

# The key to the present fulfilment of the eschatological inclusion of the gentiles into the people of God

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## Abstract

*The first part of this article the aim is to deal with the following question: How does the “new covenant” differ from the old? Who is included in this new covenant, and how are people brought into this new covenant? Although the subject is vast and encompasses some of the teaching found in the New Testament, the purpose of the article is to focus on the Spirit. According to Paul, the Spirit is the key to the present fulfilment of the eschatological inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God. An understanding of the old covenant and its significance are interpreted in the second part of the article. The purpose is to provide solutions through a meaningful interpretation and exposition of the relevant passages. In so doing, the difficulties associated with the inclusion of Gentiles are addressed.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the entire history of God’s dealing with men before the time of Christ, one finds constant mention of a future time when the Holy Spirit would be poured out, and a new covenant would be formulated. Thorsell (1998:398) states that it is commonly accepted that the idea of an eschatological covenant is present in quite a number of Old Testament passages. Consider this particular passage, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jr 31:31-34). In line with this, Fee (1994:843) writes that according to Paul, the Spirit is the way that God has fulfilled this covenant, and further to this, is the way that God Himself is now present on earth. The Spirit is the way

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God now “dwells” in His “Holy Temple”, both in the individual believer and in the gathered community. To clarify this statement a little further one needs to look at it from the role that the different covenants played within the Pauline letters

## **2. PAUL’S TREATMENT OF THE VARIOUS COVENANTS**

Of the three covenants that play significant roles in the Pauline letters, two are highly valued; the apostle minimizes the third’s importance. The construct, according to Talbert (2001:300), that seems to make the most sense out of the various things Paul says about the covenants, may be summarised as follows:

The covenant with Abraham furnishes Paul with a scriptural way to argue that justification through faith has been God’s plan all along for Jew and Gentile alike.

The law (Mosaic Covenant) was a temporary phase in God’s dealings with His people. In spite of its just requirements, it was impotent because of human sin. Hence it only functioned to expose sin. With the coming of Christ, the law has come to an end as a part of ongoing salvation history.

The Mosaic Covenant has been replaced by the prophesied new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34, in which God Himself enables His people’s faithfulness to the relationship (i e their righteousness is from God – Phlp 3:9). Based on the above, would it be fair to say that there could be two covenants, one for Israel and one for the Church?

## **3. TWO COVENANTS**

Although seldom advocated today, Decker (1995:431) writes that it was formerly popular amongst dispensationalists to propose that there are two different new covenants, one for Israel and one for the Church. While different, the two new covenants have similarities: their name, their basis (the death of Christ), and some of their provisions. He quotes Chafer who wrote:

There remains to be recognised a heavenly covenant for the heavenly people, which is also styled like the preceding one for Israel, a “new covenant”. It is made in the blood of Christ (Mark 14:24) and continues in effect throughout this age, whereas the new covenant with Israel happens to be future in its application. To suppose that these two covenants – one for Israel and one for the Church – are the same, is to assume that there is latitude of common interest between God’s purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church. Israel’s covenant, however, is new only because it replaces the Mosaic, but the Church’s covenant is new because it introduces that which is God’s mysterious and unrelated purpose.

Israel's new covenant rests specifically on the sovereign "I will" of Jehovah, while the new covenant for the Church is made in Christ's blood. Everything that Israel will yet have, to supply another contrast, is the present possession of the Church – and infinitely more.

This position is assumed throughout Chafer's writings, but nowhere in print, according to Decker (1995:432), did he discuss his basis for it, or interact with opposing positions. It is the author's view that this two-covenant view suffers from two flaws: Scripture never says there are two new covenants or juxtaposes them in the same context. Further to this, it is built on a theological presupposition rather than on exegesis of the text. This second problem is reflected in Chafer's statement (cited above) "to suppose that these two covenants... are the same, is to assume that there is a latitude of common interest between God's purpose for Israel and His purpose for the Church. Decker contends that Chafer's determination to maintain a complete distinction between Israel and the Church forced him to a conclusion that is exegetically indefensible.

The author would further contend that in no New Testament passages are both supposed covenants distinguished one from the other. The only possible way to find two new covenants is to decide beforehand that anything with relevance to Israel cannot possibly relate to the Church. On that basis then, the interpreter decides whether the passage relates to Israel or the Church. If it relates to Israel, then it must be the new covenant for Israel, if it relates to the Church, then it must be the new covenant for the Church. However, it is questionable that this approach (as stated above) represents proper exegesis.

