

THE NEW COVENANT: Perspectives from the Lord's supper traditions and from the Pauline letters¹

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Abstract

For many Christians, the concept 'New Covenant' has the connotation of 'New Testament' as opposed to the Old Testament.² 'New Covenant' is, however, also a thoroughly 'Old Testament' category (Zenger 1993:7). Although the term 'New Covenant' occurs only in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the issue is also present in the salvation prophecies of Ezechiel, Zachariah, Hosea and Deutero-Isaiah. The Exile was a dark hour in Israel's history. In the Deuteronomistic history the catastrophes of 721 and 587 BCE were seen as the well deserved wrath of God on a people which continued to be unfaithful to the only true God. The question arose whether this judgment was final or only temporal. The salvation prophecy of the prophets named above was: the old is gone, Yahweh is to create something new - a new Exodus, a New Covenant, a new Moses! (cf Von Rad 1982:140-41). The development of Old Testament covenant theology reached its goal with the prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. The creation of the most important theological system with which Israel described her relation with Yahweh, found its full expression with the promise of the New Covenant (cf Levin 1985:11-13).

1. Introduction: A New Covenant within the Old

As the crisis unfolded and reached its climax with the fall of Judah's king and the destruction of its temple in 587 BCE, a message of hope remained for the people. The preaching of Jeremiah, who had prophesied a future for his nation and people (Jer 32:1-15, especially v 15; cf 31:2-9,20) played an important role within this context. In the light of these events and with a deep consciousness of the importance of Jeremiah's preaching, the Deuteronomic school developed its covenant theology. They came to look beyond the uncertainties of a conditional covenant agreement with God to the greater certainties of the divine grace and love.

A new message of hope was preached, a message which did not discard the old covenant theology, but which came to extend it in very distinctive directions: the promise of a New Covenant (Jer 31:31-32). The substance of Jeremiah's assurance of a future for the nation is taken up in this famous prophecy, set in the distinctive language of covenant

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 - 2 Despite the criticism of Kutsch (1971;1973;1978;1981) against the translation of *berit* with 'covenant' (German: 'Bund'), this translation still seems to be the best, provided that the meaning of 'covenant' is deduced from the contexts in which it is used (cf Barr 1977; Herrmann 1986). In rendering the Old Testament term *berit*, the Septagint translators employed mainly *diatheke* in place of *sunthekē*. (According to Kutsch (1971) the LXX renders *berit* circa 267X with *diatheke*.) Louw and Nida (1988) explains this phenomenon by pointing out that the translators of the Septuagint evidently wished to emphasise the fact that the initiative for such a covenantal relationship existed with one person rather than being the result of negotiation and compromise. *Diatheke* in the New Testament has two possibilities of meaning: i) 'covenant' and ii) 'will, testament' (in Gl 3:15; Heb 9:16,17) [Louw and Nida 1988].

theology. It promises a new kind of covenant:

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer 31:33).³

God will, therefore, not only set the conditions of the covenant, but he himself will - by his action in the human heart - give the power and strength to fulfill them (cf Ezk 36:26-27) [Clements 1978:102-103].

1.1 The 'New Covenant in the Land of Damascus'

The message of the New Covenant, which first resounded in the eighth century BCE, also functioned - outside the early Christian church - in the Essene community at Qumran.

The astonishing - and somewhat ominous - phrase 'New Covenant in the land of Damascus'⁴ occurs only in the *Damascus (Zadokite) Documents* (6:19; 8:21 = 19:33/34 and 20:12).⁵ When using this phrase, the writer of this document looks back to a time already passed and refers not to the present community, but to the previous one.

In the light of 6:19, it seems as if the observance of appointed days, perhaps especially fast-days were

of great importance to the 'New Covenant in the land of Damascus'. The 'well of living water' in 8:21 refers within this context (commencing at CD 6.3) to the Torah. For those associated with the 'New Covenant in the land of Damascus' the observance of the Torah was of existential importance.

Although the 'New Covenant in the land of Damascus' was no self-description of the present community, but a reference to the preceding one, an analogy exists between both these groups: *the same obligation to observe the stipulations of the Torah* also rests on the present community (Lichtenberger and Stegemann 1991:135-36).

