

The Meaning of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31) for Israel and the Church

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In Jeremiah 31 a new covenant is announced. Because Jewish and Christian theologians differ on their interpretation of this, I discuss this new covenant in the context of the Book of Jeremiah and study the references to it in the New Testament. Next to Jewish and Christian interpretations, also the perspective of Messianic Jews on this subject is considered. How do these groups consider their involvement in the new covenant?

New Covenant in Jeremiah 31: 31-34

The Book of Jeremiah portrays repeated warnings of disaster, but chapters 31-33 form an exception to this pattern.¹ These chapters begin with the promise that God will be a God for all the families of Israel and that they shall be his people (31: 1). Further on we read that God will make “a new covenant (ברית חדשה) with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”² This covenant “will not be like the covenant” that he made when he led their forefathers out of Egypt. They have broken the covenant, made on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24). Now, the new covenant has other characteristics: “I will put my law (תורה) in their minds and write it on their hearts.” In this future it will not be necessary for people to encourage one another to

¹ Several recent Bible commentaries on the Book of Jeremiah are: Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 26-52*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005); F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC 16 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993); Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, WBC 27 (Dallas: Word, 1995); Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, The Anchor Bible 21B (New York: Doubleday, 2004); William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI–LII*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *Bijbelcommentaar Jeremia-Klaagliederen [Bible Commentary Jeremiah-Lamentations]*, ed. M. J. Paul, G. van den Brink, and J. C. Bette, SBOT (Veenendaal: CvB, 2013); Werner H. Schmidt, *Das Buch Jeremia: Kapitel 21-52*, ATD 21 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Gunther Wanke, *Jeremia*, vol. 2, *Jeremia 25,15-52,34*, ZBK AT 20/2 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2003).

² For covenant in the historical context, see Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 volumes (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012). For the theological meaning, see the overview in Gordon J. McConville, “bērit,” in *NIDOTTE*, 1: 747-55.

know YHWH, because they will all know him. He “will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.”

In the Book of Jeremiah, many prophecies outline how corrupt the people and the kings of Judah are and show that disasters result from their breaking of the original covenant. The possibility of the covenant being broken is repeatedly mentioned in the Torah, in particular in the passages concerning blessings and curses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.³ If they are disobedient, the Israelites can lose the promised land. The history of the Israelites demonstrates the aforementioned consequences: the exile, first for the ten tribes, and later on for the two tribes.

Many prophets point to a deep problem in the behavior of Israel. The sin is written in their hearts with an iron tool and inscribed with a flint point (Jer. 17: 1). In this hopeless situation, the prophet points to a way out, no longer based on the covenant of Sinai, but on a new covenant.⁴

Relationship of promises and covenants

In the Old Testament several covenants between God and mankind are mentioned. Many times, God gave promises to people and in a few cases he confirmed these promises with a covenant (ברית). In terms of content, these covenants have the character of a solemn commitment. In the first chapters of Genesis, the word “covenant” is not used. The relationship between God and mankind was determined at creation: the Creator interacted with his creatures and people “walked with God” (Gen. 5: 22). In Genesis, the first mention of a covenant is in relation to Noah (6: 18; 9: 9-17). Abram’s call preceded the two covenants

³ See Markus Zehnder, “Building on Stone? Deuteronomy and Esarhaddon’s Loyalty Oaths,” *BBR* 19 (2009): 341-74, 511-35. He discusses the date of the curses in Deuteronomy and gives arguments for an earlier date than Esarhaddon’s Loyalty Oaths.

⁴ For an overview of the texts in the prophets, see John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2, *Israel’s Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 369-93.

that were made with him in Genesis 15 and 17.⁵ David, too, was already God's chosen king before a covenant was made with him (2 Sam. 7).⁶

We characterize a covenant as an official agreement to seal a prior relationship between certain parties. This description is important, because it follows that the relationship between the Lord and his people involves more than just the aforementioned covenants.⁷

From a dogmatic point of view, one can see the need to encompass God's dealings with people in one covenant concept, but the Old Testament does not do that and reveals a number of covenants. For us, it is important to understand the unity as well as diversity of his covenants, because so the intention of the new covenant in Jeremiah becomes clearer.

