

Temple Discontinuity in WCF 7.5 and 7.6

WCF 7.3. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

WCF 7.5. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament.

WCF 7.6. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.¹

I believe that the distinctions between administrations of the covenant described in WCF 7.5 and 7.6 are not biblically accurate, although they enjoy a long tradition in Reformed theology, and are generally reflected in evangelical understanding. I do not believe that the Old Covenant is an administration of the Reformed concept of the covenant of grace. Because of this, I do find myself in strong agreement with WCF 7.3 because it emphasizes that all believers throughout history are saved only in Jesus Christ. My goal in this paper is to show why I believe there are biblical issues with Covenant Theology as described in WCF 7.5 and 7.6. I will do this by examining the role of the temple and sacrifices, why they do not stand in opposition to the inaugurated New Covenant, why they were revered and fully observed by the apostles, and

¹ http://www.opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_07

when they will fulfill their purpose and no longer exist. I also aim to show that if the discontinuity of the temple were true, we would do a disservice to the testimony of the Bible. I believe this perspective on the temple is supported by the Torah itself, the teachings of Jesus, the lives of the apostles, and in the theology of Hebrews. While I recognize that my treatment of this topic is not of sufficient depth to address all objections, I believe it provides enough support to merit consideration.

Our first caution against discarding the validity of the temple and sacrifices should come first from the words that God spoke about them when he instituted them. Repeatedly, God told the Levites to observe the sacrifices and holidays as a “statute forever” and “throughout their generations” (Leviticus 16 and 23, among others). Interestingly, when God reiterated the Davidic covenant to Israel in Jeremiah 33, we see that he also made a covenant with the Levitical priests:

¹⁴“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’

¹⁷“For thus says the Lord: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, ¹⁸**and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.**”

¹⁹The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ²⁰“Thus says the Lord: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, ²¹then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and **my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers.** ²²As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant, **and the Levitical priests who minister to me.**”

We cannot discard these words, especially when we remember that Jesus told us in Matthew 5 to not even think these words could pass away until the end of the age:

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

If we are tempted to claim that Jesus performs this priestly role as a fulfillment to Jeremiah 33, we should remember that Hebrews 7 makes it very clear that Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, has nothing at all to do with the Levitical order of priests:

“¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.”

If the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:18 were not enough, we simply need to look to the lives of the apostles to see how they never questioned the continuity of the Torah as they practiced the fulfillment of their Jewish faith in Jesus. In book of Acts, we see the Apostles engaging fully in Jewish practice as they preach the gospel. Consider Acts 2:46-47:

⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In this passage, there is no indication that the believers were hesitant in temple worship or participation, nor is there a compelling reason to believe that they excluded themselves from sacrificial portions of worship or viewed the temple as obsolete in any fashion. Instead, we see throughout the book of Acts that the temple is a locus of activity for the early believers. If we can assume Calvin speaks for the Reformed tradition, we find that even he can barely stomach such a suggestion. Calvin comments:

We must note that they did frequent the temple for this cause, because there was more opportunity and occasion offered there to further the gospel. Neither were they drawn with the holiness of the place, seeing they knew that the shadows of the law were ceased; neither meant they to draw others by their example to have the temple in any such reverence.²

To show the error of Calvin's comments, we can simply look to Acts 6 where false witnesses are needed to put negative words about the law and the temple into Stephen's mouth:

¹³ and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us."

As another example, consider when Paul returns to Jerusalem in Acts 21. Thousands of Torah-abiding believing Jews have heard rumours that he is forsaking Torah, no doubt a result of misunderstandings regarding his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and encouraging them to stand strong against those who would compel them to become circumcised. To prove that he remained a faithful Jew who fully observed Torah, James encouraged Paul to participate in the completion of Nazarite vows previously undertaken by 4 men:

²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, ²¹ and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. ²² What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³ Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴ take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. **Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.** ²⁵ But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols,

² Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (2010). Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles (Vol. 1, p. 132). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.”²⁶ Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

Calvin’s response to this narrative seems to be a combination of denial and protestation:

