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The Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Redemption

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Introduction

Above we looked at how the fall (Gen 3:1–6) had immediate impact on Adam and Eve (Gen 3:7) and their relationship with God (Gen 3:8–13). Some of the consequences of the fall are presented in Genesis 3:14–19 as God curses the serpent, the woman, and the man, respectively. But in the cursing of the serpent something remarkable happens. There is a promise of grace, the *protoevangelium* or "the first gospel." Within the word spoken in Genesis 3:15 is God's entire redemptive agenda, a promise that reverberates from this moment until the final words of John's Revelation—and beyond, since it echoes into eternity: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). What is given here in the Garden is also connected to what we call "the covenant of grace."

An excellent definition of the covenant of grace was written by the Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1636–1708) for his 1677 work, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*:

> The covenant of grace is a compact, or agreement, between God and the elect sinner; God on his part declaring his free good-will concerning eternal salvation, and every thing relative thereto, freely to be given to those in covenant, by and for the mediator Christ; and man on his part consenting to that good-will by a sincere faith.[1]

We can put his words in slightly simpler terms: The covenant of grace is a covenant God makes with the elect sinner where he promises to save the sinner through the mediator Jesus Christ and by the Spirit empowering the response of faith. Note, that this is not merely an offer to save the sinner if he believes, but the covenant of grace is God's effectual determination to save the elect sinner. It is the setting in motion of the sinner's eternal election, when he was chosen to be saved (Acts 13:48; Rom 8:29–30; 9:6–18; Gal 1:15; Eph 1:4–5).

The "covenant of grace" idea is built on something clearly observed in our Bibles, which is that the same basic shape of salvation is present in what we call the Old Testament and the New Testament. Paul is emphatic in his writings that his gospel is nothing more than is given in Genesis 15:6, "And he [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." "Righteousness" is what is needed for salvation, and this righteousness is obtained through faith. In Romans 4 and Galatians 3, Abraham is held up again and again as Exhibit A of how sinners can be righteous (Rom 4:3, 9; Gal 3:6–14). But Hebrews 11 reminds us that this salvation by faith does not begin with Abraham, it goes back further. Abel, Enoch, and Noah are all introduced in Hebrews

[1] Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank (London: T. Tegg & Son, 1837), 106.

as heirs "of the righteousness that comes by faith" (Heb 11:4–7). Further, since "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5), and "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8), we know that this one way of salvation is also through the one and only Mediator, Christ Jesus the Lord. This one way of salvation also means that there is one way of relating to God throughout the Bible, the way of faith in Christ and relating to God through the one Mediator. So, while the covenants of the Bible might change from the covenants with Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses (Israel) to David to the new covenant, the way God's people relate to God does not change. It is these observations that have led the Reformed tradition to speak of a single, overarching covenant of grace.

The Covenant of Grace in the Reformed Tradition

Reformed *covenant theology* is tied to theologians before the Reformation, but it is the Reformers who established some of the key pillars of what we call covenant theology. Letham notes that it is Zwingli in his battles with the Anabaptists who develops a covenant theology to defend paedobaptism as an extension of circumcision in the Old Testament. He is "the first to write about the covenant," and he does so in 1523.[2] Stephens says that it is Zwingli's desire for "unity" in the church that motivates his defense of infant baptism from circumcision in the Old Testament, Zwingli feeling that believer's baptism would bring division into the church. Therefore, he developed a theology built on "one covenant" in both testaments that would preserve the place of infants in the new covenant.[3] Zwingli's argument was primarily about baptism and how infants are to be included in the church, but in building this

[2] Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 440.
[3] W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 265.

case he established some of the key concepts of the Reformed covenant theology. The most important of these is the idea of a single covenant transcending both testaments. On this covenant Zwingli wrote in 1527, "The same covenant which he entered into with Israel he has in these latter days entered into with us, that we may be one people with them, one church, and may have also one covenant."[4]

A few years later, John Calvin also defended a covenant of grace idea, placed in his *Institutes* in a lengthy section tracing the continuity and discontinuity of the Old and New Testaments. He does not elaborate much on how the biblical covenants are tied together through a covenant of grace, but key aspects of these ideas are present in his writings. In his *Institutes* he speaks of the biblical covenants having one "substance" that remains constant even when they "they differ in the mode of dispensation."[5] Here Calvin is "employing the traditional Aristotelian categorical distinction between *substance* (that which makes something what it is) and *accidens* (that which is only adventitious or a matter of appearance or circumstance)."[6] If I use myself as an analogy, my "substance" (essence) as a man made in the image of God does not change as I go from infancy to boyhood to manhood to my final years. A lot about my mind and body—my "accidental" properties—changes throughout these eras, but my "substance" or "essence" does not. I might even establish new covenantal relations like marriage and taken on permanently transformative obligations and promises like parenthood. But once again, my inherent "substance" remains constant.