The 'New Covenant' in Qumran is not opposed to the 'Old Covenant' as is the case in the New Testament, but may be distinguished from the 'covenant of God', associated with membership of the present community. A serious study of the Mosaic law was required from people entering the covenant. Strict obedience to the law's demands as interpreted by the priestly hierarchy was required of each member. The covenant had its obligations, and like the Mosaic covenant, these obligations were fortified by blessings and curses (cf IQS 2:1-18).

Although the covenant and entering the community are related to one another, they are not to be equated. 'Covenant' is the given entity; it does not come into being by entering the community (cf Lichtenberger and Stegemann 1991:136).

In IQS 1:16-17b a clear difference is made between entering into the community and entering into the covenant: 'All those who enter into the order of the community, shall enter into the covenant before God', which is then more closely defined as 'to act according to everything which He has commanded' (Wernberg-Moller 1957:2).

3 Unless stated, Biblical quotations in English are from the RSV.

4 'the land of Damascus' is a cryptonym for their place of exile in the Qumran desert (cf Lundbom 1992:1090).

5 6:18b-19: To keep the Sabbath day according to its exact rules and the appointed days and the fast-day according to the finding of the members of the 'new covenant' in the land of Damascus. 8:19,21: And like this case is that of everyone who despises the commandments of God and who abandon them ... All the men that have entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus and have acted faithlessly again and have forsaken the well of living water shall not be reckoned with the gathering of the people...20:8b,11,12,13: And like this is the case of everyone who despises the law ... for they spoke error against the righteous ordinances and despised the covenant and compact which they established (or: swore) in the land of Damascus, which is the new covenant; and they and their families shall have no share in the house of the Law (Rabin 1958:24,36,38).

Entrance into the community, entrance into the covenant, fulfillment of the commandments and separation from evil-doers belong together in the Essene documents. And yet the covenant is extolled in IQS 1:8 as a 'covenant of *grace*'. Especially in the Hodayot, it is clear that God is subject of the covenant. It is *God's covenant* in which those who are in danger can put their trust. A very clear distinction must, however, be made between those who enter the covenant and those who do not. On those who remain outside rests the curse of the covenant (IQS 2:16; 5:12). But on those who live in perfect holiness according to all the instructions of the covenant 'the covenant of God shall stand fast ... to keep them alive for thousands of generations...' (CD 7:5-6; 3 cf Lichtenberger and Stegemann 1991:137-38). The demand for total obedience is set within the framework of gratuitous election, a theme especially accentuated in the 'Thanksgiving Hymns', cf 1QH 15:13-15:

And I know that in Thy hand is the purpose of all spirit and his work. Thou hadst established before Thou createdst him. And how can anyone change Thy words. (It is) Thou alone that didst create. And from the womb Thou didst establish him for the appointed time of (Thy) good pleasure, so that he may take heed of thy covenant and to walk in all (Thy ways) (Mansoor 1961:63; cf also Murphy-O'Connor 1989:201).

The covenant concept in the Qumran community was associated very closely with the Law of Moses, cf IQS 5:7-9: '...every one who enters into the council of the community, shall enter into God's covenant ... He shall undertake by a binding oath to return to the Torah of Moses, according to everything which He has commanded, with all heart and soul...' Although the concept of a 'New Covenant' also functioned in the Essene community, it was not understood in the sense of Jeremiah 31:31-34.⁶ The stability of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31 is grounded in the implanting of the Torah within humankind, the inner change brought about at the time of salvation. Contrary to this main thrust of Jeremiah 31:31-34, CD 16:1-2 reads: 'Therefore a man shall *impose upon himself* by oath to return to the Law of Moses' [emphasis mine].⁷

2. The New Covenant in the New Testament Message about the Institution of the Lord's Supper

2.1 Differences and Agreement Among Different Traditions

In the New Testament the idea of a New Covenant is encountered first in the descriptions of the institution of the Lord's supper (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:15-20 and 1 Cor 11:23-26).⁸ These four reports about the institution of the Lord's Supper may be

6 Murphy-O'Connor (1989:200) also emphasises that the New Covenant in CD is not thought of as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jer 31:31; cf also Collins (1963:556-65).

