

ETHNIC SOLIDARITY, BABEL-PENTECOST RELATIONSHIP, AND THE NEW COVENANT

The New Covenant, Babel, and the Peoples

OT Precursors to Pentecost

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Introduction

The New Testament clearly presents a picture of the Spirit endowed body moving out into the surrounding world, presenting the gospel of Christ. King Jesus is the Servant of Yahweh who suffered, but is now exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high (see e.g., Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:25-27,45-49; Acts 2:22-39, 3:12-26). The new community of the Spirit was to include both Jews and peoples from the idolatrous ethnies. These, like Israel, must repent and have “their hearts cleansed by faith,” receiving forgiveness and the Holy Spirit by faith (Acts 10-11, 15:1-21). Does this new community of the Spirit erase the ethno-linguistic distinctions originally created by Yahweh at Babel? Does Pentecost then reverse Babel, that is does Pentecost completely destroy the good diversity of ethnic solidarity (ESOL)? This is the second of two articles on the subject of Babel and the ethno-nations.

Major Prophets, the Spirit, Paul, and ESOL

New Covenant and ESOLs in Ezekiel

Yahweh stated that he would make a “covenant of peace . . . an everlasting covenant” with a re-united Israel. In the covenant, Yahweh states that he will restore the Davidic king (Ez 37:21-22,24-25). He will cleanse them of their idols and sins, and grant them his presence: “My dwelling place also will be with them” (Ez 37:23). Lastly, Yahweh promises a special relationship in the terms of the classic covenant formulation, “They will be My people, and I will be their God” (Ez 37:23). The result is: “And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever” (Ez 37:21-28; see 36:22-27).

This phrase: “they will know that I am Yahweh” (Ez 6:7,10,13,14; 7:4,9,etc.) is “a technical formula,” normally used about Israel but here used about the *gôyîm* (Vogels 1986, 67). The context for its use is always after God’s deeds of deliverance and intervention on behalf of his people with a resulting responsibility of the witnesses to respond positively to Yahweh’s initiative. Furthermore, “to know” a Suzerain, here Yahweh, is also a technical treaty-covenantal term, speaking of submission of a vassal/servant to one’s covenant Lord (see Huffmon 1966).

To know Yahweh is not merely passive, but involves witnessing Yahweh’s actions and then submitting to him as Lord. This includes Israel and the surrounding nations, as discussed in an earlier chapter. “In the eyes of [someone or something]” is also a technical term in juridical contexts (see Jer 32:12; Dt 31:7; Jer 28:1,5,11; Vogels

1986, 64). Both Israel and the nations have witnessed Yahweh's actions in the Exodus and afterwards (e.g., Ex 7:22; 9:8,12; Nm 33:3; Lev 26:45), and are called to commitment, to take a position, as a result (e.g., Dt 31:7). Israel, especially, is called to commitment and to testify to the surrounding nations concerning Yahweh's greatness (see chapter nine).

The surrounding ethno-nations in Ezekiel have seen and will see Yahweh's greatness in the judgment upon Israel (Ez 5:8, 14; 22:16) and in the deliverance of the Second Exodus and a virtual second conquest. "They are witnesses and not pure spectators" (Vogels 1986, 67). Yahweh then applies the "know Yahweh" covenantal formula to the surrounding ethnies (Ez 36:22; 37:28; 38:16,23; 39:7,23). They must also take a position for Yahweh or they will experience judgment. Here Ezekiel is not speaking of individuals but of ethnic solidarities, as the context makes clear.

Therefore, as a result of the work of the New Covenant work in Messiah's Exodus and Conquest (death, resurrection, and ascension), the nations, along with Israel, will come to know the Lord (see Ez 36:23; 37:28, etc.; Rom 11). "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh as the waters cover the seas" (Hb 2:14; Is 11:9-10; Zec 14:8-9; Rv 15:4).

Pauline interpretation (Gal 3; Rom 4)

Paul links the Abrahamic blessing for all the ethnies of earth (Gal 3:8-9) with union with the Anointed Davidic King, Jesus [ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ], who is of the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16,26-29; Rom 1:3; Ps 2). Furthermore, he couples the blessing of Abraham with receiving the Holy Spirit, and hence he joins the Abrahamic Covenant with the New Covenant of the promised Spirit (Gal 3:5,14; Ez 36:27; Is 59:21; Jl 2:28; see Bruce 1982; Fung 1988; Pyne 1995).¹ Next, Paul links the receiving of the Spirit with anyone believing the "gospel," that is "my gospel [that I preach]" (Gal 3:8b; Rom 2:16).

Observe also how Paul links this New Covenant, a covenant that promises the Spirit both to Israel and also to "all flesh" (Jl 2:28; see Is 59:21; Ez 36:27), with the Abrahamic faith. This promise comes from the one and only God, alluding to the Shema (Dt 6:4). He is both the justifying God of the Jews and the pagan ethnies [ἡ Ἰουδαίων ὁ Θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ δὲ καὶ ἐθνῶν; καὶ καὶ ἐθνῶν] (see Rom 3:28-30.). The way for all the non-Jewish peoples [τὰ ἔθνη] to enter into the Abrahamic blessing of justification (from the Law expressed by Moses: Acts 13:38-41 NKJ; Gal 3:26-29) and the Spirit² is open for all who believe (see Is 59:21; 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 7:1-6, 8:2).

The gospel in Galatians 3-4 includes the decree of "justification" from the curse and obligation of the law (of creation or legal covenant of works expressed later in the Mosaic commandments: Gal 3:8a,15-21, 4:1-5; see Fung 1988; *contra* Braswell 1991). This justification is equivalent to Jeremiah's classic statement on the New Covenant: "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer 31:34).³ Jesus took upon himself both the obligation to obey the broken law and its wrath

¹"The Abrahamic Covenant did not specify the nature of the blessing to be received by the nations through Abraham and his 'seed,' Paul appears to identify that blessing as the promise of the Spirit (cf. vv. 2,5)" (Pyne 1995, 218). "In Paul's thinking the blessing of justification is almost synonymous . . . with the reception of the Spirit" (Fung 1988, 152).

²The promise of the Spirit is found in Is 59:21 and Ez 36:27; Jl 2:28-29 and Zec 12:10.

³Cf. an explicit justification passage, Rom 4:6-8 (citing Ps 32:1-2, and parallels in Heb 10:10-18,

for the benefit of all the human ethnies including first the Israelites.⁴ The gospel thus includes freedom from condemnation of the law both presently and in the final Day of Judgment for all from the peoples who believe (Rom 2:5-16; 5:16-19; 8:1,33-34).

T. L. Donaldson explains how this occurs:

Israel serves as a “representative sample” for the whole of humankind. Within Israel’s experience, the nature of the universal human plight—bondage to sin and to the powers of this age—is thrown into sharp relief through the functioning of the law. The law, therefore, cannot accomplish the promise; by creating a representative sample in which the human plight is clarified and concentrated it sets the stage for redemption. Christ identifies not only with the human situation in general (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, 4.4), but also with Israel in particular (γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον), thereby becoming the representative individual (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, 3.13) of the representative people. Due to the very nature of Israel’s special role, the redemption of Israel is at the same time and on the same terms the redemption of the Gentiles. As Israel’s representative, Christ is the representative of all humankind; all can participate “in him.” (Donaldson 1986, 106)

Furthermore, the gospel contains the ability to walk in the “righteous requirement of the law” (Rom 8:4).⁵ At the same time, the gospel removes the obligation to keep the restrictive ceremonies, dietary commands, and other ethno-religious barriers of the Mosaic law (see Rom 14-15, 1 Cor 8-10; Gal 3-5; Eph 2:11-22; Col 2:11-14,16-23; Heb 5, 7, 8:1-10:23). The Spirit provides a real circumcision, that of the inner being [περιτομή καρδίας], which makes any person, even one from the ethnies, a “[true] Jew who is one inwardly.” These, then, become members of the “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:29), of the [true] circumcision, who worship in the Spirit and do not pay *necessary*⁶ attention to symbolic, shadowy, “flesh” ceremonies (Rom 2:28-29; see Col 2:11-12; Phil 3:3).

