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for it, thus revealing her inner inadequacy and hence her weak voice in the secular world—also indicating that the Church belongs more to the ‘not yet’ than the ‘already’. In a recent Assembly of the World Evangelical Fellowship in Singapore in 1986, the truth was brought home in no unmistakable terms that unless the Church is renewed it is possible neither for the Church to reach the world nor for the world to listen to the Church. It is essential therefore that the Church recovers its basics. In scores of discussions on mission and ministry of the Church in the last few decades, several distinctions of the Church have been lost and need to be recovered—such as the distinction between the Church and the world, between the saved and the lost, between witness and service, and between the sacred and the secular. This is why we said earlier that it is only partly valid to use the principle of relevance, for the Church’s vertical dimension needs to be kept intact in order for us to grasp her tasks—a theological understanding of the nature of the Church is thus a prior necessity to understanding her mission and ministry. **P. 174**

2. This means that our primary task is the renewal of the pastors of the local congregations, as the enablers of the Church’s leadership, as well as the renewal of the laity, those who carry out the Church’s task of mission in the world. Though mission is primarily an enterprise of the Church, this does not mean that the missionary task is solely the task of the local congregation.

3. A survey made of Indian Christians some years ago revealed that they embraced Christian faith not because of the *shanti* or peace it gives them, but rather primarily because of the offer of brotherhood in the Church. Once the Church sets her own house in order, at least to some extent (by way of taking the beam out of her eyes!), she has something to offer to the world, and can fruitfully minister to the world. A local congregation is equipped with the gifts necessary for the common good, and by being an earthly model of the Kingdom to come she manifests her saltiness and light. The Church ought to be the hope of the nation by offering such a much-needed model. Thus Church renewal strengthens any social reform.

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Covenant, Fulfilment and Judaism in Hebrews

John Fischer

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Coming from the pen of one who is involved in mission to Jews, the article makes a fascinating reading in its creative approach to the book of Hebrews, which is traditionally thought to express the setting aside of the Old Testament on account of Jesus’ fulfilment of it. The author demonstrates rather that the book of Hebrews is actually stressing the identification of Jesus as the true centre and intent of Judaism.

Editor

Hebrews has long been viewed as a dynamic treatise demonstrating how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament and Judaism. Judaism and the Old Testament are then often viewed as beautiful pictures of his character and functions, but as having been set aside with the advent of Jesus. The argument goes something like this. 'Judaism pointed to Jesus the Messiah. When he came, died and rose, he fulfilled the Jewish system. Therefore, it is no longer relevant, having been set aside because it fulfilled its function of pointing to the Messiah. So, using Jewish elements of faith or worship means going back to 'the old life'. It involves placing one's self 'under the law', going back to a system opposed to God's gracious operations through Jesus. This contradicts its fulfilment in him.'¹

But should Hebrews be so understood? In order to interpret Hebrews correctly, we need to understand its background and setting, namely the nature of fulfilment in Scripture, and the nature of the people and beliefs being addressed by the epistle. Proper treatment of the crucial passages in Hebrews necessitates such preliminary study.

We will start with a 'second look' at the New Covenant. The prophets also refer to it as the everlasting covenant or covenant of peace (cf. [Jer. 32:40](#); [Ezk. 16:60](#), [Isa. 54:10](#); [55:3](#); *et al.*). p. 176

But does this interplay account completely for [Jeremiah 31](#)? It seems quite possible that Jeremiah intended the New Covenant to be viewed as a *renewed* covenant.² A number of the associated passages ([Ezk. 16:60ff.](#); [Isa. 55:3](#); [Mic. 7:18–20](#); and especially [Jer. 33:14–22](#)) appear to indicate that this covenant is a ratification of the previous covenants with Abraham, Moses and David.³ In this sense alone, the New Covenant can be viewed as a renewal. A number of writers have seen this, e.g. Calvin and Hengstenberg.⁴

Further, as Kaiser points out,⁵ the Hebrew and Greek terms for 'new' used with this covenant frequently mean 'renew' or 'restore', as can be seen in the phrases 'new moon', 'new heart', and 'new heavens and earth'.

