

Critique of The Two Covenant Theory

by Mitch Glaser

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Introduction

It is impossible for me to be objective about the Two Covenant Theory. Theologically, this doctrine is my despised enemy. If it could ever be proven true, it makes me to be a fool and my life meaningless. If Jesus is not the only way of salvation for Jews as well as Gentiles, and if Jews are not required to confess him in order to be part of the Heavenly Father's family, then I have had a meaningless life of struggle and rejection. But even more meaningless is the death of Y'shua at Calvary!

If you wanted to hear something positive about the theory, it would have been better to invite a proponent of the view rather than an antagonist. When presenting the arguments of those who believe in the theory, I will try to quote. But let it be clearly understood that the purpose for this presentation is to deliver a critique. It is my hope that this distinguished group of professionals in Jewish ministry will find argumentation and ammunition to help expose this teaching for what it really is...theological anti-Semitism and unbiblical heresy.

Statement of the Two Covenant Theory

The Two Covenant Theory states there is a way of salvation for the Jews—through the covenants God made with the Jewish people in the Old Testament—and a way of salvation for the Gentiles...through Jesus. The theory does not imply that every Jewish person will be saved, but that the Jewish person doesn't need to believe in Jesus in order to be saved.

Rosemary Reuther, Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, explains the view in her book *Faith and Fratricide*:

Christians must be able to accept the thesis that it is not necessary for Jews to have the story about Jesus in order to have a foundation for faith and a hope for salvation. The story of Jesus parallels, it does not negate, the Exodus. It is another story, born from Abraham's promise, which becomes the paradigm of salvation for Christians.¹

Dr. A. Roy Eckardt of Lehigh University² believes that Judaism and the Church are like elder and younger brothers in one equally valid faith, united in a single covenant:

For the Christian as younger brother to behave in any way which implies that the Jew as elder brother is not already a member of the household of salvation is the height of presumptuousness. In principle, it is out of the question for the Christian church to try to “convert” the Jewish people to Jesus Christ. Such an attempt can only mean a fatal distortion of the structure of the history of salvation.³

The dual covenant position has landed a foothold within the Christian community and has caused a number of Protestant denominations to alter their historic position in relationship to the Jewish community. In some respects this has been good, as negative stereotypes about the Jewish people have been corrected and pastors have become more attuned to the sensitivities of the Jewish community. Unfortunately, it has led in a number of cases to the acceptance of the Two Covenant Theory.

The 1.7-million-member United Church of Christ, the tenth largest Protestant denomination in the United States, adopted a declaration at their 1987 annual convention calling for the church to recognize the unique role of the Jewish people in the purposes of God. The leaders asked church members “to turn from this path of rejection and persecution to affirm that Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity.” According to the report, although other Christian groups have denounced anti-Semitism, the United Church of Christ is the first to adopt a policy statement affirming the validity of Judaism.

Rabbi James Rudin, Director of Inter-religious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, commented in an interview in *Moment* magazine on the importance of the United Church of Christ statement:

This new statement means that the whole question of Christian proselytizing, missionizing, and conversion is undermined, because they don't need to convert people who already have a covenant relationship with God.⁴

Acceptance of the Two Covenant Theory is not limited to those denominations considered theologically liberal. According to Rev. George Sheridan, former East Coast Regional Director for the Southern Baptist department of Interfaith Witness:

The Jewish bond with God was not superseded by the coming of Jesus. The Jews of today, as ever, receive salvation through their having been chosen by God in covenant with Abraham, Moses, and the prophets.⁵

Sheridan continues:

My position is that Jews do not require evangelization. We ought to leave them alone in light of their history.^{6 7}

The new combined PCUSA has been working on producing a similar Two Covenant statement and establishing a new mode of operation for the denomination. In the past, Presbyterians have been very active in Jewish evangelism. At present, the PCUSA statement is only a study document and has not yet been ratified by the General Assembly.⁸

The task force which worked on the document was assisted in their study by two non-voting Jewish consultants, Dr. David Blumenthal, Emory University (Judaic Studies), and Mr. Michael Wyschogrod, Bernard Baruch College, City University of New York (Philosophy).

It could hardly be claimed that these Jewish “advisors” are anything near objective, since both have used their positions to combat the evangelization of Jews when and where possible.

Dr. Wyschogrod, along with Dr. David Berger, wrote one of the first anti-missionary books to be produced by the Jewish community. The booklet, entitled *Jews and Jewish Christianity*, is a diatribe against the person of Jesus Christ as well as a patent misrepresentation of Christian motives and New Testament doctrines.

This task force worked for two years. Their report, entitled *Christian and Jews: A Unique Relationship*, which was widely circulated for advice and comment, was carefully reviewed and revised by the Council on Theology and Culture, and was adopted and recommended to the 1983 General Assembly jointly by this Council and the General Assembly Mission Board. The 195th General Assembly (1983) took the following action:

...that the 195th General Assembly (1983) return the paper “Christian and Jews: A Unique Relationship” to the Council on Theology and Culture for further study and that the Council be instructed to broaden the base of those working on this study to include specifically Middle-East Christians and those within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) having responsibilities for working in the Middle East, and to include contacting resource people who can more effectively reflect contemporary Judaism in its relationship to Christianity.⁹

This paper included seven theological affirmations that are said to lay a foundation for a new and better relationship under God between Christians and Jews. They are:

1. A reaffirmation that the God who addresses both Christians and Jews is the same—the living and true God;
2. A new understanding by the church that its own identity is intimately related to the continuing identity of the Jewish people;

3. A willingness to ponder with Jews the mystery of God's election of both Jews and Christians to be a light to the nations;
4. An acknowledgement by Christians that Jews are in covenant relationship with God, and a consideration of the implications of this reality for evangelism;
5. A determination by Christians to put an end to "the teaching of contempt" for the Jews;
6. A willingness to acknowledge the continuing significance of the promise of land, and to explore its implications for our theology;
7. A readiness to act on the hope which we share with the Jews in God's promise of the peaceable kingdom.¹⁰

The misleading language of the fourth statement should be of particular interest to us, as it lays the theological and theoretical basis for the Two Covenant Theory and its implementation within the the PCUSA. They expanded the fourth statement in the following manner:

We affirm that the reign of God is attested both by the continuing existence of the Jewish people and by the church's proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, when speaking with Jews about matters of faith, we must always acknowledge that Jews are already in a covenantal relationship with God.

God, who acts in human history by the Word and Spirit, is not left without visible witnesses on the earth. God's sovereign and saving reign in the world is signified both by the continuing existence and faithfulness of the Jewish people and by the life and witness of the church.

As the cross of Jesus has always been a stumbling block to Jews, so also the continued existence and faithlessness of the Jew is often a stumbling block to Christians. Our persuasion of the truth of God in Jesus Christ has *sometimes* led Christians to conclude that Judaism should no longer exist, now that Christ has come, and that all Jews ought properly to become baptized members of the church. Over the centuries, many afflictions have been visited on the Jews by Christians holding this belief—not least in our time. We believe that the time has come for Christians to stop and take a new look at the Jewish people and at the relationship which God wills between Christian and Jew.

Such reappraisal cannot avoid the issue of evangelism. Should Christians seek to evangelize Jews? For Jews, this is a very sensitive issue. Proselytism by Christians seeking to persuade, even to convert, them has too often been the experience of Jews. Besides its negative judgment on Jewish faith, Christian evangelism is seen by them as a threat to Jewish

survival, because Jews who unite with the church usually sever their bonds with the Jewish people. The issue is problematical for Christians as well. Although we understand ourselves called to be witnesses to Christ in all the earth, we understand our scriptures and our confessional documents to teach that Jews are already in covenant with God, and that God's covenant is not revoked.

For Christians, there is no easy answer to this dilemma. We affirm that Jesus Christ came for all people—"to the Jew first and also the Greek." But if most Jews choose not to follow him as Messiah and Lord, we are not entitled to conclude from this that God's covenant with their forebears has now been rescinded. We do not presume to know the whole mind of God on this matter, but this we can surely say: we will witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ among all the "nations" (*ethne*), by word and by life, in accordance with our Lord's command. But whenever we speak with Jews, we must not forget that they are already in covenant with God.