Staunch advocates of the above position, Walvoord (1953:22-26) and Ryrie (1953:105-25), have since abandoned that particular position of two separate covenants, and today teach that the Church participates in some aspects of the one new covenant. Ryrie (1975:1:392) now states that "the Old Testament revelation of the new covenant links it with the nation of Israel ... the New Testament adds the truth that believers in Christ ... are ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6)."

Walvoord (1980:220) has also conceded that:

There is one covenant with application to Israel and to the Church and to anyone saved by the death of Christ. In Scripture the application of the new covenant is explicitly to the Church in the present age and to Israel as a nation in the future as far as

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millennial blessings are concerned. The new covenant is also the basis for a new rule of life according to the dispensational setting of those invoked.

Such a new covenant has already been brought in by the death and resurrection of Christ ... both Israel and the Church derive their salvation and spiritual blessing from the same covenant, that is, the covenant of grace made possible by the death of Christ.

## **4. THE PAULINE VIEW OF THE NEW COVENANT IN 2 CORINTHIANS 3**

2 Corinthians 3 is perhaps the most prominent reference to the new covenant in the Pauline Corpus. Verse 6 states that God “has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life” (NIV). This mention of the new covenant is set within a discussion of Paul’s own gospel ministry, which begins in 2:14 and continues probably to 6:13. According to Hafemann (1986:22-35) in 2:14-17, the nature of his ministry “as a weak, on-the-way-to-death captive” is compared with a Roman triumphal procession. There can be little doubt that Paul’s ministry was eschatologically conditioned. It progressively affects inner (moral) renewal now while the outer person experiences death, and in the future this renewal will be completed both inwardly and outwardly.

A cursory reading of chapter 3 brings out two important facts according to Thorsell (1998:401):

- This discussion of the new covenant is extensive – in fact, the most extensive in the Pauline Corpus. The comparison between the Mosaic Covenant and the new covenant is found not only in v.6, on the contrary, the allusions to Exod 31:18; Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26 and in 2 Cor 3:3, show that the comparison between the two covenants is already in Paul’s mind. The comparison continues in the antithesis. Paul formulates in vv.7-11: death versus Spirit, condemnation versus righteousness, passing away versus remaining. The comparison between Paul’s ministry and Moses’ in vv.12-18 continues the comparison between the two covenants.
- The subject under discussion is not primarily the new covenant but the character of Paul’s ministry of proclaiming the gospel.

Contrary to this, Decker (1995:431-447), maintains that in terms of 2 Corinthians 3, the basic interpretive approach, either affirms that Paul spoke of Jeremiah’s new covenant and denies its direct connection with his ministry,

or affirms the connection of the new covenant with his ministry, but denies that this is the same new covenant as predicted in Jeremiah.

One could argue against these two explanations by stating that Paul's mention of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 3 referred to (a) the very same eschatological covenant predicted in the Old Testament (the "two new covenants" view) and (b) described the character of his gospel-proclaiming mission because that predicted new covenant was operative in the apostolic ministry of Paul (the view that the new covenant will be fulfilled only in the future). Few modern scholars have denied that Paul intended to refer to the new covenant predicted by the Old Testament in 2 Corinthians 3. This view is echoed by Dunn (1998:147); he writes that Paul's sharpest contrast between epochs is drawn in 2 Cor 3:1-18. Here the two covenants are indeed old and new (3:6, 14), and the old is clearly identified with the "tablets of stone" at Sinai (Cor 3:3). The contrast is with the "new covenant" (Cor 3:6) which, given the parallel reference to the Sinai Covenant (3:3) can hardly be other than an allusion to Jeremiah 31:31. Dunn further writes (1998:148) that the Midrashic exposition of Exodus 34:29-35 of which 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 consists, is simply a further variation on Paul's conviction that the coming of Christ marked a new and eschatological epoch in God's overall purpose.

Dunn's reason for saying this is that one should note the following qualifying factors in Paul's Midrashic analysis in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18.