Many scholars have noted that there is very little 'new' in this covenant; many of its specifics have been mentioned under earlier covenants, e.g.

1. God's law;
2. 'I will be their God and they will be my people' (cf. [Gen. 17:7](#); [Ex. 6:7](#));
3. 'They will know the Lord' (cf. [Ex. 6:7](#), *et al.*);
4. Complete forgiveness of sin (cf. [Ex. 34:6–7](#); [Psa. 103:12](#); [Mic. 7:18f.](#));
5. Even possibly the creation of a new heart (cf. [Psa. 51:12](#)).

¹ E.g. William Currie, 'The Traditional Approach to Witnessing to Jews'; Leland Crotts, 'Response to The Messianic Jewish Approach'; papers read at the Consultation on the Variations of Life and Expression of Jewish Believers, at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois, Nov. 18–19, 1977.

² Cf. Walter Kaiser, 'The Old Promise and the New Covenant', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XV (1972), pp. 11–23.

³ Cf. George Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1 (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 1957), p. 322.

⁴ Cf. Marten Woustra, 'The Everlasting Covenant in Ezekiel 16:59–63', *Calvin Theological Journal* VI (1971), pp. 22–48, and E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 429–445, reprinted in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Walter Kaiser (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1973), p. 240.

⁵ Kaiser, pp. 16–17.

Each of the items adduced is but a repetition of some familiar aspect of salvation already known in the Old Testament.⁶

Can the New Covenant, then, in any sense claim to be new? Jeremiah may be using ‘new’ in an ironical way, much as he uses irony elsewhere in his prophecy.⁷ Israel should have been experiencing these ‘new’ realities, but they weren’t. To shock them out of complacency Jeremiah suggests that God will establish a new covenant as if these realities were foreign to them. Their experience of these realities would be as radical as a new covenant. Jeremiah intended this treatment to lead the complacent person to realize that p. 177 he was not experiencing the realities of a relationship with God. Wallis finds confirmation of this in the same use of irony in the New Testament with respect to the New Covenant.

Probably the most transparent of these New Testament cases is found in [Galatians 4:21ff](#). Already the note of irony is heard in Paul’s words, ‘Tell me, you who desire to be under law ...’ Verse [24](#) brings the apparently straightforward statement, ‘these women are two covenants’. However, in the subsequent development and contrast of the two covenants, Paul’s irony becomes apparent. The one covenant corresponding to Sarah and leading on to the mention of liberty, and climaxed by the quotation from [Isaiah 54](#), is clearly the covenant of salvation by grace. By contrast, the mention of the other covenant with its accompaniments of slavery, and most pointedly the slavery of the ‘present Jerusalem’, makes it plain that Paul is equating this other covenant with the Christ-rejecting Judaism of his day. Now to call this late situation a ‘covenant’ is surely ironical for Paul. Paul certainly intends an emphatic rejection of it by his hearers. In the parabolic words ‘cast out the slave and her son ...’ Paul means to say that the specious appeal of legalism to Moses is not a real covenant, but is the very antithesis of it—a broken covenant, as Jeremiah phrased it.

The theme of two covenants emerges in [2 Corinthians 3:14–15](#). ‘But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds....’ Paul apparently does not mean by ‘old covenant’ the volume of 24 books, *simpliciter*. He clearly means that Christ is in the Old Testament. In [Romans 10:6–10](#), quoting [Deuteronomy 30:12–13](#), Paul is careful to say that Moses’ message is his message—‘the word of faith which we preach’. It is Moses as read with hardened mind and veiled heart which is called the ‘old covenant’. ‘Old covenant’ is a way to express what happens when unbelief reads the book. Clearly we are hearing Jeremiah’s note of irony: the ‘old covenant’ implied in Jeremiah’s promise of a ‘new covenant’ is Moses read with eyes which do not see Christ: the ‘new covenant’ is not ‘new’; it is only a true exegesis of Moses. The newness of the covenant is subjective and psychological: in Jeremiah’s terms, it is the writing of the law on the heart. When the heart turns to the Lord, the veil is removed and the glories of salvation by grace shine on every page. Believers, beholding with unveiled face and heart, see the glory of Christ.⁸ p. 178

