stating, "And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, To all generations forever" (v. 31). This was the psalmist's way of referring to the priestly covenant. He includes both the idea of "generations" (דּוֹר), though a different word than "descendants" in Numbers 25:13, but a similar idea, and its nature as "forever" (עוֹלָם). Commenting on the last part of verse 31, Cohen writes that Phinehas' "reward was the covenant of an everlasting priesthood (Num. xxv. 13)."[26] Thus, Psalm 106 includes references to both the priestly and Abrahamic covenants.

Psalms 105 and 106 provide practical examples of how the Biblical writers understood the previously revealed Abrahamic and Priestly covenants and thus serve as a helpful hermeneutical reminder that meaning lies in the original passage's meaning. Time does not change the meaning of previously given revelation. The author(s) likely composed their Psalms many years after God gave the covenants. Considering that Psalm 105 exhorted Israel to praise and give thanks to God, why would the Abrahamic covenant be the basis for this exhortation if meaning could change over time? Why would one exhort God's faithfulness if the covenant lacked stability? Instead, Israel could praise and thank God because His promises do not change; they are stable because of Who He is. Keil and Delitzsch state it well, "He remembers His covenant in all time to come, so that exile and want of independence as a state are only temporary, exceptional conditions."[27] Additionally, Psalm 106:31 highlights that the Priestly covenant was made to extend "To all generations forever," a promise whose meaning does not change over time. These psalms value the enduring nature of the original covenant meanings and thus had practical importance for the worship and life of Israel.

Some believe that the covenant promises have changed because of Israel's disobedience and rejection of Christ. However, Psalm 106:40-45 demonstrates that, despite Israel's failings, God continued to "remember" His people because of the covenant. However, this should not surprise anyone who prioritizes original meaning, since the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional.

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[26] Cohen, 355.

[27] C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 142 (Ps. 105:7-11).

It would not be wise for an Israelite to petition God for deliverance from the nations if Israel's disobedience changed the covenant promises; on the other hand, when the promise is unconditional and therefore dependent on God, it is the wisest action one could take. This is the heart of Psalm 106. *The Moody Bible Commentary* summarizes the theme of Psalm 106 by stating, "...this psalm is a historical psalm that reflects the psalmists [*sic*] understanding of God's faithfulness as demonstrated in the Abrahamic covenant in the Pentateuch, and appeals to God to provide salvation to His people based upon His faithfulness to that covenant."[28] Regarding the psalmist's mention of the covenant in Psalm 106:45, Keil and Delitzsch add, "For the whole history of Israel has essentially the same fundamental character, viz. that Israel's unfaithfulness does not annul God's faithfulness."[29]

Neither time nor circumstance changed the original meaning of the Abrahamic covenant. The psalmist(s), writing under the moving of the Holy Spirit, referred to the covenants in a way that respected the original meaning.

Luke 1:68-79

The opening chapter of Luke's gospel provides another example of an individual looking back to the Biblical covenants to apply them to his current situation. In Luke 1:68-79, Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, gave a prophecy drawing upon the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants. Before his words begin, Luke notes in verse 67 that Zacharias "was filled with the Holy Spirit" (ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου). Zacharias was not speaking in his own power and thus subject to misunderstanding the covenant promises on which he would build his prophecy. He was speaking as a Spirit-filled priest. Pentecost highlights this important detail, writing, "Under the direction and control of the Spirit of God, he spoke a message that was as authoritative as any message by any of the prophets of Israel who had preceded him."[30]

Interestingly, Zacharias' name had great significance, as it is thought to mean the "LORD remembers,"[31] reflecting a key verb regarding God and His covenants. As previously discussed, the Hebrew verb "remember" (זָכַר) occurs three times in Psalm 105 and Psalm 106 in relation to

[28] *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 845.
[29] Keil and F. Delitzsch, 158 (Ps. 106:44-46).
[30] J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 50.
[31] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Jewish Perspective*, Vol. 1 (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2020), 362.

God and the Abrahamic covenant. The Greek word for "remember" (μιμνῄσκομαι) also appears in Zacharias' prophecy (v. 72) and is connected to the Abrahamic covenant. Another detail about Zacharias occurs early in chapter 1; Luke indicates that Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were Godly believers, walking in accordance with God's Law (v. 6). Thus, Zacharias likely knew and trusted in God's great covenant promises, and could praise God for them in light of how God was unfolding His Messianic plan in Zacharias' day.