- The contrast is primarily between the ministries of Moses and Paul.
- Paul affirms that Moses' ministry was one of "glory" (Cor 3:7-11), albeit a lesser glory now set aside, and Moses' going into the presence of the Lord (Ex 34:34) is seen as a type of Christian conversion (2 Cor 3:16).
- Strictly speaking, Israel is not blamed for failing to recognise that the old covenant is at an end: "*their minds have been hardened*" (Cor 3:14) "*blinded*" (Cor 4:3-4), they simply have not realised the epochal shift brought about by Christ (Cor 3:14).

In concluding this section, the author would like to point out that there is no doubt that throughout much of 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul compared the function of the new covenant with that of the old Mosaic Covenant. In verse 3 there is a definite allusion to the writings of the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone. The Old Testament text Paul had in mind might have been either Exodus 31:18; 31:15 or Deuteronomy 9:10. Regardless of which passage was cited, the comparison is between the old covenant written on

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stone, and the new covenant written on the hearts of the people. In 2 Corinthians 3:6, the contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant takes the form of an antithesis between “*letter*” and “*Spirit*”. “*Letter*” represents the Mosaic Law, which demands obedience without supplying the ability to obey, and which therefore can only condemn and kill. Belleville (1996: 94-95) describes it well:

Letter and Spirit are descriptive terms, setting forth the quality or nature of the respective covenants. What is qualitatively better about the new covenant is that it is not a *letter* covenant – that is, an external code – but a *Spirit* covenant – that is, an internal power. A covenant that is *letter* in nature *kills* because it makes external demands without giving the inward power for obedience, while a covenant that is *Spirit* in character gives *life* because it works internally to produce a change of nature.

The reference, according to Thorsell (1998:404) to the giving of the law is repeated again in 2 Corinthians 3:7, where Paul described the “*letter*” ministry as that “engraved in letters on stone”. In fact, this very comparison of the Mosaic Covenant and the new covenant is evident in Jeremiah 31. The need for the new covenant arises out of the fact that Israel did not and could not keep the old covenant. If Paul contrasted the old Mosaic Covenant with the new covenant, it strongly suggests that the new covenant he had in mind was the one Jeremiah predicted. Therefore, 2 Corinthians 3, presents formidable reasons to regard the new covenant as partially fulfilled or inaugurated in the Gospel–proclaiming ministry of Paul.

At this point, one should bear in mind that Paul’s ministry was reliant on the work of the Holy Spirit within him. The Person of the Holy Spirit is God’s power now manifest within believers through the new covenant. Like the function of the law under the old covenant, the Spirit performs as God’s agent on earth to communicate the beliefs of the new covenant, which is Christ.

## **5. THE SPIRIT AND THE NEW COVENANT**

According to Fee, Paul almost certainly understood the role of the Spirit in the new covenant in terms of Ezekial 36:26-27 and 37:14. He states that Paul combines motifs from these two passages in such a way that in the coming of the Spirit into the life of a believer, God fulfils three dimensions of His promise:

1). That God would give His people a “*new heart*” a “*heart of flesh*” to replace that heart of stone (Jr 31:31-33). This would be made possible because He would give them “*a new Spirit*” (Ezk 36:26). In Paul, this motif finds expression in 2 Cor 3:1-6; where the

Corinthians are understood to be recipients of the new covenant in that they were “*inscribed*” by “*the Spirit of the living God*” on “*tablets of human hearts*” (v.3). Paul himself is the minister of this new covenant which has no longer to do with “*letter*”, but with the Spirit who “*gives life*” (vv.5-6).

2). This “*new Spirit*” in turn is none other than God’s Spirit who will enable His people to follow His decrees (Ezek 36:27).

3). God’s Spirit in turn means the presence of God Himself, in that by putting “*My Spirit in you ... you will live*” (Ezk 37:14).

(Fee 1994:843)

Paul picks up this motif in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 as the Spirit of the living God, the Spirit provides for God’s people the one essential reality about God. “*The Spirit*”, Paul says in the context of the new covenant “*gives life*”. Thus the Spirit for Paul is the key to the present fulfilment of the eschatological inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God. The emphasis now, however, is not so much on Gentile inclusion per se, but on their inclusion, totally apart from the law. The Spirit, and the Spirit alone, identifies the people of God under the new covenant. The failure of the former covenant, the covenant of law, was that even though Paul considered the law to be “*spiritual*” in the sense that it came by way of Spirit-inspiration (Rm 7:14), and even though it came with glory (2 Cor 3:7), it was not accompanied by the empowering Spirit.