In wrestling with the same problems, Hengstenberg takes a different tack, stressing the internal and the deeper as the newness; great depth, stability and internality appear as key elements of it. In fact, after reviewing the different items in the New Covenant and showing that they were in place under the ‘old covenant’, he concludes: ‘We have thus

⁶ Wilber Wallis, ‘Irony in Jeremiah’s Prophecy of a New Covenant’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, XII (1969), p. 107.

⁷ See Wallis, p. 109.

⁸ Wallis, p. 109.

before us merely a difference in degree.⁹ The degree, extent and depth of the experience of God are much richer and fuller. As [Hebrews 10](#) adds, worshippers now have a ‘cleansed conscience’ because of the finality and completeness of Jesus’ sacrifice. Comparing Jesus’ statements in [John 14:16–17](#) with the New Covenant promise of [Ezekiel 36:25–27](#), the *permanency* of the Spirit’s indwelling appears as new also, enabling us to partake of God’s nature, making his Torah an internal motivating principle of our natures and enabling us to carry out its instructions ([Rom. 8:4](#)).

The repeated violations of his covenant make this statement stand ever more beautifully as an expression of God’s grace. Despite the broken covenant, he renews the terms and grants even greater blessing. He then takes it all one step further, extending the scope of the covenant. *All* people ([Jer. 31:34](#)) will participate in its provisions—perhaps another element of its newness.

A resolution to the problem of newness apparently lies in a combination of Wallis’ and Hengstenberg’s insights. However, one other perspective needs to be added to complete the picture, the implications of the Near Eastern covenant renewal procedure. When covenants were renewed, new documents were prepared which *brought up to date* the stipulations of the earlier documents. Deuteronomy illustrates this process ([Dt. 5:6–21; 15:5ff.](#); cf. [Ex. 12:7, 46](#)). It provides evidence for the fact that this was a renewal of the earlier covenant at the time when the leadership was transferred to Joshua. It *includes* the stipulations and sanctions of the original covenant. It is, in fact, the text of the treaty reproduced, as was common in the ancient Near East, for the dynastic succession of Joshua.¹⁰ Joshua followed the same procedure when he took leave of the people ([Josh. 24:25ff.](#)). So it served not only as a renewal of the covenant, but also as the testament of the will of Moses making Joshua his successor. This correlates directly with the statements of [Hebrew 9:16–17](#), emphasizing the necessity for the death of the testator to [p. 179](#) effect the covenant, as Kline shows in his *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (1972).

He goes on to point out that Jesus dies as the representative of God, putting the testament into effect. He then rises as the heir, succeeding to the throne. Jesus’ reticence to proclaim himself the Messianic king may reflect this perspective.

In addition to the perspectives of irony, internality, enabling, extent and renewal as they relate to the New Covenant, the principle of [Galatians 3:17](#) applies to any covenant discussion. One covenant does not set aside another. One does not invalidate another so as to nullify its stipulations. Rather, it renews, expands, adapts, updates.

THE NATURE OF FULFILMENT IN THE BIBLE

The fulfilment theme in Hebrews maintains the divine origin and establishment of the Jewish system. Rather than manifesting an attitude of disparagement or annulment, Hebrews hallows, reveres and makes prominent. So Judaism foreshadows Jesus as it is fulfilled in and highlights him. He takes it up in himself, and crowns, fills out and gives meaning to the Jewish system. This cannot be adequately seen if the Jewish system, the ‘highlighter’, is removed from the picture. It is not set aside but serves as a good contemporary teacher pointing to Jesus. Set the system aside, and you remove the pointer.