7 Lundblom (1992:1090) points out that the New Covenant idea undergoes no further development in Judaism. The Midrashim contain merely a few citations of Jer 31:33 for purposes of focusing on the problem of remembering the Torah. Midr Cant 8:14 interprets the phrase about God writing the Torah on people's hearts to mean that God recalls for the people what they themselves have forgotten and what has led them into error. In the Midrashic literature the Jeremiah verse is often given a meaning closer to the one it had originally: forgetting the Torah can be expected in the Present World, only in the World to Come, when the Torah is truly written on the heart, will people no longer forget it (Midr Qoh 2:1; Midr Cant 1:2; Midr Pesiq 107a; Midr Yal on Jer 31:33).

8 The establishment of the New Covenant is connected to the 'cup word' [German: Becherwort]: Mt 26: 27b-28: Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Mk 14:24: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Lk 22:20: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

1 Cor 11:25: This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

grouped into two traditions: the Matthian/Markan tradition and the Lukan/Pauline tradition.

The Matthian/Markan tradition put bread/body and wine/blood next to each other. The tradition represented by Paul and Luke on the other hand relates bread/body to cup/New Covenant and also contains the instruction by Jesus to repeat this act in remembrance of him. (This instruction is connected in Paul to both the bread and the cup, in Luke only to the bread.)⁹

Despite the differences between these reports, the agreement between them as far as *the meaning of the Lord's Supper* is concerned, needs to be pointed out (cf Lang 1986:151; Wolff 1982:88).

Both in Paul and in the Synoptic Gospels the foundation of the institution of the Lord's Supper in Jesus' *historical* passion history is emphasised. The institution of the Lord's Supper is, therefore, demarcated from the eternal cyclic myths and formulae of the Mystery Religions (Klauck 1984:82). In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul repudiated mishappenings in the way the congregation celebrated the Lord's Supper, by referring to the tradition of the institution of the Lord's Supper stemming from the earthly Jesus himself.

The establishment of the eschatological covenant through *Jesus' death on the cross* (cf Mk 14:24: 'This is my blood of the covenant'; Lk 22:20 and 1 Cor 11:25: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood') is an essential part of the Lord's Supper tradition. The aim of the interpretation process of the Lord's Supper within the New Testament is to point to the establishment of a new, universal, eschatological order of Salvation (a New Covenant) through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf Lang 1975:537). The 'cup word' of Jesus interprets the Eucharistic Meal as a *covenant* meal. The covenant celebrated, is the new community of life ('*neue Lebensgemeinschaft*') made possible by the death of Jesus (Kertelge 1994:142).

All four reports about the institution of the Lord's Supper have a significant *eschatological orientation*. In Mark and Matthew the description of the institution of the Lord's Supper closes with a view on the eschatological meal in God's Kingdom (cf Mk 14:25; Mt 26:29). The Lukan narration bears an eschatological stamp from the very beginning - already in Luke 22:16 Jesus speaks about the fulfillment of the Passover Meal in God's Kingdom. Paul's depiction of the institution of the Eucharist closes with the words 'until he [the Lord] comes' (1 Cor 11:26).

The foundation of the covenant in the context of the institution of the Lord's Supper has eminent *soteriological* meaning (cf 'for many' in the Pauline-Lukan tradition; 'for you' in Mark and Matthew). Those who celebrate the 5 Eucharist are drawn into the salvific event of Jesus' self-surrender. In the Lord's Supper tradition the death of Jesus is not interpreted as a theological theory - what is emphasised is the salvific reality of Jesus' atoning death (cf Levin 1985:272)

2.2 Old Testament Motifs

In the Lord's Supper tradition the death of Jesus is interpreted in the light of different *Old Testament motifs*. In Mark 14:24 'blood' and 'covenant' are closely related to one another by a genitive construction ('This is my blood of the covenant...'). This verse alludes to Exodus 24:8 where Moses interpreted the blood which he sprinkled on the people with the words: 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'. Through the death of Jesus a covenant is established. The blood of Jesus stands in typological opposition to the blood of the old covenant (cf Gnlika

⁹ A historical reconstruction of the oldest tradition falls beyond the scope of this paper. This has been attempted e.g. in Jeremias (1967); Hahn (1975); Patsch (1972); Merklein (1977); Klauck (1982).

1979:239).¹⁰

The rendering *tò ekchunnómenon upèr pollōn* (which is poured out for many) explicitly alludes to Isaiah 53:12 (cf Hahn 1963:61). The death of the Servant of God in Isaiah 53 has an atoning dimension (McKenzie 1968:136). Mark 14:24 states that the blood of the covenant is poured out 'for many' (*upèr pollōn*). In the Qumran community the concept 'the many' was used in a narrower sense, referring to the community. In the context of the Servant of the Lord songs this concept cannot be narrowed down to Israel. The Servant is called 'a light to the nations' (cf Isaiah 42:6; 49:7f). The atonement has a universal orientation¹¹ and the newly established covenant obtains universal significance.

