

A REVIEW ARTICLE

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D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume I. The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

If it is a truism that there is no end to the making of many books (Ecclesiastes 12:12), then Qoheleth's famous complaint would appear to be uncommonly appropriate in the face of the unending flow of books, dissertations and articles that have kept the presses rolling ever since the entrée of the "New Perspective" on Paul in his relation to Second Temple Judaism. Appearing in rather close conjunction with certain other responses to the New Perspective,¹ the study under review seeks to shift the paradigm away from the "Sanders/Dunn trajectory," as Moisés Silva calls it,² back to a more traditional Reformational reading of Judaism, especially as it impacts on the doctrine of justification by faith.

1. The New Perspective on Paul in His Relation to Second Temple Judaism

In order to clarify the *raison d'être* of this book, it will be helpful to summarize the position to which it takes exception, as encapsulated by E. P. Sanders' now famous phrase "covenantal nomism."³ Sanders himself explains:

Covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.... Obedience maintains one's position in the covenant, but it does not earn God's grace as such.... Righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect.⁴

¹ P. Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); A. A. Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001); S. Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origins of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); S. J. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

² Silva, "The Law and Christianity: Dunn's New Synthesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991), 341.

³ The following elucidation of the New Perspective is taken up and expanded in my commentary, *An Exposition of Galatians: A New Perspective/Reformational Reading* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 8-15. The New Perspective has been surveyed many times, but a very accessible summary is provided by M. B. Thompson, *The New Perspective on Paul*, Grove Biblical Series (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002). Thompson helpfully applies New Perspective principles to the interpretation of the New Testament and seeks to allay the unfounded fears of many evangelicals. Thompson's booklet is available through Reformation and Revival Ministries.

⁴ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 75, 420, 544.

In one place, he summarizes his position under the following points:

(1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or reestablishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement.⁵

J. D. G. Dunn further clarifies Sanders' outlook:

This covenant relationship was regulated by the law, not as a way of entering the covenant, or of gaining merit, but as the way of living *within* the covenant; and that included the provision of sacrifice and atonement for those who confessed their sins and thus repented.... This attitude Sanders characterized by the now well known phrase "covenantal nomism"—that is, "the maintenance of status" among the chosen people of God by observing the law given by God as part of that covenant relationship.⁶

Additionally, N. T. Wright epitomizes Sanders' work in these terms:

His major point, to which all else is subservient, can be quite simply stated. Judaism in Paul's day was not, as has regularly been supposed, a religion of legalistic works-righteousness. If we imagine that it was, and that Paul was attacking it as if it was, we will do great violence to it and to him. Most Protestant exegetes had read Paul and Judaism as if Judaism was a form of the old heresy Pelagianism, according to which humans must pull themselves up by their moral bootstraps and thereby earn justification, righteousness, and salvation. No, said Sanders. *Keeping the law within Judaism always functioned within a covenantal scheme*. God took the initiative, when he made a covenant with Judaism; God's grace thus precedes everything that people (specifically, Jews) do in response. The Jew keeps the law out of gratitude, as the proper response to grace—not, in other words, in order to *get* into the covenant people, but to *stay* in. Being "in" in the first place was God's gift. This scheme Sanders famously labelled as "covenantal nomism" (from the Greek *nomos*, law). Keeping the Jewish law was the human response to God's covenantal initiative.⁷

To these explanations, I have attempted to summarize covenantal nomism under three basic propositions:

(1) Israel became the people of God by his electing grace as manifested in the Exodus. (2) The covenant forms the context of law-keeping. In other

⁵ Ibid., 422.

⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentary 38 a, b. 2 vols. (Dallas: Word, 1988), 1.1xv. See additionally Dunn's *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 335-40.

⁷ Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 18-19 (italics mine).

words, Israel is bound to keep the law not in order to earn salvation, but in order to maintain her side of the covenant bond. Thus, the stress falls not on legalism but on fidelity to the covenant...and preservation of the community. (3) Sanders, therefore, epitomizes his understanding of Jewish religion with the phrases “getting in” and “staying in.” One “gets in” the covenant by being born into the Jewish community, which was formed in the first place by the electing grace of God. One “stays in” the covenant by keeping the law, not perfectly and certainly not for the purpose of establishing a claim on God, but out of a sincere intention to remain loyal to the God of grace. And if one sinned, God has provided the sacrifices to atone for sin and restore one to his standing within the community.⁸

In the midst of all the debate over these issues and the inevitable confusion on the part of some, Dunn calls to mind that the phrase “covenantal nomism” does indeed consist of two parts: covenant and *nomos* (law).

It is important to note...that Sanders did not characterize Judaism solely as a “covenantal” religion. The key phrase he chose was the double emphasis, “covenantal nomism”. And Sanders made clear that the second emphasis was not to be neglected. The Torah/law was given to Israel to be obeyed, an integral part of the covenant relationship, and that obedience was necessary if Israel’s covenant status was to be maintained. Even if obedience did not earn God’s grace as such, was not a means to “*get into*” the covenant, obedience *was* necessary to maintain one’s position in the covenant, to “*stay in*” the covenant. So defined, Deuteronomy can be seen as the most fundamental statement of Israel’s “covenantal nomism”. Given the traditional emphasis on Judaism’s “nomism” it is hardly surprising that Sanders should have placed greater emphasis on the “covenantal” element in the twin emphasis. But in his central summary statements he clearly recognized that both emphases were integral to Judaism’s self-understanding.⁹

While it is true that Sanders was hardly the first to espouse such an avenue of approach to the sources,¹⁰ it may be safely said that his work represents a watershed in the history of interpretation.¹¹ Since the publication of his book in 1977, Sanders’ assessment of pre-destruction Judaism has become increasingly popular among historians of religion and New Testament scholars. This not to deny, of course, that there are notable exceptions to the growing consensus, as evidenced conspicuously by the volume herein reviewed.

⁸ D. Garlington, “A Review Article: Mark Adam Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism*,” *Reformation and Revival* 10 (2001), 181.

⁹ From Dunn’s review of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, *Trinity Journal*, forthcoming at the time of this writing (my thanks to him for an advance copy of his review).

¹⁰ One thinks of such pioneering efforts as G. F. Moore, “Christian Writers on Judaism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921), 197-254; id., *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*. 3 vols. (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1927); M. Limbeck, *Die Ordnung des Heils: Untersuchungen zum Gesetzesverständnis des Frühjudentums* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1971). R. N. Longenecker was also ahead of his day, though this is frequently overlooked (*Paul: Apostle of Liberty* [New York: Harper & Row, 1964], 65-85). Longenecker characterizes the piety of Hebraic Judaism as “nomism,” not “legalism” in the conventional sense.

¹¹ Of the many summaries of Sanders’ work, handy compendia are provided by Wright, *Saint Paul*, 18-20; S. Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 46-51.

The actual phrase “New Perspective” was coined by James Dunn, in his Manson Memorial Lecture of 1982, entitled “The New Perspective on Paul.”¹² Dunn builds on Sanders’ construction of pre-destruction Judaism, but levels the criticism that “Sanders’ Paul hardly seems to be addressing Sanders’ Judaism.”¹³ In other words, the Paul of Sanders takes his countrymen to task for precisely the same reason that Luther did! Dunn thus distances himself from Sanders’ Paul by defining the apostle’s phrase “the works of the law” not as a generalized principle of obedience for the purpose of earning salvation, but as those works done in response to the covenant in order to maintain the bond between God and Israel (the works of “staying in”). Dunn does maintain that “the works of the law” encompasses the whole Torah, but within the period of the Second Temple certain aspects of the law became especially prominent as the boundary and identity markers of the Jewish people: prominently circumcision, food laws, purity laws, and sabbath.

Dunn is frequently misrepresented on this point, as though he restricts “the works of the law” to the “boundary markers,” without allowing that the whole Torah is in view when Paul employs the phrase. But just the opposite is the case. He states, in point of fact, that circumcision and the other ordinances were *not* the only distinguishing traits of Jewish self-identity. However, they were the focal point of the Hellenistic attack on the Jews during the Maccabean period. As such, they became *the acid tests of one’s loyalty to Judaism*. “In short...the particular regulations of circumcision and food laws [et al.] were important not in themselves, but because they *focused* Israel’s distinctiveness and made visible Israel’s claims to be a people set apart, were the clearest points which differentiated the Jews from the nations. The law was coterminous with Judaism.”¹⁴

It is just to this appraisal of ancient Judaism and Paul’s response that *Justification and Variegated Nomism* takes exception.

2. Summary of Contents and General Evaluation

This book is the first of a two volume project, the primary purpose of which is to re-evaluate Sanders’ identification of the “pattern of religion” of pre-destruction Judaism as “covenantal nomism.” In point of fact, the end in view is to shift the paradigm back to a “pre-Sanders” reading of the Jewish sources. The editors have chosen to proceed much as Sanders himself did: volume one is entirely devoted to the study of Jewish literature in close chronological proximity to Paul, while volume two will be devoted to reading Paul in light of this freshly evaluated literary context.

The motivation of the project is spelled out clearly in the introduction: Sanders’ work has been enormously influential, particularly in the way it constitutes the foundation, or at least the touchstone, for the “New Perspective” on Paul. The editors rightly claim that the work of New Perspective scholars does not represent one monolithic perspective on Paul, but that they generally share an appreciation for the way in which Sanders exposed the biases underlying the study of Paul. Sanders attempted to provide a historically grounded picture of ancient Judaism based directly on the Jewish sources within which Paul is to be situated. The present book thus sets about to test whether Sanders’ notion of “covenantal nomism” adequately characterizes the Judaism of Paul’s day.

¹² Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65 (1983), 95-122. The article is reprinted in Dunn’s *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 183-214.

¹³ Dunn, *New Perspective*, 121.

¹⁴ Dunn, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10-14),” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 526 (this essay is likewise reprinted in *Jesus, Paul, and the Law*, 215-41). See further his “Yet once more—‘The Works of the Law’: A Response,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 46 (1992), 99-117. Dunn justifiably issues a note of protest in *Theology of Paul*, 358, n. 97.

Not including the “Introduction” and “Summary and Conclusions,” both of which are written by D. A. Carson, *Justification and Variegated Nomism* contains 14 essays: Daniel Falk, “Prayers and Psalms;” Craig Evans, “Scripture-Based Stories in the Pseudepigrapha;” Peter Enns, “Expansions of Scripture;” Philip Davies, “Didactic Stories;” Richard Bauckham, “Apocalypses;” Robert Kugler, “Testaments;” Donald Gowan, “Wisdom;” Paul Spilsbury, “Josephus;” Philip Alexander, “Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature;” Martin McNamara, “Some Targumic Themes;” David Hay, “Philo of Alexandria;” Markus Bockmuehl, “IQS and Salvation at Qumran;” Mark Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism;” Roland Deines, “The Pharisees Between ‘Judaisms’ and Common Judaism.”

What strikes the reader immediately is that no “party line” is taken in this book; neither is it uniform in the way each author approaches the literature and relates the question of covenantal nomism to the texts under discussion. While the lack of uniformity might be perceived as a problem of methodological consistency, the diversity of approaches is illuminating in its own way. Had the issue of covenantal nomism been treated with precise uniformity in each chapter, this book would have been entirely predictable, not to say needlessly repetitive.

In the main, the essays are well written, handle the subject matter responsibly and even-handedly, and attempt to update and build on Sanders’ work rather than dismiss or defend it simplistically. In many cases, updating or building on Sanders’ work has meant evaluating literature that Sanders did not include in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Most of the authors recognize the complexity of bringing a modern agenda to ancient writings that may have had a completely different agenda and, consequently, may not easily yield answers to the questions posed. Also, most recognize the complexity of the literature itself and are appropriately cautious in drawing anything resembling sweeping conclusions.

Nevertheless, the volume as a whole has a few drawbacks. First, in the years since Sanders’ seminal work, the amount of material evidence respecting Jewish history, archaeology and theology that has come to light is enormous. And yet a notable amount of this evidence has gone unnoticed. One is left with the impression that at least several of the essays were written in some haste. To be fair, the volume claims to be surveying Jewish literature, not Jewish history generally. Still, because the work aspires to be a comprehensive assessment of whether covenantal nomism is the dominant “pattern of religion” for ancient Judaism broadly speaking, it would have been greatly enhanced by at least some reference to this material.