The objection usually comes at this point. ‘The argument of Hebrews demonstrates that the new is better than the old; so the old is set aside.’ But Hebrews applies the same

⁹ Hengstenberg, p. 250.

¹⁰ Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 9–14, 122.

argument to angels as to the old covenant. If the old is set aside and void, by the same argument the angels must be as well!

Jesus' teachings in [Matthew 5:17-19](#) shed further light on the meaning of fulfilment. He uses 'abolish' and 'fulfil' as opposites here. The Greek term used, *kataluo*, conveys the idea of 'do away with', 'annul', 'make invalid', or 'repeal'.¹¹ Jesus did not come to do this to the Jewish system. In fact, he mentions 'not abolish' twice to emphasize his point. The Greek construction connecting 'not abolish' and 'fulfil' (*ouk ... alla*) indicates a strong contrast. It reinforces the Opposite nature of the two ideas, implying that one contradicts the other. They are thus shown as mutually exclusive. [p. 180](#)

The word 'fulfil' (*plēroō*) carries a variety of nuances: (a) make full, fill full, fill out fully; (b) make complete, confirm; (c) show forth in its true meaning, bring to full expression. The prominent idea here is 'bring to full expression', 'show forth in its true meaning'. And, as the context brings out (vv. [20ff.](#)), the idea of 'fill out fully' also plays a significant role.

Further as Beecher reminds us, the Bible presents fulfilment as cumulative, not disjunctive.¹² The passage conveys the image of a crown. A crown shows something off in its full radiance. The whole Jewish system foreshadows Jesus and highlights him, emphasizing his brilliance and glory. He, in turn, takes it up in himself and crowns it; he fills it out and gives it meaning. He shows it off in its full radiance and significance.

We can conclude, then, that Jesus came as the fullest expression of the Jewish system, thoroughly consistent with it in its pure form, as the central, integral, and essential part of it. He showed us its true meaning and lifted it to new heights (cf. its previous heights in [Psa. 19, 119](#)). He crammed it full to the brim.

THE NATURE OF THE PEOPLE & BELIEFS ADDRESSED BY HEBREWS

Scholars have frequently argued about the kind of people addressed by the author of Hebrews. Some have made a case for a Gentile audience, while others have argued for a Jewish one. Both positions have their problems.

The main problem in identifying the nature of the addressees has been the very strange combination of beliefs which the readers are urged not to return to, or exhorted to move away from. What Jewish group would have held to a theology that combined the veneration of angels, Mosaic prophetology, the exaltation of Melchizedek, the portrayal of the cultus in terms of the wilderness tabernacle, and the vital importance of the sacrifice system ...¹³

This combination does not fit the Pharisees or Sadducees, for example. The priesthood and cultus as concepts of importance would be alien to Pharisees, as angels and the tabernacle would be to the Sadducees. However, Melchizedek as a main theme is perhaps the most [p. 181](#) problematic to assign to a Jewish group. He plays a very prominent role in Hebrews (especially chapters [5-7](#)), but has little or no significance for the commonly known Jewish sects. The Dead Sea community at Qumran (probably Essenes) stands as the one exception. Melchizedek figured prominently in their thinking. He had a heavenly position and played an active role as an eschatological saviour. Identified with the Messiah in some way, he was expected to come to proclaim release to the captives and atonement

¹¹ See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1967), p. 415.

¹² William Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1963), pp. 365-386.

¹³ Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 160.

for their sins. Anointed by the Spirit, he would punish the wicked in the last days.¹⁴ A closer examination of the beliefs addressed in Hebrews and a comparison with the Qumran teachings demonstrates their close relationship and argues for an Essene-type audience for Hebrews.