The context of Zacharias' prophecy is important for understanding its details. After a brief introduction to his gospel (1:1-4), Luke records a prophecy "an angel of the Lord" gave to Zacharias about the conception and birth of his son (1:5-25), later to be named John (1:60, 63). Luke then shifts to Mary and the message Gabriel gave her that she would bear a son named Jesus (1:26-39). Thus, at this point in the gospel account, Luke anticipates the births of both the Messiah and His forerunner. Before discussing their births, Luke briefly notes Mary's trip to see Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife (1:46-56). During this trip, Mary spoke a beautiful word of praise to the Lord, often referenced as her "Magnificat" (1:46-55). The focus then shifts to the birth of Zacharias' son John (1:57-66). Following John's birth, the Spirit-filled Zacharias (1:67) offers his prophetic words, the focus of this section of the present paper (1:68-79). After a brief note about John's growth as a child, "becoming strong in spirit," and his later move to the desert (1:80), the focus then shifts to the birth of Jesus, the Messiah (2:1-7).

Examining the structure of Zacharias' prophecy reveals a simple, straightforward breakdown. Luke opens the pericope with an introductory statement in verse 67. Zacharias' words then follow from verse 68 to verse 79 with a major topic break between verses 75 and 76. The blessings that God is providing Israel through the coming of the Messiah are the focus of the first section. Zacharias then concentrates on John and his ministry in light of the Messiah's earthly arrival in the second one. Interestingly, both sections reference back to the Biblical covenants in a significant way.

Zacharias opens his prophecy by praising God, saying, "Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel" (1:68a). He describes the Lord as the "God of Israel." Zacharias is clearly appealing to the Lord's relationship with the nation as revealed in the Old Testament. God is sovereign over all nations throughout history, but He has only entered into a covenant relationship and plan with one nation: Israel. Zacharias does not seem to anticipate a change in that plan. He then provides the basis for his praise of Israel's God using the ὅτι conjunction and three aorist verbs, with God as the implied

subject: "visited," "accomplished," and "raised" (1:68b-69a). The first verb, "visited" (ἐπισκέπτομαι), conveys that God blessed His people through a direct work, and the second verb, "accomplished" (ποιέω), elaborates on this with its accusative direct object, "redemption" (λύτρωσις). God provided redemption, and this redemption was "for His people," as the prepositional phrase τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ indicates, which contextually refers to the nation of Israel. In what sense is Zacharias using redemption? He begins to unfold that answer with the third verb, "raised up" (ἐγείρω), in verse 69. God visited and provided redemption for His people Israel; He also "raised up," or brought forth, "a horn of salvation" (the accusative κέρας plus the genitive of σωτηρίας), and this was "for us" (ἡμῖν). By using the first-person plural pronoun, Zacharias, a Jewish priest, included himself among those receiving the blessing with the nation. Thus, the words "His people" (v. 68) and "us" (v. 69) reveal the audience of this prophecy as the Jewish nation, an important exegetical fact for how God is unfolding His covenant plan.

With Zacharias' reference to God raising up a horn of salvation, he begins to focus his prophecy specifically on the Biblical covenants, starting with the Davidic covenant. The clause "has raised up a horn of salvation" is modified with the prepositional phrase "In the house of David His servant" (ἐν οἴκῳ Δαυὶδ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ). Zacharias' imagery draws from the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for "horn," which the LXX often translates as κέρας, occurs both literally and figuratively, denoting strength. In Psalm 18:2,[32] David uses the term metaphorically: "My shield and the horn of my salvation (וְקֶרֶן־יִשְׁעִי / κέρας σωτηρίας μου), my stronghold." However, Psalm 132:17, a Messianic psalm, directly links the term "horn" to David, referring to the Messiah, who would be a descendant of David.

Zacharias[33] makes it clear he is looking back to the Hebrew Bible by opening verse 70 with the conjunction καθώς ("As"), plus the aorist active indicative of λαλέω ("He spoke"), with God as the implied subject. He also includes two prepositional phrases, "by the mouth of His holy prophets" (διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων…προφητῶν αὐτοῦ) and "from of old" (ἀπ' αἰῶνος). Zacharias based his reference to David and the "horn of salvation" on earlier revelation and understood it as

[32] Psalm 18:2 in the NASB corresponds to Psalm 18:3 in the MT and 17:3 in the LXX.