Undoubtedly, that zeal of the law, which was in them, was corrupt, and assuredly even the very elders declare sufficiently that they like it not. For though they do not condemn it openly, neither sharply complain of the same, yet because they separate themselves from their affection, they secretly confess that they err. (...) The elders seem (as I said even now) to be fallen unto a foolish pampering [indulgence] through too much love of their nation. But the manifest judgment of that thing dependeth upon the circumstances which are hid from us at this day: yet they knew them well. The whole body almost did consist upon [of] Jews, so that they needed not to fear the offending of the Gentiles. For in other regions this was the cause of departure,¹ because every man was wedded to his own custom, and would prescribe a law to others. Furthermore, they had at Jerusalem many things which might provoke them to keep the ceremonies of the law, so that they had a greater excuse if they did more slowly forsake them. (...) They seem to persuade Paul to dissemble. For the rumour rose not upon nothing, that he did call away the Jews from the ceremonies, and that he did not walk in observing the law. But we must remember that which I said even now, that it was sufficient for Paul and the elders, if they could remove the slander which was unjustly raised, to wit, that he was a revolt [apostate] from the law, and there might a better opportunity be offered shortly, that in purging himself he might call them back by little and little from their error. Neither was it good or profitable that Paul should be counted an observer of the law any long time, as the disciples were then commonly; for by this means a thick³ veil should have been put before their eyes to darken the light of Christ.³

It is important to understand the gravity of Paul’s actions in Acts 21. Paul, along with James, is making a very careful statement in front of thousands of believing Jews. They want, very clearly,

³ Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (2010). Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles (Vol. 2, p. 277-282). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

to show that Paul has not abandoned the Torah. Paul pays for multiple animals to be sacrificed at the conclusion of Nazarite vows for 4 men. His actions show that he does not view the temple as obsolete. Of course, Calvin can't stomach this idea and believes instead that Paul just couldn't break his old habits. But the narrative contains no indication that this is true! We are told very explicitly why Paul and James did this - to prove he was Torah observant! I have heard other detractors suggest that this action was an example of Paul following 1 Corinthians 9:20 ("To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews"). I believe this is an incorrect assessment for several reasons. First of all, I believe it's an anachronistic objection and we should be careful not to inject more meaning into 1 Cor. 9:20 than we have warrant to do so. Secondly, consider Paul's vocal opposition to Peter in Galatians when he separates himself from the Gentiles when the Jews come around. It would be very strange and hypocritical to appease thousands of Jews who are wrongly upholding Torah in Acts 21, and then also teach against the Judaizers who are acting as a corrupting force in another setting.

When we are reconciling the seeming discrepancy between the actions and teachings of Paul we should remember Peter's words in 2 Peter 3:16 about the difficulty in properly understanding some of Paul's letters. The context of Paul's exhortations were highly specific and much different than the Gentile-dominated church of today. I believe we need to understand Paul's teachings relative to his clear actions in Acts 21, and similar testimony in Acts 24 and 25. Many current scholars understand the actions of Paul and the apostles in these (and other) passages to be legitimate examples of their thoroughly Jewish faith. This scholarship seeks to show continued Jewish practice does not stand contrary to highly contextual teaching in epistles such as Galatians and Romans. David Rudolph (PhD, Cambridge University) maintains a compilation of scholarship in the post-supersessionist interpretation at www.mjstudies.com. Sadly, I don't see many in the Reformed tradition interacting with this perspective. I believe the biblical evidence for this position is extremely strong, albeit conveniently ignored by many, especially in the Reformed tradition.

Even if some in the Reformed tradition are convinced that the apostles may have acted as if the temple continued to be relevant, they are likely to appeal to Hebrews as the authoritative teaching on the discontinuation of the temple and sacrifices. I acknowledge that there are many passages in Hebrews that must be dealt with in order to prove the ongoing relevance of the temple and sacrifices. However, I believe that when Hebrews is properly understood it actually

serves to confirm their relevance in this age. I won't pretend to do a thorough exegesis of Hebrews, but I will highlight several issues with passages that are commonly cited to prove the temple and sacrifices are irrelevant. I'll begin by reviewing the Old and New Covenants as described in the Old Testament, as this framework will be necessary to understand my argumentation. I must also note that my thinking and argumentation has been strongly influenced by the teaching of Daniel Lancaster in the book What About the Sacrifices?. I highly recommend engaging with his presentation of this content.

I believe that Covenant Theology severely misunderstands the nature of the biblical covenants as described in Exodus and Jeremiah. In Covenant Theology, it is generally understood that the Mosaic economy operated under the covenant of grace. If we use the Covenant Theology understanding of 'covenant' to signify how God relates to his people, then I would agree that God expressed grace to Israel. However, the actual words of the Mosaic covenant as ratified in Exodus 24:3 do not describe a covenant under grace:

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do."

To be sure, the Lord's responses to Israel's multiple failings throughout the OT were surely acts of grace. In this way I agree with Richard Pratt's assessment that "Christ was the implicit or explicit object of saving faith even in the Old Testament. His death and resurrection have always been the basis of salvation for all who believe."⁴ But this begs the question - why was the Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace ever required? What purpose did it actually serve? I do not believe that Covenant Theology adequately answers these questions. The Old Covenant is often equated with the Mosaic Law, but I don't believe this is accurate. Certainly the Old Covenant requires obedience to the Law, but the Law is also intrinsic to the New Covenant, as we see in Jeremiah 31:33. In order to show the similarities and discontinuities between the covenants, I've outlined the most important parts of the passages describing the Old and New Covenants in the table below.