A *gôy*, together with his family and people, can therefore become a real member of the one household of faith without becoming a Jew externally (Rom 2:28-29). An external Jew, “Israel according to the flesh” (Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα: 1 Cor 10:18), is “under the law” with its bodily-physical (e.g., circumcision, clothing, etc.) and religious-cultural customs (e.g., dietary, Sabbath,⁷ and festival observance (Gal 4:10; Rom 14:1-5; 1 Cor 9:19-23; Heb 7:16-22). A freeman in Christ (Gal 5:1) is not under that obligation, though he may put himself freely under these and any other external cultural ceremonies

discussing the New Covenant for Messianic Jews close to apostasy (Heb 8:6-10:18).

⁴Christ died exclusively “for his sheep [Israel]” (Jn 10:15), yet he has “other sheep which are not of this fold” (Jn 10:16, 11:52). He is the propitiation for “us,” the primarily Jewish group(s) to whom John was writing, and for the whole world of the ethnies (1Jn 2:1-2; Jn 3:16-17), who will be grafted into Israel.

⁵“And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (cf. Rom 3:31; 8:4). Freedom from the obligation of the law still means that a life fulfilling the law is mandatory. An obligation exists at present, not to the law, but to the Spirit who causes us to walk in love, his fruit, which fulfills the law in all its “holy, righteous, and good” moral character (Rom 7:1-6,12; 8:1-17, 13:8-10; Gal 5:19-22).

⁶The ceremonies are not necessary but may be kept in solidarity with the ancient People of God (see below, 1 Cor 9).

⁷Believers from the ethnies are not under Mosaic Sabbath and festival ceremonies. But a rest day once a week is a creation ordinance and moral command, for the good of all mankind [τὸ σάββατον διὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐγένετο] (Gn 2:2-3; Mk 2:27).

in order not to offend religious-cultural sensitivities while trying to win a cultural group to Christ (1 Cor 9). This was Paul's missionary practice (e.g., Acts 16:1-3 [circumcised Timothy]; 21:20-26 [kept ceremonial vows and sacrifices]).

Paul thus revises the traditional proselyte model for those who wish to inherit Abraham's blessedness (see Acts 10-11, 15). Donaldson again explains: "No longer is it a case of Gentiles joining an already established Jewish people of God; rather, Jew and Gentile together and on the same terms need to enter the 'in Christ' sphere of existence" (Donaldson 1986, 106). This change is a revision, not something completely original, because just as "at the consummation of salvation history $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma \text{ Ἰσραὴλ}$ [Rom 11:26] will occupy a central place" so it will now "in the inauguration of the era of salvation at the cross" (Donaldson 1988, 106). Ethnic "Israel according to the flesh" does not disappear and is not replaced by a radically new body, the church. Christ was an ethnic Jew, the representative Man ("son of Man") and representative Israelite, the son of Abraham and David. The ethno-nations, alongside of his still ethnic people, are thus blessed in him as he is in his dual identity.

Therefore, Paul links all the major post-Noahic covenants—Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenant—into one complex whole. "No features have been deleted except the ceremonies and ordinances of the 'old' Mosaic covenant whose phasing out was planned for long ago. The better covenant remained" (Kaiser 1972, 21).⁸ In connecting them, Paul never denied that each ethnic group to whom the gospel comes must sacrifice their non-moral cultural uniqueness to become members of the one body of Christ and share in the benefits of the covenant of grace. There seems to exist, then, both a true unity and real ethno-cultural diversity in that one sheepfold [$\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha \text{ ποιμνῆ}$: flock] with one shepherd (Jn 10:16; Is 56:8).

All of this is a major theme of Pauline literature: (1) Romans (Rom 1:5,16; 2:9-16;⁹ 3:9,19,20-22,29-30; 4:11-13,17-18; 5:12,18; 9:24; 10:12; 11:11-15,25-26,30-32; 15:7-12,16,18,19-21; 16:26), (2) Galatians (Gal 3:5-14,23-29), (3) Ephesians (Eph 2:11-3:16), and (4) Colossians (Col 2:8-23), as well as (5) Hebrews (Heb 7-10).

Joel 2, Pentecost, and the Peoples

Immediately after Joel speaks about the New Covenant's outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he speaks about the *gôyîm* almost uniformly concerning the judgment and wrath upon them (Jl 3). However, he teaches along with many of the other prophets, that the future also holds a different story. The reference to "all flesh" [כָּל-בְּשָׂר : Jl 2:28-29] refers to Yahweh's pouring out the gift of his Holy Spirit universally upon all humankind at Pentecost.¹⁰

⁸This is traditionally termed the covenant of grace (versus the creational "covenant of works": see e.g., Robertson 1980; Kline 1993; Hodge 1995, 2:17-22,354-377; Bavinck 2000; Karlberg 2000a,b; Irons 2000;).

Though I disagree with Walter Kaiser's premillennialism, I agree that Israel as a people and its tie to the land is addressed in the New Covenant (see Schlissel and Brown 1990). "Nonetheless by virtue of its specific linkage with the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants and promises. . . , it is therefore proper to speak of gentile participation. Under the promise doctrine, they were to be the seed of Abraham. They would be adopted and grafted into God's covenant nation Israel" (Kaiser 1972, 16).

⁹" $\tau\acute{\omega}\nu \text{ ἀνθρώπων}$ " [of men, mankind, humanity] means all peoples both Jew and "Greek" (Rom 2:10) or Jew and the ethnies [ἔθνη : individuals from a *gôy/ethnos*] (Rom 2:12-14)

¹⁰For the overall meaning of Pentecost, see chapter five, "The Meaning of Pentecost" in *Pentecost and Mission* (Boer 1961).

Joel suggests a universal application to all the *gôyîm* by contextual hints. First, Joel mentions female and male slaves [עַל-הָעֲבָדִים וְעַל-הַשִּׁפּוֹחֹת MT; ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας LXX], which broadens “all flesh” to comprise more than just the Israelites. Joel explains this expression by first giving a list of Jewish groups.

Then by way of surprise the prophet abruptly declared “and also” or “and even” (*w^egam*) menservants and maidservants. . . . This exegetical addition . . . forces the interpreter to acknowledge that Joel had ‘all mankind’ in mind. (Kaiser 1983a, 119)

Israel’s household slaves were from foreign ethnies (see Lev 25:42; e.g., Gn 14:15; 17:12-13; Dt 12:12; Kaiser 2000, 72).

Second, the phrase “everyone who calls” (Jl 2:32; see Acts 2:21) suggests a broader social context than Israel as well. Furthermore, Peter seems to interpret the phrase “all flesh” universally in the conclusion to his sermon. The phrase, “all who are far off” (Acts 2:39) is “merely a circumlocution for saying ‘Gentiles’” (Kaiser 1983b, 120; see Eph 2:13,17; Acts 10:45; Kaiser 2000, 71-72; Oswalt 1991, 86; Keil 1996, 140).

Third, comparing the phrase “all flesh” to its use in other passages makes this pan-ethnic¹¹ conclusion sure (see e.g., Gn 6:12,13,17; Nm 18:15; Dt 5:26; Job 34:15; Ps 145:21; Is 40:5, 49:26; Jer 32:27). The blessing of the Spirit was not to be merely for the Israelites, but for all peoples as well as all social ranks, ages, and both sexes. This we have seen, is the Pauline interpretation of the Spirit (see Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:10-11).

Zephaniah, Babel and Pentecost

In the present era of the Spirit of Messiah all peoples and social groups are to be blessed. The blessing is not merely to come to individuals, who as extracted proselytes are received into a cultural “Israel” whatever that Israel may be then or today. Instead, the individuals, families and clans of the ethnies come to Yahweh in lingual-cultural solidarity so that together they become one, diverse-but-united, people of the God of Abraham (Ps 47:9).

Some would contend, however, that certain passages would preclude this interpretation. A possible precursor to the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, which some believe may indicate a reversal of the ethnic division of Babel, is found Zephaniah. If this is true, it would provide encouragement for those who suggest that oneness in Christ erases ethnic distinctions in this age of the Spirit (see discussion in Kreitzer 1997, 1998).