The background of earlier covenants

In order to reach this goal, we have a look at some of the earlier covenants. YHWH chooses Abraham and his descendants. In the covenant that he makes with Abraham, the emphasis lies on the unconditional character of God's promises (Gen. 15) and in Genesis 17 the obligations holding for the patriarch are mentioned. Later on, God makes a covenant with Israel.⁸ The covenant with Israel in Exodus and the renewal thereof in Deuteronomy do not replace the promises to the patriarchs but contribute to their realisation. Hence, the Mosaic covenant is a consequence of the Abrahamic covenant. The newer Mosaic covenant emphasizes strongly the need for obedience by the Israelites. The consequence of this is that through the sin with the golden calf, the covenant is broken (Ex. 32: 19).

As has been said, the sanctions against breaking of covenants come to the fore in the texts concerning the covenant curses (Lev. 26 and Deut. 28). Despite the warnings, even in these books you can find mention of God's unconditional faithfulness. Even in the situation of

⁵ Cf. Gert Kwakkel, "Verplichting of relatie: Verbonden in Genesis; Henk de Jong en zijn visie op het verbond" [Obligation or relation: Covenants in Genesis; Henk de Jong and his view of the covenant], in *Verrassend vertrouwd: Een halve eeuw verkondiging en theologie van Henk de Jong* [Surprisingly trusted: Half a century of preaching and theology by Henk de Jong], ed. Jan Bouma, Freddy Gerkema, and Jan Mudde (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2009), 117-30.

⁶ For this text and the interpretation of Isa. 55:3, see in this volume Jaap Dekker, "What Does David Have to Do with It? The Promise of a New Covenant in the Book of Isaiah."

⁷ See Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's unfolding purpose* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 57, 75-76; Paul J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Cross, 2012), 151-52.

⁸ The order according to the canonical presentation. It is not possible here to discuss the origins of the traditions.

exile, YHWH shall not entirely reject the Israelites. He then remembers the earlier covenant with their forefathers (Lev. 26: 44-45).

In Deuteronomy 30: 1-10 a new future for the Israelites is mentioned, even after the implementation of the covenant curse (see also 4: 30-31). God will ensure that the hearts of the Israelites are circumcised, so that they shall worship him with devoted hearts. Through the conversion of the Israelites, the covenant blessings will return to the people. The Lord himself ensures the restoration of the broken covenant. It is possible to see here the realization of many earlier promises (30: 9; 9: 5, 27). The faithfulness of God to earlier promises and covenants transcends the breaking of the covenant in Deuteronomy (29:1).⁹

Jeremiah 31: 27-40

In Jeremiah 31: 27-40 the scope of the new covenant is mentioned: Israel and Jerusalem are restored to their old lustre and the covenant has a permanent character (vs. 35-40).¹⁰ In the following chapter, it is even referred to as ‘an eternal covenant’ (32: 40). There is also a relationship between the new covenant and the promise of the land (32: 41-44). This theme harks back to the promises made to Abraham and to Moses.¹¹

In the new covenant, God creates the conditions of the fulfilment of his promises, because he makes the hearts of the Israelites obedient to him. This is God’s answer to the sinful nature of the human heart.

How must we view the continuity or discontinuity between the Mosaic and the new covenant? Both covenants speak about the relationship between God and his people, the house of Israel and the house of Judah, together the twelve tribes of Israel (31: 31-32).¹² A clear connection exists between Deuteronomy 30: 1-20 and Jeremiah 31: 31-34. There is also continuity in the verses about the knowledge of God and the forgiveness of the Israelites. The knowledge of

⁹ For differences between the biblical and the dogmatic concepts of a covenant, see also Paul R. Williamson, “The *Pactum Salutis*: A Scriptural Concept or Scholastic Mythology?” *TynBul* 69 (2018) 259-281.