[33] Stein believes this may not be a continuation of Zacharias' prophecy, but possibly a comment by Luke. If Stein is correct, it does not change the fact that Zacharias draws his praise from God's plan as previously revealed by the prophets; instead of Zacharias explicitly stating it, Luke makes it known. Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary: Luke, vol. 24* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 100.

originally revealed; he was not reinterpreting or changing it. He believed God had revealed His Messianic plan through the prophets and was now unfolding it.

Verse 71 appears to reveal a key aspect of God's Messianic plan: physical deliverance of the nation of Israel. Zacharias states, "Salvation from our enemies, And from the hand of all who hate us." The prophets had foretold a time when God would provide Israel with a Messiah who would rule over them and the whole world as a King over His Kingdom. Israel's promised King and Kingdom would come through the line of David via the Davidic covenant. This kingdom, ruled by the Messiah, would bless the nation with deliverance from her enemies and establish a time of peace and well-being. Fruchtenbaum writes, "Zechariah alluded to the expectation of the Jewish people that God will set up His kingdom on earth, a kingdom in which they will live in peace under the perfect rule of Messiah Himself."[34] Zacharias knew that a significant part of God's plan for Israel involved the Davidic covenant, and he could praise God that the Messiah, the Davidic King, was coming.

However, the Davidic covenant is not the only covenant this prophecy mentions. Verse 72 shifts the focus to the Abrahamic covenant. This verse contains two infinitives indicating the result[35] of God having "raised up a horn of salvation" (v. 69). The first is "To show" (ποιέω), and its object is "mercy" (ἔλεος). Rogers and Rogers[36] and Marshall[37] believe that Zacharias' mention of "mercy" relates to covenant faithfulness. This fits the context because the second infinitive, which appears to parallel[38] the first, is "to remember" (μιμνήσκομαι), the same important action of God recorded in Psalm 105 and 106. What is remembered is "His holy covenant" (διαθήκης ἁγίας αὐτοῦ). In verse 73, Zacharias indicates that this is the Abrahamic covenant. He says, "The oath which He swore to Abraham our father." Pentecost writes, "Here Zachariah referred to the foundational covenant recorded in Genesis 12-13, 15, 17 that was the basis of God's program for Israel and the foundation of Israel's hope for the coming of the Messiah."[39] Thus, God's plan of raising up the Messiah to rule over His Messianic Kingdom demonstrates God's faithfulness in

[34] Fruchtenbaum, *Life of Messiah, vol. 1*, 358.

[35] It is possible that the infinitives express purpose.

[36] Cleon L. Rogers and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 110.

[37] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 92.

[38] Rogers and Rogers, 110; Stein, 100.

[39] Pentecost, 51.

remembering His covenant with Abraham. Here, one observes the connection between the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants.

Another interesting exegetical detail found in both verses 72 and 73 is how Zacharias includes himself, again as a Jewish individual, in this covenant plan. Speaking of God showing "mercy" (v. 72), he adds that it is "toward our fathers" (μετὰ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν). Then in verse 73 he refers to Abraham as "our father" (πρὸς Ἀβραὰμ τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν). In both cases, he uses the first-person plural pronoun of ἐγώ ("our"), indicating he is a descendant of those who received the covenant. There is no hint that the covenant party has changed; it was made with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that has stayed consistent.

In addition to the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants, Zacharias also references the New Covenant. Starting in verse 76, Zacharias switches his focus from the Messiah to John and his part in the Messiah's earthly ministry. He calls John "the prophet of the Most High" and indicates that this entails him going "before the LORD to prepare His ways" (v. 76). Then, in verse 77, Zacharias states, "To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins." This verse starts with the aorist active infinitive of δίδωμι ("to give"), providing the purpose of John's part to "go on before the LORD" (προπορεύσῃ…ἐνώπιον κυρίου, v. 76). What John was "To give" was the "knowledge of salvation," the accusative of γνῶσις plus the genitive of σωτηρία, and this "knowledge" was for "His people," a reference to Israel. The significant prepositional phrase, "By the forgiveness of their sins" (ἐν ἀφέσει ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν), modifies the term "salvation." This directly references the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. Fruchtenbaum writes, "In verse 77, Zechariah made the connection to the New Covenant…The remission of their sins was to be a product of the New Covenant."[40] With the inclusion of the New Covenant, Zacharias praises God for His provision of salvation from sin. Thus, as Pentecost summarizes the prophecy, "Zechariah directed our attention to the covenants God made through Abraham, David, and Jeremiah to deliver Israel from her enemies and from bondage to sin so that they might serve Him."[41]

