

## CHAPTER 27

---

PAUL AND THE  
COVENANT

---

JOHN W. WELCH AND JACOB RENNAKER

THE word “covenant,” whether in English, Greek, or Hebrew, is used and can be understood in a number of ways. That range of diverse meanings—along with the preservation of at least seven distinct divine covenants in the Hebrew Bible—has led to various interpretations of New Testament texts. The concept of covenant being very important for Paul, he uses it opportunistically depending on the theological needs and social contexts of each of his epistles. Modern readers looking for a single answer to the question of Paul’s understanding of covenant in its religious, historical, legal, and theological dimensions readily learn that Paul’s connections with the concept of covenant are numerous, diverse, and generatively productive. After briefly identifying the principal characteristics of the various covenants in the Hebrew Bible, we discuss the six passages in the Pauline corpus that employ the term “covenant” (*diathēkē*).

---

27.1 COVENANT TYPOLOGIES

---

The words translated into English as “covenant” can represent religious covenants, international treaties, royal grants, private contracts, vows of consecration, agreements, and last wills and testaments. In the Hebrew Bible, two primary terms are typically translated as “covenant.” The term *bērīt* appears most frequently, appearing almost ten times more often than the other term, *ʿēdūt*. In spite of the many different nuances in the types of “covenant” established in each context, both terms suggest a formal agreement established through an oath. The Greek term *synthēkē* best expresses this notion of “covenant” or “treaty,” but in the LXX, *bērīt* was consistently translated using the term *diathēkē*, which in Hellenistic Greek typically carries the sense of “last will” or “testament” (Viviano 2015). In early Jewish literature, the meanings of “covenant” were polyvalent and varied (Brawley 2014), whereas subsequent Christian thought was influenced by the



Vulgate's frequent translation of *bērit*, *ʿədūt*, and *diathēkē* by use of the single Latin term *testamentum* (Viviano 2015). While Paul's use of the word *diathēkē* to describe the general concept of "covenant" was likely influenced by the LXX, the primary texts describing covenants in the Hebrew Bible with which he was undoubtedly familiar clearly demonstrate a wide range of forms and functions. Therefore, when Paul uses the term *diathēkē*, he enjoys a degree of latitude and ambiguity that makes it malleable in his rhetorical voice and ecclesiastical hand.

Treaties, for instance, are covenants composed structurally of titles, preambles, prologues, stipulations, requirements, laws, agreement formulae, deposit of the document, periodic reading of the document to adherents, witnesses, promises, blessings, curses, oaths, solemnization, provisions concerning default, sanctions, termination, assignability, judicial interpretation or enforcement, and epilogue (Kitchen and Lawrence 2012). All these covenant elements promote durable relationships between individuals, within families or large groups, often facilitated by mediators and ultimately to benefit sovereigns, lords, or God. Such agreements can be between nations or individuals, whether the parties are on parity (as with Abraham and the Amorites, Gen. 14:13), or where one party is superior (as with Israel and the Gibeonites, Josh. 9). In making secular covenants, both sides typically invoke the name of a god as a witness that the agreement is sincere and inviolable. In addition, covenant-making served in the process of identity formation. In the Hebrew Bible, covenants with God establish the election of Israel, promote exclusivity, and promise the blessings of land and kinship. Although these elements create boundaries between insiders and outsiders, "an openness and sensitivity toward outsiders" is already embedded in Hebrew discourse on covenant because the Israelites themselves had been slaves in a strange land and had been embraced and liberated by their god (Kok 2015). Thus, the biblical concept of covenant which Paul inherited was legalistic, moralistic, cultic, and religious.

While the covenants which God made with individuals in the Hebrew Bible are generally seen as being close in form to ancient suzerainty treaties where God assumes the position of overlord and the other party as vassal, the LXX term *diathēkē* later came to mean "last will and testament." Closely related to this development was the creation of a "testament" genre that is exemplified by the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, where a "testator" near death reflects on his life from a moral point of view and gives advice, and whose death and burial are described. This additional degree of meaning for the term *diathēkē* presupposed a legal ability to dispose of property after one's own death. However, *diathēkē* was used not only for a last will and testament but also any kind of solemn agreement or compact. Such agreements are mutual but still in a sense are one-sided. The Latin *testamentum* is narrower in meaning, not embracing words such as *foedus* or *pactum*, the equivalents of treaty and alliance. *Diathēkē* could apply to a range of arrangements, many of which are related to the Greek concept of *charis* (a term which has affinities with the Hebrew Bible concept of *hesed*)—a sort of "covenant love" that has strong elements of reciprocity that are best understood in the context of classical patron-client relationships (Jackson 2012).