The following analysis depends on the work of Yigael Yadin.¹⁵

As deduced from the argument of Hebrews, its readers believed that angels would play an important role in the last days. They would operate under the direct order of God and not as servants to a Messianic agent (1:6–7, 14). In the world to come they would possess certain controlling powers and dominion (1:13; 2:1 ff.). Their status would be such that they would possess some sort of qualities of sonship in relation to God (1:5ff.). In comparison, the Essenes believed that the angel of light, Michael, would assist the ‘children of righteousness’. His authority would be magnified, and he would have dominion over the ‘children of light’ (1QM 13.9–10; 1QS 3.20; 24–25). Angels, in general, would have controlling powers, and God would operate through them directly (1QH 10.8, 1QH Fragment 2, 1.3). The scrolls also speak of angels as sons of heaven or sons of God (1QH Fragment 2, 1.3; 1QH 3.1–22; 1QS 11.7–8).

The readers of Hebrews expected a Messianic priest figure or a priestly Messiah, specifically from the tribe of Aaron (5:1f.). He would rival or be superior to Messiah the king (7:18). He would oversee a restored and purified sacrificial system, which would be primary in importance, as well as efficacious (10:1ff.; 9:25–26). Similarly, those at Qumran recognized a Messiah ‘from Aaron’ as well as one ‘from Israel,’ a priestly Messiah and a kingly one (CDC 12:22; 13.1; 14.19; p. 182 20.1; 1QS 11.11). The priestly Messiah would assume a leading role over the kingly one in the conduct of the war against the enemy, and both would serve under Michael (1QM). The scrolls call this priestly Messiah ‘the chief priest’ and ‘prince of the whole congregation’ (1QM 5.1; CDC 7.18–21; 1QSb 3.20–21). The full ritual of the sacrifices would be resumed in prominence in the last days under the direction of the chief priest and would provide atonement for the congregation (1QM 2.1–6).

In the last days the readers of Hebrews looked for a prophet, separate from the Messiah, to appear with a new revelation (1:1–2; cf. the stress on Jesus as the *final* revelation and on his superiority to the *prophets*). This probably reflects the widespread belief in the eschatological role of the ‘prophet like Moses’. (Dt. 18:18ff., cf. Mt. 16:14; Jn. 6:14). This Mosaic prophet apparently had some connection with the New Covenant (9:15ff.). The Dead Sea community believed in the coming of a prophet separate from the two Messiahs: ‘... until the coming of a prophet and of the Messiahs from Aaron and Israel,’ (1QS 9.11). They apparently considered him a ‘second Moses’, and as such perhaps expected him to serve as the mediator of the New Covenant between God and Israel (cf. the beginning of *Assumption of Moses*).

Hebrews frequently refers to biblical passages about the tabernacle—which was quite distinct from the Temple system—and the wilderness wanderings (chs. 3–4, 9–10, etc.). The repeated references to the wilderness tabernacle are quite striking because the readers lived in Temple days over a thousand years after the wilderness tabernacle. Apparently, the author tries to prove his points by using concepts close to the readers’ outlook and understood by them. So, he shows that Jesus fulfils important aspects of the

¹⁴ Yigael Yadin, ‘A Note on Melchizedek and Qumran’, *Israeli Exploration Journal* XV (1965) pp. 152–154; G. W. Buchanan *To the Hebrews*, Anchor gibe series (Doubleday: Garden City NY, 1972) pp. 99–100 Cf. also Longenecker p 161.; cf. the Melchizedek Scroll, 11Q Mel.

¹⁵ Yigael Yadin, ‘The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin (Magnes Press: Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 36–55.

tabernacle (ch. 9ff.). Significantly, the Qumran community organized themselves as a replica of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness. (Cf. 1QM, 1QS, and CDC on the entire following discussion.) They called their leaders by the same titles as those in Exodus, and their age requirements for service in the congregation and in war correspond to those in Numbers. They referred to themselves as ‘exiles in the wilderness’ and believed they would enter a new land of promise. While they awaited this, they imitated Israel’s pattern of life in the wilderness. They were, therefore, quite familiar with the tabernacle and partial to it. They used the same measurements for their weapons as those given for the tabernacle furniture. Because they felt the existing Temple and its services were defiled by the corruption and present order of the priesthood, they viewed the tabernacle system as purer. [p. 183](#)