Second, Carson, as well as a few of the contributors, makes mention of Sanders’ failure to analyze certain works in light of the concept of covenantal nomism, and they imply that Sanders’ selective use of texts skewed the argument. Carson, for example, is perplexed as to why Sanders did not make use of Josephus (p. 522). But it goes unnoticed that Sanders specifically writes in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* that his goal (one of six stated on p. xii) is “to argue a case concerning Palestinian Judaism (that is, Judaism as reflected in material of Palestinian provenance) as a whole.” Thus, Sanders did not claim to be providing an exhaustive study of all relevant Jewish literature; his exclusion of Diaspora literature was quite intentional. How his clearly stated intentions could have escaped the notice of the editors of this book is puzzling.¹⁵

¹⁵ The criticism that Sanders limited the scope of his investigation is oft-repeated and well taken. In fairness, though, it would have taken a multi-volume work to canvass *all* the relevant sources. I attempted to fill a gap as far as the Apocrypha is concerned in my *‘The Obedience of Faith’: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/38* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991). That limitations to any study are in order is illustrated by the thesis of Mark Seifrid, one of the editors of this volume, who confined his study of justification mainly to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Psalms of Solomon* (*Justification By Faith: The Origin and Development of A Central Pauline Theme*, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum 68* [Leiden: Brill, 1992]).

Third, Carson's summaries and conclusions are conspicuously at odds with the majority of the essayists enlisted by him.¹⁶ Most of the contributors actually affirm that "covenantal nomism" is an adequate designation of the Jewish understanding of the relationship between Israel and her God. Carson acknowledges that several authors give qualified validation to covenantal nomism, but he concludes that "the fit isn't very good" (p. 547); or that, while "Sanders is not wrong everywhere...he is wrong when he tries to establish that his category is right everywhere" (p. 543). But in view of the fact that Sanders limited his corpus of documents, and since he himself recognized the diversity of expression in this varied literature, Carson's criticisms are too severe and too polemical.

Even more remarkable is that his conclusions do not coincide with those drawn by the majority of the authors, whose critiques of Sanders are considerably more nuanced and far less aggressive than his own. As Eisenbaum comments, the incongruity is most apparent when Carson calls covenantal nomism "reductionistic" and "misleading"—a charge that might well be leveled against him in relation to the body of work he purports to be summarizing! With some justification, then, Dunn can query:

Was Carson reading a different version of the essays he then published? He complains that the phrase ["covenantal nomism"] is "too doctrinaire". But it seems to be he himself who so regards it; I am not aware of advocates of "the new perspective" who treat it so. Perhaps by presenting it as something rigid it becomes easier to attack. Whereas the findings of most of the contributors to his volume are [saying] in effect that "covenantal nomism" serves well as a summary phrase, so long as one recognizes the variations in emphasis, depending on different styles and circumstances—"variegated *covenantal nomism*"!¹⁷

In spite of my own disagreements with the conclusions drawn by Carson and some of the contributors, the volume comprises a very useful contribution to scholarship. Irrespective of Carson's personal biases, the essays as a whole demonstrate that "covenantal nomism" remains an appropriate category for assessing Second Temple literature. A case in point is Richard Bauckham's appraisal of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*. Sanders conceded that *4 Ezra*, as a conspicuous exception to the "rule" of covenantal nomism, lapses into out-and-out legalism, although *2 Baruch* already undertakes to correct the outlook of its author.¹⁸ Bauckham, by contrast, thinks that these two documents represent a variety of covenantal nomism that places extra stress on law-obedience.¹⁹

¹⁶ An observation made by a number of reviewers: Dunn; P. Eisenbaum, "Review of Biblical Literature" (accessible to members of the Society of Biblical Literature at the SBL home page); J. Byron, "Review of Biblical Literature;" I. W. Scott, "Review of Biblical Literature;" C. Blomberg, "Denver Journal" (accessible at the home page of Denver Seminary); M. Bockmuehl, in a Cambridge Ph.D. seminar, accessible at <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/staff/Head/J&VN.htm>.

¹⁷ Dunn relates the sagacious counsel of C. F. D. Moule that statements may vary quite strikingly in emphasis due to the very different circumstances to which they are addressed.

¹⁸ Sanders, *Paul*, 427-28.

¹⁹ With regard to *4 Ezra*, Bauckham makes several points. (1) Salvation is not represented as the result of weighing an individual's deeds, but as the reward for the kind of life the righteous person has led in faithfulness to God and the Torah. (2) It is a false alternative to posit that there is an inconsistency between God's grace and keeping the law. God gives salvation to those members of his elect people who have kept the terms of the covenant. (3) *4 Ezra* illustrates how the basic and flexible pattern of covenantal nomism could take forms in which the emphasis is overwhelmingly on salvation by obedience to the law. *2 Baruch* endorses essentially the same outlook. My only qualification is that Bauckham applies the term "merit" to the process of keeping the terms of the covenant. I would say, rather, that keeping the terms of the covenant is "righteousness."

As regards this book's applicability to Paul's theology, we must await volume two. However, we may anticipate that book by posing what would appear to be a piece of presumptive reasoning, as this first installment is meant to lay the groundwork for the second. To judge from what one may piece together from the editors' intentions, it would seem that the argumentation is as follows: Second Temple Judaism was diverse; therefore, there were legalists in Paul's day; therefore, Paul is arguing against the "legalists" (as opposed to the "covenantal nomists"). Time will tell how the editors intend to pursue this apparent agenda. But at this stage of the game, one senses that the entire enterprise may well prove to be reductionistic.

It is fair to say that scholars generally acknowledge that the Judaism of the Second Temple period was diverse. In fact, it is normally taken for granted that one should speak, these days, of *Judaisms* rather than *Judaism*.²⁰ Even so, we may legitimately continue to speak of the "four pillars of Second Temple Judaism," which provided an element of unity amidst all the diversity.²¹ Thus, it is possible to overwork the diversity angle. But even granting to this volume that pre-destruction Judaism was diverse, its real title, as Dunn proposes, should have been *Justification and Variegated Covenantal Nomism*.²²

In rounding of this segment of the review, just a couple of technical notes. For one, the editors should have exercised a heavier hand in breaking up long and complex paragraphs, of which there are many, for the sake of easier reading. For another, the volume is beautifully printed, but one wonders why the peculiar Hebrew font was chosen, one that certainly does not facilitate the reading process.

3. Specific Response to Mark Seifrid

Mark Seifrid's essay on "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism" is of particular interest because it brings us to the heart of the recent debate respecting justification and related issues. Because volume one is intended to pave the way for volume two of this undertaking on justification, it will be worth the while to examine what promises to be one of the more significant foundational articles for the exegesis of Pauline texts that is to follow.

3.1 Summary of Seifrid's Argument

Seifrid's essay commences with a very competent and helpful survey of scholarship pertaining to righteousness. (One only wishes that, for the sake of the general reader, the German quotations had been translated.) In this introductory segment, Seifrid is concerned to resist conceptions of righteousness that limit it to only a relationship and seek to dismiss any notion of a righteous status and a righteous norm. Correspondingly, he also takes scholars to task who fail to grasp the punitive component of righteousness language in its Jewish setting.

²⁰ See Garlington, *Obedience of Faith*, 263-64.

²¹ J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity Press International, 1991), 18-36. Note as well J. M G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 401.

²² Note again Bauckham's appraisal of covenantal nomism as flexible enough to accommodate even an extra heavy stress on law-keeping (*Variegated Nomism*, 174). In the case of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* in particular, account must be taken of the circumstances of their composition, i.e., in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem. Bauckham quotes J. J. Collins to the effect that the pessimism of *4 Ezra* "springs not so much from its lofty standards as from historical experience" (*ibid.*).

The nub of the matter resides in Seifrid's downplay of righteousness as covenant fidelity. According to Seifrid, we have been misled by scholars who equate the "righteousness" word-group (the Hebrew verb *tsadaq*, the nouns *tsedek* and *tsdeqah* and the adjective *tsadiq*) with "covenant" (*berith*). He is convinced of this because, on his count, there are only seven passages in the Old Testament in which the terms come into "any significant semantic contact" (p. 423). The passages are: Nehemiah 9:32-33; Psalm 50:1-6; 111:1-10; Isaiah 42:6; 61:8-11; Hosea 2:16-20; Daniel 9:4-7. Seifrid concedes that a full explanation for the infrequency of the convergence of these terms would have to be quite detailed, and that the relation of righteousness to covenant may be approached from historical and theological perspectives rather than of lexical semantics. Such matters, however, lie beyond the scope of his concern.

In pursuing his agenda that "righteousness" = covenant fidelity is misleading, Seifrid proposes that the word "covenant" signifies "a distinct relationship, which often calls forth quasi-forensic and familial language." In biblical terms, he says, one does not "act righteously or unrighteously" with respect to a covenant. Rather, one "keeps," "remembers," "establishes" a covenant, or the like. Conversely, one "breaks," "transgresses," "forsakes," "despises," "forgets" or "profanes" a covenant. He notes that charges of covenantal infidelity appear in the Prophets in the form of familial metaphors (e.g., Isaiah 1:2; Hosea 1:2). Expressed positively, a covenantal relation demands love and loyalty (Hosea 6:6). For this reason, "to act in faithfulness and love in a covenant is to act righteously, of course, so that it is not surprising to find righteousness language in occasional connection with *hesed* ("loving kindness" or "covenant love") and *'emunah* ("faith/faithfulness")" (p. 424). Such data lead Seifrid to conclude:

Just as a covenant is a particular kind of relation, righteousness takes the particular form of love and loyalty in a covenantal relation. All "covenant-keeping" is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is "covenant-keeping." It is misleading, therefore, to speak of "God's righteousness" as his "covenant-faithfulness." It would be closer to the biblical language to speak of "faithfulness" as "covenant-righteousness" (*ibid.*).

Next in the argument, Seifrid proffers that the biblical understanding of righteousness, in the first instance, has to do with creation rather than covenant. This, for him, accounts for the infrequent collocation (statistically speaking) of righteousness and covenant language. In favor of this conclusion, Seifrid points to the frequency with which "righteousness" is associated with the vocabulary of "ruling and judging," particularly in the case of the king of Israel. At root, however, the biblical conception of kingship bears a universal dimension stemming from creation. The frequent association of "righteousness" language with "ruling and judging," therefore, strongly supports the claim that "righteousness" has to do with creational theology. As Seifrid contends, "For the biblical writers, the demand for social justice derives from God, the divine king, who has determined to secure the good and beneficial order of creation" (p. 426). It is just because of this juridical background of righteousness as the expression of the divine king's function to restore and promote social order that explains, for Seifrid, the frequent association of "salvation" and "deliverance" words with "righteousness."

Seifrid buttresses his argument by noting that frequently in these instances in which "salvation" and "righteousness" stand in parallel "righteousness" is represented by the feminine form of the noun, *tsdeqah*. In so observing, he presses a distinction between the feminine and masculine genders of "righteousness," as both occur in the Hebrew Bible. His claim is that there is a difference of usage between the two: "the feminine tends to refer to a concrete thing such as a righteous act or vindicating judgment. The masculine usually signifies the more abstract concept of 'right order' or 'that which is morally right'" (p. 428). On this basis, Seifrid then maintains that the feminine form of the noun is favored by biblical writers to articulate the vindicating and punitive acts of God. God is thus said to be

“righteous” (*tsadiq*) when he rewards righteous people and punishes the guilty. Therefore—and this is the point at which Seifrid is driving—the relative frequency of the idea of “saving righteousness” (*iustitia salutifera*) is accounted for by God’s promises to intervene to “right” the wrongs in a fallen world. Presumably, Seifrid elaborates this proposition in an attempt to root the synonymous parallelism of “righteousness” and “salvation,” found in some prominent Old Testament texts,²³ not so much in God’s “covenant fidelity” as in his role of king and judge, the one who brings retributive justice to the earth.