¹⁰ Cf. Bob Becking, *Between Fear and Freedom: Essays on the Interpretation of Jeremiah 30-31* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Nico Riemersma, “JHWH sluit een nieuw verbond (Jeremia 31:31-34),” [JHWH will make a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)] *NTT* 65 (2011): 137-48. Riemersma argues that the interpretation as a completely new covenant is preferable.

¹¹ Cf. *The Earth and the Land: Studies about the Value of the Land of Israel in the Old Testament and Afterwards*, ed. Hendrik J. Koorevaar and Mart-Jan Paul (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018).

¹² The house of Israel and the house of Judah are mentioned eight times in the Book of Jeremiah. All these occurrences denote the national Israel. See Femi Adayemi, *The New Covenant Torah in Jeremiah and the Law of Christ in Paul* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 47-48.

God implies obedience to the covenant. Continuity can also be seen in the forgiveness of guilt. The characteristics of inward obedience, mutual fellowship, and forgiveness were also mentioned in the covenants with the forefathers.¹³

Given the continuity, it is better to talk about a restoration of the Mosaic covenant and about a ‘renewed’ covenant rather than to regard the latter to be a totally ‘new’ covenant. The new covenant forms the fulfilment of the covenant restoration that was foreseen in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

The main difference between the Mosaic and the new covenant has to do with the internalisation of the law. No longer is sin engraved in the heart (Jer. 17: 1), but God will now write his law in the heart (31: 33). This points to the readiness of God’s people to obey his commands. Secondly, there is an important change in quantity of obedient men and women: everybody in the covenant community knows God and shares in the blessing (31: 34).¹⁴ These two points surely figure as discontinuity and this is emphasized by Jeremiah (“not as” in 31: 32), because they are related to the breaking of the covenant. As said earlier, there is also a great deal of continuity. Looking at things from a linguistic viewpoint, the “new” in “new covenant” cannot be interpreted as “renewed,” but in terms of content we can definitely talk of renewal.¹⁵

The New Testament

In the New Testament, we find mention of the new covenant.¹⁶ When Jesus institutes the communion, he takes the cup and says “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22: 20).¹⁷ Formally, he is pronouncing that the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah has begun.

¹³ E.g. Gen. 17: 1, 7; Ex. 19: 5-6; 24: 3; 34: 6-7; Deut. 6: 1-5.

¹⁴ Several times in history only few Israelites served God according to his will (Deut. 29: 4; 1 Kings 19: 14-18).

¹⁵ According to Walter C. Kaiser the word ‘new’ in the context of Jer. 31 means ‘renewed’ or ‘restored’: *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 234. Femi Adayemi criticizes this approach in “What is the New Covenant ‘Law’ in Jeremiah 31:33?,” *BibSac* 163 (2006): 312-21, esp. 319-20. However, the Sinaitic covenant and the new covenant have much in common.

¹⁶ The new covenant is mentioned in the New Testament in Matth. 26: 28; Mark 14: 24; Luke 22: 20; Rom. 11: 27; 1 Cor. 11: 25; 2 Cor. 3: 6; Hebr. 8: 8-12; 9: 15; 10: 16-17; 12: 24. Cf. Tiberius Rata, *The Covenant Motif in Jeremiah’s Book of Comfort: Textual and Intertextual Studies of Jeremiah 30-33*, SBL 105 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 89-113. For the new covenant in the Qumran texts, see Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 473- 475.

According to these texts, the new covenant finds fulfilment in a separated community that believes it is living in the ‘last days.’

¹⁷ See in this volume Rob van Houwelingen, “Renewal of the Covenant at the Last Supper.”