First, however, as background to the crucial statement in Zephaniah 3:9-13, the prophet makes an astounding prediction (Zep 2:11). In the midst of scathing prophecies against Jerusalem (Zep 1:7-2:3), then against the surrounding peoples of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, (Zep 2:4), and even Kush (peoples then resident in present Sudan; “Ethiopia”), and Assyria (Zep 2:12-15), Yahweh will terrify the idol worshippers. The cause of their terror (כִּי: because, “for” NASB) is that he will “starve all the gods of the earth” [כָּל-אֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ] (see Pusey 1950; Calvin 1996). Then “all the coastlands of

¹¹The “all flesh” includes at least all kinds and sorts of humans outside Israel. Because of the Hebrew conception of the world outside of Israel as multi-ethnic, it is proper to see an “all peoples” (pan-ethnic) perspective also implied.

the nations” [כָּל־אֵי הַגּוֹיִם] will bow down to Yahweh, “every one from/in his *own* place” [בְּמִקְוָמוֹ] (Zep 2:11). Here the phrase “of the earth” and “coastlands of the *gôyîm*” are parallel, showing the universal extent of the prediction.

Though the translation is disputed, the words “each in their own lands” (NIV) may contrast to the usual picture of the ethnies streaming to the Temple (see Robertson 1990, 308;¹² *contra* Keil 1996, 451, see Zep 3:10). Whatever the correct translation may be, all the coastlands of the ethnies, “the whole heathen world” (Keil 1996, 451), clearly will not worship their starved out gods any more. Instead, the peoples will worship the true God in/from their own lands. Note that the phrase here אֵי הַגּוֹיִם [“coastlands of the *gôyîm*”] is used only once before in Scripture, in the Völkertafel (Gn 10:5). This returns the Hebrew readers once again to the universalism that Abrahamic particularism often seemed to obscure. Therefore, “Zephaniah joins the grand prophetic tradition in announcing the coming day in which God’s judgment on the nations will have its final issue in their adoration of the true and living God” (Robertson 1990, 309).

In the next context, after again pronouncing judgment on “the tyrannical city,” Jerusalem and all the surrounding ethnies in the judgment brought through Babylon (Zep 3:1-8), Yahweh announces a second time that he will give a blessing “to the peoples” [אֶל־עַמִּים]. He states, through Zephaniah, that he will change the peoples and give them “purified lips” so that all will call on Yahweh’s name and serve him literally “with one shoulder.” Then the “daughter of My dispersed ones” (NASB margin: בְּיַד־בַּת), clearly diaspora Israelites, will stream towards “the holy mountain” with “offerings” (Zep 3:9-11). At that time Zion will be a praise and renown among “all the peoples of earth” (Zep 3:20; see 14-20).

The implication in the context is that the converted peoples of earth, no longer heathen *gôyîm* but ‘amim, will serve Yahweh “with one shoulder,” taking upon themselves the shoulder-yoke of the covenant, streaming alongside believing Israelite pilgrims to Zion. This yoke, as Jesus said, is “light and easy” in the New Covenant because of the Holy Spirit (Mt 11:30; see 1 Jn 5:3). In the new covenant, Zion is the city above where Messiah sits enthroned (Ps 110:1). “[At that time] the distinction between *’am* and *goy* will cease” (Fishman, Mayerfeld, and Fishman 1985, 36). Just as Israel slipped back into “*goy*-ness,” so “all peoples can attain *’am*-ness or slip back into *goy*-ness. If the latter possibility represents the anguish of the Jews, then the former represents the promise for all nations” (Fishman, Mayerfeld, and Fishman 1985, 36).

Now some, with a desire to destroy apartheid, racism, and ethnicism in the church, interpret “purified lips” to mean a reversal of the division of languages at Babel (e.g., Bax n.d., 1983; Loubser 1987, 94; see also Pusey 1950, 284; Motyer 1993).¹³ However, in the context of Zep 3:9, the phrase has nothing to do with a unified language.

¹²“Zephaniah’s distinctive imagery of each person worshiping in his own place anticipates a central aspect of the worship perspective provided by Jesus” (Robertson 1990, 308; Jn 4:21-23).

¹³Douglas Bax, “The Bible and Apartheid 2,” in *Apartheid is a Heresy* (De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio 1983, 129). See note fifteen below.

Pusey (1950) and Alec Motyer see a connection as well, but with the motive of seeing a unified church encompassing all peoples in the future. Motyer titles the passage: “Babel reversed; the uniting of the peoples” and “the canceling of the confusion of Babel” (Motyer 1993, 951).

Hence it has nothing to do with the reversal¹⁴ in the company of the redeemed, of Babel's putative curse, which some think caused ethno-linguistic distinctions.

Often in Scripture "lip" [לִפְּיָו] does mean "language" as it does indeed in Gn 11:1,6,7,9; Ps 81:5; Is 19:18; Ez 3:5-6. However, it is clear in Scripture that language itself, as a created thing, is not impure¹⁵ but only the sinful motive of the words conveyed by the language-lip. The phrase means "the lip of a man who is defiled by sin" (Keil 1996, 458). Here the implication is not that Yahweh seeks to purify the lingual division of Babel, assuming that sin and the curse of God caused an impure division. It implies, instead, as the next phrase makes clear, "That all of them [the peoples] may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him" (see Jeremias 1959).¹⁶ John M. P. Smith, William Ward, and Julius Brewer correctly state in the classic ICC series that the "impure lip" of the ethno-nations is impure, according to the context, because of idolatry and immoral practices. A close analogy is the impure "lips" of the prophet Isaiah (Is 6:5).

The impurity . . . consisted in the fact that they prayed to and swore by other gods than Yahweh. The purification will consist in their being brought to abandon the worship of any and every god save Yahweh; cf. Ho. 2:12; Ps. 16:4. (Smith, Ward and Brewer 1911, 248)

It is at this point that there may be an allusion to the Tower pericope (see Pusey 1950, 283). If the total unifying human apostasy of idolatry began at the Tower (except for a Shemite remnant), and continued afterwards by the always idolatrous *gôyîm*, then Yahweh now prophesies he will reverse that second universal fall.

This parallels Joel's prophecy. "By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the purification of heart and lip was accomplished that led to a widespread calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21)" (Robertson 1990, 329). The meaning of the phrase, "I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech" (RSV) strengthens this conclusion. Yahweh changes their speech "by purifying their sinful lips, i.e., He converts them" (Keil 1996, 458; see 1Sa 10:9).

God's Holy Spirit of grace will reach past the branches of Kush's rivers, that is the White and Blue Nile branches, into the heart of Africa (Zep 3:10; see Is 18:2-7).

¹⁴“In the Old Testament Yahweh promises that when He fulfils the process of salvation (which He began in Abram), He will reverse the curse of Babel” (Bax 1983, 124).

The logic is simple and compelling. The sin of Babel was hubris. The curse of Babel is linguistic division. Christ came to destroy sin and reverse the curse of God. He sent the Spirit to effect that destruction in one body in which there is no more Jew or Greek ethnic distinction as well as slave or free social-class distinction, and male and female gender distinction. All are one in Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

The conclusion breaks down when one of the major premises is refuted. The sin of Babel was hubris (see Gowan 1975). But the curse was not linguistic division, but the cessation of city and tower building (see chapter five).

¹⁵To accept that would be to subtly bring in neo-platonic presuppositions. All divisions, including lingual divisions, are not evil. Only divisions caused by sin are evil. Redemption does not thus restore all divisiveness into an undivided unity.

Sin as rebellion to the Creator is evil, and redemption destroys the uncleanness of sin upon words, thoughts, language use, and actions. Where sin causes social upheaval and disruption (see e.g., Jas 4:1-7), redemption heals social ills, bringing the peace of justice but not destroying created social distinctions such as lingual-ethnic, gender, and some aspects of social class (see Kreitzer 1997, 1998).

¹⁶J. Jeremias correctly ties the "turning of the lip" to the confession that the ethno-nations will make. He writes, citing Ps 86:10 and Is 45:24: "with cleansed lips they will confess: 'Our fathers have inherited nought but lies, even vanity and things wherein there is no profit' (Jer. 16:19)" (Jeremias 1959, 59).