In his Spirit-filled prophecy, Zacharias looked back to the foundational Biblical covenants and understood their meaning as they were originally given. The prophecy does not indicate that the terms or parties changed; it also provides no indication that their unconditional nature was altered during this historical period. Fruchtenbaum writes, "The fact that Luke included

[40] Fruchtenbaum, *Life of Messiah, vol. 1*, 360.
[41] Pentecost, 51.

Zechariah's reference to the covenant links the redemption provided by the Messiah to the promises God made in the Hebrew Scriptures to Israel, reminding the reader that *salvation is from the Jews* (Jn. 4:22)."[42] These great covenants, understood according to their original meaning, became the basis of praising God, much like the Psalmist of Psalm 105. God was working out His covenant plan as He revealed it.

Acts 3:12-26

Another example of a believer looking back to previous revelation about the Biblical covenants and applying it to their present situation is Peter in his speech in Acts 3:12-26. This speech occurred after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and after the church's formation in Acts 2. As Peter and John were going to the temple, they encountered a man lame since birth, begging for alms (3:1-2). When the man asked for alms, Peter commanded him to "Look" at him and John (3:4), then to "walk" (3:6). Luke records that the man, lame his whole life, was instantly healed (3:7-8a). At this point, "he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God" (3:8b). This healing brought great attention, and the people who witnessed it were amazed (3:9-11), providing Peter an evangelistic opportunity to preach Christ (3:12-26). In this speech, Peter directly recalls the Abrahamic covenant and indirectly the Davidic covenant.

Peter begins his speech focusing on the Father's glorification of Jesus through His death and Resurrection (vv. 12-15), and then tells the crowd that it was this Jesus that healed the lame man (v. 16). With this foundation, Peter transitions to an exhortation for his hearers "to repent and return" to the Lord (v. 19), which is developed through the rest of his speech (v. 26). The basis of Peter's exhortation was not derived from a clever argument developed through his own wisdom. He turned to the Hebrew Bible, particularly the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants, and argued that, in light of God's faithful covenant plan, they should trust the Lord and His Servant, Jesus.

As Peter began his speech to the amazed crowd, he highlighted their Jewish identity. In verse 12, Luke records Peter addressing his audience with the words, "Men of Israel" (Ἄνδρες Ἰσραηλῖται). Historically, this speech occurs after the founding of the church, yet Peter still uses the term "Israel" (Ἰσραηλίτης) to refer to the Jewish people at the temple. Peter does not indicate that this term has a new meaning to describe the newly formed church, which at this time had very few Gentiles.

[42] Fruchtenbaum, *Life of Messiah, vol. 1*, 358.

As he continues his speech, Peter discusses the Father's glorification of Jesus (v. 13), and, in doing so, refers to God as "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Peter follows his first mention of God with a second phrase, "the God of our fathers." These two descriptions of God naturally recall Old Testament language. Regarding Peter's first phrase, Fruchtenbaum believes that it relates to the Abrahamic covenant. He writes, "He is called the *God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob*, which was the biblical formula for the Abrahamic Covenant."[43] One should also observe Peter's use of the first-person plural pronoun "our" (ἡμῶν) with "fathers" (πατέρων). As a foundational leader of the new church, Peter still connects himself with the crowd as an ethnic Israelite; he does not view his ethnic brethren as the church since he appeals to them in this speech to return to the Lord. Fruchtenbaum highlights a similar point later in verse 17 when Peter calls the crowd "brethren" (ἀδελφοί). Commenting on Peter's usage of this word, he writes that it is "not in the sense of fellow believers, but in the sense of fellow Jews."[44]

After discussing the glorification of the rejected Servant of God, Jesus, and attributing to Him the power that healed the lame man, Peter began his exhortation. He clearly articulates that Jesus' sufferings aligned with God's previously revealed plan. Because of that truth, they should "Therefore" (οὖν) "repent" (μετανοήσατε) and "return" (ἐπιστρέψατε) to God (v. 19).[45] These two imperatives are Peter's appeal for them to believe in the person and work of Jesus. At this point, Peter incorporates the Biblical covenants into his speech to justify his message, beginning with an indirect reference to the Davidic covenant, followed by a direct reference to the Abrahamic covenant.