He gives the cup of the covenant to the disciples, the twelve symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel. The new covenant begins in Jerusalem, and in the first instance the scope is limited to the Jewish disciples.¹⁸

That the complete fulfilment of the new covenant does not immediately come about at the institution of communion, can be seen in the statement that this meal will be eaten “until he comes” (1 Cor. 11: 26); in other words, until the kingdom of God and the new covenant are fully realized.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul uses the reference to the new covenant in relation to the mixed congregation of believers.¹⁹ The believers in Corinth are living letters of Christ (vs. 3). The emphasis in this chapter, just as with the Old Testament prophets, lies on the inner change that occurs. Here again it is clear that the new covenant is superior to the Mosaic covenant.

The added value of the new covenant is addressed in Hebrews 8-10, in which Jeremiah’s prophecy is quoted at length (Heb. 8: 8-12). The focus here is on the definitive nature of the forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus. It is important to realize that the author is writing to Jewish Christians and that it is not about Gentile believers.²⁰

The New Testament does not refer to Jeremiah 31: 35-39, the continued election of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

In the aforementioned passages from the New Testament, the new covenant is the successor of the covenant of Sinai and not directly of other covenants. The covenant with Abraham is not replaced and is still valid (cf. Gal. 3).²¹ There is still a bond between God and the people who reject the Messiah (Rom. 11: 1-2, 25-26). In the future, the tension between election, covenant and unbelief will be resolved (Rom. 11: 27-32). This is in agreement with the promise in Jeremiah that the people of Israel, as long as the sun and moon continue to shine, shall be a people of God (Jer. 31: 35-37; 33: 20-22). The relationship between God and his

¹⁸ Cf. Acts 1: 8; 3: 26; Rom. 1: 16 and Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 283.

¹⁹ Acts 18: 4; 1 Cor. 12: 2, 13.

²⁰ Cf. Ronald A. Diprose, *Israel and the Church* (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 47-49.

²¹ See James D. G. Dunn, “Judaism and Christianity: One Covenant or Two?,” in *Covenant Theology: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Mark J. Cartledge and David Mills (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 33-56. He writes: “Jeremiah seems to have had in mind not so much a different covenant as a more effective covenant, a renewed rather than a new covenant” (p. 40). His conclusion: “in short, the old and new covenants should be seen not so much as two quite different covenants, but as two interpretations of the first covenant: the promise to Abraham” (p. 54).

people is not completely dependent on human behavior, although belief and obedience are expected.

Jewish and Gentile believers

The New Testament texts we have dealt with, show that the new covenant refers to the first churches as these are made up of Jews and (partly) of Gentiles. That raises questions, because the texts in Jeremiah 31-33 are bound up with the twelve tribes, the promised land, and with Jerusalem. Jeremiah does not mention other peoples in the context of the New Covenant. How can it then be possible that others may share in Israel's blessing?

As we have already pointed out, the covenant with Abraham remains valid. From the beginning it has been the intention that all the peoples shall be blessed through Abraham (Gen. 12: 3).²² In the book of the prophet Isaiah there are clear indications that a new dispensation is coming in which believers from among all the peoples may take part (e.g. Isa. 2: 1-5; 56: 3-8; 66: 18-20). Later on, Simeon uses words of Isaiah and says that the child in his arms is 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel' (Luke 2: 32). Here we see the dual mission of the Messiah (cf. Isa. 42: 6; 49: 6). When he fulfils the new covenant, it will be possible not only for Israel to receive the blessings, but all the peoples will be able to share in them.