Dialogue is the appropriate form of faithful conversation between Christian and Jews. Dialogue is not a cover for proselytism. Rather, as trust is established, not only questions and concerns can be shared, but faith and commitments as well. Thus dialogue is compatible with witness, while it is incompatible with a militancy that seeks to impose one's own terms on another. In dialogue, partners are able to define their faith in their own terms, avoiding caricatures of one another, and are thus better able to obey the commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Dialogue, especially in light of our shared history, should be entered into with a spirit of humility and a commitment to reconciliation. Such dialogue can be a witness that seeks also to heal that which has been broken. It is out of a mutual willingness to listen and learn that faith deepens, and a new and better relationship between Christians and Jews is enabled to grow.¹¹

The paper was once again returned to the committee to be reconsidered at next year's General Assembly. The reason had nothing to do with the theological unacceptability of the Two Covenant Theory—item number 6 was deemed overly sympathetic to Jewish Israelis. For many years, Presbyterians have conducted missionary efforts among the Arabs and they did not want to alienate their Middle-Eastern brethren. We can expect to see this report back again, somewhat modified, yet in all probability accepted by the General Assembly.

According to the Two Covenant theorist, Judaism without Christ provides a viable means of redemption for the Jewish people. There is no need to tell Jews about Jesus.

Denominations and Christian groups are accepting the theory and demonstrating a great willingness to act on their beliefs. We should expect this trend to continue, and these groups to intensify their opposition to Jewish missions.

The Jewish Origins of the Two Covenant Theory

The Christian community is actually only the “front man” for the Two Covenant Theory. The origin of the theory is Jewish. The Two Covenant Theory gives an ideal theoretical basis for discouraging the continued efforts of Christians to preach the gospel to Jewish people. It is the intended strategy of the Jewish leaders to encourage Christians to accept a new basis for Jewish-Christian relations...a basis which allows the Jewish people theologically to survive. If Christians can be persuaded that it is unnecessary to preach the gospel to Jews, it would then reduce the level of perceived threat to the Jewish religion.

Conversion to Judaism

Yet the sages of Israel admit: “Pious men of all the nations have a share in the life to come.”¹² But this way is not necessarily by actual conversion to Judaism. The Jewish religion has had an uneven past in its attempts to make converts from among the Gentiles.

At one time in history the Jewish community was active in “making proselytes,” as recognized by Jesus in Matthew 23:15; but when the legal status of Christianity was assured by Constantine, Judaism defensively de-emphasized conversion. Some among the Reform movement today have again shown a desire to actively reach out with the intent of converting non-Jews.

It is alleged that a certain Gentile came to Rabbi Hillel and wanted to become a Jew. Hillel instructed him first to stand on one leg and recite the entire Torah. Jews have traditionally made it difficult for Gentiles fully to enter the fold of Israel. Some would argue that it was an act of compassion so as not to lay the burden of the whole Law upon the Gentile who was sincerely seeking God. But from a socio-historical perspective, it is obvious that Judaism discourages conversion, because they do not want the Jewish community polluted or diluted. Judaism has usually been more eager to exclude rather than include non-Jews within the fold. This mentality was as motivated by a desperation to survive, especially in the Diaspora, as it was to fulfill the need to maintain a separation between Jews and non-Jews.

The Doctrines of Survival

Jewish people have had to master the art of survival. After all, it is not easy regularly to outsmart the hostile majority century upon century! Techniques were developed, and strategies of survival discovered, which enabled us to preserve our race and resist conversion to the majority religion. Some of these strategies are theological in character. The Two Covenant Theory must be understood as a doctrine of survival.

From earliest days, Jews have been a minority. We have survived and flourished as a minority culture longer than any other race. Yet certain compromises have had to be made. There exist within Rabbinic Judaism doctrines of survival which validate Gentile religions and do not encourage conversion. After all, it was not in the best interest of the Jewish community to criticize the religion of the Christian or Muslim majority. Judaism was not eager to include the Gentiles in the Jewish religion nor were the authors of Halakhah wanting to bring down the wrath of the majority upon the Jews and their religion. Jews had experienced the destructiveness of that wrath before without any cause. Hence they wanted to avoid any and all provocations.

Conveniently, Judaism claimed that there was no need for the Gentiles to become Jews if they faithfully followed their own religions. There is a concept known as *Hasidei Ummot Ha-Olam*: “The pious ones of the nations of the world.”

This is a rabbinic term denoting righteous Gentiles. The concept is first found (in limited form) in the Midrash. The *Yalkut Shimoni*, for instance, explains that the verse “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness...” (Ps. 132:9) refers to “the righteous of other nations who are priests to the Holy One in this world, like Antoninus and his type.”¹³ The notion that the *hasidei ummot ha-olam* also merit a place in the world to come (a true sign of their worthiness) is found in the Tosefta, which teaches that they are as eligible as any member of the House of Israel to a share in the hereafter.¹⁴

Without specifically naming the righteous Gentiles, Maimonides also equates “all human beings who ardently seek God... desire to worship Him, to know Him, and to walk uprightly in His ways...,” with priests and Levites.¹⁵ Undergirding this strategy for survival was an attempt on the part of Jewish leaders to demonstrate their acceptance of heathen religions. One rabbi said: “Gentiles outside of Israel were not really idolaters...but only blind followers of their ancestral customs.”¹⁶

This is contrary to the religion of the Old Testament. The prophets did not hesitate to denounce pagan religions even when the idolators were in the majority. But the rabbis of the dispersion were ready to posit that the worshippers of Greek gods, and even adherents to Christianity and Islam, could possibly be righteous Gentiles. The need for Jews to survive among the nations burned far brighter than the calling to shine as lights to the Gentiles. Validating the religions of the dominant culture was a means of preserving the Jewish people and religion as well as preserving the race.

• Noachide Laws

According to Rabbinic thought, the covenant with Noah was particularly applicable to the Gentiles. The so-called laws of Noah, mirrored in Acts 15, were an acceptable basis for determining the righteousness of a Gentile. The seven laws include:

1. The institution of courts of justice
2. A prohibition against idolatry
3. Against blasphemy
4. Against incest
5. Against murder
6. Against robbery
7. Against eating the limb of a living animal

(some would also include a prohibition against castration, the mixing of breeds, and witchcraft)¹⁷

Maimonides wrote:

All who observe the Seven Commandments—obligatory to the descendants of Noah—are *hasidei ummot ha-olam*, provided that they are motivated by belief in the divine origin and the authenticity of Moses' prophecy, and not by mere intellectual cogency. In the latter case they are to be considered only as "wise ones of the other nations" (*hakhmeihem*, according to some versions).¹⁸

If these laws were obeyed, then Gentiles retained the freedom to worship their own gods and be accepted into the good graces of the God of Israel.

The words of the prophet Micah have been quoted through the centuries by Jewish leaders to justify this position:

Though all the peoples walk, each in the name of his god, as for us, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. (Micah 4:5)

The prophet does not insist that the Gentiles who will come up to Jerusalem be considered converts. They can maintain their own religious customs yet still be acceptable to God.

According to Berger and Wyschogrod, conversion to Judaism is discouraged because the Noachide laws already provide a sufficient means for the Gentile to be considered righteous and to find a place in the world to come:

The answer is that Judaism believes all good people to have a share in the world to come. In order to clarify this, we must now speak of the Noachide laws. As we have already seen, the Torah and its 613 commandments are intended only for Jews. How, then, is a Gentile to live? Does God not care how Gentiles act, or does he make demands of Gentiles as well as Jews?