“Cush is singled out as an instance of the whole world worshiping the Lord” (Motyer 1993, 952). Together, the remnant of the scattered Jews and the converted peoples will serve Yahweh with “one shoulder.” This could be an allusion to the common yoke between two oxen, which shoulder to shoulder, they use to pull the plow. Or it could allude to “bearers who carry a burden with even shoulders; cf. Jer. 32:39” (Keil 1996, 458).

Whatever the exact allusion is, Zephaniah foresees a unified “Jewish and gentile community serving with a single shoulder and presenting a single offering” (Robertson 1990, 330). In common with many other prophecies we have examined, the day will come when Jewish and gentile peoples will serve the Lord together in one body. Though I do not agree with his “reversal of Babel’s confusion of language” (Motyer 1993, 952) terminology (see below), Motyer seems to be on the right track when he adds: Zephaniah does not quite express the “fellow heirs, members of the same body” like Paul does in Ephesians 3:6 (Is 19:25), but he approximates the “sharers in the promise” as he sees the earth praising the name that the people of God bear: the promise to Abraham that in his seed (the believing family of Rom. 4:16-25 and Gal. 3:7) all families of the earth would find the blessing they need (Gen. 22:18). (Motyer 1993, 952)

Therefore, this passage teaches that the Holy Spirit will convert the ESOLs within their solidarity and he will bring unity within one body. However, Mennonite author John Howard Yoder misses the point in “The Social Shape of the Gospel”:

[Believing Jews and Gentiles] . . . together form the new humankind (Eph. 2:15). What has happened is the creation of a new socio-history which is neither Jew nor Greek, or is both Jew and Greek. . . . The reality is so new that the words Paul uses for it are *new creation* . . . and *new humanity*. In none of these usages . . . is the new thing Paul is talking about an individual. But neither is he talking about an existing ethnic group. He is talking about a new group which is so much like an ethnic group that it can be called a nation or a people, but whose constitutive definition is that it is made up of both kinds or many kinds of people. (Yoder 1983, 282-283)

Yoder then critiques Church Growth missiology, which seeks to plant self-governing ethno-churches: “‘If one is in Christ,’ there is a whole new world. Ethnic standards have ceased to count” (Yoder 1983, 283; see also Bosch 1982, 1983; Padilla 1985a,b).

There is only one logical conclusion to this position. Because unity in Christ is more important than particularity, all diversity loses “equally ultimate” existence in itself. Therefore, logically, even the individual has lost any permanent particular identity and self-determination. The androgynous person then must be encompassed by unity to participate in the social good.

Hence, not only unique ethnic diversity, but also even individual ethnic identity, must be surrendered into the “good” of the unified new humanity coming. Logically, this and only this will reverse the social curse of Babel. What the linguistic shape of this new humanity is, we are not told. However, the sound of the discourse is that of modernity and of modernity’s social unitarian ideologies, as Miroslav Volf points out (see Kreitzer 1997, 1998). It is to this discussion I now turn.

Babel, Pentecost Relationship

Does Pentecost Reverse Babel?

Many theologians who deal with ethnic relations within the body of Christ are convinced that the outpouring of the Spirit upon all kinds and sorts of humans results in a radical leveling or democratizing of humankind. Pentecost reverses Babel!¹⁷ These especially desire to see the earth's manifold ethnic and racial divisions united. That in itself is a noble desire but misuses the passage.

South African, Douglas Bax, for example, in the following extensive citation, makes precisely this point:

The miracle of Pentecost signifies precisely the reversal of what happened at Babel. It is the fulfilment of Zeph. 3 . . . and Isa. 66:15-23 (which actually appears to be a source for much of the account in Acts 2). The Lord, the King of Israel, has come into Israel's midst (Zeph. 3:14-17); and now He comes down with flames of fire like a mighty wind to gather men from "all nations and tongues" to Jerusalem to see "a Sign", and to "change their speech to a pure speech", "that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord" (Isa. 66:15, 18-23; Zeph. 3:9f). This pure speech is the one universal language of the Spirit, which makes itself understood in every language spoken by men, as a sign that through the reconciling work of Christ and the work of the Spirit the dividing effect of Babel is overcome. Though these different languages remain, the barrier of communication which they have set up between those who speak them is dramatically broken down. (Bax 1983, 129)

Observe how Bax attempts to overcome the divisiveness of the South African apartheid theology (HRLS 1976) by claiming that Pentecost and Babel are opposites. The problem is that in his zeal to reject apartheid, he allegorizes and wrenches the context of both the Zephaniah passage and that of the Acts passage. Zephaniah is not speaking about Pentecost's miracle of tongues but of Pentecost's miracle of putting a new clean heart into the peoples. The result is that the peoples' words would be words of a faith-filled confession, and deeds of justice and kindness in unity with all other peoples including the Jews.

A More Nuanced Perspective

J. G. Davies's, classic article "Pentecost and Glossolalia" points out the parallels between the Babel and Pentecost pericopes. Still he falls into the error that

¹⁷E.g., compare the following list of commentators:

See Calvin (1996) on Acts 2.

"Pentecost has to be understood within the framework of salvation history as the antithesis of Babel.

With Pentecost God restored that which went wrong at Babel by unifying the nations into one new nation (the church), and giving them one new language (the language of the Holy Spirit. In comparison with this kingdom other nations and languages have only a relative, transient value" (Loubser 1987, 94).

"We believe that at Pentecost God has undone what was done at Babel" (Hauerwas 1987, 180).

"Pentecost, therefore, is a catholic event: it represents Babel in reverse, the restoration of communication among estranged peoples" (Dulles 1987, 173).

"The event [of Pentecost] was nothing less than a reversal of the curse of Babel" (Bruce 1988, 59).

"Pentecost itself is seen through the miracle of tongues to be a reversal of Babel" (Goldsworthy 1996,

11).

These scholars, including Bax, grapple with the thematic connection of the two pericopes. Each desires to see the warring factions of humankind healed. However, their interpretation of the relationship of Babel and Pentecost is flawed.

Pentecost reverses Babel: “The account of Pentecost is dependent upon the account of Babel” in the LXX (Davies 1952, 228).¹⁸ It is best, however, as PCUSA scholars Catherine and Justo Gonzalez write, to see that “Pentecost is not simply the reversal of Babel” (Gonzalez and Gonzalez 1993, 22). The situation is much more nuanced than this. “The [common] interpretation rightly connects the two texts, but does justice to neither” (Volf 1996, 226). Pentecost does not destroy the beautiful diversities of created ethnic solidarity, Volf correctly believes. Pentecost thus does not rescind Babel.

Babel’s hubris and subsequent judgment is not then the final state of ethno-humanity. With Abraham’s call, God began “constructing’ salutary harmony” after having deconstructed “false unity” (Volf 1996, 227). God does not leave humankind in this state of total separation in sin. “The preventative and punitive divine reaction to the oppressive unity, no less than the original transgression, cries for remedy” (Volf 1996, 227). In other words, redemption will heal sin, not the state of ethno-diversity. Ernst Haenchen comments:

It was open to him [Luke] to interpret the coming of the Spirit . . . , as the occasion when the confusion of Babel was abolished: the Spirit of Christ healing the division of mankind. But in Luke’s eyes the history of the Christian mission precluded this interpretation.¹⁹ (Haenchen 1971, 174)

Pentecost is only one of the many acts of God begun when he called Abraham (Gn 12:1-3). In these acts he is “bringing order into ‘confusion’” (Volf 1996, 227) caused by sin, not by ethnic diversity. Indeed, each of the languages and peoples represented were only representatives of the peoples of the world: “Im Rahmen unseres Berichts gelten diese Diasporajuden gewissermaßen als Repräsentanten der Weltvölker, die in ihnen wenigstens potentiell gegenwärtig sind” (Schneider 1980, 251).²⁰

Babel, one language; Pentecost many

Pentecost, Volf believes, is God’s decentralized alternative to the homogenizing imperialistic unity Babel sought to create. Yet the earth does not return to

¹⁸Davies shows many similarities in shared vocabulary between Gn 11 and Acts 2 (συγχέωμεν, γλώσσαι, φωνήν [confuse, language/tongue, voice]; γλώσσαις, φωνῆς and συνεχύθη, [tongues/ languages, voice, confused/bewildered]). Davies seems to indicate, however, the problem of humankind caused by Babel’s confusion was disunification not hubris and sinful humanism as idolatry. “In Gen. 11:1-9 the scattering of mankind over the face of the earth, together with their division into different nations with different languages, is described. In Acts 2:1-13 the reunification of mankind is in their understanding of the divine message described” (Davies 1952, 228). However his conclusion does not exactly follow, though he struggles to find the meaning of the parallels. In the first account (Babel), he claims, there was one language, and here many, but “nevertheless, [they] are understood in unison by the hearers.” Babel was God’s work to confuse and bring disunity; here the people themselves “were confused at the discovery of their unity” (Davies 1952, 229). He adds: “This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who reverses the previous disruption in the unity of creation” (Davies 1952, 119).