Scholars have debated the presence and relative importance of a “covenant theology” in Pauline letters since Sanders coined the term “covenantal nomism” and argued for its primacy in Paul’s thought in his seminal work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977). Some recent scholars find that the rarity of the term *diathēkē* in Paul’s writings indicates this idea played a minimal role in Paul’s thought (Dunn 2003; Martyn 1993; Westerholm 2004), or that he purposefully downplayed this idea in order to differentiate Christian movement away from traditional Judaism (e.g. Christiansen 1995). Others, however, see the thoroughly Jewish idea of “covenant” undergirding much of Paul’s thought, even if the term *diathēkē* is not specifically used (Gräbe 2006; Porter 2003; Wright 2013).

## 27.2 COVENANT INSTANCES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Behind Paul’s uses of “covenant” stands a range of possible conceptual meanings. In more than seven major instances, individuals establish covenants with God. Because several Second Temple period texts viewed these covenants separately, rather than homogenizing or harmonizing them, one may assume that Paul saw each particular covenant as both fundamental and unique. For example, the author of Sirach concisely identifies several figures chronologically in Israelite history who explicitly entered into covenants with God: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Phinehas, and David (Sirach 44:17–45:26). To these instances, other major covenant figures in the Hebrew Bible may be added.

The term “covenant” (*bērit*) first appears in Genesis in the context of God’s impending flood (Gen. 6:18). After the flood, God enters into an “everlasting covenant” (*bērit ʾōlām*) with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature, promising that he will never again destroy the earth or cut off its inhabitants by flood (Gen. 9:11). God then establishes the rainbow as a sign of the covenant (Gen. 9:8–17). This particular covenant is recounted as a seemingly unconditional, unilateral covenant in Isaiah 54:9–10, emphasizing that it was still in effect and had not been invalidated or superseded by any of God’s subsequent covenants. Likewise, for Paul, God establishes covenants that are everlasting and merciful (e.g. Gal. 3:15–18), and everlasting life itself is only available by means of God’s covenants with humankind (e.g. Gal. 6:8–10). The requirements of the so-called Noachide Laws may be seen as underlying much of New Testament ethics in general.

Because this first canonical appearance of the term “covenant” in Genesis 6:18 uses the phrase *hēqīm bērit* (“confirm/fulfill a covenant”) instead of the more common *kʾarat bērit* (“cut/initiate a covenant”), some understand that God had established a covenant *prior* to Noah (Gentry and Wellum 2012). Two primary candidates exist for recipients of such a primordial covenant: creation and humanity. Regarding creation, Jeremiah 33:20



refers to an undefined “covenant” (*bērit*) that God made with day and night, suggesting that God’s creation was facilitated in some way through or in connection with covenant(s). Regarding humanity, Hosea 6:7 can be read as describing a covenant broken by Adam. This concept of Adam standing in a conditional covenant relationship with God was further developed in Second Temple literature—including Sirach and Jubilees—which envision Adam as prefiguring later Levitical priests, who themselves were recognized as functioning specifically within a covenantal framework (see below in this section). If Paul saw humanity as a whole participating in a pre-existing covenant through Adam, then this may have informed Paul’s openness to God’s promises extending to all, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status (e.g. Gal. 3:8), as well as his seeing Jesus as the “second Adam” through whom all were made alive (Rom. 5:12–17).

In another “covenant” episode, God promises that Abraham will have an innumerable posterity (Gen. 15:4–6) who will possess a particular land (Gen. 15:18–21; 22:17), and who will also bless all the nations of the earth (Gen. 22:18). Though this arrangement suggests penalties (Gen. 15:17), it largely functions similar to a royal grant (Viviano 2015). As a sign of this covenant, God required the practice of circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14, 23–27). This covenant was also described as being an “everlasting covenant” (*bērit ʾōlām*; Gen. 17:7, 13, 19). Thus, through the instrumentality and faithfulness of one individual, God declared this covenant to be perpetuated through Abraham’s posterity, its blessings extending from them to many nations. Paul’s concept of redemption for many coming through the instrumentality of one individual (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:20–22) may stem from this aspect of Abraham’s covenant. Also directly related to this covenant are those with Isaac and Jacob. In both of those cases, nothing new is added to the original covenantal framework—God appears to be simply reaffirming this particular covenant with Isaac (Gen. 17:19, 26:3–5) and then Jacob (Gen. 28:13–15), of which, the latter received a new name to signify his participation in this covenant relationship (Gen. 35:9–15). The early Christian practice of taking the name of Jesus Christ may reflect this renaming covenantal element.