After Peter's two imperatives in verse 19, he includes the preposition εἰς plus the articulated infinitive, τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι, indicating the purpose behind the imperatives, "so that your sins may be wiped away" (εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας). Each person is responsible for believing in the person and work of Jesus; thus, Peter's call to "repent" and "return" is a personal one. This is Peter's evangelistic message to these unsaved Israelites, whom he had previously referred to as his "brethren." But Peter doesn't stop his message there. The subordinate conjunction ὅπως ("in order that") and the aorist active subjunctive of ἔρχομαι ("may come") follow the

[43] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Acts* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2020), 93.

[44] Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Acts*, 95.

[45] The word order is: μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε

infinitive of purpose,[46] indicating a further purpose of Peter's exhortation, "in order that times of refreshing may come" (ὅπως ἂν ἔλθωσιν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου). Peter connects a second subjunctive verb back to the subordinating conjunction when he says "and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you" (καὶ ἀποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν). "Send" is the aorist active subjunctive of ἀποστέλλω. Thus, the twofold purpose of having their sins "wiped away" is "that times of refreshing" could occur and that God would "send" the Messiah, both of which relate to the nation of Israel. When one considers verses 19 and 20 together, one notes that Peter focuses on the individual Jewish unbeliever to begin his exhortation, and then moves to the nation of Israel as a whole.

The "times of refreshing" and the sending of "Jesus" in verses 19 and 20 highlight a significant eschatological doctrine built upon the Davidic covenant. These clauses describe the Messianic Kingdom's entrance at the Messiah's return. Fruchtenbaum writes, "The expression 'seasons of refreshing' refers to a national revival by turning to the Lord, which will result in the establishment of the Messianic kingdom."[47] This Messianic kingdom is ruled by the Davidic King, prophesied in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89, both vital passages that reveal the Davidic covenant. When Peter says God will "send Jesus," he is referencing the Messiah's second advent. Christ will return to rule the kingdom because He is the Father's designated ruler, as indicated by Peter's description of the Messiah as the One Who has been "appointed for you" (προκεχειρισμένον).

Building off of his mention of Jesus at the end of verse 20, Peter says that the Messiah is the One Who is in heaven, which other Scriptures indicate means at the right hand of the Father, "until *the* period of restoration of all things" (v. 21). This time indication further supports the idea that Peter is speaking about the future kingdom that was revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. He said that God had revealed the "restoration of all things" "by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time." Peter was not revealing new truth to this Jewish audience but was instead going back to the Scriptures they knew. Marty helpfully summarizes the eschatological plan which Peter is presenting when he writes, "Peter and the apostles still anticipated a literal, geo-political messianic kingdom that would be inaugurated with the visible return of Christ to earth. Peter's expectation favored a literal kingdom for regenerated Israel with Messiah Jesus ruling on the

[46] In the Greek text, the clause beginning with the subordinating conjunction ὅπως (ὅπως ἂν ἔλθωσιν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου, "in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord") occurs in verse 20, whereas the NASB translation includes it in verse 19.

[47] Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Acts*, 96.

throne of David over them and the world."[48] Though Peter does not directly mention the Davidic covenant, it underlies the eschatological doctrine he shares with the crowd, and he understands it as it was originally given in the Old Testament.