In Luke 22:20 Jesus says: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you'. The cup symbolically represents the New Covenant. It points to the sacrificial death of Jesus by which the New Covenant is founded. *Kainós* is not to be understood in a chronological, but in an eschatological sense - as an eschatological new beginning. In the Septuagint *kainós* is connected to *diathēkē* in Jeremiah 38 (31):31.¹² The Old Testament Texts dealing with the covenant established with blood at Sinai (Ex 24:8) and with the promise of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) compliment each other and are closely related to one another within the Lord's Supper tradition: Jeremiah 31:31 supplies the history of salvation background, Exodus 24:8 offers the notion of blood which is related to the death of Jesus. In the Matthian/Markan tradition the allusion is primarily to Exodus 24:8; in the Lukan/Pauline tradition the background is especially constituted by Jeremiah 31:31-34.

2.3 The Ecclesiological Dimension of the New Covenant in the Context of the Lord's Supper

In his theology of the Old Testament H D Preuß (1991:82) emphasises that throughout the Old Testament the covenant with the living God always concerns the people, not only single persons. God always took the initiative in founding a covenant - with the primary aim of separating a people from amongst the nations, a people which worships him only as the true God.

Within the Qumran community (see 1.1 above) the concept of 'covenant' had a sociological as well as a soteriological dimension. Those who entered the covenant separated themselves from their sinful environment and constituted a separate community in order to obtain salvation.

The Last Supper relates to the meals Jesus had during his ministry with people, with the disciples and with sinners (Gnilka 1979:244).¹³ The synoptic tradition shows, that Jesus repeatedly mentioned to his disciples (cf Lk 13:29¹⁴ /Mt 8:11; Lk 14:15-24/Mt 22:1-14) the eschatological banquet for all peoples on Sion (Is 25:6-8¹⁵). The Last Supper in Jerusalem

10 In Targum Onkelos and Jeruschalmi I atoning significance is ascribed to the blood in Ex 24:8. This tradition of interpretation had an effect on the tradition about the Lord's Supper, especially in the Matthian/Markan version.

11 Gnilka (1979:246) is correct in this regard, over against Pesch (1980:360) who pins this concept (*upèr pollōn*) down to the totality of Israel (cf also Roloff 1993:56f.)

12 Within the New Testament *kainós* is related to *diathēkē* in 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8,13; 9:15.

13 Robbins (1976:21-40) defends the thesis that the Last Supper completes the drama of the Feeding Stories (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-10).

14 Lk 13:29: And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God.

15 Is 25:6-8: On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees ... And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces...

is determined by the prospect of this feast. It is distinguished from Jesus' table communion with publicans and sinners through the fact that it was a Passover Meal¹⁶ and only the twelve were present. They represent according to Luke 22:28-30/Matthew 19:28 the eschatological people of God (cf Stuhlmacher 1992:133). The fact that only the twelve were present, emphasises their function as symbol of the eschatological Israel (Roloff 1993:52).

A meal served within the Jewish community not only to satisfy hunger, but also to ground and protect the realisation of communion among people.¹⁷ When celebrating the Lord's Supper, communion is not only gained with Christ, but also between those who participate themselves.

Through the Eucharist, participation with the body of Christ is gained: 'The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?' (1 Cor 10:16). The 'body of Christ' gains a double meaning: within the context of the word explaining the meaning of the bread, it refers to the eucharistic body of the Lord, communion with the crucified and exalted Lord. In Pauline theology 'body of Christ' also portrays the congregation, the church.¹⁸

3. The covenant of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3)

The first passage where Paul takes up the concept of covenant (*diathēkē*) outside the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:25), is 2 Corinthians 3. The pericope 2 Corinthians 3:4-4:6 forms part of a larger section (2 Cor 2:14-6:10), dealing with Paul's apostolic ministry (cf Gräbe 1990:137-42).