With the covenants of the Bible, their common "substance" is observable for Calvin in the "unity" of the covenants expressed

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[4] Huldrych Zwingli, "Refutation of the Tricks of the Catabaptists," in *Selected Works of Huldrich Zwingli (1484–1531), The Reformer of German Switzerland*, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1682/Zwingli_0763_EBk_v6.0.pdf.
[5] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.10.2.
[6] Cornelis P. Venema, "The Mosaic Covenant: A 'Republication' of the Covenant of Works?," *MidAmJT* 21 (2010): 40.

in the common goal of each of the covenants ("the hope of immortality" and not "carnal prosperity and happiness"), "the mercy" of God as their common foundation, and the fact that those in covenant with God "had and knew Christ as Mediator."[7] Their unity is also evident in what he calls "the very formula of the covenant," the promise, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people."[8] Yet, in his work there is no discussion on the whole series of biblical covenants, which would include the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the covenant of works, etc. His emphasis is on the old and new covenants, which is not quite equivalent to reflecting on the Old and New Testaments, but it is close.

This two-covenant emphasis is also found in Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583), important because he is the primary author of the very influential *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). In Ursinus's *Commentary* on the *Heidelberg Catechism,* he says "the covenant is one in substance, but two-fold in circumstances," and these two covenants refer to "the old and the new covenant."[9] We will find something similar in Turretin and Bavinck below.

In the 17th century, covenant theology developed significantly. Two important ways of expressing covenant theology were given in this century. One was by the paedobaptists behind the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), and a second was by the Baptists behind the *1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith*. Both were written by English Reformed Protestants, but the two documents differ in how they depict the structuring of God's covenants. The reason to mention whether the document is written by paedobaptists (*Westminster*) or Baptists (*1689*) is because the different views of baptism are so connected to the different views on the covenants.

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[7] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.10.2.
[8] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.10.8.
[9] Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Rev G. W. Williard (1851: Ted Cortez Publishing, 2023), 101.

The *Westminster Confession* captures the idea there is a single covenant "substance" within the various biblical covenants. The single covenant is "commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give until all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe" (*WCF* 7.3). Christ is said to be "the substance" that is given in "the New Testament" (7.6), but the chapter ends by saying, "There are not...two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations" (7.6). Note the reference here to there not being "two covenants of grace differing in substance." This is a distinctive of paedobaptist covenant theology that stems from John Calvin. Within that framework, there is a lot of emphasis on the Mosaic "old covenant" (2 Cor 3:14; Heb 8:13) and its relationship to the "new covenant" made with Christ (Jer 31:31–34; Luke 22:20).

These "various dispensations" include the covenants of the Bible, but there is a kind of flattening of these covenants since "one and the same" covenant covers the whole biblical narrative. The Westminster Divines in the *Larger Catechism* ask, "With whom was the covenant of grace made?" (Q31), and then answer it by saying, "The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him all the elect as his seed." The historical moment of this covenant in the Garden is not mentioned or found in the proof texts. The emphasis is on the covenant Mediator, who is Christ. Then it says that "the covenant of grace" was "administered under the Old Testament" "by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances," all these foreshadowing the Christ to come (Q34). Clearly, the emphasis in these writings is on the one "substance" of "the covenant of grace" and not on any development of that covenant throughout biblical revelation.

The Reformed Baptists behind the *1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* approach the covenants a bit differently. When their confession explains "the covenant of grace," it echoes the

Westminster Confession very closely, not changing the language of Westminster in any significant way (cf. *1689* 7.2). The big change for these Baptists is how they describe the development of the covenants throughout the Bible. Instead of using the language of an unchanging "substance" "under various dispensations," they speak of the progress of revelation that begins in Genesis 3:15 and then comes to full fruition in the new covenant:

> This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament; and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.
> *1689 London Baptist Confession* 7.3

Note that these Reformed Baptists see Genesis 3:15 as the "first" revelation of "the gospel," describing it as "the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman." Then there are "farther steps," which refers to the covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, "until the full discovery" of "the gospel" "was completed in the New Testament." All of this is said to be built on top of the foundation of "that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son." We call this "eternal covenant transaction" the "covenant of redemption," which will be addressed below. What is important to see in the *1689 Confession* is that where *Westminster* emphasized one covenant substance between the two "dispensations," the London Baptists emphasize a progression of revelation throughout biblical history until the fullest expression of the gospel in "the New Covenant." How *exactly* the various

covenants connect is not explained, but they are said to be developments of the Genesis 3:15 promise. *Westminster* sees a covenant of grace that unites all the covenants also, but it explains this covenant in more conceptual terms without pointing to a specific passage: "the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give until all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe" (*WCF* 7.3).