Now ensues a survey of righteousness language in extrabiblical Jewish writings stemming from the end of the exile to the production of the Mishnah. Seifrid rightly notes that, for various reasons, the task of analyzing this language is exceedingly complex. His own analysis of the lexical data looks first to the Dead Sea Scrolls and thereafter to rabbinic literature.

With respect to the Qumran materials, Seifrid concedes that “covenant” is often associated with righteousness terminology (see p. 434, n. 90 for references). However, he questions that Sanders’ framework of interpretation holds even here: “The community regarded the covenant into which they had entered as the true will of God, which one was obliged to perform” (p. 434). Then, citing passages from the *Community Rule* (1QS) 1:7-8; 3:9b-12), he fastens on the demand for the sect to walk in perfection in all God’s ways. Such expressions as “perfection of way” and “uprightness of heart,” he writes, are not general references to piety, but rather represent “the essence of the life and worship of the community” (p. 437). From this he concludes: “Even though the divine saving intervention is still anticipated, the Qumran covenant does not save as a promise prior to and independent of obedience, but precisely *as* the ‘perfection of way’ in which righteousness is found” (p. 435).

Seifrid’s attention is particularly devoted to *Community Rule* 11:2-4, according to which the author praises God for the righteousness that has blotted out his transgressions and vindicated him. Repeating his earlier interpretation of this passage,²⁴ Seifrid prefers a reconstruction of the Hebrew text that would make the psalmist say: “with *my* righteous deeds he blots out my transgressions,” rather than “with *his* [God’s] righteousness he blots out my transgressions.”²⁵ Given this rendering, it follows that:

The thought of 1QS 11:3 remains firmly grounded in the saving action of God. The righteousness of the psalmist is given to him by God, in the life and worship of the community. It is no contradiction to this thought, that the Qumran writers also speak of human beings as having no righteousness. The righteousness which they have is not theirs, but is found in the community which God founded. Likewise, the various references to hope in or the experience of God’s righteousness (singular) in the context of 1QS 11:3 do not make the reading we have offered less likely. The point to be taken from this reading of 1QS 11:3 is simply that for the Qumran community covenantal forgiveness is found in the doing of God-given deeds of righteousness, not apart from them, as Sanders has claimed (pp. 437-38).

²³ Psalm 98:2-3, 8-9 (LXX 97:2-3, 8-9); Isaiah 45:22-25; 51:5-6; 62:1-2. Noteworthy as well are Psalm 35:27-28 (LXX 34:27-28); 72:1-4 (LXX 71:1-4, 7); 85:11-13 (LXX 84:12-14); 96:13 (LXX 95:13); Isaiah 9:7 (LXX 9:6); 11:1-2, 5; 45:8, 22-25; 51:5-6; 53:10-11; 61:11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Malachi 4:2 (LXX 3:20).

²⁴ Seifrid, *Justification by Faith*, 100-03.

²⁵ The argument is based on the contention that the Hebrew letters *waw* and *yodh*, which form the pronominal suffixes of the noun “righteousness,” are indistinguishable from one another in 1QS. This allows Seifrid to opt for “*my* righteous deeds” rather than “*his* righteous deeds.”

The final segment of Seifrid's essay is taken up with a consideration of rabbinic literature. His thesis is that the usage of "covenant" (*berith*) in these materials is far more complicated than Sanders was willing to allow. Drawing on the work of Friedrich Avemarie, Seifrid forwards several points. (1) The rabbis associate Israel's election with the Abrahamic covenant and circumcision, not the Sinai covenant and exodus. (2) The rabbis most frequently use "covenant" as an act of obedience in association with the Abrahamic covenant. (3) Therefore, Sanders' use of the phrase "being in the covenant" to convey the notion of "participating in salvation" does not fit the nature of the rabbinic usage, since the idea of obedience is often attached to "covenant," as in the Scriptures. (4) Furthermore, when Sanders speaks of the obligation of the righteous as "faithfulness to the covenant," he has deviated from the rabbinic perspective, which placed emphasis on submission to the "yoke of heaven," i.e., love and fear toward the one true God. This faithfulness to God is to be manifested in actual obedience, which, as it was assumed, the human being has the ability to perform, not merely obeying the law to the best of one's ability.

When it comes to righteousness language in rabbinic authors, Seifrid employs the opposite tack of claiming that *tsadiq* is narrower than Sanders would have us believe. He points to the well known fact that *tsadiq* comes to mean "almsgiving" in this literature (this usage finds some precedent in the books of Sirach and Tobit). More to the point, Seifrid contests Sanders' definition of "righteous" as "the general term for one who is properly religious." For him, the word is narrower: "the term sets forth the ideal of obedience for the community, as is evident from its exceedingly rare application to contemporaries, and more frequent association with notable figures from the past" (p. 439). Furthermore, it is clear enough that the rabbis could view God's righteousness in terms of a retributive justice applicable to all creation.

For Seifrid, the bottom line is that these usages of righteousness terminology make it quite clear that Sanders' description of "righteousness" as "(Israel's) covenant status" is inadequate. The rabbinic application of the title of "righteous" to Gentiles indicates that for them, just as in biblical usage, righteousness terminology has to do with creational thought, not merely God's covenant with Israel. "Righteousness," then, can be used with reference to conformity to divine demands, and not merely membership within Israel.

The essay concludes with the concession that the task of plotting the semantic field of righteousness terminology in the Hebrew Scriptures and early Jewish writings lies far beyond the scope of Seifrid's study, and perhaps is not even feasible, owing to its complexity. Nevertheless, he remarks, the works of David Hill, J. A. Ziesler and others are indicative of "the need for greater sensitivity to the distinction between concepts and word meanings in the treatment of righteousness terminology" (p. 441).²⁶

More significantly, he believes that his observations call for a reassessment of recent interpretations of Paul's understanding of "the righteousness of God" and "justification" as God's "covenant faithfulness" to Israel. The associations from the Psalms and Isaiah, which Paul evokes by speaking of the "revelation of God's righteousness" (Romans 1:17), belong to creational thought. God appears in such texts as creator, Lord, and king, who "rules and judges" the entire earth. It is conceded that God acts in faithfulness toward his people, contends with their enemies, and executes judgment on their behalf. Yet his acts of "justification" do not represent mere "salvation" for Israel, or even merely "salvation." They constitute the establishment of justice in the world which Yahweh made and governs. Indeed, they may be seen to entail his own justification as the

²⁶ The reference is to Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

true God over against the idols. The nations are to anticipate that Yahweh will bring about justice for them, even as he has brought it about for Israel. Moreover, in both the Hebrew Scriptures and early Judaism, the usage of righteousness language includes the idea of retributive justice, which is taken up by Paul in his own elaboration of justification.

3.2 Response

Without attempting anything like a definitive rejoinder to Seifrid's essay, he has raised a number of issues that deserve some attention.

At the outset, it is to be acknowledged that this study is of positive value in that it (re)establishes that "righteousness" possesses decided components of a righteous status and norm, and that the notion of retributive justice cannot be dismissed, as too many scholars are prepared to do.²⁷ I would add that it is just this punitive side of righteousness that underlies Romans 1:18-3:20, as it follows upon 1:17: the revelation of the wrath of God from heaven as the "dark side" of the revelation of his righteousness in the gospel.

Having said that, this essay is largely concerned to downplay righteousness as covenant fidelity. Seifrid is quite sure that we have been misled by scholars who equate the "righteousness" word-group with "covenant." In attempting a response, it will be convenient to proceed, as much as possible, point by point.

(1) A mainstay of Seifrid's methodology is a statistical analysis of the conjoined occurrences of "righteousness" and "covenant." As noted before, Seifrid concedes that a full explanation for the infrequency of the convergence of these terms would have to be quite detailed, and that the relation of righteousness to covenant may be approached from historical and theological perspectives as opposed to lexical semantics. Such matters, he avers, lie beyond the scope of his concern. Consequently, instead of looking to covenant as the matrix of righteousness language, Seifrid invokes creation categories, especially as creation provides the basis for the retributive justice of the sovereign king of the universe. The upshot of the whole discussion is that he wants to remove righteousness as much as possible from the relational sphere in order to stress its forensic side. Seifrid leaves the impression that if the equation of righteousness with justice were to be established, then the component of covenant fidelity could be relegated to a subordinate position.

Yet it is just here that the methodological flaws of this study are the most evident. For one, Seifrid's approach is defective in that it is restricted to lexical semantics and does not take into account the historical and theological perspectives needed to form a fully rounded and biblically accurate picture of righteousness. As Dunn observes, Seifrid limited himself to passages in which the actual word "covenant" occurs in conjunction with "righteousness." But surely, as most students of the Bible are aware, concepts may occur even when specific lexical entries are not present.

For another, one of the most telling defects of Seifrid's argumentation is the failure to recognize that creation and covenant are overlapping and complementary to a considerable degree. Studies such as those of W. J. Dumbrell and Robert Murray have demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that the various biblical covenants recapitulate creation ideas: each covenant is a kind of new creation.²⁸ This being so, to root

²⁷ Seifrid's case would have been strengthened by a reference to The Prayer of Azariah. The Prayer contains an acknowledgment of the justice of God's judgment against a covenant-breaking people (vv. 4-5, 8-9). God, according to Azariah, is "righteous" (*dikaios*) because he has upheld his covenant threats to punish a disloyal nation (cf. Nehemiah 9:33; Tobit 3:2; Additions to Esther 14:6-7; Qumran *Community Rule* 1:26).

²⁸ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984); Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Heythrop Monographs 7 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992). See also B. W. Anderson, *From Creation to New*

righteousness in creation is, *ipso facto*, to anchor it in covenant as well. The effect of Seifrid's distancing of creation from covenant is a false dichotomy of entities that are, for all theological and practical purposes, indivisible.

(2) By merely listing the passages in which righteousness and covenant coincide (Nehemiah 9:32-33; Psalm 50:1-6; 111:1-10; Isaiah 42:6; 61:8-11; Hosea 2:16-20; Daniel 9:4-7), Seifrid has failed to convey their central significance. As we take a closer look at these texts, it will be seen that they hardly exist in a vacuum; rather, each is a kind of epitome of a broader spectrum of covenantal thought in which righteousness as fidelity to a relationship plays a principal role.

Nehemiah 9:32-33 is part of Ezra's penitential prayer, confessing the infidelity of Israel and the fidelity of God. Yahweh's faithfulness, in this instance, pertains to his removal of the people from the land because of their idolatry.²⁹ This prayer, along with similar ones in Ezra 9 and Daniel 9, gave rise to the penitential prayer tradition of Second Temple Judaism.³⁰ As a whole, the prayer is rooted in numerous biblical traditions.³¹ As Werline notes, the prayer, like Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 106 and passages from Isaiah 56-66, is a retelling of Israel's past as a history of sin (I would prefer to say a history of idolatry).³² Although vv. 32-33 of the prayer fasten on the punitive side of God's righteousness, they do take us to the heart of the "righteousness" word-groups in Hebrew and Greek. That is to say, the covenant stands or falls by virtue of fidelity or infidelity. The land suffers the ravages of chaos (Isaiah 32:14; Jeremiah 4:23-26) and the nation is taken off into a foreign land when idolatry reaches the point of no return. In the mind of Ezra the scribe, the essence of righteousness is the maintenance of loyalty, from both the divine and human sides.

It is particularly noteworthy that the kindred prayer of Ezra 9 is rooted in the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) and the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30, as Werline has shown.³³ This means that the acknowledgement of Israel's spiritual adultery and God's husbandly faithfulness is far from incidental or peripheral to a biblical definition of righteousness. The very existence of the marriage-covenant is contingent on the righteous/faithful behavior of its partners.³⁴

Daniel 9:4-7 is like *Nehemiah 9:32-33*.³⁵ Set in the exile, Daniel's confessional prayer recounts the same problems as Ezra's: Israel has been banished from the land because of idolatry. Whereas God keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, "we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to

Creation: Old Testament Perspectives, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), esp. 146-64.

²⁹ As taken up and applied by later literature: Prayer of Azariah 4-5, 8-9; Tobit 3:2; Additions to Esther 14:6-7; Qumran *Community Rule* 1:26.