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul describes his ministry as ministry of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is immediately qualified *pneumatologically*: it is not of the letter, but of the Spirit (*ou grāmματος allā pneúmatos*).¹⁹

The concept of a 'New Covenant' is fully at home in Paul's thought, even though the expression itself occurs only seldom (cf Furnish 1984:197-99).²⁰ The idea conveyed by the Lord's Supper tradition that the New Covenant was instituted in and with Jesus' death is compatible with Paul's understanding of the gospel as the 'word of the cross'. God's eschatological power is made present and effective for salvation in Christ's death (1 Cor 1:18; cf Rm 1:16-17). The significance of Jesus' death is explained in Pauline theology not

16 The question arises whether this meal actually was a Passover Meal. An effort was made to harmonise the chronology of the Synoptic Gospels with that of John by referring to Qumran. (The sun calendar is followed in Qumran, while people orientated themselves in Jerusalem according to the moon calendar.) This attempt was, however, unconvincing as John does not wish to convey the impression that the meal Jesus enjoyed with his disciples was a Paschal Meal. The chronology of the Synoptic Gospels is to be preferred for the following reasons: i. Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover Meal in the city of Jerusalem. (It was prescribed that this meal should be celebrated within the walls of Jerusalem.) ii. The Paschal Meal was celebrated during the night, as is affirmed by the old tradition about the institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:23-26. This time was not conventional, since it was customary to take the main meal before sun set. In John the chronology is changed because of theological reasons: As the true lamb, Jesus died on the hour the Paschal lambs were slaughtered (cf Jn 1:29; 19:33-36) (Gnilka 1990:282).

17 According to Ex 12:3 the Paschal Meal should be a family feast (cf Gnilka 1990:282).

18 Gnilka (1994:122) points out that this deliberately concipiated double meaning has to be born in mind when interpreting a text such as 1 Cor 10:17: 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.' The unity of the congregation, expressed by the celebration of the Lord's Supper, is symbolised by the one eucharistic bread.

19 Although some commentators take these words as a description of ministers (e.g Meyer 1890:465; Plummer 1915:88), it must be agreed with Furnish (1984:199) that they are more suitably regarded as qualitative genitives referring to the New Covenant. 22

20 Within the Pauline letters *diathēkē* (in the sense of 'covenant') occurs only in (Rm 9:4; 11:27); 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6,14; Gal 4:24. Cf also Eph 2:12.

only in terms of a 'New Covenant', but also in terms of a 'new creation'. The promise of a new creation is bestowed upon those who by faith glory only in the cross of Christ (cf Rm 5:1-11) and the reality of that new creation is manifested already in the 'newness' which marks the present lives of those who live by faith (Rm 6:4; 7:6; 2 Cor 7 5:14-17).

The New Covenant idea is also in accordance with Paul's conviction that salvation must be understood essentially as promise, not as performance. Because, as here in 2 Corinthians (1:22; 5:5) Paul can write of the Spirit as the 'guarantee' of - or the 'down payment' on - the promised inheritance of salvation, he finds it appropriate to contrast life according to the law (or 'the flesh') with life according to the Spirit's guidance (cf inter alia Gl 5:16-25; Rm 8:1-17); the law means 'sin and death' (Rm 8:2,6), but the Spirit means 'life and peace' (Rm 8:6) and 'righteousness' (Rm 8:10).

The same distinction between 'letter' and 'Spirit' which Paul makes in his qualification of the New Covenant [*ou grámmatos allà pneúmatos* (2 Cor 3:6)] is applied to circumcision in Romans 2:29. Paul asserts in this passage that having the law in its written form and being physically circumcised is no guarantee of fulfilling the law (Rm 2:27). Later in Romans Paul writes of Christians as those who are 'discharged from the law' which had held them in bondage, and thus free 'to serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not under the old written code' (*en kainótiēti pneúmatos kai ou palaiótēti grámmatos*, Rm 7:6). The distinction between 'letter' and 'Spirit' is fundamentally a distinction between two different powers, one which enslaves and one which liberates (Furnish 1984:199).²¹

2 Corinthians 3 is the chapter of the Spirit (cf 3:6 [2X], 8,17 [2X], 18). In the background of the New Covenant motif in this pericope lies not only Jeremiah 31:31-34, but also Ezekiel 36:26-27.²² True to the promises of the prophets, the New Covenant is an eschatological phenomenon brought about by the Spirit (cf Klauck 1986:37). Through Christ the old covenant (the law, in the sense that it is embraced as the way of salvation) has come to an end, and through him a New Covenant, inscribed on human hearts by the Spirit, has been given as the power and the promise of life (Furnish 1984:201).

