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A PROMISE KEEPING GOD
EXPLORING THE COVENANTS,
ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

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A PROMISE KEEPING GOD

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ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Alex Jacob

Welcome to the Olive Press Research Paper – the replacement for the Olive Press Quarterly. This features articles that cover a wide spectrum of issues which relate to the ministry of CMJ.

Articles are contributed by CMJ staff (past and present), also by Trustees, Representatives, CMJ supporters or by interested parties.

Articles do not necessarily portray CMJ's standpoint on a particular issue but may be published on the premise that they allow a pertinent understanding to be added to any particular debate.

Setting the Scene

At the heart of the ministry of CMJ is the understanding that God is faithful. God is the promise keeping God. This understanding of faithfulness leads, I suggest, to a number of positive responses. Firstly thankfulness, secondly trust and thirdly hope. We see God's faithfulness in terms of the past (what God has done) the present (what God is doing) and into the future (what God will do).

I understand that the clearest demonstration of this faithfulness is found in the Biblical record of the establishing and outworking of covenants. Although the precise etymology is unclear, the word 'covenant' probably comes from the Hebrew and Assyro-Babylonian word meaning to join, to bind or to cut (in Hebrew – '*berit*'). In the ancient near-east there appear to have been three main types of covenants/treaties¹ in which the two covenant parties are bound together by an oath. I will therefore define a covenant as "a solemn binding obligation or agreement". This covenantal agreement would be marked by a symbolic act or sign. In the Bible, there are many covenants between individuals, for example, between Abraham and Abimelech (Genesis 21) and David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18). However, the main focus in the Bible is on covenants made between God as the prime mover (the one who initiates) and people. With this focus on the 'religious meaning' of God-given covenants within the Bible, there tends to be a shift in emphasis from two parties making a solemn agreement, to an understanding of the giving of God in terms of the outpouring of God's grace through which God brings His covenantal people into significant relationship with Him.

How Many Covenants?

In terms of God's covenant purposes, a key theological question is: "How many covenants are there in the Bible between God and people?" The answer given to this apparently simple question can often indicate and reflect a wider theological position. For example, in asking this question in a number of teaching contexts, there have been three main answers which I have received. Firstly, the answer one covenant is given. This answer is supported by the understanding that there is one

1 Firstly, a royal grant in which a King gives unconditionally to a loyal servant. Secondly, an agreement between a great King and one of his vassal rulers; such agreements tended to be conditional. Thirdly, an agreement of parity; here, equals would pledge mutual respect/friendship. The treaty of brotherhood, referred to in Amos 1:9, is probably a good example of such a covenant of parity, as are the individual covenants for example, between Abraham and Abimelech and David and Jonathan.

overarching work of grace within the Biblical record. God in His mercy brings into being the one ‘People of God’. The teaching on the unity of the one covenant of grace is fundamental to many expressions of Reformed Protestant theology. This is perhaps most clearly shown in terms of the classical Reformed view of the Church. The Church is seen as the (new) covenant people of God, the true Israel of this age. Karl Barth, for example, uses the metaphor of the bow, in which he sees one bow of God’s grace which arches over the community of God’s People which exists in two dispensations (Ethnic Israel and the Church). These dispensations are linked by the overarching covenant of grace. Barth states:

There are two forms of the elected community. The two poles between which its history moves (in a unilateral direction from here to there) but in such a way that the bow of the one covenant arches over the whole.²

The second main answer to be given is two. This answer is supported by the understanding that there are two covenants (as there are two parts of the Bible), the old and the new. The new is the “better covenant” (Hebrew 7:22) or perhaps the ‘better half’ of the one covenant of grace. This new covenant is brought into reality by and through the sinless life, sacrificial atoning death and glorious resurrection of Jesus.

In terms of the first two answers, there are some useful insights and some theological issues which must be explored. However, I suggest that, from the clear reading of the Bible, both of these previous answers are at best, weak. The third main answer which is given (and the one I would offer) is that there are five³ major covenants. These five covenants are as follows; the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abram/Abraham, the covenant with Israel/Moses, the covenant with David and the New Covenant made with the house of Israel and Judah.

2 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, the Doctrine of God, vol 2*. Translated by G.W Bromiley (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1957), p200.

3 Some would suggest that the answer should in fact be increased to 6, as they would want to include the covenant between God and the priest Phinehas (Numbers 25:10-31). In terms of the theological outworking of the question ‘how many covenants?’ there is no significance to including the covenant with Phinehas (6 covenants) or excluding (5 covenants) the covenant with Phinehas. It is simply a question of judgment in terms of deciding if the covenant with Phinehas is or is not a ‘major’ covenant on the same or similar level of importance as the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the New Covenant.