A couple of other things should be added about the nature of those addressed by Hebrews. The strong emphasis on the New Covenant (chs. 8–10) may also reflect a background of Essene beliefs. The Essenes felt that they were members of the New Covenant (CDC 6.19; 8.21; 20.12).¹⁶ In fact, yearly they celebrated the renewing of this covenant on Shavuot (Pentecost).¹⁷ The Essenes also would have felt right at home with the stress on the end of days (cf. 1QM) found right at the outset of Hebrews ([1:2](#)). Finally, if Hebrews was written in the tense period before the revolt against Rome, the Messianic Jews were facing a difficult choice and test of loyalty either to their nation or their Messiah. The author warns them not to revert to a Judaism without the Messiah.¹⁸

Now that we have examined the nature of covenant renewal in the Near East, the nature of fulfilment in the Bible, and the nature of the people and beliefs addressed by Hebrews, we are better prepared to analyze the crucial passages in the book of Hebrews.

THE CRUCIAL PASSAGES IN HEBREWS

Although not usually so interpreted, some have used [Hebrews 6:1–2](#) as an attack on Judaism and Jewish identity.

But is this so evident? Westcott,¹⁹ for example, equates the elementary teaching with the first teaching of the apostles (cf. [Acts 2:38](#); [4:2](#), [33](#); [8:16f.](#)). The context ([5:11f.](#)) reinforces Westcott’s understanding and militates against the former interpretation. The context equates ‘elementary teaching’ with milk, those first principles which fed the young believers. These are necessary for early growth but are inadequate to fuel further development. As a person grows properly, he grows beyond the ABC’s and moves on to that which assists his maturity. As Bruce²⁰ restyles the author’s point: you have remained immature long enough; I am going to give you something which will take you out of your immaturity. The ‘milk’ and the ABC’s do not pertain solely to Jewish teachings but apply more broadly to [p. 184](#) basic teachings given to new believers in general, as the context indicates. [Hebrews 6](#) challenges us to build on these, not abandon them.

¹⁶ Buchanan, p. 137.

¹⁷ Frank M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Duckworth: London, 1958), p. 164.

¹⁸ Longenecker, p. 162; cf. Alexander Nairne, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. lxxv–lxxvi. On the dating of Hebrews see John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 200–220.

¹⁹ B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 143.

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 111.

[Hebrews 8](#) poses a more difficult problem. The passage speaks of a better covenant and better promises (vv. [6](#), [13](#)). Apparently this sets aside the old, doing away with the Jewish system, as some would assert. Note first though, the passage speaks of a 'better covenant' and 'better promises' not a better Torah. God's Torah could not be improved, as [Galatians 3:21](#) implies. Besides, how could you improve on something God describes as 'holy, just and good,' and as 'spiritual' ([Rom. 7:12, 14](#))? Further, Jesus clearly stated that he fulfilled, not set aside, the Torah. Hebrews would not contradict this clear teaching.

To what, then, do the better promises and better covenant refer? Clearly the reference involves a *covenant* and *promises*. From the context they refer to the *New Covenant promise* of the Torah on the heart (v. [10](#)). This is the new dimension of the covenant—internality and enabling. However, it is based on the same Torah; it has just been internalized, not set aside. It is no longer simply an objective criterion outside the believer. It invades him as his very essence, driving force and motivating impulse from within. This fits the conclusions of our survey on Near Eastern covenant procedure. Jeremiah spoke in ironical terms about the 'new' covenant whereby the people would experience the kind of intimate relationship with God he intended for them under the previous covenants. So it was really a renewed covenant, ratifying the past covenants and enabling its participants to experience the intended benefits. As in the Near East with the renewal of covenants, here also the relationship and obligations continued but were brought up-to-date (as for example, the Sermon on the Mount, which explains, adapts and expands the Torah). The dimension of enabling and internality remains as the striking 'newness' of the covenant.