The next significant covenant is made at Sinai. There God sets Israel apart as a “holy nation” (*gōy qādōsh*), dedicated to God (Exod. 19:3–6). In this episode, God provides a historical prologue (Exod. 19:4, 20:2), stipulations (Exod. 24:12, 31:18, 32:15), and outlines blessings (Exod. 19:5), much like a suzerainty treaty (Viviano 2015). The written account of this interaction (Exod. 20:23–23:33) is referred to as the “book of the covenant,” and plays a role in the covenant ratification ceremony, where Israel declares that they are willing to obey God’s commandments and are subsequently sprinkled with the “blood of the covenant” (Exod. 24:7–8). This covenant is also described as “everlasting” (*bērit ʾōlām*; Exod. 31:16; Num. 25:13), and Joshua renews this covenant with the Israelites upon entering their promised land (Josh. 23:14–24:28). Paul clearly recognizes the significance and endurance of this particular covenant, but he also recognizes how it differs from other covenants (e.g. Gal. 4:21–31).

Within this covenant framework, Aaron enters into an additional covenant with God regarding his (and the other Levites’) functions as priests. While no specific divine “covenant” encounter appears between God and Aaron, several texts mention that



Aaron and his posterity are anointed, consecrated, and set apart to minister in the tabernacle (Exod. 28:1–4, 29:9, 40:15), and Jeremiah 33:20–22 explicitly mentions a covenant made with the Levites. Similarly, the covenant that Phinehas (Aaron’s grandson) receives explicitly ties the Levitical priesthood to the concept of covenant—God enters into a “covenant of peace” (*bērit šālōm*) with him that ensures an “everlasting position” in the priesthood (*kehunnat’ōlām*) for his posterity (Num. 25:10–13), much like a royal grant. Paul’s concept of “one for many” (e.g. Rom. 5:12–15) finds relevance here—it was a solitary high priest who made atonement for all of Israel (Lev. 16).

God enters into yet another unique covenant (also similar in form to a royal grant) with David. In 2 Samuel 2:4 and 5:1–3, God officially sanctioned David’s kingship and confirmed this by promising a permanent place of settlement and peace for the Israelites, as well as the establishment of a kingdom in which God’s love would always remain (2 Sam. 7:8–17). While the term covenant (*bērit*) is not explicitly used here, this event and its associated promises and obligations are later referred to as a covenant in 2 Samuel 23:5, 1 Kings 8:24, 2 Chronicles 21:7, Jeremiah 33:14–16, Psalms 89, and Isaiah 55:3 (where it is extended to all of Israel). This covenant with David was an “everlasting covenant” (*bērit’ōlām*; 2 Sam. 23:5) but was clarified elsewhere as being conditional, depending upon the righteousness of David’s posterity (1 Kings 11:11; Ps. 132:12). It may be this particular covenant that underlies Paul’s use of the term “kingdom of God” (*basileian theou*) in his preaching (e.g. Acts 28:23) and writings (e.g. 1 Thess. 2:12).

The two final instances of individuals entering into covenants with God are actually renewals of previous covenants. In the first, King Josiah receives a forgotten “book of the law” (2 Kings 22:8), or “book of the covenant” (2 Kings 23:2). He then makes a covenant with God that he and his people will carry out the book’s terms, which they were not then obeying as a nation (2 Kings 23:1–3). In the second, the Judean governor Nehemiah publicly reads the law (Neh. 8:18) and then takes the initiative in creating a covenant with his people that they will keep the law of God in very specific ways (Neh. 10:28–39). This text focuses on a renewed commitment to a previous set of obligations, not the establishment of a unique covenant, focusing less on formal elements in the earlier covenants and more on the general notion of a collective, public commitment to obeying the stipulations of previously made covenants. The idea of covenant renewal can be seen in 1 Corinthians 11:25, where remembering a pre-existing covenant is central (see 27.3.2.1) and relates to both the idea of an “everlasting covenant” and the renewal of an unspecified pre-existing covenant as with Noah in Genesis 9.