It is also good to understand to what degree the believers share in the blessings of the covenant with Abraham and of the new covenant. Paul says in Galatians 3 that the believers are "blessed" in Abraham (vs. 8-14). That is different from fully participating in the covenant. The covenant of Abraham also includes: circumcision, many descendants, possession of the land of Canaan and the birth of kings (Gen. 15 and 17). Not all these things apply to the Gentile believers. The core of the covenant is this: "I am your God, and you are my people." Those who believe in Jesus Christ may belong to the spiritual descendants of Abraham. The New Testament does not say that Gentile believers share in all the promises made to Abraham.²³ They share in the greatest privilege, but certain promises hold specifically for the

²² For arguments for this passive translation, see Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context*, BZAW 332 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

²³ In the spiritual unity of the believers, the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians remained important. The discussion of the Council at Jerusalem was only about the position of the Gentile believers, not about the Jewish believers and the laws of Moses (Acts 15). After that meeting Paul circumcised Timothy while he had a Jewish mother (Acts 16: 1-3). The elders of the congregation in Jerusalem heard the rumor that Paul

descendants of Abraham and endure until the messianic future. If we take this difference into account, we can avoid spiritualising the promise of the land or having to expand it to the whole world.

The same is true of the new covenant in Jeremiah 30-33. That covenant is in the first instance for the people of Israel, but all the peoples may share in the spiritual renewal that is given. Within the spiritual unity of the believers, various differences remain. Certain concrete, physical aspects (land, city, throne, temple) are preserved for Israel alone.²⁴

The Jewish Christians in the First Centuries

In the first centuries many Jewish believers in Jesus remained faithful to Jewish customs. Eusebius mentions the first fifteen leaders of the Christian congregation of Jerusalem, from the apostle James to the time of the revolt of Bar Kochba (132-135). These leaders were ‘bishops of the circumcision.’²⁵ Justin Martyr describes Christians who observe the Law of Moses.²⁶ The Christian Ebionites and the Nazoreans practiced circumcision.²⁷ Although the mainstream of the Christian church wiped out these customs, these examples illustrate the point that the new covenant is sometimes seen as in greater continuity with the Law of Moses.

Fulfilment in phases

The Book of Jeremiah covers many concrete issues that are not realized in the period thereafter, not even in the time of the New Testament and the later history of Israel. The complete renewal and devotion to God have not yet been fully realized, not even after the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2). Christians have not yet received the full covenant blessing. Those who are of the opinion that these issues will be fulfilled in heaven, have a problem with the great attention to the land and to Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s prophecies. In the prophecy of

taught the Jews to run away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children (Acts 21: 21). Galatians 3: 28 stresses the unity of Jews and Greeks, and of men and women in Christ, but that unity does not wipe out the differences.

²⁴ M. J. Paul, *Het nieuwe verbond en de uitleg van de profetieën over de toekomst van Israël [The New Covenant and the explanation of the prophecies about the future of Israel]* (Baarn: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 2013), esp. 16-18.

²⁵ Eusebius, *Church History* IV.5. Cf. *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 69-70.

²⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, par. 47.

²⁷ Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers*, 427-28, 451, 472.

the new covenant, several geopolitical issues come to the fore.²⁸ The believing remnant will take possession of the land. The New Testament does not deal with these aspects of the new covenant and focuses on one specific issue: that with and through Christ, the new covenant begins. In principle, the messianic kingdom has begun but is not fully realized. The Kingdom of God in the time after the resurrection of Christ is best described as: present, but not yet complete. Only at the coming of Jesus in glory shall the messianic kingdom come in its fullness and glory. Until this coming in glory, the emphasis is on forgiveness and God's renewing work.

In the present time, the promises of salvation are not completely realized. Paul had great sorrow over the rejection of the Messiah by his own people. He looks forward to the future when their acceptance will come (Rom. 11: 15). All Israel will be saved (Rom. 11: 26). Then the promises of Jeremiah can be fulfilled.²⁹

Church history

People have not always thought as above. The church in the 2nd and 3rd centuries often held polemics against Judaism.³⁰ Many church fathers saw the Jews as the rejected people that were replaced by the church.³¹ When Christians spoke of Jews, the old covenant was set against the new covenant. Around the end of the 2nd century the gospels and other apostolic scriptures were referred to as "the New Testament" and the Hebrew scriptures as "the Old Testament."³² These names fit in with 2 Corinthians 3: 14, where Paul talks of the reading of the "old covenant" in the synagogue. However, the name "Old Testament" creates a change, because the "Old" is widened to the whole Hebrew canon, and does not only refer to the covenant at Sinai. In this way, we lose sight of the continuing covenant with Abraham.³³

²⁸ See above, and Jer. 31: 38-40; 32: 40-44.