Verse [7](#) goes on to state that the first covenant was not faultless. But as the context demonstrates (vv. [8–9](#)), the problem resides not with the covenant, promises or Torah, but with man. He 'finds fault with [blames] them' (v. [8](#)) because '*they* did not continue in my covenant' (v. [9](#)). Or, as Jeremiah put it ([31:32](#)), 'which covenant *they* broke'. To this, [Romans 8:3](#) adds that it was 'weak because of the flesh'. The passages emphasize man's inability to keep the covenant. This perspective is emphasized by the terms in verses [7](#) and [8](#). 'Faultless'—referring to the covenant—and 'blaming'—referring to man—come from the same root, making the point that the covenant was not blameless because the Jewish people could not keep it.²¹ p. 185

Verse [13](#) adds the phrases 'obsolete', 'growing old' and 'ready to disappear'. Once again these refer to the covenant, not the Torah, and do so because of the new dimension. Further, the term 'obsolete' means 'outdated' or 'antiquated', not 'annulled'. The new dimension makes the former covenant antiquated. The believer, by the Spirit of God, can now accomplish what before he was commanded but was not able to carry out. Thus, there is now a better way to accomplish the same old objectives. ([Romans 8:4](#) proclaims the same message.)

Notice, too, that verse [13](#) says 'growing old' and 'ready to disappear', not 'old' and 'having disappeared'. The former still has a present use. This reflects the 'already and not yet' tension expressed by Jocz and the interplay of old and new noticed by Cullmann, as cited earlier. The ultimate fulfilment of the 'new' awaits the Messianic age when 'everyone shall know God' (v. [11](#)) and 'the Torah will go forth from Zion' ([Isa. 2:3](#)).²²

[Hebrews 9:3–10](#) poses still another problem for continuance of Jewish practice and identity, particularly verse [10](#) which seems to indicate an end for the 'regulations of food and drink and various washings'. Clearly the context (vv. [7](#), [9](#), [12–13](#), [19](#)) refers to the

²¹ Buchanan, pp. 137–138.

²² Cf. W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age or the Age to Come* (Society of Biblical Research: Philadelphia, 1952).

sacrificial system that existed in both tabernacle and Temple. The main point of the passage occurs in verse [8](#): ‘the way into the holy place had not yet been disclosed’. In other words, the people had no direct, unhindered, free access to God within that structure. ‘The people were separated from the object of their devotion.’²³ So, the author contrasts the free access to God with the symbolic limited access permitted by the tabernacle and Temple.²⁴ Verse [9](#) explains verse [8](#) and then verse [10](#) modifies verse [9](#), thus continuing the expansion of verse [8](#). Therefore, the regulations of food, drink and washings in verse [10](#) refer to those associated with the sacrifice system and not to the food laws, other washings, *et al.*, ‘... the accompaniments of the sacrifice, the personal requirements with which they were connected ...’²⁵ These regulations relating to the sacrifices were temporary as was the sacrificial system. However, as the text notes (v. [9](#)), even this was a picture or lesson for ‘the present time’ (‘then’ is not in the Greek text); it served a present function. [p. 186](#)

The text concludes by stating that the regulations were imposed until a time of ‘reformation’ or ‘new order’. The term ‘reformation’ used here implies reconstruction,²⁶ renewal as opposed to building a new structure. It means ‘making straight’, the idea of making stable,²⁷ reminiscent of Kimchi’s statement cited earlier: ‘It will not be the newness of the covenant, but its stability.’ Qumran, too, eagerly anticipated this time of the *renewal* of creation after final judgement.²⁸ This verse refers to the time initiated by Jesus, with his one *permanent* sacrifice replacing the many *temporary* ones (as chapters [9](#) and [10](#) go on to develop).