⁴ Dr. Richard Pratt, Jr, *To The Jew First, A Reformed Perspective*, <http://www.mountainretreatorg.net/articles/jewfirst.html>

Aspect	Old Covenant (Exodus 24)	New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-40)
Parties	God, 12 tribes of Israel (co-guarantors)	God (guarantor), houses of Israel and Judah (promisee)
Standard of behavior	Mosaic Law (Exodus 24:7)	Law written on Israel's heart (Jeremiah 31:33)
Conditions	"All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." (Exodus 24:7)	None
Ratification of the Covenant	Blood on the altar and people (Exodus 24:6-8)	Christ's blood (Matthew 26:27-29)
Promises	If they obey, Israel will dwell in the land in security and will be a treasured possession and a holy nation to the Lord.	Sin forgotten, no need to remind each other to know the Lord, as the least to the greatest will all know him, Israel will never cease from being a nation before the Lord, Jerusalem will be rebuilt and expanded
Timeframe	This present age	Instituted at the cross, not yet here in fullness

If the covenants are read in their contexts in these passages, it's clear that the Old and New covenants are more comprehensive than simply describing the relationship between God and man in this world under two different economies, or administrations, of the covenant of grace. I believe that the distinctions made between these in WCF 7.5 and WCF 7.6 are actually inaccurate. What we find in these covenants are depictions of humanity in this present age and the age to come. This present age (*olam hazeh*) describes life under the Old Covenant, where Israel (and by extension, mankind) strives to obey God's law, but is unable to do so fully. The age to come (*olam habbah*) describes life under the New Covenant, where mankind is able to enjoy perfect fellowship with God through Jesus Christ, where brother will not need to teach or remind brother of the Lord, when Israel lives in their land in peace before the Lord, and

Jerusalem is rebuilt and expanded. For this reason, I believe it is clear that we are not yet fully living in the New Covenant. Because of the inauguration of the New Covenant through Christ's work on the cross, we are living in the "already, not yet" of the New Covenant, awaiting its fulfillment in the age to come. However, we find that our current human experience remains similar to the temporal blessings and curses found in the Old Covenant as we struggle to obey the law perfectly, even though we have the gift of the Holy Spirit present in us. Our human experience still resembles the will to act according to the Law, even if we are not able to fully live to this standard. This summary of the framework will be helpful to keep in mind as I walk through parts of Hebrews:

1. The Old Covenant is not synonymous with the Torah, although it requires Torah observance
2. The Old Covenant describes God's relationship with humanity in this present age
3. The New Covenant describes God's relationship with mankind in the age to come
4. The New Covenant has been inaugurated and currently stands in "already, not yet" fulfillment

The first 4 chapters of Hebrews largely serve to establish the supremacy of Jesus over the angels and Moses. The author is setting the stage to show that Jesus occupies a more important role than the angels and Moses could fill. As the priesthood of Jesus is introduced in chapter 5, note how the author regards the Levitical priesthood in active, present-tense verb forms. The author is not making an attempt to relegate the Levitical priesthood to a position of irrelevance, at least at this point. Throughout chapter 6 and as chapter 7 begins, we see the author claiming that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, who acted without precedent, or according to an established order. In Hebrews 7, we again see that the Levitical priests are treated as a completely legitimate ministry:

⁵And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham.

It may be tempting to disagree with that assessment once we read Hebrews 7:11:

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

Is this passage relegating the Levitical order to obsolescence? If so, we'll have a really hard time understanding the Levitical covenant in Jeremiah 33 (especially in light of Hebrews 7:13-14). In any case, the author is making it very clear that Jesus as priest serves on a different legal basis than the Levitical priests. Jesus is not serving as a weak human priest (Hebrews 7:23), he is the guarantor of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22), and he does not need to continually perform his work (Hebrews 7:27). In order to understand the next 3 chapters of Hebrews, we need to start thinking about two other comparisons being made - this present age, and the age to come.