³⁰ See R. A. Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution*, Society of Biblical Literature: Early Judaism and Its Literature 13 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

³¹ See the tabulation of passages by J. M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Anchor Bible 14 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 167-69.

³² Werline, *Prayer*, 57. On the motif of Israel's unfaithfulness, see R. C. Ortlund, *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

³³ Werline, *Prayer*, 46-53.

³⁴ That the covenant is a marriage-like relationship is well known. But see the detailed study of G. P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi*, Biblical Studies Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

³⁵ See Werline, *Prayer*, 67-86.

your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land” (vv. 4-6). For this reason, Daniel is compelled to acknowledge that “righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel....” (v. 7).

Like the prayer of Ezra, Daniel’s confession presupposes the blessings and curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. As John Goldingay remarks, the prayer’s opening allusion to God’s keeping his covenant commitment is not an implicit appeal for mercy, but an acknowledgment that Yahweh has kept his side of the covenant and bears no responsibility for its collapse.³⁶ But as distinct from Ezra, Daniel prays in positive terms by linking righteousness to God’s covenant love toward those who love him and keep his commandments. Goldingay comments that this is the point that Daniel 9:23 echoes: “the history of Israel is the story of God’s faithfulness to them; his promises, his protection has been constant.”³⁷

The text is explicit and emphatic in its identification of righteousness with covenant commitment. It is on this basis that Daniel pleads with God: “O Lord, in view of all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain; because of our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors, Jerusalem and your people have become a disgrace among all our neighbors” (v. 16). The “righteous acts” (*tsdeqoth*) of Yahweh recall Judges 5:11b; 1 Samuel 12:7; Psalm 103:6; Isaiah 45:24; Micah 6:5. Again Goldingay speaks to the point. These right acts are his actions on behalf of Israel attacked or afflicted by oppressors in Egypt, in the wilderness, in the period of the Judges and in the exile. At the beginning of Daniel’s plea (v. 15), he refers specifically to the exodus, Yahweh’s paradigm “righteous acts.” According to Goldingay, “God brought Israel out of Egypt by strength of hand and thus established his reputation for doing what is right.”³⁸

Psalm 50 strikes the theme of the appearance of Yahweh for judgment, cast in terms of theophany, and probably echoing the giving of the law on Sinai (especially in view of v. 5).³⁹ Its contents, as A. A. Anderson comments, are reminiscent of the classical prophets, with their admonitions and conditional promises.⁴⁰ Thus, in keeping with this prophetic atmosphere of the Psalm, vv. 1-6 depict Yahweh as the coming judge. In a manner recalling Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19; 32:1; Isaiah 1:2, heaven and earth are called upon as witnesses to the judgment (see also Micah 6:1-2; Jeremiah 2:12).⁴¹ In accordance with what scholars have called the “*rib* motif” (*rib* is the Hebrew verb for “contend”), God intrudes theophanically to engage his people in covenant lawsuit.⁴²

³⁶ Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 242.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

³⁹ On the theophany motif of the Psalm, see H. J. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 491-92.

⁴⁰ Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible. 2 vols. (Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1972), 1.381.

⁴¹ P. Craigie notes that in the original covenant the people accepted Moses’ invocation of heaven and earth (*Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 [Waco: Word, 1983], 365; *id.*, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 376). But now, the same heaven and earth testify as “hostile witnesses” against them.

⁴² With regard to Isaiah 1:2, J. Oswalt rightly notes that Isaiah’s references to covenant are not as explicit as those of Jeremiah. In fact, Isaiah does not use *berith* at all. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Isaiah knows of the covenant. Covenant would appear to be the ground of all the prophet’s thinking; it is a pattern for living, without which life cannot be sustained (*The Book of Isaiah*, New International Commentary on

In commencing the judgment, Yahweh commands: “Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!” (v. 5, probably alluding to Exodus 24). The term translated “faithful ones” is the Hebrew *hasid*. This is the same adjective employed by David in Psalm 32:6, where he implores “everyone loyal to Yahweh’s covenant” (Anderson’s translation) to pray. Craigie states that the term “designates specifically those who were committed to God in the relationship of a covenant.”⁴³ Later in Jewish history, this term would distinguish the Israelite loyalists from apostate Jews during the Maccabean crisis (e.g., 1 Maccabees 2:24; 7:13).

The occurrence of *hasid* in the present passage might be unexpected, since the Psalm has to do with the judgment of an apparently less than faithful people. Anderson suggests that “faithful ones” may convey a touch of irony, unless we understand the phrase as equivalent to “my covenant people,” i.e., “those whose main characteristic is not so much any special virtue or obedience, as their responsibility to God and his laws.”⁴⁴ A. Weiser concurs: the phrase “my godly ones” (his translation) “addresses the members of the people of God not on account of their special virtues but on the strength of their responsibility, which follows from their relationship with God.”⁴⁵ If these appraisals of the “faithful ones” are correct, then it is simply underscored that the center of gravity of a covenant is a *relationship*, so much so that even a people ripe for judgment can be depicted in terms of the alliance they are bound to maintain.

In the Psalmist’s mind, therefore, it is only natural to invoke the righteousness of God: “The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge” (v. 6). Anderson thinks that “righteousness” is tantamount to Yahweh’s “righteous claim.” However, it is more natural to maintain the traditional translation of “righteousness” and refer the term to the Lord’s obligation to uphold the curses of the covenant (see above). As in the case of Nehemiah 9:32-33, the “dark side” of righteousness is brought into view, as stressed by the predication of this attribute to God the judge. To be sure, Psalm 50:5-6 is a strong text for establishing a retributive element of righteousness (it is somewhat surprising that Seifrid does not make more of it). Nevertheless, the notion of righteousness here does not appear out of the blue, nor does it occur in the abstract, simply because this Psalm is steeped in the covenant theology of Exodus, Deuteronomy and the Prophets. If Yahweh the judge brings retributive justice upon Israel, it is precisely because *the covenant* has been violated.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the “faithful ones” are to renew with sacrifice the covenant that was ratified by sacrifice (Exodus 24), in order to see the salvation of God (vv. 14, 23).

Psalm 111 is a hymn of praise. Kraus’ summary of its contents is apropos for our purposes:

the Old Testament. 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 1.85). A consideration such as this should have been weighed more carefully by Seifrid.

⁴³ Craigie, *Psalms, 1-50*, 365.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Psalms*, 1.384.

⁴⁵ Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 395.

⁴⁶ One of Seifrid’s objections to *berith* as the matrix of righteousness is that it has received “the same abstract treatment” as *tsdeqah*. He complains that scholars are not clear in their delineation of “God’s covenant faithfulness.” Is the reference to the Sinaitic, Abrahamic, Davidic or Noachic covenant, or something else? He questions whether it is historically and theologically legitimate “to collapse all of the biblical covenants into one” (p. 425, n. 47). However, this particular problem is imaginary, not real. No one is suggesting that the various covenants be collapsed into one. God’s faithfulness to his people pertains historically and theologically to whatever covenant they find themselves under at any given period of salvation history, with its own peculiar demands and privileges. Far from being abstract, God’s righteousness as covenant faithfulness is a principle that transcends the various epochs of *Heilsgeschichte* and yet is localized in each.

(1) This psalm is a hymnic and didactic record of God's gracious attention to his chosen people. It glorifies the reliable, foundational event of the covenant and the continuous salvific faithfulness of Yahweh in history and worship. The foundational traditions of the OT are addressed by means of short references. (2) The singer wants to provide his hearers with a new relation to Yahweh's management and rule. An inner appropriation, joy and fear, is to be determinative.⁴⁷

The two points affirmed by Kraus are typical of all the seven passages under consideration: Psalm 111 presupposes the foundational event of the covenant and God's faithfulness to it, and then seeks to apply "Yahweh's management and rule" to its own day.

In this Psalm, the righteousness of God that endures forever (v. 3) is demonstrated by his "works" (v. 2) and "wonderful deeds" (v. 4). In short, "the Lord is gracious and merciful" (v. 4), proof positive of which is that "He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant" (v. 5). It is by virtue of such "works," "wonderful deeds," "grace" and "mercy" that he has given his people the heritage of the nations (v. 6). Apart from these adulations, the faithfulness of Yahweh is particularly stressed in vv. 7-9:

The works of his hands are faithful and just;
 all his precepts are trustworthy.
 They are established forever and ever,
 to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
 He sent redemption to his people;
 he has commanded his covenant forever.
 Holy and awesome is his name.

If anything is conspicuous from this Psalm, it is that the faithfulness of God is assessed in no other terms than that of covenant. The *righteousness* of God that endures forever (v. 3) is just his *fidelity* that has been revealed in the "works" and "wonderful deeds" that have procured a heritage for his people. In performing such works, he is "*mindful of his covenant*" (v. 5).

On the people's part, the corresponding attitude is articulated as the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding (v. 10). That the bottom line of the Psalm is the fear of God is of more than passing significance. If the Lord has "commanded [literally, "cut" or "made"] his covenant forever," then the fear of God is the primal response on the part of the human participants in the covenant. In his study of the fear of God in the Old Testament, J. Becker has demonstrated that the phrase "fear of God" is the Old Testament equivalent of "religion," i.e., devotion to the Lord who has redeemed his people by grace.⁴⁸ In practical terms, the fear of the Lord is obedience to the divine will. In his study of the theology of the Psalms, Kraus appropriately subsumes "the fear of God" under "The Faith of the Righteous." He notes that in English we do not have terms that could reproduce the loyal, intimate and trusting relationship of life and service, the commitment and devotion of those who are faithful to God. Nevertheless:

The most frequent expression in the Psalms for this relationship is "those who fear Yahweh" (Ps. 22:23; 25:12, 14; 31:19; 34:7, 9; 61:5; 66:16; 85:9; 103:11, 13; 112: 1; 128:4; 130:4; 147:11). Those who fear Yahweh live in obedience to God's will, in permanent attentiveness and submission. What is involved here is a never-ending commitment to the God of Israel and to

⁴⁷ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 359.

⁴⁸ Becker, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, Analecta Biblica 25 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1965).

his commandments, an always present “knowledge of God”.... For those who fear Yahweh, God is a living reality. They look for the self-disclosure of God and are always alert to receive him. Undoubtedly, the phrase “fear Yahweh” became less vivid with the passage of time and occasionally it became a mere formal designation. But the basic meaning of real fear never disappeared, fear that knows that God is the judge and is aware of his incomprehensible sovereignty and freedom (Ps. 119:120). Fear does not exclude love.... Yahweh’s people turn to him in love (Ps. 5:11; 18: 1; 31:23; 40:16; 69:36; 97: 10; 122:6; 145:20). They are constantly attentive to God and always long to be near him. Therefore they love the temple as the place where they meet God (Ps. 26:8; 27:4; 84:4).⁴⁹

So, even while the actual term “righteousness” is not predicated of the faithful, it comes down to that all the same. Those who fear the Lord are none other than his covenant keeping people. As though the covenant setting of the Psalm needed further confirmation, the provision of food (v. 5) probably harks back to Israel in the wilderness. The Psalmist’s thought is thereby anchored to the exodus and the establishment of the law at Sinai. Once more in Kraus’ words: our Psalm “*glorifies the reliable, foundational event of the covenant and the continuous salvific faithfulness of Yahweh in history and worship.*”⁵⁰

Isaiah 42:6 (7) comes in the midst of one of the great servant songs of the prophet’s volume of consolation for Israel:

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
 I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
 I have given you as a covenant to the people,
 a light to the nations,
 to open the eyes that are blind,
 to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
 from the prison those who sit in darkness.