It is better to see both the similarities and dissimilarities between the passages (Volf 1996, 226; Gonzalez and Gonzalez 1993, 22), and to see the message as one of creating harmony out of sinful rebellion, according to the Abrahamic mandate, while maintaining ethnic diversity, a created good.

¹⁹He immediately adds: “At Pentecost, the time was not yet ripe for the ἔθνη, the Gentile peoples, to be seized by the Spirit: it was to the Jews that the mission first turned” (Haenchen 1971, 174). This cannot be a totally correct interpretation. The coming of all the scattered sheep of Israel from all the nations back to Jerusalem as the prophets foretell, is only a picture of the coming of “all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD” [ἄξουσιν τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν δῶρον κυρίῳ] (Is 66:20). It is possible that to this offering Paul refers in Romans 15:16 as the “ἡ προσφορὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν.”

²⁰Schneider, however, believes these were not pilgrims but Diaspora Jews now resident in Jerusalem.

a pristine world of one language before Babel. Miroslav Volf carefully understands: “Before Babel the whole of humanity spoke *one* language; in Jerusalem the new community speaks *many* languages” (Volf 1996, 228; italics in original). Barrett, though possibly holding to the reversal of Babel rhetoric,²¹ is correct: “The church from the beginning, though at the beginning located only in Jerusalem, is in principle a universal society” (Barrett 1994, 108). There is thus an excellent theological point Luke is trying to make in the Pentecost account.

When the Spirit comes, all understand each other, not because one language is restored or a new all-encompassing meta-language is designed, but because each hears his or her own language spoken. Pentecost overcomes the “confusion” and the resulting false “scattering,” but it does so not by reverting to the unity of cultural uniformity, but by advancing toward the harmony of cultural diversity. (Volf 1996, 228)

Contextual considerations

A close look at the worldview of the Hebrew bible supports this position. For this section, I depend greatly upon James M. Scott’s magisterial article, “Luke’s Geographical Horizon” (Scott 1994). As we saw in chapter three, the Völkertafel of Genesis 10 placed Canaan in the center of the earth. This is followed by the copy of that table in 1 Chronicles 1:1-2:2 (see Scott 1994, 501). The prophetic eschatology carefully follows this outline (see Ez 38-39; Dan 11; Is 66:18-20; Scott 1994, 503-4). Isaiah 66:18-20, a clear prediction of the sending out of Pentecost, as we have seen, unmistakably echoes the worldview of the Table of Peoples (Scott 1994, 505-506) in both “geography and ethnography” (Scott 1994, 509). Scott comments:

It is clear that descendants of each of the three sons of Noah are represented In other words, by alluding to the Table of Nations, the partial list of nations in v. 19 explicates what is meant by “the nations,” which, in turn, provides concrete examples of God’s intention to gather “all nations” in v. 18. . . . [Last], the focus on Jerusalem in this text (cf. v. 20) is characteristic of the OT and Jewish tradition based on the Table of Nations. (Scott 1994, 506)

It seems that it was exactly this Hebraic worldview that influenced Luke in his twin volume work.²² Luke also implicitly sees Jerusalem as the center of the earth, around which exist the peoples and nations (Scott 1994, 524). The idea that the disciples would preach to all the peoples represented by the sons of Noah, beginning from the center in Jerusalem, is thus explicit in Luke-Acts (Lk 24:46-47; Acts 1:8). Many have seen the list of peoples and geographical reaches in Acts 1:8 as providing an outline for the whole of Acts. Further, the “concentric circles radiating out from Jerusalem in a northwesterly direction” to the furthest reach of the known world suggests influence from the Völkertafel pericope (see Scott 1994, 526).

The same can be seen in the account of the Pentecostal outpouring. The list is similar to that in Hebrew “Table-of-Nations tradition” (Scott 1994, 528). Scott finds

²¹“The old linguistically based divisions of mankind had now been overcome. ‘Unitatem linguarum quam superbia Babylonis disperserat humilitas ecclesiae recolligit, spiritualiter autem varietas linguarum dona variarum significant gratiarum’ (Bede)” (Barrett 1994, 116).

²²See Barrett (1994, 122-123) for background in list of Jews in the Diaspora. Scott points out that these often were outlined by the Völkertafel (Scott 1994). See Metzger 1980; Bruce 1988, 55; Scott 1994; Barrett 1998, 122 for refutation of view that the background was an astrological table.

three other similarities. Acts shares an apparent lack of structuring and shares many of the traditional names of ethno-nations in that tradition. Third, Luke alludes to the Babel tradition and the longer Table of Nations in his account (Scott 1994, 529-530).²³

Scott further believes that a mission to the three sons of Noah is reflected in the outline of the book, based as it is upon the programmatic verse, Acts 1:8. (1) “Mission to Shem (Acts 2:1-8:25)” (Scott 1994, 531), that is to Jews in Jerusalem, Judeans, and the Samaritans. Note Peter’s reference to the Abrahamic covenant in Acts 3:25, showing that the mission to the rest of Noah’s sons is not being neglected. (2) “Mission to Ham (Acts 8:26-40)” (Scott 1994, 533). This is the account of Philip’s outreach to the Kushite eunuch [ἄνθρωπος Αἰθίοψ εὐνοῦχος].²⁴ This was a clear reference to a person from Kush, the firstborn of Ham. The *Kushîm* are the inhabitants of the far southern part of the Table of Peoples. (3) “Mission to Japheth (Acts 9:1-28:31)” (Scott 1994, 538). Note in this section several references to the Servant Songs²⁵ and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, both of which in turn serve as the backdrop of the prediction of the mission to the ethno-nations coming out of Jerusalem (Is 66:19).²⁶

Summary: The miracle of tongues not of ears

In summary, the miracle on the day of Pentecost, therefore, was a miracle of “tongues,” that is the apostles spoke in real human languages, found in the “whole world.”²⁷ “Zugleich zeigt die Bezugnahme auf V4b, daß es sich um einen Sprachenwunder, nicht um ein Hörwunder handelt (Schneider 1980, 251-252).²⁸ The dispersion from Babel to populate the earth according to the Creator’s explicitly resisted command (Gn 1:28, 9:7, 11:4), provided the backdrop for the call of Abram and his seed

²³Unfortunately Scott falls into the Pentecost reversing Babel error at this point.

²⁴Compare the LXX and MT, in e.g., Jer 39:16 [וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַכַּשְׂמִי] MT; Αβδεμελεχ τον Αιθίοψα LXX]; see Jer 13:23. See discussion in Scott (1995, 533-535).

²⁵For possible allusions, compare Acts 9:15 and Is 43:10, maybe also Is 52:15, especially if נוז = “sprinkle;” Acts 13:47 and Is 49:6; Acts 26:17,23 and Is 49:6; see also Acts 22:14-15 and Is 43:10. See, “To the ends of the earth”: The geographical and ethnic universalism of Acts 1:8 in light of Isaianic influence on Luke (Moore 1997b).

²⁶Consider further Paul’s references to the Table of Peoples in his Mars Hill address in a short summarizing of the proto-history: (1) the self-sufficient Creator of all things (Acts 17:24-25; Gn 1), (2) creation of every nation [πάν ἔθνος] from one man so that they would spread out over the whole face of the earth [ἐπὶ πᾶν τὸ προσώπον τῆς γῆς] (Acts 17:26; Gn 9-11; cf. ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, Gn 9:19). Note reference to Dt 32:8 in Acts 17:26.