In contrast, the new covenant by means of the life-giving Spirit is written on “*tablets of human hearts*” (2 Cor 3:3). Its rite of “*circumcision*” is that “*of the heart*” (Rm 2:29). The new covenant is life-giving, because its content, Christ, is administered by the Spirit, through whom also believers behold – and are being transformed into – the glory of the Lord (2 Cor 3:8). The promised new covenant has replaced the old, and the gift of the Spirit proves it.

Decker (1995:443) takes this view one step further; he maintains that the new covenant was only inaugurated at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. With that event the internalised ministry of the Spirit, as Ware (1992: 68-97) says, “*has now begun to be realised*”. Paul portrayed the benefits of this new covenant ministry of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3, as “*enabling its covenant participants to live increasingly righteous lives through the Spirit*” (Ware 1992:88).

The reason, therefore, for a new covenant, according to Fee (1994:813), was the failure of the old to affect a truly meaningful righteousness, a righteousness coming from an obedient heart, rather than

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finding expression primarily in observances – as though God’s people could be identified by circumcision, the observance of days, and food laws. The Old Testament itself is abundantly clear that God’s intent with the law was for His character to be revealed in the way His people worshipped and lived, hence the crucial role played by the Spirit. The Spirit, promised as part of the new covenant, would affect the righteousness the law called for, but failed to produce. The eschatological Spirit has now, in Fee’s view (1994:813) been experienced, by Jew and Gentile alike, and that quite apart from the law. Thus, the Spirit is the eschatological fulfilment of the promised new covenant.

In concluding this particular section on the Spirit and the new covenant and before one can go on to discuss the redemptive work of Christ in a covenant framework, there is one particular area that needs to be examined. It does seem that current Biblical theologies of redemption do leave room for further work, for if one asks *why* did God want the death of Christ for people’s redemption, and *how* did His death bring about that redemption, the answers given are not completely satisfying. Believers do say that Christ is their head, that He is the way, that He is the suffering servant. However, these explanations, while quite true, do not go far enough in answering the *why* and the *how*. One would hope, however, to follow up one particular approach that has seemingly been ignored or little used; this being, is the new covenant unilateral or bilateral? The significance of this is that in the former, one plays a passive role until after the formation of the covenant, whereas in the latter, one takes an active part in the beginning of the formation. The obvious place to begin in addressing this topic would be with the Sinai Covenant as this is where, in most cases, the debate begins.

## **6. THE NEW COVENANT BILATERAL OR UNILATERAL?**

With this question, one is immediately plunged into the midst of a debate on its nature. Was it unilateral or bilateral? Bonsirven (1963:28) emphatically argues that “the essence of the covenant, unilateral rather than bilateral, was the promise God made ... we cannot say that blood played any part in it. This is truer still of the new covenant”. Further to this argument, Giblet, (1966:27) states that “of course this covenant was essentially a favour and is, in no sense a bilateral contract ...” (See also Huffmon 1965:101-113; McCarthy 1965:217-240; Von Rad 1962:131).

In opposition to this, Walther (1961:37) argues that “... the use of the covenant concept in secular life argues that the religious *tyrb* (*covenant*) too was always regarded as a bilateral relationship; for even though the burden is most unequally distributed ... this makes no difference to the fact that the relationship is still essentially two-sided. The idea that in ancient Israel



the *tyrb* (*covenant*) was always and only thought of as Yahwe's pledging of Himself, to which human effort was required to make no kind of response, can therefore be proved to be erroneous." In this same pattern Vawter (1958:289) writes:

For Amos a covenant by its very nature consists in *bha* (*love*) a term which means the spontaneous dedicated love that a mother feels for her child. The other prophets join to this the virtue of *dsj* (*kindness*) the dutiful love which results from a common bond and which conveys mutual *obligations*. He further argues that from these two fonts have sprung the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians and the Last Supper Discourse of John's Gospel.

At the outset it is important to clarify what is meant by a bilateral and a unilateral covenant, for there has been much confusion on this point.

A bilateral covenant is one that tends to the idea of a reciprocal choice or human co-operation in divine works. Bilateralism would mean that God would owe something to His creatures. A unilateral covenant is one that has only one side: pertaining to one party in an agreement.