Judaism teaches that God does indeed make demands of Gentiles, though they are different from those he makes of Jews. The Talmud speaks of the laws that are binding for Gentiles as the Noachide commandments, basing itself on Genesis 9:1-17. There God makes a covenant with Noah never again to cause a flood to come upon the world. At the same time God demands of Noah and his descendants not to take human life (Genesis 9:6), and the rabbis include other aspects of moral law, such as theft, adultery and incest, idolatry, etc. **Judaism believes that a Gentile who obeys the Noachide commandments has a place in the world to come. This is the basic reason why conversion to Judaism by Gentiles is discouraged. A Gentile who wishes to convert to Judaism is told that, as a Gentile, he can find favor with God by adhering to the Noachide commandments.** Were he to convert, he would be obligated to fulfill all the commandments of the Torah, and since this is a difficult thing to do, he is advised to stay with the Noachide covenant, under which it is easier to please God. Should a Gentile persist in his desire to become a Jew, he must indicate his willingness to accept all the commandments of the Torah. He is then circumcised and miraculously becomes a Jew with all the obligations of a Jew.¹⁹

A medieval writer, Rabbi Menachem Meiri, drew a distinction between idolaters and Christians and Muslims. The latter, he writes, are "people disciplined by religion" and on principle, are to be regarded as Jews "as far as economic and social relations were concerned." This was an extreme view for the time, but it does demonstrate how intent the Jewish leaders were on showing tacit acceptance of the dominant religious and political forces of their day. Maimonides claims that a Gentile who observes the Noachide laws should be honored above a Jew who does not study the Torah.²⁰

The Noachide laws are doctrines of survival, allowing Jews to treat the Gentile majority with a semblance of respect while hoping for reciprocal treatment. How could the Jewish

people possibly survive without religious compromise? This method of placating the religious majority would become a pattern.

• The Doctrine of Shittuf

Essential to the Christian religion and God's revelation in Jesus Christ is the divinity of the Messiah. This is a doctrine which is seemingly repugnant to the Jewish people. Yet a way was found around this doctrine as well. It is the Rabbinic understanding of the doctrine of *shittuf*... partnership. The question must be answered: Are Christians idolaters if they believe that Jesus is God?

Medieval Jewish writers wrestled with the problem. The tosafist, R. Isaac of Dampierre, held that since Christians could not be regarded as strict monotheists, according to the Halakhah they come under the category of Noahchides who are not enjoined against trinitarian belief.²¹

Berger and Wyschogrod explain it as follows:

Does a Gentile who believes in the divinity of Jesus in accordance with the Nicene Creed commit idolatry? While Gentiles are not obligated to obey all the commandments which are obligatory for Jews, one of the commandments which is binding on Gentiles is the prohibition against idolatry. From the Jewish point of view, are Gentile Christians idolaters? The answer, according to the dominant Jewish view, is that they are not. In Jewish literature, the term that came to be used for the Trinitarian concept of God was *shittuf* (partnership). **The accepted Jewish view is that belief in *shittuf* does not constitute idolatry for Gentiles but does so for Jews.** The reason for this is that the definition of what constitutes idolatry is different for Jews and Gentiles. Belief in *shittuf*, the belief that God shares his being in equal partnership with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is not idolatry by the standard demanded of Gentiles. But the very same belief held by a Jew constitutes idolatry by the standard applicable to Jews. It is for this reason that Judaism does not condemn Christian Trinitarianism as idolatry unless those holding the belief are Jews who are bound by the covenant of Sinai.²²

The inconsistency in the treatment of Jews who accept the deity of Christ and with the Gentiles who are trinitarian is incredible. Thus we come to a double standard which presumes the spiritual superiority (or inferiority) of the Jews. It bothered no one that the doctrine is unfair. It concerned no one that there was no appeal on the basis of sincerity and convictions. It was impossible to argue that a Jew might honestly believe that Jesus was God and was acting in concert with the covenants. Jews who believed in Jesus had to be rejected and must always be presumed to be acting in "bad faith."

Yet it should be understood that it would have placed the Jewish people in a precarious situation if they were to condemn Christians as idolaters. Anyone who knows the history of Judaism and Christianity recognizes that this would have brought annihilation to the Jewish people in most of Christendom. It was hoped that the toleration offered to the Gentiles regarding the Trinity would be reciprocated by Christendom in respect to doctrines particular to Judaism.²³

• Preparation for the Messiah

Maimonides claimed that Christianity was *preparatio messianica*, God's way of preparing the Gentiles for the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom. Maimonides viewed Islam in the same way. He wrote:

All these matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite (Mohammed) who came after him, served to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God in one accord, as it is written, "For then I will turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent." (Zeph. 3:9) Thus the messianic hope, the Torah, and the commandments have become familiar topics.²⁴

Maimonides was forced to validate Islam. What choice did he have? If, in the spirit of Isaiah, he condemned Mohammed as a false prophet, he would have brought about his own destruction and precipitated a Holy War against the Jewish people.

Jehuda Halevi uses a parable to teach the relationship of Judaism to both Christianity and Islam.

The wise providence of God towards Israel may be compared to the planting of a seed of corn. It is placed in the earth, where it seems to be changed into soil, and water, and rottenness, and the seed that has changed the earth and water into its own nature, and then the seed raises itself from one stage to another, transforms the elements, and throws out shoots and leaves...Thus it is with Christians and Moslems. The Law of Moses has changed them that come into contact with it, even though they seem to have cast the Law aside. These religions are the preparation and the preface to the Messiah we expect, who is the fruit himself of the seed originally sown, and all men, too, will be fruit of God's seed when they acknowledge Him, and all become one mighty tree.²⁵

Abraham Joshua Heschel believes that this openness to the validity of Christianity should be reciprocated by Christendom:

Thus, whereas the the Christian doctrine has often regarded Judaism as having outlived its usefulness and the Jews as candidates for conversion,

the Jewish attitude enables us to acknowledge the presence of a divine plan in the role of Christianity within the history of redemption.”²⁶

Acknowledging the validity of other religious systems is a means of possible peaceful coexistence. Judaism views its unique role as having given birth to both Islam and Christianity. The root of conflict with both daughter religions is due to their apparent disrespect for the parent in trying to make converts of Jewish people to Islam or Christianity—especially when the conversion attempt came at the point of a sword!

Modern Day

Jewish philosophers, attempting to argue for the necessary mutual respect of the modern, pluralistic Western mind, emphasized the Two Covenant Theory. But now Christianity was the sole target as the Jews in the West had to survive in a “post-Haskalah” society. Jews were now able to integrate into Western society. The doctrines of survival became increasingly important... not only as a means of appeasing the dominant culture and religion, but to halt Jews from turning to Christianity. The *race-specific* validity of Judaism for Jews was emphasized to decrease their attraction to Christianity.

Martin Buber claims: “God’s doors are open for all. In order to come to God, the Christian need not go through Judaism nor the Jew through Christianity.”²⁷

Buber illustrates his point with a poignant story.

I live not far from the city of Worms, to which I am bound by the tradition of my forefathers; and, from time to time, I go there. When I go, I first go to the cathedral. It is a visible harmony of members, a totality in which no part deviates from perfection. I walk about the cathedral with consummate joy, gazing at it. Then I go over to the Jewish cemetery consisting of crooked, cracked shapeless, random stones. I station myself there, gaze upward from the jumble of a cemetery to that glorious harmony, and seem to be looking up from Israel to the Church. Below, there is no jot of form; there are only the stones and the dust lying beneath the stones. The dust is there, no matter how thinly scattered. There lies the corporeality of man, which has turned to this. There it is. There it is for me. There it is for me, not as corporeality within the space of this planet, but as corporeality within my own memory, far into the depths of history, as far back as Sinai.

I have stood there, have been united with the dust, and through it with the Patriarchs. That is a memory of the transaction with God which has given to all Jews. From this the perfection of the Christian house of God cannot separate me, nothing can separate me from the sacred history of Israel.

I have stood there and have experienced everything myself; with all this death has confronted me, all the dust, all the ruin, all the wordless misery is mine; but the covenant has not been withdrawn from me. I lie on the ground, fallen like these stones. But it has not been withdrawn from me.

The cathedral is as it is. The cemetery is as it is, but nothing has been withdrawn from us.²⁸

Franz Rosenzweig was an advocate of the Two Covenant Theory. He was not, as some mistakenly assume, the originator of the idea, but he was perhaps the most articulate spokesman for the view among contemporary Jewish theologians.