Exploring the covenants

The Covenant with Noah

Firstly we need to explore the covenant with Noah. This covenant concludes the account of the flood (Genesis 6-8) and follows on from the revelation of God already gleaned through God's dealing with Adam, Cain and Abel. Noah is affirmed as a righteous man (Genesis 6:9) and the covenant is made with him and his descendants and all living things. This therefore is a universal and everlasting covenant symbolised by the sign of the rainbow (Genesis 9:16). Within this covenant, God promises never again to allow the waters to become an all-consuming flood of destruction. The dignity of human life is affirmed, linking back to the creation reality, namely; 'for in the image of God has God made man'. Here we are given a glimpse into the dignity and mystery of all human life, for humanity is both the earthly representative and central focus of God's Kingdom purposes.

Aaron Chalmers in the recent Tyndale Bulletin (60.2, 2009) emphasises the universal importance of the Noahic covenant and states:

The Noahic covenant shows that the parameters of the covenant story of redemption are as wide as creation itself. In the Noahic covenant God reaches out to embrace his creation as a whole, it is unambiguously creation-wide in scope. Hence the title 'Noahic' covenant is somewhat inadequate, for the recipients of the covenant are broader than simply Noah and his descendents. 'God's covenant with creation' would perhaps be a better label for what is happening here.

The Rabbis also taught that out of this universal covenant flow universal laws. These laws, known as the Noachian Laws, are understood as binding upon all humanity. There are seven such laws, six are prohibitive, outlawing idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, robbery and the eating of flesh cut from a living animal. There is one positive commandment, namely, the requiring of establishing appropriate courts of justice. In Rabbinic writings, there is much discussion on how these Noachian Laws relate both to the commandments given at Sinai (Exodus 20) and to the 'modern' legal systems of the nations.

We turn to the covenant with Abram/Abraham. This covenant is often seen by both Jewish and Christian theologians as the fundamental covenant. From the Christian understanding, this covenant will find fulfilment in both the **calling out** of His people from exile in Egypt (Genesis 15:14) and the **sending into** the world of His Son.⁴ There are a number of key texts⁵ which speak of this covenant and of its significance, beginning with Genesis 12. Here, we have God's call to Abram. It is a call to leave and to follow. It is a call to let go of the past and to embrace a 'pilgrimage' with God. In one sense, Abram's call provides a pattern for all subsequent calls to follow God.⁶ Alongside this initial call is the ongoing sense of God's initiative, six times within Genesis 12:1-3 God declares- "I will". Here, the emphasis is on God's unconditional promises which are given as a blessing both to Abram and his descendants and to the whole of humanity. Abram is blessed in order to be a blessing.

In Genesis 15 this covenant call is deepened and expanded. Within a vision, Abram hears from God. God promises protection to Abram (I am your shield) and a reward/legacy. I suggest that these are the two issues which dominate the overall Abraham narrative. For Abram as a homeless and childless man,⁷ the combined issues of present security and future legacy impinge upon every step of Abram's pilgrimage. The pressing question within the narrative is will Abram continue to respond with the faith/trust so powerfully expressed⁸ in Genesis 15:6, or will these two pressing needs lead Abram to compromise his calling and, by so doing, undermine his faith/trust and his emerging relationship with God?

At the heart of this legacy promise are the two connected themes of land (15:7) and descendants (15:5). God affirms these promises by ordering a sacrifice (15:9) and by the manifesting of a blazing torch,⁹ which passed between the

4 See Acts 3:25-26

5 See for example, Romans 4, Galatians 3, James 2 and Hebrews 11.

6 See the calling of the first disciples of Jesus. In Mark 1, for example, Jesus invites Simon and Andrew to follow Him and at once they left their nets and followed.

7 The issue of Abram's need to build a family is at the heart of the events around Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 17:20-27.

8 D.F Payne comments upon Abraham's faithful response and contrasts it with the arrogance of Babel and the false wisdom Lot. He describes Abraham as being "...helplessly dependent on God". D.F Payne, Bible Study Books-Genesis/Exodus (London: Scripture Union, 1970) p 18.