## 27.3 PAUL’S EXPLICIT REFERENCES TO COVENANT

An examination of Paul’s explicit uses of the term “covenant” (*diathēkē*) will begin to demonstrate the significance of the idea of covenant in Paul’s thought.



### 27.3.1 Galatians 3:15–18

Paul invokes ideas expressed in the Hebrew Bible concerning Abraham (e.g. Gen. 12:7) in order to demonstrate that God anticipated how future Gentile converts would be justified not by the law of Moses but by faith in Christ. According to Paul, Christ redeemed believers from the penalties associated with the law, but without nullifying that law. To explain this idea, Paul uses the “human analogy” (*kata anthrōpon legō homōs anthrōpou*) of a “covenant” or “will” (*diathēkē*) that has been ratified—this “covenant” was officially in force, and no one could change its terms or conditions following that ratification. In the Hebrew Bible, God declares that the covenant with Abraham will extend to Abraham’s “seed” (*spermati*). According to Paul’s reading of this passage, God intended the laws associated with Moses to be the primary mode of redemption from sin until Christ (Abraham’s intended “seed”) arrived, when God’s still-active covenant with Abraham would reach its fruition by providing redemption in Christ and through the Christian community’s obligation to love their neighbors (Viviano 2015). The word *sperma* functions here as a collective noun, incorporating a single family in Christ out of all nations the elect who will share the inheritance (Wright 2013).

Some have seen a uniform concept of “covenant” (specifically, the notion of a last will and testament) running successfully throughout Galatians. Others, notably Jackson (2000, 2012), have seen the concept being used in 3:15 only as a legal analogy. Detractors of the legal analogy approach have argued that it fails because the ability of a testator to annul or add codicils to a formally valid will is well established in contemporary Roman law, which would presumably run contrary to Paul’s seeing the covenant as unalterable. Paul is loosely arguing by analogy here, for his line of thought would not work well if *diathēkē* has only a single sense in the passage. Moreover, what kind of will does Paul have in mind, if, unlike a human testator, God cannot die? Llewellyn favors a model reflected in P. Yadin 19 “a transaction comparable to the *matenat bari* which was irrevocable” (1992: 46f). Indeed, a Jewish deed of gift when made in Greek used the expression *diethemēn* and thus could have been called a *diathēkē* (Jackson 2012). In any case, Paul’s use of *diathēkē* here presupposes the knowledge of contemporary legal practices of his day.

Looking at this passage through the lens of God’s various covenants in the Hebrew Bible, the covenant with Abraham is clearly recognized, whereas the covenant with Moses is left unmentioned. Instead, Paul appears to disassociate “covenant” from the “law” portion of the Mosaic covenant in a rhetorical move, perhaps in response to Judaizing Christian teachers at Galatia who had overemphasized the law (Martyn 1997). Paul’s framing of his discussion within a “human analogy” gives added weight to the idea that “covenant” in this particular passage is likely dealing with the common legal understanding of *diathēkē*—“will” or “testamentary disposition.” Within this particular framework, God’s covenant with Abraham cannot be nullified by the introduction of the law at Sinai. The “promise” (*epangelion*) of God to Abraham was established through a “covenant” (*diathēkē*) which was made long before God gave the law to Israel, and thus cannot be modified or annulled by a later law, even if both were given by God (Betz 1979).





Some see Paul here as emphasizing an Abrahamic “promise theology,” rather than a “covenant theology” (Dunn 1982), but God’s promise to Abraham cannot be separated from his subsequent covenant.

This covenant language used in Galatians finds resonance in Hebrews 9:15–22, where “the choice of legal model is driven by the theological message” (Jackson 2012). The argument in Hebrews builds on the idea that a new covenant, through which the elect receive an eternal inheritance, involves a death which redeems people from the sins they incurred under the first covenant. This should not be surprising to the audience because a last will and testament does not come into force until the death of the testator (even the first covenant involved the sacrifice of blood). Thus, regarding these texts in Galatians and Hebrews, it is “indisputable that they use legal analogies from inheritance primarily for their connotations regarding revocability or irrevocability,” as may have been useful to the theological context in each case (Jackson 2012).