Rosenzweig almost became a Christian as a result of the ongoing testimony of a Jewish believer, Eugene Rosenstock. But on the eve of Yom Kippur, Rosenzweig had an experience with God that caused him to renounce any interest in Christ and to re-embrace Judaism. On the eve of his conversion, Rosenzweig was faced with what should be a very familiar situation to Jews who believe in Jesus. Rosenzweig was confronted by his mother as he told her of his intention to become a Christian.

From Leipzig Franz Rosenzweig went home to Cassel, and he attended the New Year's service at the Cassel synagogue (October 2 and 3). A day or two later, after a night spent in discussion with a friend, he came down from his study into the living room to his mother: "I want to talk to you." His mother, guessing what was on his mind, said excitedly: "You want to be baptized!" Franz pointed to the New Testament in his hand: "Mother, here is everything, here is the truth. There is only one way, Jesus." His mother asked him: "Were you not in the synagogue on the New Year's Day?" Franz answered: "Yes, and I will go to the synagogue on the Day of Atonement, too. I am still a Jew." His mother said: "When I come in I will ask them to turn you away. In our synagogue there is no room for an apostate.

Franz Rosenzweig left Cassel and went to Berlin. There he attended the Atonement Day service (October 11) at a small orthodox synagogue. The experience of this day was the origin of his radical return to Judaism.

In his magnum opus, the *Star of Redemption*, which appeared in 1921, Rosenzweig proposed the thesis that both religions, Judaism and Christianity, possess equal validity and are mutually complementary. Neither is the arbiter of the truth, which will only be fully known at the end of days.

Judaism is the Life—the faith that was with the Father at the beginning—while Christianity is the way toward the Father of those who are not yet with Him. Judaism is the first; Christianity the rays. Judaism is the Star of Redemption turned in upon itself; Christianity the Cross with its arms branched outward.²⁹

Many contemporary Jewish authors have accepted the Two Covenant Theory as a basis for continuing dialogue with Christians. But some Jewish leaders are willing to speak their mind regarding the Two Covenant Theory and their true desire for how they wish to be treated by Christianity. Eliezer Berkowitz pulls no punches when he scathingly writes:

This is still conceived in the old questionable tradition of religious persecution. It is not a matter of whether Christianity acknowledges fragmentary truths in Judaism. All we want of Christians is that they keep their hands off us and our children!³⁰

Yechiel Eckstein mildly concurs in his book, *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism*. He writes:

The most prevalent Jewish view of what essentially constitutes the ideal relationship between Judaism and Christianity is that, if Christians were to become better Christians and Jews better Jews, both would be better off, as would the world in which we live.³¹

The Two Covenant Theory is an attempt to neutralize the testimony of the church to the Jews. If both have valid covenants with God, then leaving one another alone except for occasional readjustments in the uneasy balance of religious pluralism would be the superior course for the minority religion. In other words, no nativity scenes, no prayer in schools, and by all means no evangelism!

The Development of the Two Covenant Theory in the Christian Community

The doctrine which was Jewish in origin was “transferred over” to the Christian community. It was conscientiously injected into the circles of liberal theologians, who would not denounce it as the bastardization of the doctrine of salvation since they viewed soteriology largely in terms of saving a whole society by social means. This shift in soteriology had already taken place within the World Council of Churches. They were recasting the mission of the church among the Jewish people in terms of dialogue rather than evangelism.

According to Methodist missiologist, Gerald Anderson,

Within the National Council of Churches in the USA, there was for many years a Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews. An official of the National Council of Churches describes the demise of that Committee as follows:

The decline in the work of the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews and its eventual disappearance was of course directly related to the increasing questions in our member communions about the theological and sociological propriety of evangelizing the Jews. As early as the late 1950's, as a result of the thinking of Reinhold Niebuhr and others, serious questions were being asked and the Committee had to choose between being an operation vitiated by the fact that it was refusing to face its theoretical question head-on, or to do so and to be completely consumed or fragmented by continuing debate of that issue.³²

The end, he says, came in the 1960's:

Some orderly processes for dealing with the issue were put into motion between 1960 and 1963, but it became increasingly clear as we moved into the 1960's that the **choice between dialogue and conversion as the focus of Christian encounter with the Jewish community was being resolved in favor of the former.** Whereas there has been money available before for evangelism, there was no money available for programs in Jewish-Christian relations divorced from some element of conversion. The result was that the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews slowly withered away, was never officially terminated, but certainly did not exist in any functioning capacity whatsoever by the end of the decade.³³

Increasingly, the Two-Covenant theory became the only acceptable basis for further discussion within the Christian community; albeit mostly among those who would identify themselves as theological liberals.

The doctrines of universalism had been making headway within the World Council for many years.

John Stott, fresh from his experience at the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in 1974, admonished the leaders of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi in 1975 on the dangers of universalism:

Universalism, fashionable as it is today, is incompatible with the teaching of Christ and His apostles, and is a deadly enemy of evangelism. The true universalism of the Bible is the call to universal evangelism in obedience to Christ's universal commission. It is the conviction not that all men will be saved in the end, but that all men must hear the Gospel salvation before the end, as Jesus said (Matt. 24:14), in order that they may have a chance to believe and to be saved (Romans 10:13-15).³⁴

The Two Covenant Theory is simply universalism disguised as Jewish-Christian relations.

- **The Catholic Church**

The Declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) was the most significant breakthrough in Jewish-Catholic relations in this century. According to a report:

The Catholic church has gone on record as acknowledging that the Jewish people today are the heirs of and continue in God's eternal covenant with them. The Jewish people today, according to this teaching, are the Israel of God. The ancient covenant between God and Israel, in other words, continues today, ever new and ever alive in the ambiguous contemporary life of the Jewish people. Not since the Apostle to the Gentiles insisted on this point has the church seen this so clearly. It constitutes a reversal of the tradition at a point so central to the church's understanding of itself and God, as well as of Israel, that it cannot fail to have major consequences for christology.³⁵

Later statements in explanation of the *Nostra Aetate* continued to move the Catholic church in the direction of the Two Covenant Theory so that even the Jewish Catholic writer, Gregory Baum, is opposed to the preaching of the Gospel to the Jews. I cannot fathom how he lives with this contradiction. Why then did Baum become a Catholic...if the Jewish people still had a valid covenant with God that provided individual Jews with salvation? What a wasted life!

- **The Protestant Church**

Liberal Protestants quickly identified with the Two Covenant Theory. One of the first modern theologians to call upon the church to accept a dual covenant position was Reinhold Niebuhr. At a meeting of the joint faculties of Union Theological Seminary and the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1958, he declared:

Missionary activities among the Jews are wrong, not only because they are futile and have little fruit to boast for their exertions. They are wrong because the two faiths despite differences are sufficiently alike for the Jew to find God more easily in terms of his own religious heritage than by subjecting himself to the hazards of guilt feelings involved in conversion to a faith which, whatever its excellencies, must appear to him as a symbol of an oppressive minority culture.³⁶

He rejects the idea that Jewish people need Jesus Christ. His sentiments were echoed by Paul Tillich, who wrote:

Many Christians feel that it is a questionable thing, for instance, to try to convert Jews. They have lived and spoken with their Jewish friends for decades. They have not converted them, but they have created a community of conversation which has changed both sides of the dialogue.³⁷

- **Among Evangelicals**

And now the “darling doctrine” of Liberal Catholics and Protestants engaged in Jewish-Christian dialogue is slithering into evangelical circles.

A well-known evangelical pastor in Northern California, who is truly supportive of Jewish missions, would accept a form of the Two Covenant Theory. This pastor, a confirmed inerrantist, has made numerous trips to Israel throughout the years and has a number of Israeli friends. When asked if he witnessed to them, he responded with the fanciful retort of a Two Covenant theorist. He claims that because of what these friends went through in the Holocaust, they would never be able to accept Jesus. The pastor then asked the question, “Do you really think God would condemn them without giving them a fair chance?” He stakes his hope for the salvation of these Jewish friends on Romans 11:25-27.

The dual covenant view is growing, especially among those evangelicals who are most concerned and sensitive to the Jewish people.