The question now posed is, was the Sinai Covenant bilateral, and is the new covenant bilateral, although on the surface it seems to be unilateral.

In the view of Most (1967:5), there are at least four reasons to suggest that the Sinai covenant was bilateral.

- It should be noted that a *condition* is required for the exercise of; *dsj* (*kindness*) "all the ways of the Lord are *dsj* (*kindness*) and *ḥs* (*mercy*) towards those who keep His covenant and His decrees" (Bonsirven (1965: 19). Now if a condition is required for *dsj* (*kindness*), then *dsj* (*kindness*) cannot be mere mercy in the exact sense of that word for mercy as such is gratuitous, and so does not require a condition. But here it is required that the human partner keep the covenant.
- Many texts put God and Israel in parallel positions, for example, in Deuteronomy 26:17-18 it asserts "today you have proclaimed the Lord to be your God and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His judgements ... The Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He has promised you, that you should keep all his commandments".

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- The imagery of the marriage between God and His people plainly conveys the same sort of mutual bond, for example, Hs 2:18-22; Jr 2:2; 3:1; Ex 16:8; Is 50:1; 54:5; 62:5.
- It also definitely seems as if Paul considers the Sinai Covenant to be bilateral, for it is that very fact that raises a difficult problem in his thought in Galasians 3:16-18, where he tries to explain how it can be that the Sinai Covenant being conditioned on human response, did not conflict with the unconditional promises to Abraham.

The conclusion that seems to emerge is that Sinai was bilateral, so that both God and His people undertook obligations, with Him promising to make them His favoured people on condition of their obedience. In the light of this, one may now ask, is the new different to the old, and if so, what are the differences?

## **7. IS THE NEW DIFFERENT TO THE OLD?**

One notes at once that the new is to be different from the old in two ways:

- The old was broken, but the new will be eternal.
- The old was written on stone, but in the new, the law would be written in hearts.

It is equally clear that the new is parallel to the old in certain essential respects. Firstly, the old covenant created a people of God; so does the new. Secondly, the favour of God in the old required a condition, the obedience of His people; in the new, obedience is likewise required, even though it is not to an external law written on stone, but to an interior law written in hearts.

Paul, according to Most (1967:10), clearly teaches that the new covenant creates a new people of God: *“you are the temple of the living God, as God says: For I will dwell among them and will walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people”* (2 Cor 6:16). In Romans 11, he envisions this new people as not entirely distinct from the old people of God, but rather as grafted into the old (Rm 11:13-22), and he applies to the new people the words of Hosea, originally written of the old people of God:

A people not mine I will call My people; and an unbeloved, beloved,  
and her who has not obtained mercy, one who has obtained mercy

and it shall be in the place where it was said to them: you are not  
My people, there they shall be called sons of the living God.

(Rm 9:25-26)

The old, written on tablets of stone, would now be replaced by the new,  
written on the heart, but just as the old covenant required an act of obedience,  
so does the new.

## **8. OBEDIENCE AS A REQUIREMENT IN THE NEW COVENANT**

In Romans 8:14 Paul told the Romans “that as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous”. So the obedience of Christ to the will of the Father was the basic required condition on the human side of the new covenant, just as the obedience of Israel was the human condition in the old covenant. But Paul does not confine the requirement of obedience to Christ himself. Those who belong to His body, and in order to come under the covenant with Him, must do all things *ἐν Χριστῷ* (in Christ), they too must obey. Paul presents this requirement in the vein inaugurated by the words of Jeremiah 31, for he tells the Romans that the Spirit of Christ writes in Christians the “law of the Spirit” (Jr 8:2) so that they “do not walk according to the flesh” (Jr 8:1) but Paul knows well according to Most (1967:11) that Christians can refuse to follow the Spirit, and so he injects a condition into his assertions, “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (Rm 8:9) and similarly: “If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live” (Rm 8:13) or, “whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rm 8:14). One can see that those who are not led by the Spirit of God are not sons. Paul does not, according to Most (1967:11), even shrink from using the imagery of slavery to describe this obedience, and does so in the very epistle in which he so splendidly extols the freedom of the sons of God:

... do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that ones slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness. But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart ... and having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

(Rm 6:16-18)

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To conclude this section, and by adding up the data presented, one sees that the result is really parallel to the old covenant on the essential points.