9 The blazing torch is a symbol of God's presence (see also Exodus 3:2, 19:18, 1 Kings 18:38 and Acts 2:3-4). God gives to Abraham assurance by submitting Himself to human covenant rituals.

slaughtered animal pieces. This practice seems to connect with ancient acts of solemnising a covenant in which a self-maledictory oath is present; “May I be so cut and killed if I do not uphold my covenantal obligations”.¹⁰ Such an act of solemnisation is a vivid reminder that this covenant is God’s initiative and gift. It is His honour and word which is at stake, as was also the case with the earlier covenant with Noah.

In Genesis 17, this covenant is enlarged and deepened to issues beyond land and descendants in order to include a divine pledge to Abraham¹¹ (and his descendants) that God will be his God (Genesis 17:7). This pledge calls for total consecration of Abraham and his descendants, the prime sign of such consecration is to be circumcision. Following on from this extension to the covenant with Abraham, the promise of blessing through the birth of Isaac¹² (Genesis 17:19) is given.

The Covenant with Moses

The third major covenant is that made with Moses. This covenant is rooted into the Exodus event. The Exodus is initiated by God who hears the cries of the Israelites and remembers His covenant (Exodus 2:23-24). This sense of remembering the covenant shows how there is an ongoing connectedness through Abraham’s descendants. God is the God not just of Abraham, but also of Isaac, Jacob and on into future generations. The People of Israel are God’s People.¹³ This is the outworking of the call which came through Abraham and is now renewed and enlarged through Moses as Israel grows from a tribal family into a constituted nation.

In this covenant with Moses, God directs His People into a holy way of living. This theme is affirmed by Paul who speaks of the gift of Torah as a good, holy and righteous gift.¹⁴ This gift of Torah is a gift of covenantal grace; it is the gift which calls Israel to live as a priestly nation (Exodus 19:6). It is the outworking of this calling which inspires the prophets as they challenge, rebuke and encourage Israel throughout the subsequent generations, both within the land of Israel and in times of exile.

10 See Jeremiah 34:18-19.

11 It is within this covenant encounter that Abram’s name is changed/enlarged to Abraham (Genesis 17:5)

12 Paul in Romans 9:6-13 points to the choice of Isaac(the child of promise) rather than Ishmael as evidence of the outworking of God’s sovereign election based on grace.

13 See Exodus 4:22 and Deuteronomy 8:5.

14 See Romans 7:12-14 and Romans 9:31

The Covenant with David

The covenant with David develops out of Israel's request for a King.¹⁵ This request could well be interpreted as an act of disobedience which inevitably undermines the rule of God. However, the request is granted and, when King Saul fails in his Kingly function, God initiates the appointment of David as king. This appointment is seen in terms of a covenant (Psalm 89:1-4). This covenant creates a 'royal dynasty' from which Jesus himself is descended. This Messianic inheritance linked to the covenant with King David is a key theme within the Scriptures. For example, Isaiah 11:1, Ezekiel 34:22-24, Romans 1:3, Hebrews 4:7, Revelation 5:5 and 22:16. It is also a prominent motif in Matthew's presentation of Jesus.¹⁶

The New Covenant

This covenant is proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31) and is closely linked with Ezekiel's words of restoration (Ezekiel 36:25-27). This covenant is with Israel and Judah and implies a future restoring of Israel/Judah. It is worth noting that this covenant is spoken of in future terms rather than as in the case with the previous four covenants, in which the context is that of a present inauguration. This New Covenant does not annul or supersede the previous four covenants but rather we see a progression; the New Covenant enlarges God's redemptive purposes and increases intimacy. This New Covenant will restore the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. This New Covenant in no way undermines God's call to Israel. Clearly, the establishing of the New Covenant and the subsequent drawing in of Gentiles into believing Israel will bring about aspects of discontinuity.¹⁷ As Jeremiah states:

15 See 1 Samuel 8-9.

16 See Matthew 1:17, 9:27-24 and 12:22-24.

17 This sense of discontinuity is often affirmed by reference to Hebrews 8:5-13. Clearly, through the ministry of Jesus and the establishing of the New Covenant aspects of the covenant with Moses (note not the covenant with Abraham) will fade and become obsolete. This is seen in part by the fact that many aspects of the Torah relating to the temple, the priesthood (Hebrews 7:11-28) and the sacrificial system have found fulfillment in Jesus through his priestly ministry. However, while such aspects of discontinuity need to be affirmed, it is, I suggest, a mistake to simply dismiss the ongoing significance of many aspects of the covenant with Moses and the place of Torah as part of a faithful response to God, especially by Messianic Jewish Believers. The role of Torah within Messianic Jewish communities is a very important issue within the life of the Church and within the wider field of Jewish-Christian relations. For a balanced exploration of the place of Torah within Messianic Jewish communities, see the following, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (London/New York: Cassell, 2000) John Fieldsend, *Messianic Jews* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1993) and Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology-A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2009).