The antithesis of law and Spirit becomes explicit in verse 6, where the Spirit is identified with a *New Covenant*, and what is written (the letter) is identified by implication with the old covenant. It is precisely at this point where Paul's idea of a 'New Covenant' is fundamentally different from the conception of it found within the Essene community at Qumran. As pointed out above (1.1) the Qumran community regarded themselves as constituting a community devoted entirely to obeying the law. At the same time this community was an eschatologically orientated community which saw itself as the heir of God's eschatological Spirit and regarded this Spirit as the basis and source of its spirituality. They seem to have had no sense whatever of any incompatibility between 'life in the Spirit' and 'life under the law'. For Paul, however, these stand over against one another as two radically different and mutually exclusive modes of existence (Furnish 1984:199; Sekki 1989:223).

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 can be viewed as a Christian 'Midrash' on Exodus 34:29-35 (Klauck 1986:37). This passage is constructed through antithesis and heightened comparison. A peculiar feature of this pericope is the three fold repetition: *Ei ... pōs ... mállon* (3:7-8); *ei ... pollō... mállon* (3:9); *ei ... pollō mállon* (3:11) [cf Gräbe 1990:141; 1992:232]. The thesis stated in this passage is that the ministry of the new covenant, to

21 Cf also Käsemann (1969:259): 'Merkwürdigerweise spricht Paulus hier ... von Geist und Buchstaben in weltweitem Horizont. Sie erschienen als kosmische Mächte...'

22 Ezk 36:26-27: A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

which Paul referred in 3:6 (identified in vv 7-11 as 'the ministry of the Spirit' [v 8], 'the ministry that brings righteousness' [v 9] and 'that which lasts' [v 11]), is attended with a far greater glory than that of Moses (here termed 'the ministry that brought death' [v 7], 'the ministry that condemns men' [v 9] and 'that was fading away' [v 11]) [Furnish 1984:226].

4. Two covenants (*dúo diathēkai*) in Galatians 4:21-31

This pericope may be viewed as the sixth argument of the *Probatio* in Galatians (cf Betz 1988:410-411). It contains the concluding proof from Scripture for the *Propositio* in Galatians 2:15-21. Employing the allegorical method of exposition of Scriptures, this passage argues that heathen Christians (such as the Galatians) are the offspring of Abraham's free wife, Sarah and not of the slave, Hagar.

Paul describes his method of exposition in verse 24a as 'allegorical' (*átiná esten allēgoróúmena*). What he calls 'allegorical' is actually - in modern terminology - a combination of allegory and typology.

Galatians 4:21-31 fulfills a key function within the whole of Paul's letter to the Galatians: the leading motif 'freedom' plays an important part in the last part of the third main section of Galatians (5:1-12) and serves in 5:13 as hinge towards the ethical part of the letter.

The abrupt way in which Paul continues his argument from 4:20 to 4:21 may be explained by the apostle's indignation over the conduct of the congregation. The problematic situation indicated in 1:6-9 now incites Paul to renewed argumentation, born out of his perplexity (*aporoúmai*) mentioned in 4:20 (cf Becker 1976:55). Paul considers it necessary to address again the theme 'law and promise' in the light of the Scriptures (Mußner 1988:316-317). Stylistically the address in verse 21 corresponds to common usage in Hellenistic *Diatribē*-literature (Betz 1988:414).

It is evident that Paul presupposes a certain exegetical and theological knowledge on the part of his readers. The contrasting of the two covenants in Galatians 4:21-31 is not the theme of this passage, but it aids Paul in his argument that it is impossible that there can be another way of salvation parallel to the gospel (Luz 1967:319; cf also Gräßer 1985:76).

The two covenants referred to in Galatians 4:21-31 are in diametrical opposition to one another. Paul proceeds from the opposition of the two women: the enslaved Hagar and the free Sarah. He not only stresses the different social statuses of these two mothers, but also underscores the difference between their two sons: The son of the slave is born *katà sárka* (according to the *flesh*) 'in the ordinary way' [NIV], the son of the free woman, however, *di' epaggelias* (as the result of a promise) (Betz 1988:416-417). The opposition between these two women is then interpreted allegorically in terms of the presupposed typological opposition between the two covenants (Luz 1967:320). Hagar and her slavery (which is also inherited by her children) symbolises the conclusion of the Sinai covenant (Becker 1976:57).²³

This process of interpretation is then continued in verses 25 and 26 with the aid of a newly introduced (though traditional) pair of oppositions, namely the *earthly* and the *heavenly* Jerusalem. The present, earthly Jerusalem belongs as the classic location of the law on the side of Sinai (=Hagar). Therefore, the following concepts belong together: *Hagar* (and her son *katà sárka*), *slavery*, the covenant of Sinai and the earthly Jerusalem (Becker 1976:57).