²⁹ Cf. Williamson, *Sealed*, 208-10.

³⁰ For an overview of the new covenant in the theology in the Patristic Literature, see Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 479-82.

³¹ However, many church fathers expected a future conversion of the Jews. See M. J. Paul, "Ik zend u de profet Elia': De toekomst van Israël volgens de vroegchristelijke kerk," ["I will send you the prophet Elijah": The future of Israel according the early Christian Church] *ThRef 57* (2014): 22-39.

³² These descriptions are used in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV 15.2.

³³ Cf. Mart-Jan Paul, "Das Neue Testament als Fortsetzung und Vollendung des Alten Testaments," in *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Die bleibende Botschaft der hebräischen Bibel*, ed. Hendrik J. Koorevaar and Mart-Jan Paul (Giessen: Brunnen, 2016), 324-47, esp. 331-34.

The Jewish approach

The idea that the old covenant should be replaced by a new, Christian way of being connected to God has met several objections by Jewish voices. According to these, a new Torah cannot be intended since Jesus himself says that he does not wish to abolish the Torah (Matt. 5: 17-18). There is also the question how uncircumcised peoples can come to know that they are referred to, because Jeremiah is addressing Israel. Particularly in the Middle Ages, the Jewish exegesis was polemical against this kind of Christian appropriation.³⁴ Don Isaac Abravanel asks: “Is it really true that the new covenant will come in the future redemption as a new and different Torah that will replace the Torah which is ours?” According to him, the opposite is true: “The main idea is the opposite, that we believe in the eternal nature of the Torah, and it will not change at any time at all, and already enemies of the Lord, the Afikorsim [= non-believers], using this statement [= the replacement], definitely promoted this hypothesis and fought much with us.”³⁵

Messianic Jews

It is obvious that deeper questions concerning the relationship between believers from Israel and the peoples are at stake. Hence, it is useful to listen to Messianic Jews. Many of them try to do justice to the beginning of the new covenant in the time of the New Testament as well as desire to do justice to the words of Jeremiah to his own people and to the covenant with Abraham.

Baroech Maoz, a Jewish believer in Jesus, writes: “The Abrahamic covenant is not replaced by the Mosaic; ... The new covenant in Christ is also given as a reinforcement of the covenant with Abraham.”³⁶ The new covenant is one of the many gifts of grace that God has promised to Israel. The new thing about this is, that “the peoples are now invited to have a share in the gift to Israel.”³⁷ According to Maoz, the covenant with Abraham remains, whilst the Mosaic

³⁴ Richard S. Sarason, “The Interpretation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Judaism,” in *When Jews and Christians Meet*, ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski (New York: State University of New York, 1988), 99-123, esp. 103-9. Hermann Lichtenberger and Stefan Schreiner, “Der neue Bund in jüdischer Überlieferung,” *Theologischer Quartalschrift* 176 (1996): 272-90.

³⁵ Isaac Abravanel in his commentary on Jeremiah (Warsaw: Orim Gedolim, 1862), Jer. 30, “The fifth question.” Thanks to Randall Ford who gave me this quotation.

³⁶ Baroech Maoz, *Vervolg en vernieuwing: een joods-christelijke visie op het evangelie in oud en nieuw verbond [Follow-up and renewal: a Jewish-Christian vision on the Gospel in Old and New Covenant]* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1992), 26.