“this covenant will not be like the covenant made with Moses”.¹⁸ Something new is to take place! Gentiles are to be grafted into the olive tree. This grafting in based on God’s grace, Gentiles will respond in faith to the person and work of Jesus, they will belong to believing Israel, not by becoming Jewish but by being born again into God’s Kingdom. Within God’s Kingdom there is equality and ‘unity within diversity’ between Jews and Gentiles.

This New Covenant will release a new broader and deeper work of the Holy Spirit. It is through the atoning death¹⁹ and glorious resurrection/ascension of Jesus the Messiah and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit that the reality of the New Covenant is to be established.

How should we respond to God’s faithfulness through His covenants?

As I noted in the opening paragraph, there is a general sense of thanksgiving, trust and hope which should, in the light of God’s covenantal faithfulness, pervade into all areas of Christian theology and spirituality. However, I will outline the following four specific areas, beginning with discipleship and then moving onto our overview in reading and interpreting Scripture and then onto Ecclesiology/Israelology before concluding with issues around a theology of mission.

Discipleship

Firstly, in terms of our discipleship, be it expressed individually or as part of a Christian community, there should be a sense of expectation. For example, if you know that God has given to you or to your community a specific calling or prophetic word²⁰ then it is vital to plan and act accordingly. It is sadly often the case that individuals and Church communities (and even, perish the thought,

18 This New Covenant is different to the covenant made with Moses on three major levels. Firstly the New Covenant is eternal while elements of the covenant with Moses will fade away. Secondly, there is in the outworking of the New Covenant a new reality of the depth of the work of the Holy Spirit. There is to be an inner reality of the Holy Spirit - the revelation of God will be internalised (in their minds and on their hearts). Thirdly the New Covenant is to be enlarged through the rule and reign of the Messiah to all peoples. Those who were once separated from Israel are brought into God’s covenantal promises through the atoning death (Ephesians 2:13) of Jesus the Messiah and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:7)

19 See Luke 22:20.

20 Clearly every calling and prophetic word needs to be carefully tested. A genuine prophetic word will always be in line with the clear teaching of Scripture. It is also important to discern if a word is conditional to a particular time and upon a particular response of an individual and or a community or if a word is primarily unconditional.

mission societies!) fall short of God's purposes for them because they lose sight or give up on their specific calling or neglect to treasure the prophetic word within. It is all too easy to drift into other patterns of discipleship and activity rather than being patient and expectant towards the specific calling or prophetic word. I realise, as Christians, we all live within the tension of the Kingdom which is 'here and now' but is also 'not yet' and 'still to come'. However, in the light of God's faithfulness within His covenant actions, it seems to me that each Christian can be sure of God's utter trustworthiness. If God has called, He will equip. If God has spoken, it will come to be. If God begins a work, God will bring that work to a fulfilment. For as the scripture tells us, "...your labour in the Lord, is not in vain".²¹

Reading and interpreting Scripture

Secondly, in terms of our overview in reading and interpreting of Scripture, it is vital to see the continuity and connectedness between the past, present and future within God's purposes. This connectedness is shown in God's faithfulness to Israel and His purposes to bless all of His creation through His Son. God does not change His mind or substitute Israel for any other group. There is (or should not be!) no disconnection or discontinuity between being Jewish and being a disciple of Jesus. There is no disconnection or discontinuity between the Kingdom Jesus brings and the legitimate longings and hopes of God's covenantal promises and the Jewish prophetic witness.

In the light of God's covenantal faithfulness, it seems we must reject a hermeneutical method based on a robust 'promise-transformation-fulfilment' approach which is implicit within the three main strands (economic, punitive and structural) of replacement theology.²² We must rather find a method which allows for 'promise, continuity and enlargement' within God's purposes. I have found the following insight, from James Dunn, helpful in this search for an appropriate understanding of continuity. Dunn states (while commenting on Romans 9:6):

After all there can be a continuity by transformation, where the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, and the empty skin of the caterpillar is all that is left behind of the old stage of existence. Is Paul arguing for

21 1 Corinthians 15:58.