Our attempts to understand one another can result in well-intentioned empathy which can lead to confusion and compromise. This is a heartbreak for those of us who want to tell these sensitive Christians that their empathy is powerless to reach beyond the gate of the grave and comfort those in a Christless eternity. The irony is, these brothers and sisters not only feel they are doing their Jewish friends a favor, but feel they are putting God and Christians in a better light as well. Many believe that Christians should exercise a greater degree of sensitivity towards the Jewish people because of the history of Christian mistreatment of the Jewish people. Indeed they should! But the greatest form of sensitivity is to recognize the urgent need for eternal life through Christ.

Withholding the Gospel is not better treatment for Jews! It is rather the most toxic form of anti-Semitism. The same logic would be true if applied to American Blacks because of the inhumane treatment received during the days of slavery. Should we then withhold the Gospel from Blacks? This kind of misguided sensitivity can lead to a missionary retreat in any and all lands and among all peoples who have in some way been mistreated by Christendom.

There is a right kind of Christian empathy. Jesus agonized over the destruction of Jerusalem. He did not deny it. **The right kind of Christian empathy does not heave a sigh of relief because certain people can be saved without Jesus—it agonizes because they cannot. The Christian with the right kind of empathy does something about it!**

But where are they confused? The critical point of confusion is the nature of God's covenant relationship to the Jewish people. God will remain faithful to his promise to Abraham (Rom. 11:29). But the question remains: does God's faithfulness to the covenant imply that individual Jewish people can have a relationship with God without personally accepting Christ?

The Method of Critique

Most critiques of the Two Covenant Theory counter the view with a presentation of the uniqueness of Christ. Passages such as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 clearly present Jesus as the only way of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. Rev. Murdo McLeod, writing for the LCJE meeting held in England in the summer of 1986, argues with great force that the Gospel mandate is inclusive of the Jewish people. He cites numerous portions of the New Testament to prove his point.

Yet most proponents of the Two Covenant Theory are theological liberals who do not accept the integrity of the New Testament. Passages such as John 14:6 are trivialized by the relentless hacking of form and redaction criticism. Rosemary Reuther strikes a blow against the Christology of the New Testament when she writes in *Faith and Fratricide*:

We have seen that the anti-Judaic myth is neither a superficial nor a secondary element in Christian thought. The foundations of anti-Judaic thought were laid in the New Testament. They were developed in the classical age of Christian theology in a way that laid the basis for attitudes and practices that continually produced terrible results.³⁸

Her solution is to rewrite the New Testament, including more favorable terms for the Jewish people. Paul Van Buren makes a similar suggestion which is countered by Dr. Arthur Glasser of the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission:

"Van Buren wants a Christianity that has lost contact with the historical Jesus. Since he doesn't grapple with the New Testament data, other than to make general charges of its anti-Judaic spirit, it is not possible to have substantive dialogue with him. The truth about Jesus can be found only in that intensely Jewish book--the New Testament--written by Jews within two brief generations of Jesus' death and when its details could be confirmed by Jewish eyewitnesses still living."³⁹

It would be easiest to argue against the Two Covenant Theory from the New Testament. Yet if those we are countering do not accept our premise (i.e., that the New Testament is

authentic) then a polemic based upon the teaching of the New Testament is weak and ineffectual. Curiously, whereas some Two Covenant theorists refuse to accept the integrity of the New Testament, they act as if they accept the authenticity of the Old. God's Covenant relationship to the Jewish people in the Old Testament Scriptures is accepted by the Two Covenant theologians. And it is on the basis of this covenant that the Jewish people are granted theological standing and freed from any obligation to accept the New Covenant.

It goes without saying that the Jewish thinkers who insist on the Two Covenant Theory would prefer to ignore the New Testament. Most assuredly, they balk at any question of its authenticity and authority. It is important to critique what I believe is a misunderstanding of the Old Testament Covenants on the part of Two Covenant theologians. It will also be imperative to present a sound explanation for the salvation of Israel in Romans chapter 11. Our critique will rest upon these two points.

The Old Testament Covenants

Those who accept a dual covenant position misunderstand God's covenant relationship to the Jewish people. Most evangelicals believe God will remain faithful to his promise (Rom. 11:29). He *will* be faithful to His chosen people, yet the question must be asked: Does God's faithfulness to the covenant imply that individual Jewish people can be saved from sin without personally accepting Christ? Was this God's intent in choosing the nation of Israel? The answer is no! The Jewish people were chosen to be servants of the living God, that was their divine vocation. Personal salvation was a matter between each individual Jew and God. The covenant insured nationhood, but faith and faith alone was still the only possible conduit of forgiveness.

• Etymology and definition of the term

The Hebrew word usually translated covenant is *b'rit*. It is used 286 times in the Old Testament. The origin of the term is unsure.⁴⁰

At least 86 times, when the Bible refers to a covenant being made, the term *b'rit* is used in conjunction with the word *karat*. The phrase would then be best understood as "cutting a covenant" rather than making or establishing a covenant. This is vividly illustrated in

Genesis 15, when God has Abram kill a number of animals and, after cutting them in half, tells him to lay them out in a field. God himself then passed between the animals, signifying the irrevocable nature of the covenant agreement which was sealed in blood. O. Palmer Robertson, writing in his book, *Christ of the Covenants*, combines a number of the possible roots of the term and defines a covenant as a “bond in blood sovereignly administered.”⁴¹

• The Nature of the Old Testament Covenants

God’s covenants with Israel were not merely lifeless legal agreements. The covenants are His means of governing His relationship with mankind in general and with the nation of Israel in particular. Those covenants are rooted in the sovereignty and love of God, but no covenant stands alone. They cannot be accepted or rejected as individual agreements. A person or a people must first accept the God who revealed himself to all men and sovereignly ministers all covenants. One cannot choose one covenant over another because he finds the terms of one more agreeable than the other. Covenants were never intended to be bargains; God does not allow us to shop for the best deal. *He* decides the terms of all his relationships with mankind. We are mistaken when we emphasize the agreement and trivialize the person with whom the covenant is made.

It is not the right of theologians to determine how and with whom covenants are established. It is the sovereign right of God alone. The primary misunderstanding of Two-Covenant theologians is the belittling and humanization of God, who is presented as capricious and unfaithful. What kind of God promises a new covenant and then fails to fulfill his commitments? But this is only the beginning of confusion!

A multitude of scholars have written volumes analyzing the nature of the Old Testament covenants. A number of remarkable parallels between the Biblical covenants and the covenants of Israel’s ancient Semitic neighbors have been unearthed within the last fifty years. Yet these parallels are not germane to our topic.⁴²

Covenants were made with a number of different parties. They were made between individuals, such as Jonathan and David (1 Sam. 18:3), and among nations (1 Sam. 11:1ff).

Traditionally, scholars have divided God’s covenants into two major categories: unilateral (unconditional) and bilateral (conditional) covenants. The results of a

covenant agreement come as either blessings or curses. In a unilateral covenant, blessings are secured by the grace of God, and in a bilateral covenant by obedience.

The covenants referred to most frequently in the Old and New Testaments were made with Abraham and Moses. There is mention of a covenant with Noah, David, and perhaps, according to Drs. Pentecost and Fruchtenbaum, a Palestinian covenant which directly regulates God's promises regarding the inheritance of the Land.

The New Covenant spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah is significantly different from the Mosaic covenant and seems to be related more directly to the Abrahamic covenant. The few references to an everlasting covenant in the Old Testament appear to point to the Abrahamic covenant, as the Psalmist writes:

Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant. (Psalm 105:9-10)⁴³

• **The Abrahamic Covenant and Individual Salvation**

The more blatant propounders of the Two Covenant Theory insist that individual Jewish people can be saved through their relationship to the Abrahamic covenant. They view the provisions and blessings of the covenant as adequate for a personal relationship with the God of Abraham. Some who identify as evangelicals would also suggest the same thing; albeit they view these individuals as somehow accepting Christ without being aware of their decision.

In a conversation with a leader in the Messianic Jewish Movement, I asked whether or not he thinks it possible for a Jewish person to be saved without receiving Christ. He made it absolutely clear that he believes the only way to be saved is through the atoning death of the Messiah.⁴⁴ Yet he thinks there is a possibility that a faithful Jewish person could perhaps be saved through the Abrahamic covenant. He went on to explain:

If Jewish people living under the Old Covenant were saved while looking forward to the Messiah, without personally accepting Christ, then wouldn't it be possible for a Jewish person today, who was faithful to God and expecting the Messiah, to be saved? What if he had never heard about Jesus?