²⁷Note the parallels here: tongues, peoples or ethnies, and named birth languages or dialects: “[They] began to speak with other tongues [ἑτέρας γλώσσας], as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation [peoples or ethnies] under heaven [ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν]. And when this sound occurred, the multitude . . . were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language [τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ]. And they were amazed and marveled, saying, ‘Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear *them* in our own language to which we were born [ἕκαστος τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ἧ ἐγεννήθημεν]? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our *own* tongues [languages: ταῖς ἡμετέρας γλώσσας] speaking” (Acts 2:7-11 NASB).

²⁸See Schneider 1980, 252, n. 74 and sources listed: “Die Annahme eines Hörwunders ist im allgemeinen heute aufgegeben.”

Abraham Kuypers sees the same: “Immers op den grooten Pinksterdag spreekt de Heilige Geest niet in eenvormige sprake, maar een eigentlijk hoorde in zijn eigen taal dien Geest de werken Gods verkondigen” (Kuypers 1870, 24).

to be a channel of blessing to the whole world of the Table of Peoples. The prophetic historians, prophets, and wisdom writers constantly referred to the day when that instrumental task will succeed.

Isaiah especially laments the fact that Israel's sin caused the failure of that task then. Now, however, the whole Table of Peoples and the many ethnies that have sprung from them are beginning to be reached from Jerusalem at the center. When the city and temple in bondage to sin and obsolete ceremony (Heb 8:13) is destroyed, the pilgrimage of the tongues, ethno-nations, and peoples to Zion still proceeds because of the message of the disciples. This time, however, it is to the heavenly Jerusalem above, the city of promise (Gal 4:24-31; Heb 12:22-23; Is 54:1-5), the bride of the lamb (Rv 21:9), into which flows all the ethnies, their kings, and wealth (Rv 21:24,26).

The miracle was thus not of the ears. The listeners did not understand one new unifying language. The miracle was of tongues, that is languages and dialects created first at Babel, confirmed for a time in apostasy, and now being restored to the worship and praise of the one true Creator-God. This is just as OT writers foresaw, as we have seen. It is to this OT vision that Paul refers in his Mars Hill address: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to mankind [ethno-humanity] that all everywhere [τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι πανταχοῦ] should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:30-31). The time for repentance for the whole world of the sons of Noah has now come.

Pentecost, therefore, did not destroy the beauty of ethno-linguistic diversity; it sanctifies it in Christ, the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:5-16). One message of Pentecost, thus, is that God speaks to each ethnie in their own, beautiful and unique, God-created language and dialect (Acts 2:4-11; see Dayton and Fraser 1980, 118-119).²⁹ Therefore, Christ's redemption does not restore a condition in the church like that before Babel or like that of Israel. Neither the mono-ethnic proto-humanity nor a Hebrew monolingual, mono-cultural ideal serves as the model for a unified church in a "new humanity" in Christ. The new humanity is rather to be pan-cultural, pan-lingual, and pan-geographical.

Lastly, this more nuanced perspective on the Babel-Pentecost relationship teaches that in the Pentecost account, the Lord sent the Spirit to restore human confessional unity in Christ. This unity has been broken because of Babel's hubris and idolatry (similar in many ways to modern democratic humanism, see Rushdoony 1963, 1970, 1978). Therefore, when God speaks to any people, he speaks to them in their tongue, that is in their own identifiable human language, which he created.³⁰

Pentecost and the New Jerusalem

Bernhard Anderson summarizes the contrary perspective to the reversal-of-

²⁹“Pentecost is a signal that the new people of God will incorporate the vast array of tribes, clans, castes, languages, and subcultures. The miracle of tongues signals that each language group is to hear the mighty acts of God in its own tongue. The Church does not reduce the people of God to one culture or to one people in the same sense that Israel was a single people sharing a single culture. Rather the people of God is a community sharing a common loyalty to the same Lord, confessing the same faith, and yet retaining distinctive ethnic and cultural ways of life. The unity of the Church is a unity of the Spirit, not of cultural or linguistic uniformity” (Dayton and Fraser 1980, 118-119).

³⁰God directly created the ancestor of that tongue at Babel. In his sovereignty, he guided the development of the present form of that language. He is thus responsible for “creating” the modern form of the “tongue” as well (see chapter 5).

Babel view.

Eschatological portrayals of the consummation of God's historical purpose do not envision a homogenized humanity but human unity in diversity. According to the Isaianic vision (Isa. 2:1-4), when the peoples in the last days stream to Zion, the City *par excellence*, they will come as nations with their respective ethnic identities. And when the Spirit was given at Pentecost, . . . human beings "from every nation under heaven" heard the gospel, each "in his own native language," in the city of Jerusalem. (Anderson 1977, 63-64, see Brueggemann 1982, 101)

Edward Dayton and David Fraser agree: "A number of verses in Revelation (5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15) envision the end of time as encompassing rather than erasing the differences that characterize people groups" (Dayton and Fraser 1980, 117). The new Jerusalem from above, is thus a city "*of perfect diversity within perfect unity*" (Van Rooy 1991, 240; italics in original). It is therefore necessary to emphasize both in equal ultimacy (C. A. Van Til). "*In the church of Christ diversity glorifies unity and unity accentuates diversity*" (Van Rooy 1991, 240; italics in original). We must not therefore chase away others of diverse language, culture, or color because of fear of their diversity. The "*city of God is open to all*" (Van Rooy 1991, 241; italics in original). Yet at the same time, we must realize that even with the greatest of accepting love (e.g., Rom 15:7), the Other may not feel culturally or linguistically at home in my ethno-cultural diversity, my people's style or place of worship (McGavran 1970, 1980). O.R. Johnson summarizes. The city of God "is not that of a city of identical inhabitants, but rather a richly variegated community" (Johnson 1977, 89).

Great Commission, the Gospels, and the ESOLs

The Gospels include two separate version of the commission King Jesus gave to his disciples after his resurrection (Mt 28:17-20; Lk 24:45-51). The Lukan account is a statement of summary by the resurrected Lord of what "the Scripture" teaches concerning his work. There are many affinities to the Isaianic books here, which in turn have roots in the Abrahamic covenant. The holds true for the Matthean account, which occurred after the Lukan version.

Matthew's Great Commission

Matthew emphasizes that King Jesus is the one possessing the Son of Man's authority over heaven and earth (Mt 28:17; Da 7:13-14; Michel 1983, 36; LaGrand 1999, 238). Furthermore, this version of the Great Commission³¹ was not an afterthought in the structure of the Gospel. Instead, it "provides the unifying climax of the entire Gospel's teaching on mission that is anticipated in many ways through Matthew's narrative" (Köstenberger and O'Brien 2001, 87; see Brooks 1981; Carson 1984, 61, 596).³² David Bosch summarizes:

One thing contemporary scholars are agreed upon, is that Matthew 28:18-20 has to

³¹For up-to-date bibliography on the passage, see Hagner 1995, 878-880; Keener 1999, 715-721.

³²See discussion and literature cited in Scaer 1991; Bosch 1983, 1992, 56-57; and LaGrand 1999, 236-237. "Matt. 28:18-20 is the key to the understanding of the whole book" (Michel 1983, 35; italics in original). "The concluding *pericope* (xxviii 16-20 has controlled the entire design of the Gospel of Matthew" (Brooks 1981, 2). "The closing pericope (28:16-20) is . . . [the] climax toward which the entire Gospel moves" (Carson 1984, 36; see 61,596). Matthew begins with the mention of Jesus as Messianic King, "son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1), and ends with the command to fulfill Abraham's blessing by discipling all the ethnies of earth.

be interpreted against the background of Matthew's gospel as a whole and unless we keep this in mind we shall fail to understand it. No exegesis of the "Great Commission" divorced from its moorings in this gospel can be valid. (Bosch 1993, 57)

The questions asked about this passage in its total context, which are relevant to my thesis, are twofold. First, does Jesus³³ mean disciple "all the ethnies of the world" with the term "πάντα τὰ ἔθνη" or is this phrase used "with no sense of the plurality of the nations; that is, it is used non-sociologically" (DeRidder 1975,188). Second, what or who are the τὰ ἔθνη?