### 27.3.2 Galatians 4:21–31

Paul provides an allegorical interpretation of Abraham’s two wives and their respective children (Gen. 16:1–4, 15, 21:1–7) in order to illustrate the difference between the covenant (*diathēkē*) that God established with Israel and the covenant that God established with believers in Christ. Here, Abraham’s wife Hagar represents the Mosaic covenant, and because Hagar’s status as a slave transferred to her children so too did the Mosaic covenant create a binding relationship (described as “slavery,” *douleian*) which was transferred to all subsequent Israelites. Abraham’s other wife, was a “free” (*eleutheras*) woman who gave birth to free children, which was analogous to the covenantal situation of the Gentiles—they were not required to enter into the same sort of covenant that produced slaves, but were rather “children of the promise” (*epangelias tēkna*). Paul goes on to argue that entering into the Mosaic covenant would effectively nullify the Gentile’s status as free “children of promise,” obliging them to live by every law and obligation dictated by the Mosaic covenant, which notably included the sign of circumcision (Exod. 4:24–26; Acts 15:1). Acting on the decision of the apostolic council, Paul dismisses this covenantal sign as no longer required as it would subject people to the entire law of Moses (Gal. 5:2–6).

Only one covenant is explicitly identified here—the Mosaic covenant, at which the law was given. The other covenant is presumably the one between God and Abraham that Paul mentioned earlier (3:15–18), and here both of these “two covenants” (4:24) exist simultaneously (Brawley 2014; Christiansen 1995). In this passage, Paul’s use of “covenant” may be a reactionary response to how Judaizing Christian teachers were using this term, which would explain why Paul’s use and explanation of covenant in the Hagar/Sarah contrast does not exactly correspond with his use of covenant in 3:15–18. Rather, Paul identifies the law given at Sinai as the content of a covenant (4:25). Here it is clearly implied that the covenant of flesh or law (Hagar or Sinai), which would have



favored Ishmael as the older son, has been revoked by disinheritance in favor of the contrast between “promise” and “freedom from sin” (Sarah or Jerusalem), favoring Isaac. The imagery of disinheritance is used here in juxtaposition to the notion of a continuing covenant relationship.

Paul’s opponents appear to have been teaching that the Mosaic covenant was the only valid covenant, as it had subsumed or superseded God’s earlier covenant with Abraham (Martyn 1997). In his allegorical reading, Paul ignores the historical contexts in which God made covenants with Abraham and Moses (Betz 1979), while using this story to illustrate that God has established two different covenants which are also equally valid and binding upon their communities. If Martyn is correct in presuming that Paul is solely concerned with addressing the covenants that Christians could participate in, then previous views requiring Paul to hold a single, monolithic view of “covenant” (e.g. Dunn 2003) are to be challenged—Paul taught the existence and importance of multiple, unique, yet equally binding covenants established by God that Christians could acknowledge and embrace.

### 27.3.2.1 *Corinthians 11:25*

In his first epistle to the Corinthian community, Paul refers to the “new covenant” (*kainē diathēkē*) memorialized at the Lord’s Supper, but he does not explain its meaning. This “new covenant,” might be new in many ways, including its broader inclusion of who belongs to the covenant, its new mediator, its revision or supplementation of previous covenants, and new enforcement provisions. Participants covenant to remember Jesus and to examine themselves for worthiness to withstand the covenantal sanctions of partaking without due regard. Their remembering harkens back to Sinai: “Remember this day” (Exod. 13:3); “remember all my commands” (Num. 15:39). The incorporation of a shared cup in this ritual recalls meals in biblical and ancient Near Eastern covenant ratification ceremonies (e.g. Gen. 14:18–24, 26:26–30, 31:43–54; Exod. 24:9–11).

To the extent that Paul’s “new covenant” terminology, like that of Luke (22:20) and some manuscripts of Mark (14:24), alludes to the “new covenant” promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34 between God and Israel, it may be understood as a renewal (Brawley 2014) and reaffirmation—somewhat as in the case of the re-adoptions by Josiah and Nehemiah—or as having a transformational spiritual effect (Wright 2013), rather than as an abandonment of an earlier covenant. Mark and Luke’s mentioning the blood of the new covenant likely alludes to Moses ratifying God’s covenant with Israel by sprinkling the people with the blood of sacrificial animals (Exod. 24:5–8). These invocations of covenant imagery suggest that, through this ritual, participants renew a covenant both vertically (with God) and horizontally (with their fellow worshippers).