[Hebrews 13:10–14](#) stands as the last major, crucial passage relating to Jewish continuity. Verse [13](#) expressed the key to the paragraph, ‘bearing his reproach’. It states the only command in the section, ‘go to him outside the camp’. ‘Bearing his reproach’ then modifies the command, explaining its meaning. The command emphasizes identifying with Jesus ‘go to *him* ...’ So, the author stresses, not leaving behind, but identifying with Jesus even if it means reproach and persecution. The Dead Sea community, and those influenced by it, would have understood reproach because of the stand they had taken in separating themselves. To them, Hebrews says: ‘Now suffer reproach for a worthier cause, the Messiah himself.’ Remember, if Hebrews was written just prior to the revolt against Rome, this would have been a time of real pressure for greater harmony and unanimity, to stick with the system as is, to ‘not make waves’. Differences could easily have resulted in great ‘reproach’.

Does the phrase ‘outside the camp’ then imply leaving the Jewish system? Westcott makes an interesting observation but does not follow through on the implications.

Moses did originally set up the tent or meeting ‘outside the camp’ ([Ex. 33:7](#)) and spoke with God there, making it the earliest and ‘purest’ form of established worship—from Essene eyes. The sacrifices originally took place here (cf. [Heb. 13:11–12](#)), making it the true centre of the religious system, the place of communicating with God. Even later, it was the place for the cleansing ashes of the red heifer ([Num. 19:9](#)). The Yom Kippur

²³ Westcott, p. 252.

²⁴ Bruce, p. 195.

²⁵ Westcott, p. 254.

²⁶ Bruce, p. 197.

²⁷ Westcott, p. 254.

²⁸ Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Thomas Nelson and Sons: New York, 1961), p. 171.

sacrifice, 'a sacrifice from which no one can eat' (cf. [Heb. 13:10](#)), was brought here to be consumed [p. 187](#) ([Lev. 16:27](#)). Jesus died here, 'outside the camp', the original place of worship and communication with God, in fulfilment of the sacrifice system and as the true centre of Judaism.

The further references to 'outside the gate' would have struck another responsive chord among the Essenes. It would have coincided with their emphasis on the purity of the tabernacle and the impurity of the Temple, 'outside the gate' indicating separateness from the 'corrupted'—for the Essenes—Temple practices. So this command does *not* refer to withdrawing from the Jewish traditions and practices. Rather, it stands as a readily understood challenge—in terms the Essenes would appreciate—to return to God and identify with true Judaism ('outside the camp and the gate') centred in Jesus, apart from whom the whole thing is bereft of its ultimate meaning, life and reality.

The Essenes would also have responded favourably to Hebrews' emphasis on 'the city to come' and not having a present 'lasting city' (v. [14](#)). They had gone outside the gate', having left the city because of their objections to the corruptness of the priesthood and its operations, e.g. impurity of the practices, wrong calendar, and so on. Therefore they believed the Temple and city had to be cleansed before true worship could take place.²⁹ They viewed themselves as 'exiles in the wilderness', awaiting entrance into a 'new—and cleansed—promised land'. So they had no present city; they looked for one to come. This would occur when Messiah ruled from Jerusalem. Verse [14](#) then repeats and reinforces the challenge of verse [13](#), using concepts and terminology familiar to the readers.

The background of the Near Eastern covenant procedures and the historical context of the Dead Sea community must affect our understanding of Hebrews. A biblical understanding of fulfilment must also shape our approach to the book. Finally, we must not push passages in Hebrews to contradict other Scriptures such as [Matthew 5:17–20](#), [Romans 7:12ff.](#), and the testimony of Acts to continued Jewish practice and identity. As these principles are kept in mind, the critical passages fall into place and the message of Hebrews becomes clear. Hebrews stresses identifying with Jesus as the true centre and intent of Judaism; it does *not* set aside Jewish identity and practice.

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Book Reviews

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORLD RELIGIONS

by Ajith Fernando

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²⁹ Buchanan, p. 235.