However, the parallel structure continued in verse 26 is incomplete - no parallel is provided for Sinai. Paul immediately contrasts the 'present' Jerusalem with the Jerusalem

²³ For a detailed discussion of the text critical problems encountered in verse 25a, cf Mußner 1988:322-323.

above (*áno*), with God in heaven.²⁴ The following notions, therefore, respectively belong together: the free woman (Sarah) and her son *di' epaggelias*, the 'new' covenant and the Jerusalem that is above. This Jerusalem 'that is above' is, however, not only a future entity of salvation, now concealed in heaven; but it is an entity already present, which is already 'our mother', that is, the matrix of those who believe in Christ. The concept 'mother' is derived from the preceding allegory and has been coined by the idea of Jerusalem (or Sion) as being the 'mother' of Israel. The heavenly Jerusalem is the mother of those believers born unto 'freedom', not of those still clinging to the law (Mußner 1988:326-327). The decisive outcome can therefore be drawn: The assembly of Christian believers does not belong under the law, but belongs to Sarah, the free woman. The heavenly Jerusalem has become an eschatological reality in the church, the fellowship of believers - in the 'new' covenant (Becker 1976:57-58).

The relationship between 2 Corinthians 3 and Galatians 4:21-31 should not go unnoticed, despite the fact that the opponents in Galatians had a stronger nomistic orientation. Although the freedom (*eleutheria*) of the congregation is specifically defined in Galatians as freedom from the law - it is also grounded (as in 2 Corinthians 3) on the basis of the gift and authority of the Spirit (cf Gl 4:29; 5:5,16-18) (Klaiber 1982:163).

The image of Jerusalem as a holy city, not belonging to this world, is derived from Old Testament references to that city containing the temple of God on earth (eg Ps 2:6; 48:2; 50:2; 78:68; Is 18:7; Mi 4:1-2). However, the present employment of this image now supersedes the literal city as political or geographical entity. Specific hopes, tied up with the real city, Jerusalem, on Mount Sion (cf for example Jl 3:5; 4:16-21) are resumed and Jerusalem could again become a metaphor for a city transcending this world (Elliot 1987:609-612).

A new era has dawned in the history of salvation. Believers do not live any longer in the old order of salvation, Sinai, but they live in a time of a new order of salvation - a New Covenant - inaugurated through the death of Jesus. It is possible to speak about the 'Jerusalem above' in the sense of Galatians 4:26, because God sent his Son, in order to make the believers his free sons (cf Gl 4:4-5). The believers have become fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household (cf Eph 2:19). Their citizenship is in heaven, from where they await the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phlp 3:20). In this sense the 'Jerusalem that is above ... is our mother'.²⁵

Motifs which play an important role in Galatians 4 also function in Hebrews 12.²⁶ In contrast to the earthly 'tangible' phenomena of the Sinai-event, Hebrews 12:22a points to Mount Zion in connection with the 'heavenly Jerusalem', 'the city of the living God'. The heavenly Jerusalem is no earthly locale any more, but a symbol of the eschatological, the other-worldly salvation. The position of *proselúthate* at the beginning of verse 22 underscores a present-eschatological interpretation of the motif of the heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews 12: The congregation has already arrived at Sion, at the heavenly Jerusalem. Christians are already - Pauline speaking - children of the 'Jerusalem above'. The heavenly Jerusalem represents the true reality of salvation, in contrast to all earthly (Heb 12:18-21), which is a 'copy and shadow' of the true reality (Heb 8:5; 10:1). In Hebrews 12:24 the author concludes his description of the salvific status of Christians: Those who have come to Jesus, the 'mediator of a new covenant', find themselves within the horizon of a 'new

24 The distinction between an earthly and a heavenly Jerusalem is also found in early Jewish literature, cf Billerbeck (1926:573); Mußner 1988:325-327.