Τὰ ἔθνη equals all non-Jewish individuals

Most now correctly reject the concept that the term τὰ ἔθνη excludes the Jews (see Bosch 1992).³⁴ Further, however, many reject the idea that τὰ ἔθνη are anthropological or sociological groups and agree that they are collectively the amalgam of all non-Jews in a religious sense (e.g., Hoekendijk 1948, 229; DeRidder 1975, 188; Bosch 1983, 235-240; Hre Kio 1990). Johannes Hoekendijk gives his classic expression: "Panta ta ethne is terminus technicus voor de gehele mensheid, uit wier midden God zich zijn volk vergadert. Niet ethnisch, maar heilshistorisch is de mensheid verdeeld in Israëel en de 'volkeren' (= heidenen)" (Hoekendijk 1948, 229).³⁵ He concludes on this basis that "volks-kerstening vindt dus geen grond in de terminologie van het zendingsbevel" (Hoekendijk 1948, 229).

He rejects a covenant-family approach and adopts an individualistic approach, more similar to the Radical than the Genevan Reformation (see Kreitzer 1998). The Great Commission thus must be brought to individuals alone, not individuals-in-family, clan or ethnic bonds. "Alle mensen in de gehele oikoumene, die niet in het volk Gods zijn opgenomen, zijn het adres der zending" (Hoekendijk 1948, 229). Harry Boer agrees:

It is significant that while we read much . . . about groups of believers that enter the Church, about families that are baptized as a unit, about the right of Jews to remain Jews and of gentiles to remain gentiles, we read nothing about the significance of ethnic characteristics for the ingathering of the Church. On the contrary, Paul . . . states specifically that in the Church ethnic characteristics fall away. There is in the Church neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian nor Scythian, Col. 3:11. When the nations are discipled they enter thorough the sacrament of baptism into a communion in which ethnic characteristics may play no determinative role. (Boer 1961, 168-169)

Boer, Hoekendijk, Bosch, Verkuyl, DeRidder and many others are correctly

³³Despite much doubt about the pericope's genuineness as actual *ipsissima verbal Jesu* (see e.g., Bosch 1983; Köstenberger and O'Brien 2001), James LaGrand makes a very strong stand for the passage's authenticity (LaGrand 1999).

³⁴Bosch cites Michel, Strecker, Trilling, Hahn, Zumstein, Frankemölle, Matthew, and Friedrich. This point can be clearly seen in Lukan material in the citation of Ps 2 in Acts 4:25 [Ἰνατί ἐφρούαξαν ἔθνη καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά]. The leaders of the worship interpret: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain" to mean "the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel" [ὄν ἔθνεσιν καὶ λαοῖς Ἰσραήλ].

³⁵"Πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is a technical term for the whole of humanity, out of whose midst God himself is gathering his people. Humanity is not ethnically but salvation-historically divided into Israel and the peoples, which equals the heathen [gentiles]" (my translation).

reacting to Germanic, post-war racism. They rightly agree that the term people or *volk/Volk* in Germanic languages such as Afrikaans and German, and to a lesser extent Dutch, is a “romantic, race-conscious, and emotionally laden term” (Boer 1961, 169; see Moodie 1975). They hold, thus, that *volk/Volk* has little to do with the church beyond pragmatic considerations of language and style. The church should be one institute in which ethnicity plays little essential part (see critique in Kreitzer 1993, 1997, 1998).

Those who come from a Reformed background usually further infer that “the New Testament clearly does not extend the believing social unit beyond the family” (Boer 1961, 172). “Disciple the nations” means then that believers must seek to disciple only a representative full number of the gentiles to fulfill Christ’s command. Though this group of scholars complains of an Idealist-Romantic background for the German *Volksideal*, there seems to be a Greek-platonic background to their rejection of the idea of ethnicity in the church (Kreitzer 1998). The created good of ethno-linguistic particularity is not something natural to be discarded in the spiritual times of the post-Pentecost era. Hear again Boer:

When German missionary thought attempts to make the *Volk* concept an essential part of the Church concept it does violence to the discontinuity that the eschatological event of Pentecost has effected between the fellowship of the new people of God and the natural relationships existing among the peoples of the world. (Boer 1961, 173)

David Bosch and Harry Boer make similar comments concerning Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner’s Homogeneous Unit concept, agreeing that they are merely an “anglicized version” of the Germanic concept (Boer 1961, 179; Bosch 1983, 238).

Τὰ ἔθνη equals all peoples

Many, on the other hand, now accept the fact that King Jesus states in the Great Commission that his “followers are called not merely to disciple individuals, but entire nations, indeed, all nations” (Köstenberger and O’Brien 2001, 104; see Meier 1977; Carson 1984; Hagner 1995; Piper 1992, 1993; Keener 1999). If by nations, they mean distinctly identifiable ethnies, unique in language, and so forth (see chapter 4), this perspective is more correct. It takes into account the whole context of Matthew and biblical theology.

Context of Matthew

Certainly Matthew’s version of the mission imperative is not a “drastic innovation,” as Craig Keener calls it (Keener 1999, 719). It is instead the logical extension of the Abrahamic covenant, read through OT lenses, especially colored by Isaiah and Daniel. Matthew begins his account with King Jesus as the heir of the seed-blessing found in the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants, and concludes with the Abrahamic covenant’s renewed commission to bless the peoples. Read this way, the whole book comes freshly alive.

Briefly, Matthew founds his account of Jesus in a genealogy grounding his humanity in the ethno-covenantal seed-line of Abraham and David, the first godly king (Mt 1:1-17,20). “Jesus the Messiah came in fulfillment of the Kingdom promises to David and of the Gentile blessings promises to Abraham” (Carson 1984, 61; see Mt 3:9, 8:11). He next establishes him to be the virgin-born King to come from the Davidic line, as Isaiah 7:14-16 states (see Is 9:1-7). He will save his people from their sins as Isaiah 53 foretells (Is 53:5,8,10-11; Mt 1:21-25). He was born in David’s city, Bethlehem as

predicted by Micah (Mt 2:6; Mi 5:2). He recapitulated the life of Yahweh's son, Israel (Mt 2:15, 18; Is 9:6; Hos 11:1), as the Fulfillment-seed of all the Abrahamic-Davidic promises. The Servant Songs especially express these promises.

The Son's way was made ready by the voice introducing those Servant Songs, identified as John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-4). John was the prophesied Elijah who was to come (Mt 3:4; Mal 4:5-6). His mission was to restore the people to the Abrahamic covenant (Mt 3:9) and to repentance lest the Mosaic curse flare up soon (Mt 3:7-10). Jesus, poured with water [βαπτίζω] and anointed [ἔχρισέν] with the Holy Spirit, received the Father's commendation in words alluding to the Servant Songs (Mt 3:16-17; Is 42:3; see Lk 4:18). John claimed that Jesus, the Spirit-anointed one, would pour out upon/baptize his people with the Spirit. This was in accordance with the prophecies (e.g., Ez 36:24-27; Jl 2; Is 59:27).

This Anointed King preached the coming of his Father's reign, and recapitulated and overcame the steps of Adam's Fall (Mt 4:1-13). Victorious over the Serpent, he began to fulfill Isaiah's vision of him being the Davidic, royal light, one sharing Yahweh's work, character, and name, to Galilee of the ethnies (Mt 4:12-25; Is 9). As the Prophet like unto Moses, he proclaimed the universally valid law from a mount (Mt 5-7) and then fulfilled the Servant of Yahweh's royal-priestly-prophetic task of carrying the sicknesses and diseases of heart and body away in his work (Mt 8-9; 8:17; Is 53:4).

King Jesus then sent out his twelve apostles. They were participating in the Servant's task to restore first the tribes of Jacob and then, by implication, the gentile ethnies to Yahweh's kingdom (Is 49:6; see Acts 13:46-47). The instructions he gave to his disciples, however, anticipate Christ's later commission to Paul to bear witness before kings and governors of the ethnies (cf. Mt 10:18 with Acts 9:15). Paul believed this commission came directly from the Servant Songs (Acts 13:47; 26:18,23).