He clearly stated that he had never encountered this hypothetical person. He illustrated his point by saying:

If there were a Jewish person who was sincerely seeking after God and was hit by a car and killed before he ever personally accepted Jesus, would he not be saved? What if the person had an Abraham-like faith?

According to this leader, the gospel was incipient in the Abrahamic covenant. He gleans this from Paul's statement in Galatians 3:8,

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

This Jewish person might die without accepting the historical Christ while he was alive, and yet still be saved. This hypothetical Jewish person's faith in the Messiah to come would, indeed, save him. Yet in interpreting Galatians 3:8 it appears to me that the gospel can only be incipient before the cross. Both Jews and Gentiles are now responsible for the revelation of the gospel at Golgotha.

If the authority of the New Testament is at all accepted, then there must be a difference in God's expectation on this side of the cross. After all, God did expect the Old Testament saints to believe *all* that had been previously revealed, or at least they could not be in a position of denying established revelation. No faithful subject of the household of Israel was allowed to discard the book of Leviticus simply because it favored the priests and he didn't happen to be a priest.⁴⁵

This leader in the Messianic movement is radically different in his position from a typical Two-Covenant theologian, who believe that Jewish people do not need Christ, since covenant with Abraham was intrinsically adequate.

He believes that the entire scenario is unlikely, as Paul graphically describes both Jews and Gentiles in Romans chapters 1 through 3 as sinners by nature. This leader considers this a theoretical issue and does not think that he will ever meet a Jewish person who would be saved without knowingly receiving Y'shua.

This position is a far cry from the Two Covenant Theory, yet any view of the Abrahamic Covenant that claims it alone is enough for personal salvation is still a misunderstanding of the covenant. This view is shared by those who oppose evangelization of the Jews.

Yet is it unfair to ask, "If a Jewish person has an Abraham-like faith and is seeking after God, then would he not logically have the yearning of his faith fulfilled by God who would give the gift of faith in Jesus?" Surely we cannot allow ourselves to hold any view which

makes God to be a bystander. Doesn't our belief in the sovereignty of God demand that he answer seeking faith with certain disclosure of Himself and those facts essential to salvation?

Furthermore, why limit this ultimate favor of salvation to Jews alone? Would this not be true also of a pagan who follows the trail of general or natural revelation to the Savior? After all, the promise to Abraham also contained provision for the Gentiles. If God can offer the gift of salvation to Jews on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant, then should this offer not be extended to the Gentiles?

The actual term *b'rit* is not used in the Hebrew Scriptures as a reference to individual or personal salvation. The language of the covenant describes God's relationship to the nation of Israel. The phrase which Two Covenant theorists use to describe this relationship is, "And I will be their God and they shall be my people." This covenant promise is found seven times in the Old Testament and three times in the New.⁴⁶

Each of these passages, except Jeremiah 31:31-34, emphasize the nature of the blessings as national, not personal. This terminology describes the blessing of a unique relationship graciously bestowed upon the Jewish people by God, representing His designs for their covenant relationship.

- **Jeremiah 31:31-34—The New Covenant**

The Covenants of the Old Testament were nationalistic in their emphasis and were given to insure God's ongoing relationship to the Jewish people. They were not intended to provide the individual Jew with personal salvation or forgiveness of sin. This was only previewed in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, but fulfilled through the finished work of Christ and the institution of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant was a promise made by a Jewish prophet for the Jewish people. By stating that the New Covenant is unnecessary for the Jews, we are demeaning the word of God through Jeremiah. If we say that the New Covenant is applicable only to the Gentiles, then we are being back-handed Anti-Semites. The announcement of the New Covenant at the Last Seder was made to His group of Jewish disciples. The Book of Hebrews, which articulates the theology of the New Covenant, was written to Jewish believers in Jesus (Heb. 6,8).

Yet this new covenant is unlike the one made previously with the Jewish people. If the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants were deemed adequate, why was a new one promised?

Many unique features in the New Covenant point to its role in the personal salvation of individual Jewish people. The law would be internalized, God would be personally known by all men, sin would be forgiven and forgotten.

Jeremiah uses similar language as before, yet the covenant relationship he describes takes on a new dimension of intimacy as it emphasizes both personal and national blessings. The New Covenant is God's grace fully established through the instrumentality of the cross. To keep Jews from the cross is tantamount to sending them into the wilderness to be judged by a plague of serpents, and hiding the brass serpent that God provided for healing. You might as well toss desperately ill people out of the hospital that could cure them. Yet Jesus came to heal the sick. And each of us, Jew and Gentile, is suffering from the suffocating sickness of sin. Can we afford to be selective in offering the cure?

The Mosaic Covenant and Personal Salvation

The blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant were primarily addressed to Israel as a nation, although it is obvious that nations do not experience either blessings or troubles...people do. But the covenant was not selective, and the covenant results were universally meted out among the children of Israel. Some use the term "corporate solidarity" to describe God's workings among the Jewish people, as if they were one person. For even the righteous would suffer famine and dispersion on account of the sin of his less righteous neighbor.

The terms of the covenant were attached to the land of promise: destruction for disobedience (Dt. 29:9) and prosperity for obedience (Dt. 29:21). The covenant was binding upon Israel for their mission in the world—and it was in the world that the rewards and judgments of the covenant were executed.

Many passages clearly teach that God's covenant with Moses was never intended to provide individuals with salvation; it was a national covenant which bound Israel and God to each other under very specific terms. Personal salvation through the Mosaic covenant would not be possible. The covenant contained terms too stiff for any sinful human beings to fulfill.

The salvation paradigm which has Jews going through Moses and Gentiles through Jesus is untenable, as it confuses the intent of the great Old Testament covenants. The Mosaic

covenant was never intended to provide personal salvation for Jewish people...its purpose was to point towards the New. Paul says that the Law was a schoolmaster to teach us the way of salvation in Christ. (Gal. 3:24) It would be the height of irony if we Jews were barred from graduating from the school of our own law! For according to the Apostle, Christ is the very fulfillment of the Torah. (Rom. 10:4)

The foolishness of this misunderstanding of the Mosaic covenant is apparent. If personal salvation was the object of the Mosaic Covenant and the relationship described as “my people...your God” were intended to guarantee individual salvation through one’s obedience to the laws of the covenant, then no Jew could be saved. Even Judaism teaches that it is impossible to keep the Laws of Moses at all times. It would be a covenant that excludes Jews from a relationship with God.

The Problem of Romans 11:25-29

- **The Exegetical Problem**

What is the meaning of Paul’s words, “and all Israel shall be saved”? Who is the “all Israel,” and how will they be saved? Can the revived natural branches draw nourishment from the Covenant of Abraham without Jesus, who is the connection and fulfillment of the promises of God?

Before we attempt to understand chapter eleven, it is critical to grasp a few essential truths from chapter ten. The Apostle clearly teaches that both Jews and Gentiles must accept Y’shua to find eternal life. There is no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles according to Paul—eternal life through the Messiah was available to all. (Rom. 10:12) The provisions of salvation were the same for Jews and Gentiles, and so was the means of receiving salvation. (Rom. 10:13)

We are instructed to call upon the Lord, believe the Gospel in our heart and confess Him with our mouths. (Rom. 10:9-10) But our confession goes beyond the Messiahship of Jesus, to confessing His deity. This is the meaning of the Greek word *kurios* in this context. The great expositor on Romans, John Murray, writes:

Verse 13 is again confirmation from the Old Testament (Joel 2:32; Heb. and LXX 3:5). This formula, “call upon the name of the Lord” is a characteristic Old Testament way of expressing the worship that is addressed to God and applies specifically to the worship of supplication (cf.

Gen.4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; I Kings 18:24; II Kings 5:11; Psalms 79:6; 105:1; 116:4, 13; Isa.64:7). Joel 2:32 has the same significance as belongs to it elsewhere.