22 See for a fuller discussion on these different strands of Replacement Theology, R.K Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p181.

that kind of continuity and fulfilment? Has God's purpose for Israel as such failed because Israel as such is now only an empty skin of the earlier of God's purpose? But there is also a continuity by development and extension, as when a tree grows substantial new branches, or new branches are grafted in, where the new stage does not require the abandonment of the old, but new and old are parts of the larger whole.²³

Ecclesiology and Israelology

Thirdly, in terms of how we view the Church and Israel, it is important to keep a distinction between the two. Such a distinction is often made by speaking of two dispensations in terms of time, namely Israel belongs to the old (past) dispensation, while the Church belongs to the new (present and future) dispensation. Within this understanding the Church is often seen as the replacement or fulfilment of the old Israel and is often described as the new or true Israel of God. There are a number of dangers with such use of a time-structured dispensational view, as it implies that all the covenantal promises given to Israel are either transferred to the Church or have become obsolete.

The Biblical witness relating to Israel and the Church is far more multi-faceted than any simple time structured dispensational view. From my reading of God's covenantal faithfulness, and especially in terms of Paul's teaching in Romans 9-11, it appears to me that our understanding of God's People (Israel and/or Church) must be explored in terms of three distinct yet closely connected groups.

Firstly, there is ethnic Israel. It is to ethnic Israel that the irrevocable promises of the land as part of the covenant with Abraham are made. It is to ethnic Israel that God's irrevocable gifts and calling are given (Romans 9:4-5²⁴ and 11:29). It is through ethnic Israel that Jesus is born as the son of David and the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). It is to ethnic Israel/Judah that the New Covenant is made (Jeremiah 31:31). It is to ethnic Israel that in the fullness of time the deliverer will come and all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26). Yet, the majority of ethnic Israel has not yet accepted the offer of the New Covenant. This reality shocks and distresses those of ethnic Israel who have become part of the New

23 James Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary-Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), p546.

24 Note how Paul refers to the gifts in the present not the past tense.

Covenant people. Paul, for example, speaks of this shock and distress in deeply emotional terms in Romans 9:2. Such emotion leads to significant questioning about God's trustworthiness, justice and human accountability. Such questions make up key parts of Paul's teaching, especially in Romans 9-11. In terms, therefore, of response to the New Covenant ethnic Israel splits into two groups. Firstly unbelieving Israel and secondly believing Israel (often referred to as the faithful remnant or Jewish believers in Jesus/Messianic Jews).

In addition to these two groups within Israel, a third group emerges within the purposes of God. This group is made up of non-Jewish people. People who, up until this stage of history have been largely outside of God's covenantal relationships, but are now fully brought into God's purposes (Paul speaks of this bringing in as a grafting into the olive tree²⁵ and joining the household of God) through the outworking of the New Covenant, which has been brought into reality through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Now these non-Jewish people who have believed in Jesus have received the fullness of God's Spirit poured out as a gift of the New Covenant in **just the same way** as those believing Jewish people. This remarkable fact of God's grace changes the missionary trajectory of the early Messianic community²⁶ and creates a New Covenant community of Jews and Gentiles united in and through the person and work of Jesus.

In the light of the above, I suggest it is Biblically appropriate when describing God's covenantal people today that we need to hold to a threefold description,²⁷ namely unbelieving Israel, the faithful remnant of Israel and the

25 The olive tree root which Gentiles are grafted into and supported by is probably a symbol pointing to the Patriarchs (Romans 11:28) with, I suggest, special reference to Abraham (Romans 4:12-17). This association seems to fit in with the chronological progression of Paul's teaching in this section of Romans 10 (See David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 6th edn -Clarksville, Jewish New Testament Publications, 1999, p143). However, other identifications of the olive root have been offered, namely the root refers to the faithful believing Jewish remnant or (probably least convincing as it seems to deprive the Jewish People of their place within God's covenantal history) to Jesus the Messiah.

26 See Acts 10:27, Act 15:6-35, Romans 10:12, Ephesians 2 etc.

27 David Stern in his *New Testament commentary* uses the metaphor of God as a skilled juggler throwing up three balls without letting any of them drop. These balls are Gentile Christians, Messianic Jews and non-Messianic Jews. I find the metaphor of the juggler helpful (it is certainly more helpful than the metaphor of the bow presented by Karl Barth- the difficulty with the bow metaphor is that the complexity of the relationship between Israel and the Church can not be held within such a simple singular image of a bow) as it points to the existence of three communities within the ongoing People of God. However, within Stern's metaphor, all three balls remain separate and

New Covenant community (the ecclesia of Jewish and Gentile believers). I have no theological objection to describing any one of the three groups as 'Israel' along as one notes the other contexts in which Israel may be recognised. Equally, I think it is important to see God working out His ongoing covenantal purposes through each aspect of Israel, as long as, in focusing in on one area of God's work, we do not exclude or invalidate the other expressions of God's work. It seems to me that if we are to understand and partner faithfully within God's purposes today we need to hold and explore in a generous and inclusive way this 'creative tension' flowing from God's faithfulness to unbelieving Israel, the faithful remnant within Israel and the ecclesia (Church).