Mendenhall (1962:723) sums it up thus:

... The Sinai Covenant of the Old Testament and the New Testament covenant in Christ's blood are one: each created a people of God out of those who were no people, demanded the complete self surrender to God as a joyful response to the love of God which preceded. The simple stipulation of the Decalogue were summed up in the yet simpler obligation of love at Jesus' command...

On closer inspection of all pertinent passages, one notices that the covenant concept is as Mendenhall asserts.

Firstly, the new covenant does create a new people of God. If one reads the passage of Hebrew 8:6-13 in which Jeremiah 31:31 is quoted, one clearly sees this applied in the new covenant. Note especially verse 10: "for this is the covenant ... I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people". The fact that God binds Himself is clear in v.6 of the same passage, which speaks of a "superior covenant enacted on the basis of superior *promises*". Since God has promised, He is bound by His promise.

Secondly, there is a human condition, obedience. That this condition is really required so that there is not just a *unilateral* promise, is made clear argues Most (1967:16) in several places. First in verse 10, just cited: "I will put My laws into their mind and write them on their hearts" but, still more clearly, Hebrew 10:36 says "for you have need of endurance, so after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise". Here it is explicitly stated that for the people to receive what is promised, they must do the will of God, they must obey. So it is evident that God's promise is not *unilateral*: it is conditioned by people "doing the will of God". In saying this, the will of God within the framework of obedience needs to be clarified. The obedience of the believer is based on faith in God to do what He has promised. Hebrews 10:38 is clear that "... the just shall live by faith ...". This is the bi-laterality expected of the believer within this covenant framework and in which the believer trusts the mediator of the new covenant which is Christ himself.

A confirmation of this bi-laterality of the covenant also appears in the repeated assertions made in Hebrew 7:22; 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, that Christ is the *mediator* or *surety* of a new covenant. In the framework of a last will concept, there is neither need nor place for a mediator. In the framework of a bilateral covenant, parallel to the Sinai, in which Moses was the mediator, there is place for the new Moses, Christ (Heb 3:1-6). As Paul says, "there is no

intermediary where there is only one party” (Gl 3:20) but a *bilateral* agreement has room for an intermediary.

## 9. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is every indication that Paul expected a future for Israel in conformity with the Old Testament predictions and covenants. The “hardness of their minds” attributed to unbelieving Israel in 2 Corinthians 3:14 means that they are outside of the Spirit and the new covenant at the present time. The language of 3:14 is similar to Paul’s description of Israel’s hardness in Romans 11:7-8, 25. Although in 2 Corinthians the agent of Israel’s hardening is unstated, in Romans 11:7-8 the agent is God Himself. The good news is that God has now made a way for those who were never part of the first covenant to now enter into a second much better covenant with better promises. This new covenant ratified at the coming of Christ, marked a new and eschatological epoch in God’s overall purpose for the Gentiles. This new covenant also brought about the coming of God’s Spirit, who now manifests Himself within believers. Through the coming of the Spirit, God has now replaced the heart of stone (Jr 31:31-33) with a new heart of flesh. In Paul, the motif finds expression in 2 Corinthians 3:1-6; where the Corinthians are understood to be recipients of the new covenant in that they were *inscribed by the Spirit of the living God on tablets of human hearts*. Paul himself is the minister of this new covenant which has no longer to do with “letter” but with the Spirit who “gives life”.

This “new Spirit” in turn, is none other than God’s Spirit, who will enable His people to follow His decrees (Ezk 36:27). Thus, the Spirit for Paul is the key to the present fulfilment of the eschatological inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God. The failure of the former covenant, the covenant of law, was that even though Paul considered the law to be “Spiritual” in the sense that it came by way of Spirit-inspiration (Rm 7:14), it was not accompanied by the empowering Spirit. One could say that the reason for a new covenant was the failure of the old to affect a truly meaningful righteousness, a righteousness coming from an obedient heart, rather than finding expression primarily in observance of the law. The new covenant also requires the exercise of obedience in order for it to become meaningful in one’s life. It is bilateral in its application so that both God and His people have undertaken obligations with Him, promising to make them His favoured people, on condition of their obedience.

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