When Paul applies the same to Christ this is another example of the practice of taking Old Testament passages which refer to God without qualification and applying them to Christ. It was the distinguishing mark of New Testament believers that they called upon the name of the Lord Jesus (cf. Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; I Cor. 1:2; II Tim. 2:22) and therefore accorded to him the worship that belonged to God alone.⁴⁷

God will fulfill the covenant destiny of the faithful remnant through Jesus. We might not be certain whom Paul had in mind or the precise turning of Israel to the Lord, but we are certain that the chapter teaches the necessity of a conscious turning to the Savior by Jewish people and the acceptance of His equality with the Father.

The turning of the Jews will result from the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:17) and the object of their faith will be the person of Y'shua. Is there any other way to be saved? For if faith "comes by hearing," how is it possible for Israel to be saved without believing?

There is no such thing as an unconscious turning to Christ. This is a convenient myth which undermines the integrity of both God and man. Is God like Laban, who made Jacob work for seven years for Rachel, but gave him Leah instead? Does God command the church to reach the world and offer His grace to "whosoever will," only to pull an eternal switch beyond the grave? It is almost amusing to imagine the face of an Orthodox Jew who crosses over, only to discover that Jesus, not Moses or Abraham, was there to usher him into the "world to come."

God is not a liar and the Apostle Paul was not confused. There will be a turning of Jews to Jesus, but if this is to be consistent with all Scripture, it will be a conscious turning of a faithful remnant to the Savior.

• Denial: The Rejection of Faith

We have been too lenient in making allowances for unbelief among the Jewish people. True, we must be compassionate and take into consideration the multitude of evils perpetrated by Christendom against the Jews. But we must remember that the opposite of faith is not merely a lack of conviction, but rejection and denial.

Can a person deny Christ before men and be confessed by Christ before his father in heaven? Is not everyone who hears the gospel and chooses not to heed it a denier? And if a

person refuses to hear and is willfully ignorant, whatever his reason for not listening, is he any less culpable of denial? To say that one cannot hear when one chooses not to listen is a misrepresentation of the way God created the human soul. We do have a choice and we do have a responsibility for that choice. Isn't it true that refusing to hear, then compounding it by refusing to take responsibility, is even more serious than a sin of omission? Isn't it merely a device of commissioned denial?

Jesus clearly said, "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 10:33) The ingathering promised in Romans 11 will be an ingathering of Jews who believe in Jesus and have repented of their denial and sin. The fountain of cleansing grace flows only in response to true repentance and faith. We cannot expect God to change His ways to accommodate any people, even his chosen people.

The Response of the Missions Community

Repudiation of the Two Covenant Theory

The Two Covenant Theory excludes the Jewish people from the mission of the Church. Why should Christians evangelize Jewish people if Jews have their own valid way to God outside of Christ? What would stop us from developing a two-and-a-half covenant theory for Muslims? They accept both the Old and New Covenants. The Two Covenant Theory must be repudiated by all who take the Great Commission seriously. That which may seem only to threaten Jewish evangelism is the nemesis of world evangelization. The missions community does not see it—it is innocently cloaked in the benign respectability of Jewish Christian relations. This "not-so-new" theological threat to the unfinished task has primary implications for the evangelization of the Jews, but it will not stop there! For when the church lacks the conviction that the gospel is the power of salvation to the Jews, (Rom. 1:16) the credibility of the gospel to save Gentiles is also on the verge of collapse.

Conclusion

Eckstein freely admits what may be termed the "hidden agenda" of Two Covenant theology. It is indeed a modern day doctrine of survival...and evangelism is the supposed threat. He writes:

There are Christian thinkers who have come to affirm the two covenant notion, and as a result, have renounced all proselytizing efforts toward the Jews.⁴⁸

He explains further:

Jews will, undoubtedly, bid evangelicals to make the theological attempt to adopt some form of the double covenant theory as many liberal Protestants and Catholics have done, and to acknowledge the continuing validity of the divine covenant with the Jewish people. Jews, in this light, are not in *need* of adopting Christianity to achieve fulfillment and salvation. They will ask Christians to refrain from missionary efforts toward Jews “until the full number of Gentiles enter in.” (Romans 11:25) Should this prove to be too theologically difficult, they will request that evangelicals regard dialogue as the proper forum in which to “preach the gospel” to Jews and that they abandon the zealous and even cultic techniques often employed in attempts to convert them. For is it not the Christian’s commission simply to testify through words and deeds to the truth of the Christian message while it is the Lord’s prerogative to act upon the individual through the Holy Spirit and possibly bring about his conversion? If this is so, is it not reasonable for Jews to ask evangelicals to fulfill their missionary commission through dialogue, decently and courteously, by model, teaching, and joint cooperation and without the intention of converting them? Certainly Jews will ask responsible evangelicals to be especially alert to evangelizing efforts that involve any sort of manipulation, deception, or excessively aggressive tactics and to refrain from giving moral and financial support to the many Hebrew Christian para-church groups that target Jews for conversion.⁴⁹

Will evangelicals continue to be lured into the Two Covenant trap? The current President of the National Association of Religious Broadcasters is on the Board of Eckstein’s foundation, which was started to help Christians understand the Jews. Is the goal of his organization to promote the free exchange of ideas, or to gain influence with evangelical leaders and do whatever is possible to counteract Jewish evangelism? We might succumb also—unless our passion is rekindled for the person of Christ. Can there be life outside of the Savior for Jew or Gentile? Can there really exist another way to God that bypasses His person and atoning death? If so, then we do not know the same Jesus! More than ever, we must cry aloud with the Apostle Paul, “For me to live is Christ!” (Phil. 1:21)

The cornerstone of concern is and should be the person of Christ. For if Christ is the fulfillment of God’s covenants with Israel, then there indeed is only one way to the Father for both Jew and Gentile...for the Moslem, the Taoist, the Animist and the Secularist.

Michael Wyschogrod sees the conflict clearly when he writes:

These are some of the questions that go through my mind when I think of Christology in the context of the current Jewish-Christian dialogue. Frankly, I have the feeling that we are witnessing the encounter of the irresistible force with the immovable object. It is difficult for me to see how progress can be made without compromising doctrines essential to each of the faiths.⁵⁰

If only every evangelical viewed the conflict as clearly as Dr. Wyschogrod!

The battlefield is not Jewish evangelism, but the person of Christ. Can there be true conversion without Christ? According to the Two-Covenant theorists, yes; but according to the Scriptures, no. We must affirm the statements of our Lord Himself regarding His uniqueness. (John 14:6) We must add our “amen” to the confession of Peter who, speaking to a large gathering of Jewish people, said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) All we have to give to our despairing world is a person—a person who stands willing to make a new and everlasting covenant with individuals from every culture and nation. The person is Jesus and only through His atoning power can Jews and Gentiles be saved.

There is a two-fold path described in the Scriptures. One way leads to everlasting life and the other to an eternity of loneliness and condemnation. Our task is to give men and women a choice.. to stand out in the cross-section of these two paths warning of the danger and inviting all to enjoy the blessedness of His mercy and grace. The real question is not whether or not there are two or more ways of salvation or whether or not it is possible for a person to be saved by Christ without knowing that it is Christ who saved him. There is the penultimate question that we must keep on asking ourselves and everyone else. That question is:

What think ye of Jesus?

¹ Reuther, Rosemary, *Faith and Fratricide*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974) pp.256-257.

²Dr. Eckardt has served both in the National Council of Churches’ study group on Israel and in the World Council of Churches’ Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People.

³Anderson, Gerald, *The Church and the Jewish People: Some Theological Issues and Missiological Concerns*. *Missiology: An International Review*, (1967) p. 285.

⁴*Moment Magazine*, November 1987.

⁵*Dallas Times Herald*, February 27, 1988.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Rev. Sheridan was recently removed by Rev. Larry Lewis, the President of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, who claimed, "We must believe in Jesus Christ and accept Him as our Lord and Savior. Someone who doesn't hold that position shouldn't be in an evangelistic position for the Home Mission Board."