In verses 22-24, Peter's focus shifts to a warning about rejecting the prophesied Prophet (cf. Deut. 18:15) and all the other Old Testament prophets. Peter then links his audience to the prophets, calling the crowd "the sons of the prophets"[49] (οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν προφητῶν) in verse 25. The phrase τῶν προφητῶν ("of the prophets") is a genitive construction modifying the predicate nominative οἱ υἱοὶ ("the sons"). Fruchtenbaum adds, "While the people of Israel were not the literal descendants of the prophets, they were descendants in the sense of inheritance, heirs of the promises made by God through the prophets. They were the sons of the prophets because they would inherit the prophets' promises."[50] However, they are not only connected to the prophets, but they are also "sons…of the covenant," indicated by the second genitive noun διαθήκης ("covenant"). In verse 25, Peter specifies which covenant by using a relative clause introduced by the pronoun ἧς. He says, "which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham." The verb translated "made," with God (θεὸς) as the subject, is διατίθημι, meaning "to make formal arrangements for someth. to be done or brought about, *decree, ordain."*[51] The adverbial participle λέγων ("saying") plus the prepositional phrase πρὸς Ἀβραάμ ("to Abraham") indicates a covenant provision first told to Abraham. Peter then quotes, most likely,[52] from Genesis 22:18, which is the provision that God would bless the world through Abraham's descendants. Thus, Peter emphasizes to the crowd that God made a covenant with Abraham, and then passed it on to the nation, including them ("made with your fathers"), thereby making them "sons…of the covenant."

After saying that the crowd was the "sons…of the covenant," Peter ended his exhortation, and his entire speech, by driving home the point that God's covenant plan with Israel was a blessing to the nation, including the Jewish people he was exhorting. God intended to bless the world through the Abrahamic covenant, but the first recipient of those blessings was Israel, "For you

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[48] *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1680.

[49] Verse 25 begins with an emphatic ὑμεῖς, focusing and heightening the attention on this Jewish crowd.

[50] Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Acts*, 98.

[51] Frederick W. Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 238, Accordance Bible Software.

[52] F.F. Bruce believes that the background of the quote is also Genesis 12:3. "This quotation conflates the LXX rendering of Gen. 12:3 ('in you all the families of the earth will be blessed') and of Gen. 22:18 ('in your posterity all the nations of the earth will be blessed')." F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 88.

first" (v. 26). Rogers and Rogers write, "Although the universal blessing in the Messiah is for all people, it is first (πρῶτον) for those of Israel who will accept it by faith."[53] This covenant plan included sending the Messiah as Israel's Savior, and Peter said this should encourage the people to believe in Him.

Throughout Peter's speech in Acts 3, he consistently appealed to the Scriptures his audience would have known. Both the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants played a major role in Peter's evangelistic exhortation to the Jewish crowd, and he demonstrated an understanding of these covenants as they were revealed. Acts 3 gives no hint that he was giving these covenants a new interpretation or meaning. He explained them in the same sense as they were originally given despite the vast time difference between his day and the days they were given. Additionally, the truth that Christ died, was buried, and was resurrected, along with the formation of the church, did not change the covenant's original meanings in Peter's discourse.

Conclusion

Dispensationalism has been targeted and attacked for its support for Israel. Influencers in the social media and podcast world have attributed dispensationalists' support of Israel to various reasons, some even being nefarious. However, dispensationalism teaches that God has a plan for the nation of Israel because its hermeneutic interprets the Old Testament as it was originally revealed. The three passages discussed in this paper, Psalms 105 and 106, Luke 1:68-79, and Acts 3:12-26, provide encouraging examples of believers understanding earlier revelation about the Biblical covenants the same way dispensationalists do today. In each case, the writer or speaker appeared to appeal to the original meanings of key covenant passages. There was no hint of a change or alteration in meaning. They understood the stability of these crucial covenants in God's plan, and because of that confidence, they could rightly look to them to praise, petition, and exhort.

The hermeneutical method of dispensationalism is a strength, not a problem or a shortcoming. Our method of understanding Scripture aligns with the Psalmist(s), Zacharias, and the Apostle Peter. The literal or originalist hermeneutic allows dispensationalism to clearly articulate God's overall plan because it correctly understands the original meaning of the Biblical covenants and thus their implications for the future. This leads to dispensationalism's view of a glorious future for Israel as God's chosen nation, while also recognizing God's wonderful plan for

[53] Rogers and Rogers, 236.

Christ's church. It is not inconsistent to see God working in and through both Israel and the church. What is inconsistent is believing that Scripture had a meaning when it was given, but a different one later in history.