Some suggest that Paul did not use the expression of a “new covenant” in his own covenant theology and was simply restating this idea as part of the tradition that authorized the Lord’s Supper to be administered to the community (Dunn 1982). However, functioning in the context of the divisions present in the Corinthian congregation, the concept of “new covenant” seems at home within Paul’s covenant theology. This particular





sort of bidirectional covenant imagery would have created a conceptual framework helping these different groups to reconcile.

### 27.3.2.2 *Corinthians 3:6, 14*

In the first of these passages, Paul declares himself a minister or implementing agent of the “new covenant” (*kainē diathēkē*). Although covenants are used in the Pentateuch as a means of resolving disputes between individuals (Jackson 2000), some have seen Paul’s stated role here as echoing passages in the Hebrew Bible identified as prophetic lawsuits, in which God and Israel are adversaries in a juridical process (Lane 1982). In these instances, the prophetic indictment takes its form from a controversy or lawsuit (*rib*) arising out of a breach of covenant. Just as biblical prophets served as messengers of God’s covenant lawsuits in the Hebrew Bible, Paul here may be warning the Corinthians not to neglect their covenant with God. In particular, some see Paul here responding to the community’s undue glorification of Moses’s ministry (Dunn 1982).

Adding to his previous use of “new covenant” in 1 Corinthians 11 in conjunction with the Eucharist, Paul now incorporates the idea of life-giving spirit found in Ezekiel 11:19–20 and 36:35–36. He then juxtaposes this new covenant with an “old covenant” (*palaiās diathēkē*). The term “old covenant” appears for the first time in Paul’s writings in verse 14, where he refers to it as something to be “read” (*anagnōsei*), likely referring to the public reading of the Torah in synagogues. In drawing his distinction between the old and new covenants, Paul recounts the story in Exodus 34:29–35, which describes how Moses’s face shone after receiving the law from God as part of a covenant (v. 28) with Israel. According to Paul, as Moses had to put a veil over his face to hide its glory, a sort of “veil” (*kalumma*) exists in relation to the covenant established through Moses that needs to be lifted in order to reveal the glory of God’s new covenant through Jesus. This would allow the Corinthian community to enter more fully into a presumably pre-existent covenant relationship. Thus, the “new” covenant is not something radically different (Christiansen 1995) but rather a renewal, restoration, amplification, or fuller realization of the “old” covenant.

### 27.3.3 *Romans 9:1–5*

Paul here affirms the reality of God’s irrevocable covenant relationship with Israel (Viviano 2015). He describes the unique nature of this relationship in a series of three paired statements: adoption as sons/receiving the law; glory/temple worship; and covenants/promises. According to Paul, the convergence of these several elements created an environment in which the righteous Israelite patriarchs could thrive, which ultimately resulted in the arrival of the Messiah within Israel. In this passage, Paul uses the unusual plural term “covenants” (*diathēkai*), but without specifying which covenants he has in mind. Some scholars argue that Paul refers here only to the covenant with Abraham that was reaffirmed by and with Isaac and Jacob (e.g. Dunn 1982), or possibly



the Mosaic covenant, renewed through Joshua, Josiah, and Nehemiah (e.g. Christiansen 1995). However, as outlined in section 27.2, the covenants that God made with different individuals in the Hebrew Bible often had different nuances, and that variety appears to have been recognized by Second Temple authors (e.g. Sirach). Thus, Paul was likely referring to the full manifold of covenants recorded in the Hebrew Bible. If so, Paul recognizes here the validity of each of these covenants, as well as their necessity for the advent of the Messiah.

One more subtle invocation of covenant imagery in this and the following chapters is in Paul's use of the term "Israel." As the patriarch Jacob received the new name "Israel" to signify his covenant relationship with God, the use of the term "Israelite" carried with it a strong sense of being God's covenant people (Dunn 1982). Since twelve of the nineteen uses of "Israelite" in the Pauline corpus appear in Romans 9–11, Paul may have deliberately used this term here and elsewhere in this thinking to emphasize the significance of all these covenants in the formation of Christian identity, even when *diathēkē* is not used explicitly.