After the identification of the called one in Isaiah 42:1-5, vv. 6-7 inform us of the manner and purpose of his calling. Here, Yahweh announces that he has called this personage “in righteousness.” E. J. Young interprets “in righteousness” to be “in the sphere of righteousness.” Young then defines righteousness as “conformity to a fixed norm or standard.” To “act in righteousness,” therefore, is to act in accordance with what is right, with absolute justice. However, since there is no abstract standard of justice apart from God, the servant acts in accordance with God’s will and purpose.⁵¹

Young’s appraisal of Isaiah’s language is correct as far as it goes. Yet he is guilty of abstracting “conformity to a fixed norm or standard” from its moorings in the covenant *relationship*, a relationship that permeates all the servant songs with their atmosphere of

⁴⁹ Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 157-58. So fundamental is the fear of God that the scribe Jesus Ben Sira made it one of the outstanding themes of his wisdom book. See J. Haspecker, *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach: Ihre religiöse Struktur und ihre literarische und doktrinaire Bedeutung*, *Analecta Biblica* 30 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1967). According to Ben Sira, the fear of God is tantamount to trust in God (Sirach 1:14), an equation surely derived from the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. J. Snaith comments that “the fear of the Lord implies neither childish terror nor merely formal respect for authority.” Rather, “It is to be understood...as a warm, personal trust and reverence” (*Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*, Cambridge Bible Commentary [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974], 11).

⁵⁰ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 359 (italics mine).

⁵¹ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament. 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965-72), 3.118.

mutual intimacy and trust between Yahweh and his servant. Besides, strictly speaking, the servant does not “act in righteousness,” but is “called in righteousness.” The reference is indeed to the sphere of his calling, and, as such, the sphere is just that of covenant commitment.

Given that the arena of the servant’s calling is “righteousness,” we are not surprised that the design of his commission is to be a “covenant to the people” and “a light to the nations.” Exegetically, there is the question of whether “people” has Israel specifically in mind or is synonymously parallel to “nations.”⁵² For our purposes, it is necessary only to observe that the servant is depicted as though he himself were a covenant. In the abstract, this might seem odd: How can a person be a covenant? However, given the characteristic nature and ethos of a biblical covenant, the point is that the servant has been called to be the very embodiment of God’s own faithfulness to all nations.⁵³

If Ernst Käsemann was right, then the thought of Isaiah 42:6 is grounded in the creation. God’s righteousness, according to Käsemann, is none other than his commitment to the creation; and in the act of justification God is seen to reclaim the creation as his own.⁵⁴ The creation reference is confirmed by the “light” that the servant will shed on the nations. “Light” is generally a metaphor for “salvation,” but ultimately it stems from Genesis 1:3, as brought forward by numerous passages from both Testaments. As the light-bearer, the servant is the bringer of a new creation to the entire globe of sinful humanity—“far as the curse is found.” It is he who causes a new order to emerge from the chaos of sin by virtue of the knowledge of himself (cf. Isaiah 53:11; John 17:3).

In biblical-theological perspective, this servant is Jesus the Christ, who is placed before our view as the man of faith exemplifying covenant steadfastness and fidelity (especially in the Gospel temptation narratives and the Letter to the Hebrews).⁵⁵ It is he who shines eschatologically upon the nations (Matthew 4:15-16 [= Isaiah 9:1-2]; John 1:4-5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5, etc.). If, then, Christ embodies in his own person and work new covenant/new creation realities, it is he who empowers “all the nations” to render to God the creator “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26). The obedient one has created a race of creatures in his own image (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:49).⁵⁶

We see in Isaiah 42:6, therefore, another instance in which a passage draws together vocabulary, images and conceptions founded much earlier in the biblical record. By virtue of this intertextuality, it is confirmed once more that the intermingling of righteousness and covenant is embedded in the consciousness of a scriptural author.⁵⁷

⁵² See the discussions of Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 2.117-18; Young, *Isaiah*, 3.119-20.

⁵³ Cf. Young, *Isaiah*, 3.120-21.

⁵⁴ Käsemann, “‘The Righteousness of God’ in Paul,” *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 168-82.

⁵⁵ Many scholars are convinced that Paul articulates this conception of Christ the covenant-keeper by means of the Greek phrase literally translated as “faith of Jesus Christ” (*pistis Iêsou Christou*) (e.g., Romans 3:22, 26; Galatians 2:16). For discussions of the phrase, with other literature, see my *Galatians*, 112-13, 127; I. G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 84 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); essays by R. B. Hays, J. D. G. Dunn and P. J. Achtemeier in *Pauline Theology. Volume IV: Looking Back, Pressing On*. eds. E. E. Johnson and D. M. Hay. Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 4 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 35-92.

⁵⁶ See D. Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 79 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994), 72-109.

⁵⁷ Intertextuality is not so easy to define formally, but the gist of it is that later passages of Scripture echo earlier ones. This field of study is one of the hot buttons of hermeneutics at present. Amongst the massive amounts of literature, see R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale

There is, in point of fact, a covenant theology that pervades the Hebrew Scriptures and is regarded as a given and an axiom among its writers.

Isaiah 61:8-11 is likewise part and parcel of a servant song. In these verses, Yahweh declares that he will faithfully recompense his people and make an everlasting covenant with them (v. 8). Their descendants shall be known among the nations and all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed (v. 9). In explicit terms, God's faithfulness is directed toward his covenant: it is "in faithfulness" (*emeth*) that the eternal covenant will be established. This covenant is, no doubt, the new covenant to be ratified by the work of the servant. The effect of God's covenant faithfulness is twofold. First, there will be a recognizable Israelite offspring, an echo of Genesis 12:2; 15:5; 17:5-8: the ancient promise to Abraham will be kept. Second, not only will Israel survive, the nation will be a witness to the world.

Next, there is a declaration of joy, cast in terms of wedding imagery (vv. 10-11):

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
 my whole being shall exult in my God;
 for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
 he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
 as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
 and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
 For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
 and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
 so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
 to spring up before all the nations.

Although the identity of the speaker is a matter of some debate, the majority of commentators opt for Zion. This makes the most sense, because the singer has been made the recipient of "salvation" and "righteousness" (cf. Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16). Here we find the synonymous parallelism of these two familiar terms: the latter is tantamount to the former.

Next, the imagery switches from a wedding to horticulture. Just as the earth yields its produce, "the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations." The picture is consonant with numerous prophetic passages in which the age to come is depicted as a fruitful field. We first encounter fruit in the Genesis creation account and later in the flood narrative (itself a new beginning) (Genesis 1:11, 12, 22, 28, 29; 3:2, 3, 6, 12; 8:17; 9:1, 7). Later, one of the central promises of the Abrahamic covenant is fruitfulness in terms of the patriarch's descendants (Genesis 17:6; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4; Exodus 1:7). In the Prophets, the fruitfulness of the land features prominently in the prophecies respecting Israel's return from exile (Isaiah 4:2; 27:6; 29:17; 32:15-16; 65:21; Jeremiah 23:3; 31:5; Ezekiel 17:23; 34:27; 36:8, 11, 30; 47:12; Amos 9:14; Joel 2:22; Zechariah 8:12). In the prophetic vision, Palestine was to be made like the Garden of Eden before Adam's fall, a veritable new creation.⁵⁸

The righteousness which is salvation is to take the form of Israel's renewed commitment to the covenant. In plain language, "those whom he wraps in his robe of righteousness experience not only deliverance from unrighteousness and its effects but also divine enablement to live out his righteousness."⁵⁹ Directly parallel is Isaiah 32: a king will reign in righteousness (v. 1); the Spirit will be poured from on high; the wilderness will

University Press, 1989); D. C. Allison, *The Intertextual Jesus: Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000).

⁵⁸ This considerable "fruit tradition" lies behind the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23 (Garlington, *Galatians*, 253-54).

⁵⁹ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 2.575.

become a fruitful field (v. 15); and “then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever” (vv. 16-17).⁶⁰

In brief, the equation of righteousness and covenant fidelity—on both the divine and human sides—is glaringly obvious in Isaiah 61:8-11. Yet the passage hardly occurs in isolation and is far from representing a mere incidental or minority outlook on the righteousness language of the Old Testament. Quite the contrary, it takes its place alongside the other six texts that themselves are the heirs of an articulated and developed covenant theology, according to which righteousness is none other than an irreversible commitment to a familial bond established by grace.

Hosea 2:16-20 takes its place within the promise of the restoration of Israel after the judgment due to her adultery = idolatry (2:1-13). Cast in terms of the creation account, as taken up by Noachic covenant, the prophecy looks forward to a new covenant when the curse will be removed: war will come to an end, and even the wild animals will no longer pose a threat to Israel’s peace and security. On that day, the broken marriage between Yahweh and his spouse will be restored: “I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD” (v. 19).

Righteousness and covenant are linked in terms of conjugal fidelity: Israel will no longer call Baal her husband, but Yahweh (v. 16). Commenting on this image, A. A. Macintosh can say: “in this situation Hosea seeks to redeem the notion of love between man and woman from the murky confusion into which Baalism had dragged it and to exalt it to a representation of the faithful love of the just and true God for the people that he had chosen of old.”⁶¹ Therefore, righteousness is conceived of as loyalty to this familial bond of commitment to be reestablished at the time of the nation’s restoration to the land.

God’s devotion to the covenant is articulated as the “steadfast love” and “mercy” that have compelled him to end the exile and renew the marriage. From the people’s side, although they had been no better than the prophet’s own adulterous wife, in the restoration they will become “my people” (v. 23), a phrase that hearkens back to “my peculiar possession,” or Israel as a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:5-6). “On that day” (v. 16), the ideal relationship of Israel to her God will be realized and consummated. The terms of vv. 19-20, remark F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, “constitute a profound theological statement describing the foundational components of the marriage relationship, which derive from the character of Yahweh himself.”⁶²

In sum, the seven passages just examined demonstrate that the correspondence of righteousness and covenant is far from casual or incidental. In point of fact, the notion of covenant forms the indispensable context and subtext of the talk of righteousness. Each of the seven presupposes and echoes previous strands of biblical tradition, and each seeks to apply to its own day foundational concepts reaching back into the earliest stages of Israel’s nationhood. Statistically speaking, one may argue, as Seifrid does, that seven texts do not a major motif make. But the passages in question are not to be relegated to the status of prooftexts, as Seifrid is in danger of doing. A mere lexical analysis is insufficient to assess the fundamental significance of ideas that form the substrata and axioms of Old Testament biblical theology. If anything, these passages take us to the heart of what covenant theology is all about—righteousness as the fidelity required of both the divine and human partners of

⁶⁰ It is frequently overlooked that Isaiah 32:16-17 is the backdrop to Romans 5:1. See Garlington, *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance*, 75-76.

⁶¹ Macintosh, *Hosea*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 79. On the confusion of the names Baal and Yahweh, see *ibid.*, 80.

⁶² Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, Anchor Bible 24 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 283. On the marriage imagery of this passage, see G. I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 28 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 21-26.

the marriage bond that bears the name of *berith*.

(3) Seifrid has proposed that, in biblical terms, one does not “act righteously or unrighteously” with respect to a covenant. Rather, one “keeps,” “remembers,” “establishes” a covenant, or the like. Conversely, one “breaks,” “transgresses,” “forsakes,” “despises,” “forgets” or “profanes” a covenant. Just as a covenant is a particular kind of relation, righteousness takes the particular form of love and loyalty in a covenantal relation. All “covenant-keeping” is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is “covenant-keeping.” It is misleading, he insists, to speak of “God’s righteousness” as his “covenant-faithfulness.” It would be closer to the biblical language to speak of his “faithfulness” as “covenant-righteousness.”

My impression is that this formulation is rather convoluted and difficult to understand. At best, Seifrid is guilty of hair splitting by maintaining that all “covenant-keeping” is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is “covenant-keeping.” Even more conspicuous is the assertion that is misleading to speak of “God’s righteousness” as his “covenant-faithfulness.” Supposedly, it would be closer to the biblical language to speak of “faithfulness” as “covenant-righteousness.” Yet the very passages cited by him, as examined above, link inextricably righteousness and the covenant. That being so, it is really inconceivable that there should be a righteous behavior which is not at the same time covenant-keeping. Seifrid’s distinction can only exist in the abstract, not in the concrete and everyday realities of covenant life. Moreover, to insist that it would be better to speak of God’s “faithfulness” as “covenant-righteousness” rather than of his “righteousness” as “covenant-faithfulness” is a meaningless distinction, which most certainly would be lost on most readers of the Bible.