⁸The Council on Theology and Culture, a theological working group convened by the 195th General Assembly (1983), presented a paper entitled "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews" to the 99th General Assembly for consideration. This study was the successor of another study which was first undertaken jointly by the Council on Theology and Culture and the Division of Corporate and Social Mission of the General Assembly Mission Board in 1981.

The four members of that task force were:

Dr. Catherine G. Gonzales, Columbia Theological Seminary (Church History), Chair of the Task Force

Dr. W. Eugene March, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Old Testament), Chair of the Council on Theology and Culture

Dr. Robert McAfee Brown, Pacific School of Religion (Theology)

Dr. Robert D. Miller, Director, Division of National Mission, General Assembly Mission Board

⁹*Report and Recommendation on a Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christian and Jews*, by the Council on Theology and Culture.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Heschel, Abraham Joshua, "No Man is an Island," *Disputation and Dialogue*, p. 357; Tosefta, Sanhedrin 13:2; Bava Bathra 10b.

¹³Yalkut Isaiah 42:9.

¹⁴Tosefta, Sanhedrin 13:2.

¹⁵*Yad*, Shemittah 13:13; *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 7, p. 1383.

¹⁶Hul. 13b; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 411.

¹⁷Sanhedrin 56a-b ff.; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol.7, p. 412.

¹⁸*Yad*, Teshuvah 3:5; *Yad*, Melakhim 8:11; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol.7, p. 1383.

¹⁹See Berger, David and Wyschogrod, Michael, *Jews, and Jewish Christianity* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1978) pp. 29, 32-33, 61-63.

But why is there a special set of laws which are binding only for Jews and not for Gentiles? The answer is found in the Bible. There, we are told that God selected Abraham as his particular servant, promising that his descendants would become a great people who would be God's particular nation (Genesis 12:1-3). And here we come to the crux of the matter, Israel's election, a doctrine that many people over the ages have found difficult to fathom. Isn't God the father of all? Doesn't he love all nations equally? If there is any group that God prefers, wouldn't it be the group consisting of all those who love God and deal justly with their fellows, no matter what nation these good people come from?

From our human point of view, this does sound like the fairer way of proceeding. But it is not what the Bible tells us God did. He chose Abraham as his beloved and the descendants of Abraham as the nation of God. Whatever God's reasons for choosing Abraham, the people of Israel, once chosen, thereby becomes the elect people of God from whom God demands a code of conduct far more stringent than that demanded of anyone else. That is why the Torah is binding only for Jews. But is a person a Jew if he does not obey all of the Torah? From the Jewish point of view, whether someone is a Jew is determined by his mother; if a mother is Jewish, so are her children. Whether they are good Jews depends on the extent to which they obey God's commandments. But the election of Abraham is an election of his seed, and it is therefore physical descent that determines membership in the Jewish people. If your mother was Jewish, so are you, no matter what you believe. It is, of course, true that conversion to Judaism is possible. But it has generally been discouraged in Judaism. Why?

²⁰*Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 412.

²¹Tosefta to Sanhedrin 63b beg. Asur; Tosefta to Bek. 2b beg. Shema; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 414.

²²Berger and Wyschogrod, pp. 29, 32-33, 61-63.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Heschel, p.358.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Heschel, p. 357-358.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Talmage, Frank, *Disputation and Dialogue*, p. 246.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 245. "The Jews simply refuse to see that their development leads through Jesus in whom alone the Jewish religion could 'consummate itself.' Judaism has not taken this step; on the contrary, it rejects with all possible force the notion that He has already arrived through whom their historic mission is to be fulfilled; Judaism is still waiting for him and will continue to wait so long as it exists. The development of Judaism has by-passed him whom the 'heathens' call 'Lord' and by whom 'they reach the Father.'

"Here an abyss opens between Jesus and his church, on the one hand, and every Jew on the other--an abyss that will never be filled up. That 'connection of the innermost heart with God' which the heathen can only reach through Jesus, is something the Jew already possesses, provided that his Judaism is not withheld from him by force; he possesses it by nature, through having been born one of the Chosen People..."

Glatzer, Nahum, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1953) pp. 25, 27.

³⁰See Jocz, p.293.

³¹Eckstein, Rabbi Yechiel, *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism*, (Waco, TX: 1984) pp.264, 265, 321.

³²Hunter (1974). See Anderson, Gerald, "The Church and the Jewish People: Some Theological Issues and Missiological Concerns." *Missiology: An International Review*, p.281.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Harvey Hoekstra, *The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids: Tyndale, 1979) p. 138 .

³⁵*Religion & Intellectual Life: The Journal of Associates for Religion and Intellectual Life*, Volume III, No. 4, ISSN:0741-0549, pp. 41-42.

³⁶Heschel, p. 356.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Reuther, p. 227.

³⁹*Religion & Intellectual Life: The Journal of Associates for Religion and Intellectual Life*, Volume III, No. 4, ISSN:0741-0549, p.68.

⁴⁰For a number of years, scholars suggested that *b'rit* came from one of two different Akkadian words: the term *burru* meaning "to establish a legal situation by testimony with an oath" or from *birtu*. The word *birtu* literally means "fetter," and emphasizes the binding quality of all

covenants. (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. pp.128.) Some Old Testament scholars, such as Ludwig Kohler, believe that the root of *b'rit* is *brh*, which means "eat." He claims that the animals killed in the inauguration of the covenant became the main course for a ritual meal. Whereas most Old Testament scholars are unsure of the root, it is commonly accepted that the shedding of blood is the essential element in rightly understanding the nature of Old Testament covenants.

⁴¹Robertson, O. Palmer, *Christ of the Covenants*, (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House), p. 4.

⁴²Studies by Meredith Kline, an evangelical, as well as Von Rad, Eichrodt and Mendenhall, offer very useful information in placing the Old Testament covenants in their Semitic setting.

⁴³Is. 24:5, 61:8; Jer.32:4; Ezek. 16:60, 37:26.

⁴⁴ *Jewish Roots*, pp. 167-171.

⁴⁵ 1. Exodus 6:7

This passage is a reiteration of the Abrahamic covenant (v. 8). The author uses the term "redeem," and the phrase "take you" for my people. But this is clearly a reference to the national redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage.

2. Leviticus 26:12

The curses of the Covenant are described in this passage. The blessings of the covenant are described in Lev. 26:1-13. The Abrahamic covenant is mentioned in verse 9. This is an assuring passage (see vs. 11 and 13).

3. Jer. 7:23

The Egyptian deliverance is again mentioned in verse 25. The conditional elements of the relationship are spelled out very clearly in this passage. We are told in verse 23 that if Israel was obedient, God would bless them, and if not, He would hurl judgment upon them. It is unclear which covenant the prophet has in mind, whether the Abrahamic or Mosaic, but the conditions of the relationship seem to be based upon the covenant obedience of the Jewish people.

4. Jer. 11:4

Judgment again is the theme of this passage. The relationship of "your God... my people" comes about as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant through Israel's obedience to the Mosaic covenant. Yet Israel does not obey. The blessings for obedience are clearly nationalistic (v. 5) and the curses (v. 11) are temporal rather than eternal.

5. Jer.30:22

This passage refers to national restoration, as seen clearly in verses 17-18.

6. Jer 32:38

This section, especially verses 36-44, contains language which implies that there is personal salvation through the covenant. Verse 37 speaks of national restoration, but verse 39 speaks of “one heart and one way.” Verse 40 mentions the everlasting covenant and God’s action of putting “fear of Himself” into their hearts. But when examined, it is obvious that this is a further explanation of the New Covenant. This passage, like chapter 31, contains a mixture of blessings which are both personal and spiritual in character as well as national and political.

⁴⁶Ex. 6:7, Lev. 26:12, Jer. 7:23, 11:4, 30:22, 32:38, and in the New Testament 2 Cor. 6:16, Heb. 8:10, Rev. 21:3. Colin Brown, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 368.

⁴⁷Murray, John, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968) p. 57.

⁴⁸Eckstein, p. 265.

⁴⁹Eckstein, p.321.

⁵⁰*Religion & Intellectual Life: The Journal of Associates for Religion and Intellectual Life*, Volume III, No. 4, ISSN:0741-0549, p. 80.