³⁷ Maoz, *Vervolg en vernieuwing*, 33. He points to Eph. 3: 6.

covenant reaches its intended completion with God's glorious Son, Israel's promised Messiah. "It is not the Old Testament which is fulfilled, but the covenant with Moses ... the Mosaic covenant is replaced by the new. The covenant with David and the new covenant as it now applies, are awaiting their fulfilment."³⁸ On the basis of the promises already given, Israel will come to believe in Christ. "They shall accept their redeemer in faith and repentance ... He shall restore their fate, restore their land, bless their government and be with Israel as never before. Israel shall be a blessing to the peoples and reverence and love for God shall increase worldwide."³⁹ In this line, more witnesses can be named, such as Adolph Saphir.⁴⁰ In many publications of the Messianic Jews the new covenant is mentioned, as this concept is very important for their identity. A part of this concept is the question about the nature of the Torah, which is written in the heart.⁴¹

Gentry and Wellum

A recent book about the covenants is *Kingdom Through Covenant*, written by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum.⁴² It is an important biblical-theological study with many stimulating insights for exegesis and systematic theology. However, it does not do enough justice to the discussion above. The authors pay too little attention to the permanent character of the covenant with Abraham, and are of the opinion that "all of the covenants find their fulfilment, terminus, and *telos* in the new covenant."⁴³ The authors also see the institution of the communion by Jesus too much as a transferral of the promises holding for Israel to a new group of disciples, regardless of their origin.⁴⁴ They see the disciples not as representatives of Israel, but of the believers. The authors appear to view the relationship between Israel and the Messiah in the sense of the type, Israel, being transcended by the greater antitype, Jesus. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel, it is argued that there is no future significance for Israel as a nation. A better understanding, though, is to see the relationship between Jesus and Israel as

³⁸ Maoz, *Vervolg en vernieuwing*, 109-12.

³⁹ Maoz, *Vervolg en vernieuwing*, 164-65.

⁴⁰ Cf. Adolph Saphir, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. 2 (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1902), 501: "The law of Moses, the old covenant, was vanishing; but the Messianic promises never were connected with the legal dispensation; they are rooted in the promise to Abraham; they are fulfilled in the covenant of grace."

⁴¹ Cf. Adayemi, "What is the New Covenant."

⁴² Gentry and Wellum hold a theological position between dispensationalism and covenant theology.

⁴³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 644.

⁴⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 497.

that of *corporate solidarity* in which the One (Jesus the true Israelite) represents and restores the many (the nation Israel).⁴⁵ His life and work make possible the fulfilment of the promises (2 Cor. 1:20). This restoration is also connected with the belief in Jesus.

The way the authors view the connection between the Old Testament expectation and New Testament fulfilment also raises questions. They claim that “precisely because Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament, there is also massive change or discontinuity from what has preceded, which entails that in Christ an incredible epochal shift in redemptive-history has occurred.”⁴⁶ They also go on to say that because of the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the entire new covenant age, “many of the themes that were basic to the Old Testament have now been transposed and transformed.”⁴⁷ Instead, I regard it hermeneutically better to pay greater attention to the context of the Book of Jeremiah and to assume a partial fulfilment in the New Testament.

In conclusion

My argument is to assume a partial fulfilment in the New Testament and to draw a line from the prophecy of Jeremiah to the new Christian communities, made up of Jews and Gentiles. Jesus has brought the new covenant into being and it surpasses the old covenant. However, not everything that Jeremiah prophesied has already become reality in the Christian church. Moreover, the promises of the new covenant are not yet realised in the first addressee, the people of Israel and not yet in the geopolitical aspects. In the future, a further development of the fulfilment of this prophecy can be expected.

The approach of seeing the covenant with Abraham as permanent is important for the relationship between Old and New Testament and for the relationship between the present church and Israel. God is faithful to his own Word. He can involve other peoples, but remains faithful in the promises to the people whom he first chose.

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⁴⁵ Michael J. Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum’s, Kingdom Through Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 24/1 (Spring 2013): 5-24.

⁴⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 598.

⁴⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 598.

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