Besides, his argument is self-contradictory. Seifrid plays on terms such as “keeping,” “remembering,” “establishing” a covenant, or, conversely, “breaking,” “transgressing,” “forsaking,” “despising,” “forgetting,” “profaning” a covenant. In so observing, he wants to maintain that one does not “act righteously or unrighteously” with respect to a covenant. Yet he goes on to state that a covenantal relation is familial and demands love and loyalty (Hosea 6:6). For this reason, “to act in faithfulness and love in a covenant is to *act righteously*, of course, so that it is not surprising to find righteousness language in occasional connection with *hesed* (“loving kindness” or “covenant love”) and *’emunah* (“faith/faithfulness”)” (p. 424. Italics mine.). By his own admission, then, one *does* “act righteously or unrighteously” with respect to a covenant!⁶³

(4) Seifrid’s attempt to locate righteousness in creation rather than covenant categories has been addressed above. He leans particularly on the frequency with which righteousness language is associated with “ruling and judging.” The demand for social

⁶³ The interplay of covenant faithfulness and such terms as keeping Yahweh’s statutes (tantamount to keeping the covenant) or “doing the law” is evident in Deuteronomy. Crucial is an appreciation of the centrality of the Torah in Israel’s self-consciousness of being the chosen people. It is the book of Deuteronomy that gives the classic statement of the role of the Torah in the life of the people. The heart of the book (chaps. 5-28) consists of a restatement of the covenant made at Sinai. Deuteronomy 29:1 sums up the whole of that block of material: “These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.” Throughout the book, the emphasis of covenant life is sustained and reinforced in numerous restatements of the promise (and warnings): “This do and live” (Deuteronomy 4:1, 10, 40; 5:29-33; 6:1-2, 18, 24; 7:12-13). This promise does not originate in Deuteronomy, because Leviticus 18:5 had already said: “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.” I have sought to demonstrate the equation of law-obedience or covenant-keeping with fidelity to the God of the covenant in my essay, “Role Reversal and Paul’s Use of Scripture in Galatians 3.10-13,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 65 (1997), 95-106 (now reprinted in *Exegetical Essays*. 2nd ed. [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003], 197-231).

justice derives from God, the divine king, who has determined to secure the good and beneficial order of creation. This, for Seifrid, explains the frequent association of “salvation” and “deliverance” words with “righteousness.”

Certainly, he has demonstrated amply that righteousness language, in at least some instances, pertains to “ruling and judging.” He is equally correct that God’s role as the divine king accounts, partially anyway, for the relation of righteousness and salvation/deliverance. But given the overlapping and interpenetrating character of creation and covenant in biblical theology, rather than disproving the connection of righteousness with covenant, his data only prove it. Seifrid is obviously concerned to keep retributive justice at the fore of righteousness, at the expense of the relational component. But in so doing, he has committed himself to two methodological mistakes. One is the artificial bifurcation of creation and covenant. The other is the failure to recognize that even where righteousness is retributive justice, the retribution is meted out as a result of the violation of a covenant relationship. Even in the case of wrath directed toward pagan peoples (*à la* Romans 1:18-3:20), the *creation covenant* is still operative (see the appendix).

In his endeavor to distance God’s righteousness, as retributive justice, from covenant fidelity and root it in his role as king and judge, Seifrid appeals to certain lexical data, namely, the distinction between the feminine and masculine forms of the nouns for “righteousness.” “The feminine tends to refer to a concrete thing such as a righteous act or vindicating judgment. The masculine usually signifies the more abstract concept of ‘right order’ or ‘that which is morally right’” (p. 428). On this basis, Seifrid then maintains that the feminine form of the noun is favored by biblical writers to articulate the vindicating and punitive acts of God. God is thus said to be “righteous” when he rewards righteous people and punishes the guilty.

On the surface, this may seem like a compelling argument. But without disputing Seifrid’s findings as such, I would add the caution that there is such a thing as overinterpretation of linguistic data, which loads onto individual words more freight than they can bear. As numerous scholars have taught us, in pursuing the task of exegesis, we must read words within words; that is, words do not exist on their own, but form part of an entire segment of discourse.⁶⁴ Therefore, while it may be true that the feminine and masculine forms of “righteousness” *tend* (his word) to refer to concrete and abstract conceptions respectively, ultimately the semantic range of terms is determined by actual usage with a broader context. In the case of righteousness in particular, that context is the covenant, though covenant finds its rootage in creation. This means that even in those instances in which *tsdeqah* and cognates designate a vindicating judgment, that judgment falls in response to covenant infidelity.

To this I would add that “righteous acts” (feminine plural) in a passage like Daniel 9:16 (cf. Judges 5:11b; 1 Samuel 12:7; Psalm 103:6; Isaiah 45:24; Micah 6:5) are retributive with regard to Israel’s enemies, but salvific on behalf of his covenant people. If anything, this datum indicates that one may overplay the retributive dimension of this form of the noun. Moreover, if Goldingay is correct, then the “righteous acts” of God in Daniel 9:16 serve to establish “his reputation for doing what is right.”⁶⁵ Here, the feminine falls into Seifrid’s more abstract (masculine) category of “that which is morally right.”

⁶⁴ See, among many, J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); M. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989).

⁶⁵ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 243.

(5) Seifrid's handling of the postbiblical materials is of necessity limited,⁶⁶ and he is right that the task of analyzing these materials is exceedingly complex. First come the Qumran texts. Although he concedes to Sanders that "covenant" in the Scrolls is often associated with righteousness terminology, he questions whether Sanders' framework of interpretation actually holds. He fastens on the demand for the sect to walk in perfection in all God's ways (*Community Rule* 1:7-8; 3:9b-12). Such expressions as "perfection of way" and "uprightness of heart" are not general references to piety, but rather represent "the essence of the life and worship of the community." From this he concludes that the Qumran covenant does not save as a promise prior to and independent of obedience, but precisely *as* the "perfection of way" in which righteousness is found.

In response, it is regrettable that Seifrid does not define "perfection" in biblical terms, leaving the impression with the general reader that the term is to be understood more or less as it is in English. But the fact of the matter is that in the Jewish milieu, as P. J. Du Plessis has shown, "perfection" is principally a "cultic" and "quantitative" term, indicating "wholeness, entirety and intactness." "Perfection," according to Du Plessis, is wholeness in one's relationship to God.⁶⁷ D. Peterson adds that the concept is not formal or abstract. While conceding that perfection in the Old Testament is not essentially a moral concept, it does involve "*loving obedience to God* as the one who, in his mercy, has initiated the relationship with man."⁶⁸ Therefore, to walk in perfection in all God's ways is hardly "sinless perfection," but rather a wholehearted commitment to honor the entirety of the Lords' revealed will. Otherwise put, perfection is simply a David-like desire to seek God and follow his commandments with all one's heart (Psalm 119:2, 10, 34, 69, 145).

This being so, the "legalistic" edge is taken off Seifrid's reading of the Scrolls. Granted, the Qumran covenant does not envision salvation as taking place independently of obedience. But "salvation" for a Second Temple Jew was understood eschatologically as the vindication of his fidelity to God in final judgment. Many Christian writers fail to grasp this point and consequently assign a synergism to ancient Judaism that is entirely inappropriate, as though Jews of this period were Pelagians before Pelagius. If, in Seifrid's words, this covenant saves "precisely as the 'perfection of way' in which righteousness is found," then nothing more need be involved than perseverance in God's commandments as the pre-condition of final vindication. With this the canonical Scriptures are entirely in agreement.⁶⁹

Not only so, passages like *Community Rule* 11:1-3, 5, 11-12, 13-15 and *Hymn Scroll* (1QH) 4:30-33; 7:30-31; 13:17 graphically illustrate that the Qumran sect held to justification by the free grace of God. The point is not that the sectarians embraced a

⁶⁶ See his treatment of the Qumran materials and the *Psalms of Solomon* in *Justification by Faith*, 78-135. That these texts by themselves require a full-length study is evident from B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 41 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); M. Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous: A Comparative Study of the Psalms of Solomon and Paul's Letters*, Coniectanea biblica, New Testament 26 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995).

⁶⁷ Du Plessis, *TELEIOS: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959).

⁶⁸ Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 24 (italics mine). Hence, "perfect" is tantamount to "blameless" (cf. Luke 1:6; Philippians 2:15). 4 Maccabees 7:15 makes the righteous Eleazar's loyalty to the law "perfect," i.e., "complete," by his martyrdom (cf. Peterson, *Hebrews*, 25).

⁶⁹ See the splendid study of K. L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 105 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

“justification by decency,”⁷⁰ but rather *justification was restricted to the community* as a “private reserve.”⁷¹ This is the real point and precisely the conclusion of Otto Betz, which is only to be expected since, in his words, “at Qumran *the righteousness of God has absolute priority over human activity*. It leads to obedience to the law, but this does not turn into merit.”⁷²

Among the Scrolls, Seifrid’s attention is particularly turned to *Community Rule* 11:2-4. The gist of his argument is that the Hebrew text of v. 3 should read: “with *my* righteous deeds he blots out my transgressions,” rather than “with *his* [God’s] righteousness he blots out my transgressions.” From this it follows, says Seifrid, that for the Qumran community covenantal forgiveness is found in the doing of God-given deeds of righteousness, not apart from them, as Sanders has claimed.

First, as in the case of Avemarie’s book on the rabbinic materials (see below), Seifrid, at best, has oversimplified Sanders. If anything, Sanders clearly acknowledged that forgiveness is linked to God-given deeds of righteousness. To quote him at length:

God’s grace and the requirement of performance on the part of man are both stressed so strongly in the Scrolls that it is difficult to state the precise relationship between grace and works. This is Burrows’s formulation: “The sons of light are saved by the faithful study and observance of the law, but they are able to keep the law only because they have been placed under the dominion of the spirit of light.” I should prefer not to say that they are saved by study and observance. It appears more accurate to say that they are saved by the electing grace of God *when it is responded to with repentance and commitment*, and that they keep the commandments, with God’s help, as a *consequence* of the election and as a *condition* for remaining in the covenant.⁷³

Later, Sanders writes in pointed terms that at Qumran “obedience is the condition *sine qua non* of salvation.”⁷⁴ And in the conclusions of his survey of the Scrolls, he remarks that the soteriological patterns to be found in them are consistent. There may be differences here and there on points of *halakah* (application of the law), but the general pattern of religion is not affected by such differences.

We find no layer in the Qumran material in which obedience to the law is not required or in which transgression is not punished. Further, the place of obedience in the overall scheme is always the same: it is the *consequence* of being in the covenant and *the requirement for remaining* in the covenant.... Obedience to the commandments was not thought of as earning salvation, which came rather by God’s grace, but was nevertheless required as a

⁷⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1958), 336, writing of the soteriology of Pelagius.

⁷¹ E. Käsemann, “The Faith of Abraham in Romans 4,” *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 88.

⁷² Betz, “Rechtfertigung in Qumran,” *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. J. Friedrich, et al. (Tübingen/Göttingen: Mohr-Siebeck/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 34 (italics his).

⁷³ Sanders, *Paul*, 295 (first italics mine, second his).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 304.

*condition of remaining in the covenant; and not obeying the commandments would damn.*⁷⁵

If these statements of Sanders' seem to be at variance with his overall thesis of covenantal nomism, the solution resides in the fact that, in the Judaism of this period, grace and works, or grace and law, were not juxtaposed as they are in Western systematic theology.

The heightening of the perception of God's grace and the requirement of obedience is instructive for understanding Judaism generally, for it indicates that "grace" and "works" were not considered as opposed to each other in any way. I believe that it is safe to say that the notion that God's grace is in any way contradictory to human endeavour is totally foreign to Palestinian Judaism. The reason for this is that *grace and works were not considered alternative roads to salvation*. Salvation...is always by the grace of God, embodied in the covenant.⁷⁶

The only way that Seifrid's allegation will work is if "forgiveness" is given the narrowest definition possible and is somehow detached from "salvation," especially considering that salvation for Jews of this period was dominantly eschatological in nature, corresponding to the restoration of Israel.⁷⁷ Sanders is as clear as anyone could be that forgiveness and salvation hinge precisely on devotion to the Torah, not "legalistically" conceived, but as the appropriate response to God's covenant grace.