A Theology of Mission

In terms of a theology of mission, I suggest there are three immediate responses that need to be put into action.

Firstly, there must be a response to invest in universal mission. The New Covenant enables all to enter into the Kingdom of God. The word of faith is near; it is being proclaimed (Romans 10:9). The invitation is freely given to respond, the conditions are clearly set out and the promise is wonderfully made, namely; "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Therefore the community of believers in Jesus (the Church) must invest faithfully in the works of evangelistic mission, in order to reach out to all peoples. For this reaching out is a reflection of the reaching out of God's covenantal purposes, beginning with the promised universal blessing through Abram (Genesis 12:3), the calling of Israel to be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6), the gift of Messiah to the world (John 3:16) and the great commission of the Messiah to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

Secondly, there must be a response to invest in Jewish mission. The New Covenant is made with the house of Israel and Judah. In the light of this there can

27 continued

distinctive from each other. This is I suggest a weakness as the conviction I have is that in the case of the Messianic Jewish ball it cannot exist in isolation from the other two balls but must somehow be seen to merge and become part of the other two balls. For Messianic Jews are fully part of Israel and the ecclesia (Church) community.

In terms of offering a metaphor, I am working on the metaphor of a river. This river has a single source which flows into three connected yet distinct meandering streams along its course. Eventually, when the river reaches its destination the three streams will all become one.

be no validity given to any theology²⁸ which states that the Jewish people do not need to hear or respond to the New Covenant for they have their own covenantal relationship through the covenants with Abraham, Moses and David. Jewish people have a need and right to hear of the claims of their New Covenant. The Church community has received such a rich heritage from the Jewish People that God has placed upon the Church a sense of responsibility to prioritise the sharing of God's covenantal purposes to the Jewish people (Romans 1:16). The Church must also strive to rid herself of any form of anti-Semitism, false theology or cultural practices which creates barriers to effective Jewish mission.

Thirdly, there must be a response to recognise the threefold expression of God's People. The Church must reject a replacement hermeneutic which invalidates God's Purposes today within ethnic Israel. It is important that a theology of mission honours God's covenantal work in restoring Israel as a nation. This is a significant work of God and points to an even greater future restoration of Jewish People to their Messiah. Alongside this there must equally be an honouring of the unique pressures, responsibilities and privileges of Messianic Jewish believers. A theology of mission must invest in supporting and equipping the emerging contemporary Messianic Jewish movement in order that Messianic Jews may be a blessing, both within ethnic Israel and within the Church.²⁹

Closing comment

I hope that this brief exploration of the covenants, Israel and the Church has been helpful. Certainly this is a huge area of debate and study. I hope to publish³⁰ some more detailed research under the title of "The case for Enlargement Theology". Enlargement Theology is offered as a response to the impasse within contemporary Jewish-Christian relations arising from the inherent weaknesses and mutual incompatibility of Replacement Theology and Two Covenant Theology in the light of Romans 9-11.

28 Two-Covenant theology teaches that God deals with Jews and Gentiles in different ways. Jewish People are in a right relationship with God through their election, marked by the covenants implemented through Abraham and Moses. This covenantal relationship has not and never will be revoked, superseded or replaced. Gentiles, however, are not in this covenantal relationship, but a new covenantal relationship is 'opened up' for Gentiles through the person and work of Jesus. These two (dual) covenantal relationships work alongside each other within the purposes of God.

29 For a fuller discussion on how Messianic Jews and the wider Church relate together see my olive press paper "*Root and Branch?*" (Olive Press Quarterly, Issue 6, 2007).

30 Please contact CMJ at Eagle lodge, Hexgreave Park, Farnsfield, Notts. (email: enquires@cmj.org.uk) if you would like details of how to purchase this publication.

One of the key purposes of the CMJ-sponsored Olive Press research paper is to stimulate debate and to refine our thinking and understanding, I therefore look forward to your responses, questions and challenges to my line of argument. The goal in doing this is that we might all encounter the promise keeping God and respond appropriately.

*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory for ever!*

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