One of the men behind the 1689 *London Baptist Confession of Faith* was Nehemiah Coxe, the son of Benjamin Coxe (ca 1595–1664). Nehemiah wrote a treatise on covenant theology in 1681 that worked through many of the biblical covenants.[10] The covenants with Adam, Noah, and Abraham are examined thoroughly by Coxe. Ultimately, this Reformed Baptist will show that the covenant with Abraham was indeed a revelation of the covenant of grace and a true gospel.[11] Yet, for him the covenant of grace must be made with a representative head, and this Mediator is Christ himself.[12] Coxe's work importantly tries to show that the Abrahamic covenant had dual elements, first the ones tied to the covenant of grace and second the ones tied to national Israel. He pulls from John Owen on the covenant with Moses and the new covenant by including portions of Owen's commentary on Hebrews. In the included passages, Owen basically mirrors the kind of treatment found in Westminster and Calvin in their "one covenant" and "two administrations" approach.[13] The covenant with David gets no attention in either Coxe or the quoted John Owen passages. Coxe's detailed look at each of the major covenants (except for the Davidic) is distinctive. In the tradition following John Calvin, it will be centuries before a paedobaptist theologian adopts such an approach (John Murray).

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[10] Nehemiah Coxe, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005).
[11] Coxe, *Covenant Theology*, 73–82.
[12] Coxe, *Covenant Theology*, 39, 57.
[13] Coxe, *Covenant Theology*, 155–312.

Contemporary with Coxe was the Italian Reformed theologian, Francis Turretin (1623–1687), who further developed John Calvin's covenant theology. He, too, speaks of "the twofold economy of the covenant of grace," which at times means the old covenant and the new covenant but at other times seems to refer to the whole Old Testament and then the New Testament.[14] The terms feel a bit interchangeable in this part of his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Yet, he divides the "former" part into "three periods or stages: from Adam to Abraham; from Abraham to Moses; from Moses to Christ."[15] Note that the covenant of David has no significant place in his covenant theology and gets hardly a mention. When speaking of the covenant of grace in the "three periods or stages" of the Old Testament, he notes Genesis 3:15 and says it contains "the sum of the covenant of grace."[16] Like Calvin and Ursinus, Turretin has an extensive treatment on how the old covenant and the new covenant are the same in essence but with the new covenant also possessing a superiority in its clarity and promises and experience of its participants.

Herman Witsius (1636–1708) in his 1677 work, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, also approaches the covenants with the Calvinistic idea of "one substance" and various "economies" (a word meaning something like "dispensations" in other writers or "eras"). He sees the one substance in the fact "one and the same eternal life was promised," "Jesus Christ was held forth as the one and the same bestower of salvation," and the fact "they [the elect] could not become partakers of it any other way, but by a true and lively faith in him."[17] Importantly, he also refers to the covenant of redemption, the

[14] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:220.
[15] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:220. Charles Hodges adopts a similar three-part division of the Old Testament, speaking of four "dispensations" in a few pages: "Adam to Abraham," "Abraham to Moses," "Moses to Christ," and "the gospel dispensation." See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:373–75.
[16] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:220.
[17] Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 195.

covenant "between God the Father and Christ the Mediator," as the basis for the covenant of grace. He says the covenant of grace "presupposes" the covenant of redemption and is "founded upon it."[18] The covenant of grace remains constant from the fall until Christ, though various periods are observed. These periods extend from Adam to Noah, Noah to Abraham, Abraham to Moses, Moses to Christ, and presumably Christ to the present.[19] David is mentioned often but not as a part of Witsius's covenant scheme.

The Reformed Baptist John Gill (1697–1771) develops the covenant of grace extensively. For him the covenant of grace is synonymous with the covenant of redemption, which is the eternal covenant made between members of the Trinity. The covenant of grace for Gill thus has an eternal aspect (eternal intra-Trinitarian covenant) and then various "administrations" of that covenant in salvation history, seeming to go between "one covenant in two administrations," old and new, and at other times seeing the various covenants as multiple administrations.[20] He affirms the Reformed idea of one "substance" between all the covenants with differing elements in each of them. He also sees that the covenant of grace is made "with the chosen people of God in Christ."[21] A distinctive of his approach is seeing the Davidic era as its own epoch, one that extends from the making of "the covenant of royalty" with David until the time of Christ. Here he looks at the aspects of the covenant of grace that are found in the prophets, especially the prophecies about Christ and the blessings of the covenant that are connected to the Christ. Faith is not highlighted, which is surprising in light of passages like Habakkuk 2:4, cited in Romans 1:17.[22]

When we get to Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), there is a presentation of covenant theology similar to Calvin and Turretin.