#### 27.3.4 Romans 11:25–29

Finally, Paul argues that God will continue to extend salvation to Israel because of enduring covenants with their ancestors. Paul constructs a composite quotation from Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 to demonstrate that salvation would come through a deliverer (i.e. the Anointed One) and that Israel's future salvation from sin would be facilitated through another covenant. Israel's resistance to God's salvation through Christ provided an opening for Gentiles to receive this salvation, but through that act of salvation, a space would also be provided for Israel to receive the salvation they had rejected. Some see Paul here opposing a view that God's covenant relationship with Israel had been irreparably broken, and instead scripturally affirming the irrevocable power of Israel's covenants (Christiansen 1995).

Commentators disagree as to Paul's utilization of "covenant" (*diathēkē*) in the statement: "and this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." Many look to the phrase that follows ("they [Israel] are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors") as clarifying the nature of this covenant formulation. Others see this as referring to God's covenant with Abraham (e.g. Moo 1996), while some see this as referring to the Mosaic covenant (e.g. Dunn 1982). Still others see an allusion to the "new covenant" promised in Jeremiah 31:31, and thus view the covenant mentioned in Romans as referring to a future covenant that God would yet enter into (e.g. Jewett 2006); and along that line, others suggest that Paul may have also had in mind Ezekiel 36:25–27, where God promises that Israel will be made "clean from all uncleanness" and receive "a new heart" and a "new spirit" at some future point in time (e.g. Dunn 1982).

While intertextual allusions with Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 may be at play in this passage, none of the commentaries attempt to connect the language in Romans 11 of "taking away their sins" with any of God's previously established covenants in the



Hebrew Bible. Of the various covenants mentioned above, the only one that overtly addresses the issue of sin is the Mosaic covenant, which was intended to create a “holy nation” (*gōy qĀdōsh*, Exod. 19:3–6). A major component of achieving such “holiness” depended upon ritual sacrifices performed in the tabernacle for the expiation of sin (Exod. 25–27; Lev. 4–7). Such expiatory rituals could only be performed by priests (Exod. 28–29), which would involve God’s covenant with Aaron and with the Levites by association. If Paul has these allusions in mind, all this would emphasize the continuity and irrevocable nature of God’s faithfulness as a covenant partner (Brawley 2014), while at the same time allowing his covenant relationship to operate more effectively in the present because of the deliverer (i.e. Christ) mentioned in 11:26 at the outset of this covenantal testimony.

## 27.4 AFFILIATED COVENANTAL CONCEPTS

In the future, scholars will find it fruitful to cultivate research agendas that look for covenant connections in the network of constitutive covenantal elements, not just in passages that contain the word *diathēkē*. Paul’s use of any term that refers to any aspect of a covenant invites remembrance of everything related to that covenant and should be thought of against the broad backdrop of covenant theology. Porter suggests “language that has traditionally been examined in relative isolation, or at least in a different interpretive frame of reference, must be brought into the discussion of covenant and vice versa” (2003: 284). With this in mind, the concept of covenant may in fact be relevant to hundreds, not just dozens, of Paul’s arguments and declarations.

Regarding suzerain treaties alone, several terms are inextricably tied to the idea of covenant that should be re-evaluated in Paul’s writings. For example, relationships between suzerains and vassals are described using words such as “love” and “know” (both of which play a central role in 1 Cor. 13), as well as “fear” (Rom. 11:20, 13:4). In suzerain covenants, the expected behavior of vassals is described using words such as “to walk after” (Rom. 8:4), “obey the voice of” or “serve” (Rom. 16:18–20), and prosperity is often set forth as the reward for loyal behavior (Viviano 2015). Similarly, concepts such as “commandments” (1 Cor. 7:10), “promises” (2 Cor. 7:1), “blessings” (Gal. 3:8–9), “curses” (1 Cor. 16:22), “gifts” (1 Cor. 12), and even “grace” (e.g. Gal. 5:4) can also be viewed through the lens of covenant and merit re-examination in relation to Paul’s covenant theology.

The term “kingdom” in Paul’s teachings and writings was suggested in section 27.2 as having covenantal overtones (esp. in relation to God’s covenant with David), as does also his use of the term “Israel” to describe the Jewish people (in relation to Jacob receiving a new name to signify the re-establishment of his covenant relationship). In light of the Second Temple period view of Adam as a prototypical covenantal figure, Paul’s discussions of Adam (e.g. 1 Cor. 15 and Rom. 5) should be included in efforts to fully portray Paul’s covenant theology. Similarly, because of the emphasis on the several individuals



who entered into covenants with God (e.g. Sirach), Paul's references to Abraham, Moses, and David should all be re-examined for overlooked theological connections to the concept of covenant.