We begin to understand the argumentation more fully once we read that Jesus is priest in the temple in heaven. How many Christians are even aware there is a temple in heaven? That is where Jesus currently ministers. But yet we see in 8:4 that the earthly priests are not denigrated: "Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law." What follows in 8:5 is the source for much dismissal in the Reformed tradition regarding the Old Covenant: "a copy and shadow". It is my experience that "types and shadows" represent things that Reformed theology is eager to discard and relegate to the Old Testament museum of faith. But I believe this position is profoundly unbiblical. To be a copy and shadow of God's design is to bear honor! But even as the earthly temple and priests bear honor, the covenant they mediate is not eternal. Indeed, they will pass away when they are "obsolete" and "ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13). Before we declare that event to have occurred in 70 AD, we must remember the apostles didn't find the temple irrelevant after Jesus left them on the earth to complete his mission. Were they just participating out of nostalgia, were they making a mockery of Christ's sacrifice, or was there a "transition" period (albeit not taught in scripture)? I believe that reading the destruction of the temple in 70 AD into Hebrews 8:13 is anachronistic. As we've seen earlier, declaring the temple as obsolete stands in opposition to the words of the Torah itself, God's promises to the Levites, and Jesus' warning about removing

anything from the Torah until the end of the age. We have a pretty high bar to clear before we make this judgment, so let's dig in further.

As we are taken on a miniature tour of the temple in chapter 9, we are reminded the priests are performing "duties". Whose duties are these? Are they man's duties? No, they are God's duties. They are under God's command, and only God's command could free them from this obligation. The temple and the sacrifices are his design. In fact, they are so incredibly relevant, we find that the temple gives us insight into this current age and the age to come; the first section of the temple is "symbolic for the present age" (9:9). Likewise, the Most Holy Place represents the age to come. Accordingly, the priest only entered the Most Holy Place once per year, symbolizing how Christ's performed his work "once for all when he offered up himself" (7:27, cf 9:12). So what purpose do these earthly priests serve, if Christ has entered the heavenly temple? WCF 7.5 tells us they were administering the covenant of grace before Christ's work (and were performing work in vain after his resurrection), but this is not what Hebrews 9 tells us:

⁹ According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

The priests were not and are not administering the covenant of grace. They have been acting to purify defiled people with the blood of goats and bulls, which required daily atonement. Again, in Hebrews 9:11-14 we see the sharp contrast between the priestly functions of the temple above and the temple in earth. It is not that the temple in heaven caused the temple on earth to be irrelevant, it is that they operate in completely different venues for completely different purposes! We see this contrast more fully explored through Hebrews 10:4, where the ultimate conclusion on the earthly temple is offered: "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins". In Hebrews 10:5-14 Christ's work is further contrasted with the sacrificial system. Readers who are skeptical of the temple's ongoing relevance will surely point out 10:9 where it is clear the "second" does away with the "first". But is this passage talking about covenants, administrations, or the first and second ages? Because I believe that the first and second covenants are respectively aligned with the present age and the age to come, I believe that this verse confirms again the ongoing validity of the temple and sacrifices "...until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18). I should add that I believe there are potential translation issues

with much of these critical passages that I don't have the expertise to address. David Rudolph has compiled a list of resources on Hebrews⁵ that might address some of these issues. Daniel Lancaster also addresses some of these issues in his book [What About the Sacrifices?](#), showing how implied words like 'covenant' in Hebrews 8:13 have been inserted in translation to apparently help the reader understand how the Old Covenant is obsolete. We should continue to engage with the original text to ensure translation bias is not affecting our theology.

Obviously I do not have the academic background that allows me to comprehensively address what Hebrews has to say about the temple and sacrifices in light of the New Covenant in Christ. Nevertheless, I hope that this introduction to an alternative perspective shows the legitimate concerns we should have about assuming the temple and sacrifices have no ongoing relevance, especially when the temple is rebuilt. We should feel compelled to consider this viewpoint in light of the words of the Torah about these institutions, the teachings of Jesus, and the example of the worship of the apostles, and the theology we find in the New Testament. The most common objection to this position is that it somehow reduces the value of Christ's work on the cross. On the contrary, I believe this view actually encourages a higher view of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection! His work is not at all comparable to what earthly priests do! His work did not replace theirs - his work was so far above the earthly priests that there is no conflict for them to overlap in the "already, not yet" fulfillment of the New Covenant. And as the Bible repeatedly tells us, when all has been accomplished in this age, the temple and earthly priests will no longer exist, having served their purpose.