Second, perhaps the best answer to Seifrid's treatment of IQS 11 is the essay of Marcus Bockmuehl, "IQS and Salvation at Qumran," which appears in this very volume and of which Seifrid could have taken advantage. Bockmuehl first surveys the significance of the *Community Rule* as a whole. In the discussion of election and the people of God (the corporate dimension) in the *Rule*, he demonstrates that the notion of covenant holds sway in the sect's conception of itself. True, covenant is restricted to the members of the Dead Sea community. Nevertheless, the Scrolls give no indication that a belief in the basic continuity of the covenant promises has been surrendered (p. 391). This is a very telling consideration in light of Seifrid's downplay of covenant as a framework of interpretation for righteousness.

Next, Bockmuehl analyzes the *Rule* in terms of voluntarism and predestination (the individual dimension). As ironic as it may seem, one chooses to enter the community and commit oneself heart and soul to the standards of the sect; yet this choice has been predetermined by God. Though on the surface it might seem like the *Rule* embraces a merit-based system of salvation, this is not the case.

Salvation, on this view, could never be a matter of human merit. The covenanters do not know themselves elect by their works but, on the contrary, their works bear witness to their election. God has "caused them to inherit the lot of the Holy Ones" (IQS 11:7-8), "caused them to draw

⁷⁵ Ibid., 320.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 297 (italics his). It is noted that M. Bockmuehl, in the essay "IQS and Salvation at Qumran," appearing in this book, reminds us that Sanders had access to only four main documents among the Scrolls. He is right that "no serious student would today attempt to describe 'the Qumran pattern of religion' without reference to the large number of additional texts that have become accessible since 1977" (*Variiegated Nomism*, 383).

⁷⁷ The salvation = restoration motif is taken up by N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); S. McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

near” to the covenant (so 1QS 11:13; cf. 1QH 6[=14]:13). It is his agency that supremely determines a person’s standing, and which underwrites human choice in the first place. Although Josephus suggests that it was the Pharisees who held divine providence and human free will in a fine balance (*J. W.* 2.162f.; *Ant.* 13.172; cf. *m. ’Abot* 3:19), in these texts we do in fact find a comparable co-existence of these two theological topoi in tension. Here lies the paradox of Qumran’s view of salvation: although the sons of light freely choose to belong to the covenant and thus to be saved, the very fact that they do so is itself an expression of the overruling grace of God, whose sovereign design disposes over both the saved and the damned. At the same time, even the sect’s evident determinism in relation to historical and cosmological events serves fundamentally only to reinforce and confirm this eternal predestination of the elect (p. 397).

Consonant with this outlook is Bockmuehl’s conclusion respecting righteousness and justification in the *Rule*:

Thus, the *Serekh*’s [*Rule*’s] view of justification clearly rides on a cosmic order of God’s righteousness whose revelation constitutes both the final salvation of his people and the final destruction of the forces of darkness. The revelation of that righteousness, moreover, does not depend on either the predicament or the achievements of believers, but is determined solely by God himself (p. 399).

This reading of the *Rule* is simply buttressed by its conceptions of sin and atonement (pp. 399-402).

In sum, Bockmuehl is aware that his findings are “not fundamentally incompatible” with those of Sanders. “Qumran manifests an eschatological faith in which salvation and atonement for sins are not humanly earned but divinely granted by predestined election and membership in the life of the observant covenant community” (p. 412).

Given this highly responsible and entirely plausible reading of the *Community Rule*, Seifrid’s attempt to rewrite 1QS 11:3 is destined for failure. On the strictly paleographical level, and in the abstract, his argument for “my righteous deeds” rather than “his [God’s] righteous deeds” might fly. But in the light of the doctrine of salvation in this Scroll, his translation comes across as a piece of special pleading; and it is doubtful that many objective readers of the Scrolls will be convinced.

After Qumran, there is a perusal of rabbinic texts. Seifrid’s thesis is that the usage of “covenant” (*berith*) in these materials is far more complicated than Sanders was willing to allow. His four essential points about “covenant” in this literature are summarized above, and I will simply respond to them here.

(a) Even if the rabbis associate Israel’s election and circumcision with the Abrahamic covenant rather than the Sinai covenant, the fact remains that *her identity as a chosen people is bound up with a covenant*. That circumcision in particular should be associated with Abraham instead of Moses follows quite naturally from the fact that circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:11; Romans 4:11), not the Mosaic, which was the sabbath (Exodus 31:12-17). The only way that Seifrid’s observation can carry any weight is to assume that rabbinic authors somehow conceived of the Abrahamic covenant in abstraction from the Mosaic, which most certainly was not the case.

(b) His second point is linked to the first, namely, that rabbinic writers frequently use “covenant” as an act of obedience in association with the Abrahamic covenant. One would readily grant that this is case; but the problem for Seifrid is that this datum does not carry any more conviction than his first observation. He seems to assume that obedience to

the Abrahamic covenant is in some way detachable from the covenant under which these authors lived, the Mosaic.

(c) The third point is the contention that Sanders' use of the phrase "being in the covenant" to convey the notion of "participating in salvation" does not fit the nature of the rabbinic usage, since the idea of obedience is often attached to "covenant," as in the Bible. It should be obvious by this time that we have here another of Seifrid's false alternatives. Participation in salvation is not to be distinguished from obedience, since the latter is proof positive of the former. It is only by placing a "legalistic" construction on "obedience" that Seifrid is able draw such a sweeping conclusion.

(d) The fourth point charges that when Sanders speaks of the obligation of the righteous as "faithfulness to the *covenant*," he has deviated from the rabbinic perspective, which placed emphasis on submission to the "yoke of heaven," i.e., love and fear toward the one true God. This faithfulness to God is to be manifested in actual obedience, which, as it was assumed, the human being has the ability to perform, not merely obeying the law to be best of one's ability.

At the risk of repetition, the "yoke of heaven" can be viewed as but another way of speaking of "faithfulness to the covenant." Seifrid, by placing a negative spin on "yoke," has created a presumption against the Sanders-type reading of the Tannaitic sources. It would appear to be characteristic of his work that terms like "obedience" and "works" are consistently placed in such a pejorative light. That faithfulness to God is to be manifested in actual obedience is a given. However, the implication that the human being, in Jewish/rabbinic thought, had the inherent ability to perform the law (apart from grace) is an assumption imposed on the materials in question. Some such reading of these texts is characteristic of a number of scholars who have reacted to the New Perspective.⁷⁸ The question is obviously complex, but suffice it to say that I have argued elsewhere that any "anthropological optimism," as it is called, is due to the awareness that one sustains a covenant relationship to God and is enabled by his grace to obey.⁷⁹

As related in the summary of Seifrid's essay, when it comes to righteousness language in rabbinic authors, he employs the tack of claiming that *tsadiq* is narrower than Sanders would have us believe.⁸⁰ He argues against Sanders' definition of "righteous" as "the general term for one who is properly religious," because, for him, the word is narrower: "the term sets forth the ideal of obedience for the community, as is evident from its exceedingly rare application to contemporaries, and more frequent association with notable figures from the past" (p. 439). Furthermore, it is clear enough that the rabbis could view God's righteousness in terms of a retributive justice applicable to all creation. For Seifrid, the bottom line is that these usages of righteousness terminology make it quite clear that Sanders' description of "righteousness" as "(Israel's) covenant status" is inadequate. The rabbinic application of the title of "righteous" to Gentiles indicates that for them, just as in biblical usage, righteousness terminology has to do with creational thought, not merely God's covenant with Israel. "Righteousness," then, can be used with reference to conformity to divine demands, and not merely membership within Israel.

⁷⁸ For example, D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, New Foundations Theological Library (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); T. Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 115 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

⁷⁹ See my *Obedience of Faith*, 19-20, 31-33 (note n. 99).

⁸⁰ The appearance of "righteousness" as "almsgiving" is a subsidiary point, but still one worth addressing. Carson finds the presence of almsgiving in the book of Tobit to be evidence for an incipient merit theology (*Sovereignty*, 51). In Tobit, the Greek term is not "righteousness" but *eleêmosunê* (related to the word for "mercy," *eleos*). However, rather than merit, *eleêmosunê* is simply righteousness as directed manward in love for neighbor. See my *Obedience of Faith*, 165-66. The point may not be so significant in itself, but it does illustrate how scholars can read texts tendentiously.

Some of these points are well taken in themselves. Several rabbinic authors do conceive of “righteous Gentiles,” and very possibly righteousness terminology does have to do with creational thought, not merely God’s covenant with Israel. That said, we should remind ourselves that covenant and creation do not exist in hermetically sealed containers. To say that (righteous) Gentiles conform to creational standards is virtually to admit that they comply with various sanctions of the Mosaic law. Once again, Seifrid’s attempt to divorce covenant and creation is unsuccessful.

As for Sanders’ definition of “righteous” as “the general term for one who is properly religious,” it is difficult to think that Seifrid has improved upon it. If, in Seifrid’s words, the term sets forth “the ideal of obedience for the community,” I, for one, find it rather arbitrary to distinguish between this and “properly religious” deportment. Seifrid’s definition may be technically more accurate, but at the end of the day, his and Sanders’ definitions come down to pretty much the same thing. That the sources more frequently apply “righteous” to notable characters from the past than to contemporaries proves nothing in itself, simply because Jewish authors were accustomed to placing paradigm figures before their readers for the purpose of emulation in the present.⁸¹ The righteous of days past are called to mind in order to engender righteousness in their descendants. The most famous of such encomiums is Ben Sira’s “Praise of Famous Men” (Sirach 44-50).

All in all, Seifrid has hardly refuted Sanders’ take on the rabbinic materials. Additionally, Seifrid leaves the impression, from Avemarie’s work, that rabbinic religion was heavily “works” oriented in the pejorative sense. In point of fact, Avemarie’s book includes lengthy engagements of such matters as obedience to God from the vantage point of knowledge of God and community.⁸² The conclusion to that particular discussion is that “the Torah not only comes from God, *it leads to him as well.*”⁸³ The conclusion to the entire book is: “The Torah is, according to the rabbinic understanding, the means and way to life, the medium of salvation. But it is more than that. Israel keeps it because God has given it and because she loves it.”⁸⁴ Even more strikingly, Avemarie grants that throughout this literature it is possible to speak of a “covenantal nomism” (*Bundesnomismus*)! The Torah of the rabbis cannot be divorced from this context in which the law was given: in this sense, Sander’s coinage of the phrase, says Avemarie, is certainly justified!⁸⁵

Therefore, the actual data emerging from rabbinic texts hardly support the expectations of those who go looking for a *quid pro quo* relationship, wherein reward was dished out in proportion to a mechanical obedience. That God’s grace, forgiveness and provision for sin loom large in rabbinic literature is amply demonstrated by specialists in the area. Correspondingly, the dominant mentality of the sources is that “works” are but the human response to the covenant grace of God.⁸⁶ To be sure, many scholars have established that works feature prominently in the sources and that the destiny of individuals hinges on the performance of such works. But that is only to be expected, given that works are just the other side of the coin to faith—and the New Testament hardly forms an

⁸¹ See G. W. E. Nickelsburg and J. J. Collins, eds., *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms*, Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies 12 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980). Cf. my own treatment of various paradigm figures, *Obedience of Faith*, 35-48, 163-91, 216-27.

⁸² Avemarie, *Tora und Leben: Untersuchungen zur Heilsbedeutung der Tora in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur*, Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 55 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996), 244-61.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 261 (italics mine).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 584.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 40.