Recent studies have shown that the fundamental idea of "law" in Israelite and later Jewish thought always functions within the framework of God's gracious covenants, which should challenge the traditional isolation of "law" in Paul's writings as something that actively works against God's will. Ware (2011) demonstrates this principle at work in Romans 3:19–20, and argues that when Paul speaks negatively of "law," he is really speaking of "the law's observance apart from the covenant and its promise of mercy" in Christ (see also the holiness of "law" in Rom. 7:12). Along similar lines, Wright (2013) argues that a law court metaphor stands behind the entire concept of covenant, which is also directly related to the concept of "justification," a central idea in Paul's writings (e.g. Gal. 2:16). This perspective should open doors for future research that looks more closely at the positive relationship between covenant and law in Paul's writings.

Finally, holiness (e.g. 1 Thess. 4:7), or sainthood (e.g. 1 Cor. 14:33) would have been readily associated in Paul's mind with the concept of covenant. The idea that the nation of Israel and now the followers of Christ have entered into a collective bond with God "is the key to understanding the term *am kadosh*—a nation endowed with *kedushah*," or holiness... The notion of the *kedushah* of Israel stems from its covenant with God" (Berman 1995: 9). Anything that is described as holy in the Hebrew tradition is connected with covenant; anything that is dedicated or separated for the service of God by way of covenant is holy. This idea was preeminent in the Mosaic covenant, and therefore it may have been equally significant to Paul's understanding of "covenant" and how he employed that concept in his writings.

Fruitful studies of Paul's covenant theology must not only take linguistics seriously (Porter 2003) but also take into consideration the rich and complex understanding of covenants in the Hebrew Bible and wider Near East in order to circumvent narrow stalemates among Pauline scholars in efforts to appreciate his understanding of the concept of covenant and its implications for interpreting his writings. As demonstrated, an interrelated matrix of covenant-connected concepts in Paul's writings awaits discovery and articulation.

## REFERENCES

- Berman, Joshua. *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995.
- Betz, Hans Dieter. *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.
- Brawley, Robert L. "Covenant." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics*, edited by Robert L. Brawley, 122–30. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Christiansen, Juhl. *The Covenant in Judaism & Paul: A Study of Ritual Boundaries as Identity Markers*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1995.
- Dunn, James. *Romans 9–16*. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1982.



- Dunn, James. "Did Paul Have a Covenant Theology? Reflections on Romans 9.4 and 11.27." In *The Concept of Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, edited by Stanley Porter and Jacqueline de Roo, 287–307. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003.
- Gentry, Peter J., and Stephen J. Wellum. *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Gräbe, Petrus. *New Covenant, New Community: The Significance of Biblical and Patristic Covenant Theology for Current Understanding*. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006.
- Jackson, Bernard S. *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law*. Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- Jackson, Bernard S. "Why the Name *New Testament*," *Melilah Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies* 9 (2012): 50–100.
- Jewett, Robert. *Romans*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Kitchen, Kenneth A., and Paul J. N. Lawrence. *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2012.
- Kok (Kobus), Jacobus. "Killing." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics* edited by Robert L. Brawley, 472–77. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Lane, William. "Covenant: The Key to Paul's Conflict with Corinth," *Tyndale Bulletin* 33 (1982): 3–29.
- Llewelyn, Stephen R. "The Revocation of Wills and Gal. 3.15." In *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, edited by xxx 6:41–7. North Ryde, New South Wales: Macquarie University, 1992.
- Martyn, J. Louis. "Covenant, Christ, and Church in Galatians." In *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor Leander E. Keck*, edited by Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeks, 137–51. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Martyn, J. Louis. *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1997.
- Moo, Douglas. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996.
- Porter, Stanley. "The Concept of Covenant in Paul." In *The Concept of Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, edited by Stanley Porter and Jacqueline de Roo, 269–85. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003.
- Viviano, Pauline. "Covenant." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, edited by Brent A. Strawn, 130–38. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Ware, James. "Law, Christ, and Covenant: Paul's Theology of the Law in Romans 3:19–20," *Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (2011): 513–40.
- Westerholm, Stephen. "Matters of Definition, 1: 'Righteousness' in Paul." In *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*, 261–96. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.