I believe that the final reason we should question the obsolescence of the temple is that it forces us to misread much biblical prophecy. Upon mentioning this implication, I would expect a Reformed perspective to raise objections to my position similar to criticisms lodged against Dispensationalism. However, I hope it is apparent how different my position is from Dispensationalism. I believe that similar to Covenant theology, Dispensationalism misunderstands the nature of the covenants. Rather than attempting to unify the covenants in a way that artificially limits or distorts them, as I believe Covenant theology does, Dispensationalism attempts to bifurcate the people of God (Jew and Gentile) along covenantal lines in a way that is unbiblical, potentially even withholding the obligation of preaching the gospel to the Jews. In the Dispensational system, Israel is relegated to a role of eschatological

⁵ <http://www.mjstudies.com/hebrews/>

utility. I believe that the alternative I am offering keeps the people of God unified under Christ, but also allows them to express biblical diversity in line with the covenants promised by God to Israel.

This third perspective also lets us understand Biblical prophecy about the temple in a way that we do not have to spiritualize, nor do we need to awkwardly fit it into the New Covenant. Consider Ezekiel's temple vision in chapters 40-48. The Covenantal perspective is forced to spiritualize this entire passage. I believe this dishonors the word of God, as exegesis of multiple chapters must be ignored so as to avoid the clear implications. Consider the instructions God gives to Ezekiel in 43:

¹⁸ And he said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord God: These are the ordinances for the altar: On the day when it is erected for offering burnt offerings upon it and for throwing blood against it, ¹⁹ you shall give to the Levitical priests of the family of Zadok, who draw near to me to minister to me, declares the Lord God, a bull from the herd for a sin offering. ²⁰ And you shall take some of its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar and on the four corners of the ledge and upon the rim all around. Thus you shall purify the altar and make atonement for it."

How can Covenant theology explain the instructions of God regarding this future temple? I posit that it cannot do so adequately. In the Covenantal interpretation, God's words must be stripped of their meaning here. Careful exegesis will not yield any relevant application for the amillennial and premillennial Covenantalists, and any non-spiritual application will contradict WCF 7.5 and 7.6. Meanwhile, the Dispensationalist must explain why this Jewish Old Covenant system is kept around even after Israel has accepted their Messiah, after his second coming, when they had formerly relegated the Old Covenant to Israel as a consolation prize after they corporately rejected their Messiah. In addition, what answer does Dispensationalism provide regarding the believing Jewish remnant - what people of God do they fit into? But if we understand the temple to be relevant until all is accomplished in this age, as the prophets, Jesus, and Hebrews tell us, then we have no problem reading Ezekiel 40-48 in its plainest sense. Ezekiel's temple will stand in the Millennium, which is the triumphant last act of this current age. After the Millennium, the temple will vanish away, just as Hebrews says it will, and as confirmed in Revelation chapters 20, 21, and 22.

Another critical prophetic passage concerning the temple is found in Daniel 12:11, where the abomination of desolation takes his seat, proclaiming himself to be God. Jesus explicitly mentioned this event in his Olivet Discourse, and tied it directly to his second coming. Paul does the same thing in 2 Thessalonians 2. If one is convinced the temple is irrelevant, then attempts are made to either subscribe to some sort of partial-preterism, or to spiritualize the interpretation. These interpretations are the most common Reformed perspectives. I believe that both of these attempts lack exegetical basis, although an examination is beyond the scope of this paper. I also believe that these incorrect interpretations leave most of the Reformed tradition blind to important prophetic events that Jesus explicitly told us to be watching for in Matthew 24:25: "See, I have told you beforehand". At this point it's natural to wonder where this temple is that will feature prominently in our prophetic future. We should remember that only 70 years ago the nation of Israel as an intact entity was basically unthinkable, and it exists today. Nearly every day we can find the temple mount conflict in the international news. We are right to wonder how the temple could be rebuilt, but then we should also remember that the Jewish organization called The Temple Institute has architectural plans for a third temple completed, and has a stone altar and temple artifacts fully constructed and ready for service. We can trust God will bring these things together according to his word.

This nullification of crucial prophetic passages, along with an amillennialist interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6, leaves Reformed eschatology in a position that I believe distorts the clear biblical teaching, and further encourages them to distort other prophetic passages. I do not believe a theological tradition is worth keeping when it endangers our understanding of eschatology, which is not subject to man's interpretation, as 2 Peter 1:20 reminds us. I am not claiming to have a flawless and systematic eschatology that incorporates the full breadth of scripture on this topic, but I believe this interpretation fits best and holds up well when compared to the eschatology taught in the prophets, gospels, epistles, and in Revelation.

Properly understanding the role of the temple and sacrifices will positively impact our understanding of the full counsel of scripture. It will bring us closer to Jesus, increase our understanding of our Jewish faith, help in our attempts at Jewish evangelism, and give us insight into prophetic events to come. In the spirit of *Semper Reformanda*, I hope that theologians in the Reformed tradition will reexamine what the Bible says about the temple, the future of Israel, and the implications for our understanding of biblical prophecy.