Christ thus is the King of First Isaiah (Mt 11:4-5, 10-14), to whose Temple-body all the peoples shall stream (Is 2:1-4, 11:6; Mt 26:61; Jn 2:19). All the ethnies will hope in him, find his gentleness and justice, and wait until he completes the victorious task of discipling the ethnies (Mt 12:15-21; Is 42:1-4). This is again a reference to the Servant Songs. Jesus then preached in parables in fulfillment of the King's calling found again in First Isaiah (Is 13:14-15). He proclaimed truth to a vainly worshipping people as First Isaiah also described them (Mt 15:8-9). Jesus next tested the Canaanite woman who addressed him in terms derived from the Davidic Covenant. She called him the Son of David, the Lord of all peoples of earth (Mt 1:1,20; 9:27, 12:23, 20:30-31, 21:9,15, 22:42-45). He in turn marveled at her faith, which was greater than any found in his own people (Mt 15:21-28).

As the Second Moses, the Prophet, he prophesied that he was setting up his **קְהָל** and the gates of Satan's peoples would not withstand his people's assault, just as the prophets foretold (Gn 22:17; Is 11:10-16). The two greatest prophets, Moses and Elijah, honored him, and he called himself the Son of Man of Daniel, who will sit upon his heavenly throne, judging Jerusalem (Mt 19:28, 24:30, 26:64). He fulfilled the Servant's death as a ransom for "many," that is all his people (Mt 20:28; Is 53), and he allowed himself to be proclaimed to be the Davidic King upon arrival in Jerusalem, riding on Zechariah's prophesied donkey (Mt 21; Zec 9:9). He prophesied the destruction of his Vineyard-City, the temporary setting aside of Israel, and gave kingdom-authority to

another multi-ethnic nation who will bear the fruit of it (Mt 21:28-42), as the Psalmist and Isaiah foretold (Ps 118:22-23; Is 28:16). He is the Lord upon David's throne, one whom even David will honor (Mt 22:42-45; Ps 110:1). As the Mosaic prophet, he proclaimed judgment upon Jerusalem (Mt 23-24:33),³⁶ and foretold the interim period after which he will return and judge all the peoples, including Israel (Mt 24:33-25:46; 25:32).³⁷

After his trial and death as the rejected King of Israel (Is 53; Ps 22; Dn 7:13-14; Mt 26-27), he rose and inherited "all authority over heaven and earth," by which he clearly meant all the peoples of earth. These peoples did not worship, follow, praise, or trust him then, but they will (Pss 67; 96; 117). Now he would be with his people as he sends them out to all the peoples of earth, to fulfill the vision of the Davidic King of First and Second Isaiah. This suffering King of the Servant Songs is he who fulfills the Davidic Covenant's theme that foresees Messiah's ownership and reign over all peoples. This in turn fulfills Abraham's blessing that all the peoples of earth should be blessed and hence should bless Yahweh because of him, the seed.

Within this extensive background context that Matthew skillfully interweaves from Old Testament material, we must interpret the words μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, as well as the rest of the phrases. Abraham's seed would be the source of blessing: ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς (Gn 18:18, 22:18). Abraham was the father of "many," probably meaning "all" the ethno-nations of earth. First they must come into the Abrahamic family, as individuals in families, then as each people is disciplined, we can expect a great majority of the families of an ἔθνη to turn in faith. That will work out into all areas of life as they put their disciplined obedience into practice, because his tôranic wisdom will flow from heaven's Jerusalem to his heavenly-yet-earthly dwelling people unto all the peoples of earth (Is 2:3; 11:1-10; 51:4-5).

Luke's Missional Necessity

Luke likewise ends his first epistle to Theophilus in a similar manner with the Lord's vision of reaching the ethnies of earth. Sharing a similar outline study would be redundant. The last passage again summarizes the thrust of the whole book (Bosch 1991, 91; Köstenberger and O'Brien 2001, 123). This is focused by the climax of the Emmaus Road story (Lk 24:25-27) in which Jesus spoke about the Christocentricity of the Scriptures.

The two men on the Emmaus Road and the other disciples with the eleven remaining apostles then saw the resurrected Lord appear in a room in Jerusalem. There, he opened their understanding to see this Christological key to understanding "τὰς γραφάς." He summarized the central redemptive message of Scripture as including two major points. The first, the Messianic King's death and resurrection, resulted in the

³⁶Mt 23:36-24:34 is bracketed with an inclusio, indicating that everything between these brackets are fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole [civilized world: ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ] for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come" (Mt 24:14) most likely is fulfilled in the Pauline mission, with his associates, to the Roman empire before Jerusalem's destruction (see Kik 1975; Sproul 1998). The term ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ most likely refers to the Roman empire (see same term in Lk 2:1: πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην).

³⁷He gathers them ethno-collectively, but judges individually. This passage cannot be used to support the idea that the πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is merely non-Jewish individuals.

second, that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed³⁸ to “εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη” beginning in Jerusalem. Out of proper necessity (εἶδει), these ought to be continually declared to all peoples.

Again, the background is the Abrahamic covenant (Lk 1:54,67-73), focused through the lenses of the Davidic covenant’s “charter for all humanity” (Kaiser 1974; see Lk 1:32-33; Is 9:6-7; Dan 7:14) and Isaiah’s Servant Songs (see Weerstra 1992; Piper 1992, 1993; Showalter 1996; Köstenberger and O’Brien 2001, 125). Luke adds new information not given by Matthew. The old prophet Simeon claimed that Jesus was Yahweh’s salvation, prepared in the presence of all peoples (κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν), as a light for both τὰ ἔθνη and Israel. He alludes to two Servant Songs found in Isaiah (Is 49:6, 42:6-8) and possibly from a later poem concerning Yahweh as the glory-light of his people (Is 60:1-3). There τὰ ἔθνη = אֲרָצוֹת, which, as an ethnic solidarity term, served as the background for this saying of Simeon. It also served as the background for Christ’s explanatory message given in Jerusalem, mentioned above, about the Christocentricity of Scripture.

Conclusion

In contrast to the first view, Gustav Warneck (Warneck 1902) and Donald McGavran (McGavran 1955, 1970, 1979, 1980) and their followers believe that the greatest part of every *Volk* (Warneck 1902) or people-group (e.g., McGavran 1955) should be disciplined. Indeed in rejecting Warneck and McGavran, the first perspective in effect rejects the Commission’s vision to transform all areas of every ethno-culture’s life under terms of the covenant in Yahweh’s Anointed King. Both Testaments in several places state this (e.g., Is 2:1-4; 11:1-10, 19:24-25, 51:1-5; Pss 2, 47, 82, 67, 96). Indeed this seems to be what Jesus is claiming when he states that his disciples are to “teach them all that I have commanded” (Mt 28:18).

Surely one must strip the excessive pragmatism from McGavran and Wagner’s approach as it is necessary to strip Romantic-Idealist philosophy from the “de Duitse Zendingswetenschap” (Hoekendijk 1948). However, as we saw in chapter four, Hoekendijk’s classic perspective is not as exegetically certain as its proponents proclaim. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Church is not a “*triton genos*, the third race next to the existing two races of Jews and Gentiles” (Bosch 1983, 239; Hoekendijk 1948, 237-238).

Instead, Christ’s Commission mandates the planting of a multi-ethnic, and at the end of history a pan-ethnic, diverse-yet-unified body in every corner of earth (Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8). Christ’s people are to express ever-greater visible unity in that multi-ethnic body³⁹ as they work out their collective salvation/sanctification with fear and trembling (Php 2:12-13; Kreitzer 1997). This results in true spiritual *and* visible unity, along with real, four-self (Hiebert 1985) diversity in one holy, universal (“catholic”) body (Eph 2:14-22; 4:3-7). True diversity includes language, culture-style, and hence ethnic solidarity. It includes also four duty-rights for congregations and churches in each ethnic: (1) Self-propagation, (2) self-support, (3) contextualized self-determination or self-government, (4) self-theologizing (Hiebert 1985, 193-224). Unity and diversity together,

³⁸Κηρυχθῆναι = coordinate with the proceeding two infinitives modifying εἶδει.

³⁹Open services and fellowship for all wishing to come, open baptismal font and Eucharist table, and ever-increasing inter-congregational, inter-regional fellowship are the signs of visible unity.

reflecting trinitarian unity, fulfill the prayer of Jesus in John 17 (Dewel 1979), and the various forms of the Commission to disciple all peoples.

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