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[18] Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 107.
[19] Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 210–11.
[20] John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Tegg & Company, 1839), 1:491.
[21] Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 1:493.
[22] Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 1:508–13.

The emphasis is on the single covenant of grace that remains consistent across salvation history. The covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses/Israel, and even David are mentioned but only in passing as he deals with the one covenant of grace. He touches on the covenant of grace being the result of an eternal intra-Trinitarian "covenant of redemption," but he does not spend much time on this. Yet, he does see a progression of ideas as biblical history and revelation unfolds. The promises get richer, the details of the covenant get clearer, the Mediator becomes known to God's people, and the requirements for obedience are revealed. The covenant of grace is never truly conditional as was the covenant of works. Ultimately, it is summarized in the great promise, "I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Gen 17:7).[23]

It seems that a significant shift happens in covenant theology with the work of Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949). His *Biblical Theology* was monumental in many ways, but it especially brought a way of presenting the unfolding of salvation history and God's revelation. Doing so he highlighted God's covenants, which was not new. What was new was his elevation of the Davidic monarchy in God's unfolding plan of salvation. He saw with David a major epoch of revelation, which he called "the prophetic epoch of revelation" (revelation spoken through the prophets).[24] What was it, though, that produced this escalation of God speaking to his people through the prophets? Since God's interpretive Word always follows God's redemptive acts, what acts created the need for these new words? The answer is "the new organization of the theocratic kingdom under a human ruler," first through the Saul but then much more through David.[25] David's kingdom especially as "an instrument of redemption" anticipated "the kingship of Christ,"

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[23] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 3:196–232; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 4:499.
[24] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 185–298.
[25] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 185.

which is "the very acme and perfection of the Biblical religion."[26] Vos gave to the Reformed a sound way to think of the progression of revelation from the Garden of Eden to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David and then to Christ. These periods of time are marked by the covenants made in the respective eras.

With the work of Vos, a new door seemed to open for the Reformed. We can see this in Louis Berkhof, where more attention is given to the various covenants and not simply mentions in passing as he addresses the covenant of grace. His basic framework is straight from Calvin and Westminster: "It is preferable to follow the traditional lines by distinguishing just two dispensations or administrations, namely, that of the Old, and that of the New Testament; and to subdivide the former into several periods or stages in the revelation of the covenant of grace."[27] Within what he calls "the Old Testament Dispensation," he speaks of "the first revelation of the covenant" in Genesis 3:15, the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, and the Sinaitic covenant.[28] Once again the covenant with David is left out of Berkhof's overall covenant scheme. A couple decades later is John Murray's, *The Covenant of Grace*, where we see more development of the various covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Christ.[29] All of these are presented as part of the singular "covenant of grace." What is new with Murray is the way David and Noah are treated so matter-of-factly as significant milestones in salvation history. Unlike Calvin and Turretin, where the emphasis was on the continuity and discontinuity of the old and new covenants, Murray focuses a great deal on Noah as a prototypical gracious covenant that helps us define the covenant of grace. At the end he notes that "at the center of covenant revelation" is "its constant refrain of

[26] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 185–86.
[27] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 293.
[28] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 293–99.
[29] John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-Theological Study* (London: Tyndale, 1953).

assurance 'I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.'"[30] The recent *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* follows in Murray's path where the whole series of biblical covenants is treated individually but also as part of the single "covenant of grace."[31] John Frame works through the various covenants of the Bible in his *Systematic Theology*.[32] Again, this marks a significant development of—but not a deviation from—Calvin's (and Zwingli's) covenant theology, which emphasized two covenants in the Bible (old and new) and a single covenant of grace across both.

There are other covenant theologies being developed. One significant and recent one has been labelled "progressive covenantalism," which is the idea that covenants undergird the Bible's structure, and these covenants progress throughout time until the fulness of the new covenant.[33] This is a Baptistic approach to the covenants but deviates from traditional covenant theologians in not really embracing a covenant of works and rejecting the moral law of the Old Testament. The authors are really trying to integrate the kingdom scheme of Graeme Goldsworthy with a more robust emphasis on the Bible's covenants.[34] The emphasis on the covenant is welcome, but I do not think they have created a solid biblical

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[30] Murray, *Covenant of Grace*, 32.