⁸⁶ References are easily located throughout Moore, *Judaism*; Avemarie, *Tora und Leben*; S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Conceptions of the Talmud* (New York: Schocken, rep. 1961); E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge MS: Harvard University Press, rep. 1987); C. G. Montefiore and J. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, rep. 1974).

exception to this rule (e.g., Matthew 7:21-27; 12:33-37; 25:31-46; Luke 8:15; Romans 1:5; 2:13; 16:26; James 2:14-26; Revelation 2:19; 3:2; 22:12).⁸⁷

(6) It remains only to say a word or two about Seifrid's concluding reflections. He believes that the works of Hill, Ziesler and others are indicative of the need for greater sensitivity to the distinction between concepts and word meanings in the treatment of righteousness terminology. But more significantly, he believes that his observations call for a reassessment of recent interpretation of Paul's understanding of "the righteousness of God" and "justification" as God's "covenant-faithfulness" to Israel. In his view, the associations from the Psalms and Isaiah which Paul evokes by speaking of the "revelation of God's righteousness" (Romans 1:17) belong to creational thought. God appears in such texts as creator, Lord, and king, who "rules and judges" the entire earth. God does act in faithfulness toward his people, yet his acts of "justification" do not represent mere salvation for Israel, they constitute the establishment of justice in the world which Yahweh made and governs. Accordingly, Seifrid places a good deal of stress on righteousness as retributive justice, which, he believes, is taken up by Paul in his own elaboration of justification.

Granted, some scholars might possibly want to increase their sensibilities to the distinction between concepts and word meanings in the treatment of righteousness terminology. If so, then we are grateful to Seifrid for the challenge. I would qualify, however, that Hill spends the first twenty-two pages of his book discussing lexical semantics, in order to prepare the ground for his word studies. Perhaps his approach is dated to a degree, but at least there was an effort to address the appropriate concerns.

While biblical scholars must always be prepared to reassess their work, my impression is that Seifrid has presented insufficient data to discredit the current paradigm of the righteousness of God as God's covenant faithfulness to Israel. The claim that righteousness is more properly associated with creation rather than covenant has been addressed above, as has Seifrid's focus on righteousness as retributive justice. Suffice it to say here that the Old Testament picture of God as king and righteous judge in no way lessens his role as the Lord of the covenant, who is ever mindful of the needs of his chosen people. To be sure, the ultimate purpose for God redeeming his people is the establishment of justice throughout the entire earth. Yet to speak of "mere" salvation for Israel is to overlook the obvious: it is through the restoration and justification of the remnant of Israel that the light of salvation was meant to shine to the ends of the earth.⁸⁸ Once again, Seifrid has set at odds entities that are meant to coexist in harmony. God's covenant fidelity to Israel and his determination to set right the wrongs of this world are of a piece.

Finally, the claim that retributive justice forms the backbone of Paul's doctrine of justification will, presumably, be addressed in the second volume of this undertaking. For the present, the case remains to be proven. But I can say with little hesitancy that none of the data marshaled by Seifrid encourage us to think that he will be able to effect any kind of significant paradigm shift away from the consensus reading of righteousness as covenant fidelity.⁸⁹ Why Seifrid is particularly concerned to press for retributive justice is not

⁸⁷ The unity of faith and works is disrupted, for example, by Das, who argues for "Deserving Obedience in Early Judaism" (*Paul, the Law*, 12-44).

⁸⁸ Prophetic passages such as Isaiah 42:1 ("he will bring forth justice to the nations") and Habakkuk 2:14 ("But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea") are set precisely in the context of return from exile.

⁸⁹ Seifrid claims that the associations from the Psalms and Isaiah, which Paul evokes by speaking of the "revelation of God's righteousness" (Romans 1:17), belong to creational thought (exclusively). But he disregards the fact that lying behind Romans 1:17 is Psalm 98:2, 9: "The Lord has made known his salvation; before the nations he has revealed his righteousness.... For he comes to judge the earth; he will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with uprightness." In Paul's mind also must have been such Psalm texts as 9:8; 96:13. The Psalmist's mention of the "nations" may very well echo creation. But

altogether certain at this point. But one senses that by playing down covenant fidelity and playing up retributive justice, he intends to land a broadside against the growing conviction that eschatological justification is contingent on fidelity to a covenant commitment. We shall see.

3.3 Conclusions

Seifrid's essay has presented a challenge to the New Perspective understanding of righteousness. In so doing, Seifrid has argued for a renewed appreciation of righteousness as retributive justice, in keeping with the Old Testament portrayal of God as a king and judge. To the degree that he has been able to redress the balance in favor of a neglected dimension of righteousness, we are in his debt. Certainly, he has raised a number of issues that deserve to be weighed carefully; and it is always good to have our assumptions subjected to careful scrutiny.

Having said that, the down-side of this paper far outstrips its positive benefits. Methodologically, the essay starts off on the wrong foot. By confining himself mainly to lexical matters, excluding for the most part biblical-theological concerns, Seifrid has cut himself, and his readers, off from the single most valuable source of information respecting righteousness. Surely, any resolution to the current debate on righteousness and justification must be pursued on the basis of exegesis, an exegesis informed by the panorama of salvation history. Symptomatic of Seifrid's approach is his mere listing of passages in which righteousness and covenant come into "any significant semantic contact" (his words). Had these texts been expounded to any degree, it would have been seen that their function is that of a conduit through which broad steams of covenant theology are allowed to flow. As it is, we are presented with a myopic conception of righteousness.

To the degree that theological motifs are pursued, Seifrid is eager to bifurcate creation and covenant. By so doing, he is able, at least to his satisfaction, to shift attention away from righteousness as covenant fidelity and shift it onto the component of retributive justice. As intimated above, his motives remain to be seen. Until these are clarified, it certainly appears that Seifrid is guilty of driving a wedge between categories that overlap, interpenetrate and exhibit reciprocity to a considerable degree, as though we were forced to choose between one or the other. Even where he concedes that righteousness and covenant are found in combination, the relevance of such data tend to be submerged in favor of righteousness as retribution. What Seifrid has failed to realize is that retributive justice itself is relational in terms of covenant relationships, even in the case of peoples outside of Israel, who live in contradiction to the ideals of the creation covenant. The bottom line is that his linking of righteousness with creation to the practical exclusion of covenant is misleading in the extreme.

While one appreciates the necessity of limiting the materials under examination, especially in a symposium such as this, the fact remains that Seifrid's handling of the sources is very one-sided indeed. Scant attention is paid to texts that support the relational component of righteousness, especially as they might bear on justification and kindred issues. The effect is a reductionism, which, ironically enough, is just Carson's complaint against Sanders!

A rather troubling matter is Seifrid's misrepresentation, not to say, at least at times, distortion of Sanders, with whom he disagrees, and Avemarie, with whom he wants to agree. The particulars of these misrepresentations are indicated above; and it is sufficient to

the fact remains that Psalm 98 is cast primarily in exodus terms, with the call for Israel to sing to the Lord a "new song," recalling the "old song" of Moses in Exodus 15. That Paul proceeds to quote Habakkuk 2:4 simply nails down the point, as this prominent text embodies the vision of return from exile—a new Exodus. This means that Romans 1:17 adapts an *Israel* text and applies it to a new people. God's covenant faithfulness in reversing the exile is now extended to the Gentiles.

say in these conclusions that Seifrid's case and credibility are not enhanced by his inaccuracy in reporting the views of others.

*Appendix:
The Creation Covenant*

Because anything like a full examination of the relation of creation and covenant is impossible within this review, I want simply to convey some indications that Genesis 1 and 2 have a covenant relationship in view. A significant portion of Seifrid's argumentation rests on the assumption that righteousness, in the main, is to be understood within the confines of creation categories rather than covenantal. As I have sought to counter above, the distinction is artificial and represents a false alternative, inasmuch as covenant stems from creation. It might be objected that the actual term "covenant" (*berith*) is not used in the creation account. However, I would argue that all the constituent elements of a covenant, with the exception of ratification by blood, are present.

First, there is a family relationship established by virtue of the creation of a man and a woman, and from them progeny. It is just the family that is made to be the paradigm of covenant relations. In this light, a covenant may appropriately be defined as *a familial bond of commitment*. The well known biblical figures of parent-child and husband-wife as images of God and his people take their point of departure from creation. Adam was the son of God (Luke 3:38), and Adam and Eve together were the recipients of God's fatherly and husbandly care. And in their relationships with their own children, the first human pair were intended to mirror the Lord's care and provision for them.

Second, there are what might be called covenant stipulations, or the "house rules" regulating the relationship. These are: (1) the creation mandates (subduing the earth and procreation); (2) the prohibition against eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the focal point of Adam's testing. Adam, in other words, was obliged to follow a course of obedience, i.e., to persevere in the life which had been given him. He was to continue listening to the voice of God, accept his interpretation of reality, and bear his likeness in all things, all the while accomplishing the mandate to subdue and protect the earth. In case of disobedience, a penalty is specified (Genesis 2:17).

Third, there are covenant privileges. (1) Life, both physical and spiritual. In all the covenants, life is the pinnacle point of blessing. The statement of John 17:3 ultimately derives from the creation: to know God is to have eternal life. In Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, John the seer depicts the life of the new creation as access once more to the tree of life. The course of salvation history is thus brought full circle; the end represents a return to the beginning, as eschatology corresponds to protology. From the vantage point of life as covenant privilege, Eden is the symbol of Adam's life and the presence of God. (2) Man is given the position of creator and regent. In his original condition of creation, he was only "a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:5), with the potential of rising above them (1 Corinthians 6:3).

Fourth, there is the immediate presence of God, which forms the basis of "the promise" of Ephesians 2:12, i.e., "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). Eden is the aboriginal symbol of God's presence. Later in the biblical record, Eden-like ideas are taken up and applied to the land of Palestine, especially as the temple occupies the central portion of the land and stands on its holiest ground. In the new creation, once again the dwelling of God is with men (Revelation 21:3), in the person of the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).

Fifth, there is a covenant servant, Adam. In Genesis 2:15, Adam was to "serve" (*abad*) the ground. As being of the earth and earthy, he had direct responsibility to the earth. Each of the subsequent covenants is likewise organized around a servant who embodies the covenant in his person (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Christ).

Sixth, according to the most natural understanding of Hosea 6:7, the Adamic

relationship is a *berith*.⁹⁰ As Adam, according to the prophet, Israel has broken the (Mosaic) covenant. This is buttressed by Deuteronomy, which repeatedly represents Israel as the “son of God” who is enduring testing, only this time in the wilderness.

Seventh, the absence of a formal oath is no argument against the essentially covenantal character of the creation relationship. It is true, as O. P. Robertson says, that the covenants entail a “verbalized declaration of the character of the bond being established.”⁹¹ But one of the most impressive features of the creation account is the persuasiveness of the speech of God. In other words, God’s creative speech is his commitment to his creatures. This is so from two perspectives. One is that his creative *fiat* entails a commitment to preserve what he has made (see Psalm 104:30). The other is that his pronouncement of blessing upon his creatures (Genesis 1:22, 28) is his assurance to them that he will be faithful to his commitment to them. Because sin is not yet a reality, a formalized oath is superfluous: trust is fully operative (contrast Hebrews 6:13-18). It is just in these terms that J. H. Stek rightly argues that the reason why the word covenant does not appear in Genesis 1-2 is that it only applies in a fallen world, where relationships of love, loyalty and trust need to be bolstered by oaths.⁹²

Finally, the absence of blood sacrifice to ratify the covenant is likewise no insurmountable obstacle. For one thing, the Davidic covenant makes no mention of sacrifice, but it is a *berith* nonetheless (Psalm 89:3). More importantly, in the pre-fall condition, death had not yet entered the picture: there was no necessity for one life to be forfeited in place of another; there was no debt to be paid. Therefore, blood sacrifice would have been totally inappropriate. Perhaps this is why *berith* is not used in Genesis 1 and 2, because Genesis is written for the emerging nation of Israel, for whom covenantal commitment was inseparable from animal sacrifice (e.g., Exodus 24:4-8).

All in all, the data supporting an equation, or at least an overlapping, of creation and covenant is impressive enough to resist Seifrid’s efforts to banish righteousness, by and large, from the latter and localize it in the former. The distinction is simply unwarranted.

⁹⁰ See B. B. Warfield, *The Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*. ed. J. E. Meter. 2 vols. (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), 2.116-29.

⁹¹ Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 6.

⁹² Stek, “‘Covenant’ Overload in Reformed Theology,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), 12-41. I am grateful to my friend, Dr. Peter Gentry, for this reference.