25 Borse (1984:172) correctly points out that within the context of Gal 4 a closer interpretation of the meaning of the concept of the 'Jerusalem above' is impossible.

26 Cf also Rev 3:12; 21:2-4.

order of salvation'. The legal grounds for the *prosérchesthai* have been laid through the 'sprinkled blood', i.e. through the sacrificial death of Jesus, through which a New Covenant was inaugurated (cf Weiss 1991: 676, 681-682; Lohse 1964: 337).

5. Conclusion

In Jesus' words about a New Covenant, a concept is used which served in the Old Testament as a central metaphor for the relationship of God to his people (Mendenhall/Herion 1992:1201).²⁷ In the Lord's Supper, God's history of salvation with his people reaches its climax and all-surpassing fulfillment. This is reached in the promise of the New Covenant, which does not re-establish the old, but replaces it (cf Karrer 1990:215; Levin 1985:270). Already in Jeremiah 31:31-34 the New Covenant signified the overcoming of the sinful breaking of the first covenant and the forgiveness of sin. At the Last Supper, Jesus portrays this New Covenant to become a reality through his atoning death on the cross.

It is significant that the Lord's Supper was instituted in the presence of the twelve. This corresponds to their function as a visible sign of God's new beginning with humankind. Through the mentioning of the twelve in Revelation 21:14,²⁸ the New Covenant is related to the heavenly Jerusalem (cf Berger 1989:210).

In the 'cup word' Jesus interpreted the Eucharist as a covenant meal. The covenant celebrated in this banquet is the covenant which mediates a new living community with the exalted Christ. When celebrating the Lord's Supper, however, community is not only gained with Christ, but also between the participants.

The New Covenant message, therefore, points to a decisive Christological foundation of the church. *The church is the community of those who participate in Jesus' death - with a view on the eschatological banquet in God's Kingdom.* It is the community of those who through their unity with Christ have become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; cf also Rm 7:6).

Not only is the church's Christological foundation highlighted by the New Testament message about the New Covenant, but also its Pneumatological nature and eschatological orientation. The present activity of the Spirit points to the eschatological character of the church and constitutes a contrast to the old covenant.

The New Covenant, inaugurated by the atoning death of Jesus, is an effective present reality through the power of the Holy Spirit in the post-Eastern era. The concept *kainē diathēke* is, therefore, closely related to *kainektisis* (2 Cor 5:17-19). The church is that group of people, who by the renewing power of the Spirit, have experienced that, '... if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come'.

This New Covenant is realised by the Spirit and is attended with far greater glory than that of Moses. The foundation for this motif of 'glory' is to be found in Christ's resurrection, who according to Romans 6:4 'was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father'. It has been pointed out that Jesus' last meal with his disciples is determined by the prospect of the eschatological feast for all peoples on Sion, where the Lord 'will swallow up death for ever, and ... will wipe away tears from all faces' (Is 25:8). Through Jesus' death a New Covenant has been founded, the dispensation of the Spirit, of righteousness; a permanent dispensation of all-exceeding glory (2 Cor 3:4-11).

The New Covenant and the Jerusalem above (heavenly Jerusalem) are motifs which are

27 Also Nicholson (1986:191) emphasises the importance of covenant theology: 'For covenant theology proves, on closer examination, to hold the key to a question that has long occupied the attention of Old Testament scholars: the question of the distinctiveness of Israel's religious faith.' Cf also Lohfink (1989:344).

28 Rev 21:14: And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

inextricably linked to one another in Galatians 4:21-31, as well as in Hebrews 12:22-24 (cf Berger 1989:209). The *Jerusalem above* referred to in Galatians 4 portrays the new order of salvation, inaugurated by the death of Jesus. God sent his Son to make believers his *free children*. These children have already become fellow citizens with the saints (Eph 2:19) and they have their commonwealth in heaven (Phlp 3:20).

Although the New Covenant is a fulfillment of the promises of the prophets, its final fulfillment still lies in the future. A new and glorious relationship with the only true God through Jesus Christ has been made possible (cf 2 Cor 3:18). The New Covenant is related to the heavenly Jerusalem and yet the people of God are still waiting for the realisation of John's vision described in Revelation 21:2-4:

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them²⁹; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

29 Note the covenant language in this verse - an example of the 'Covenant Formula', cf Smend (1986), Rendtorff (1995).

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