[31] Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

[32] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 55–86. Interestingly, though, Robert Letham in his recent *Systematic Theology* seems almost accidentally to leave out a discussion of the Davidic covenant. He says on p. 443 that he will discuss the Davidic covenant, but as the chapter unfolds it is the Davidic only which is left out of his discussion (*Systematic Theology,* 447–468).

[33] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*; Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016).

[34] See footnote 32 on p 122 of Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*. It would have been nice if the authors gave more background into how they went from Goldsworthy to their own framework. They cite as foundational for them Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 19–110.

framework that really ties together all of God's covenants. Thomas Schreiner's work on the covenants is similar, feeling more like a Bible study on an important theme in the Bible than a real interpretive system integrating the covenants.[35]

The Covenant of Grace and the Major Covenants of the Bible

In this section we want to trace the major covenants of the Bible and note how they reflect a unique moment of salvation history but also a continuation of the covenant of grace. As I said above, *the covenant of grace is a covenant God makes with the elect sinner where he promises to save the sinner through the mediator Jesus Christ and by the Spirit empowering the response of faith.* Each of the major covenants below will continue this covenant and add either more detail to it or a greater experience of it—but they will not fundamentally differ from it. We start with the covenant made in Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15: The First Revelation of the Covenant of Grace

Various covenants in the Bible get treated as if they are a definitive revelation of the covenant of grace, but I believe Genesis 3:15 most merits this status. Bavinck says, "In this mother-promise is contained nothing less than the announcement and institution of the covenant of grace....In principle and essence there is present in the mother-promise all that constitutes the meaning of the covenant of grace."[36] The covenant with Abraham and the new covenant are more often given this position, but they seem too much to merely echo the great promises within Genesis 3:15. The progressive approach of the *1689* captures the place of Genesis 3:15 well, seeing

[35] Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*.
[36] Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 271.

it as the "first" expression of the covenant of grace that reaches a pinnacle with the new covenant (*1689* 7.3; cf. *TCOF* 8.4). And yet, there is a completeness in the Genesis 3:15 promise that we ought not miss. As Turretin says, "The sum of the covenant of grace was contained in the briefest, but still most clear words of the first gospel (*protevangelii*) or first promise: 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent' (Gen 3:15)."[37]

We should be clear, though, about the relationship between Genesis 3:15 and the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is a theological concept that brings together many ideas in various passages of the Bible. As a *covenant*, it is an arrangement that establishes a new relationship between God and his people. This new people is a redeemed people, a people delivered from the wrath and curse of God brought about as a result of Adam's sin (Gen 2:16–17; Rom 5:12–21). The redemption promised in Genesis 3:15 will be accomplished by Christ, who is revealed as our "great high priest" who offers his own blood as a sacrifice for sinners (Heb 4:16; 9:13–14). This redemption includes an appropriate response of faith and repentance on the part of God's people (Heb 11:4–7), and the people who do respond are those eternally chosen by God to be his own (Eph 1:3–6). The completion of this covenant requires the work of Christ the Redeemer, who is also "the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 9:15).

Not only is Christ the "mediator" in this covenant, but the Reformed tradition at times speaks of Christ as the other party in the covenant. An example of this is the *Westminster Larger Catechism*: "With whom was the covenant of grace made? A. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed" (*WLC*, Q31). Charles Hodge observed that Reformed theology sometimes spoke of the covenant of grace being made between God and Christ and sometimes between God and man. He felt the "covenant of grace" is really God and man but that this is built on the foundation of a second covenant

[37] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:220.

that is between God and Christ, what he called "the covenant of redemption."[38] Turretin says that the covenant of grace is made between three parties and not two to bring together these different aspects: "The contracting parties or the subject of the covenant are three: God offended, man offending and Christ, the Mediator, reconciling offending man to God offended and angry."[39] In Turretin's framework, it does not appear that the covenant of redemption has a clear place, and the emphasis is really on the covenant of grace exclusively. Berkhof looks at Reformed theology and observes that sometimes fallen humanity is the other party, sometimes "Abraham and his seed," but most often and most forcefully it is "with the elect or the elect in Christ."[40] He goes on to define the covenant of grace as, "that gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience."[41] Given the certainty of the promise in Genesis 3:15, it seems best to say God is making the covenant of grace with his people (i.e., the elect). Implied in the covenant is therefore God's effectual work of regeneration and his people's irresistible response of faith and repentance. Genesis 3:15 communicates the final *result* of the covenant of grace, establishes the parties and Mediator of the covenant, and provides the essential promise of the covenant of grace. Yet, it is separate from the covenant of grace in that it is not given in a typical covenant form as we find with the covenants with Noah or Abraham.

In the Bible's storyline, Genesis 3:15 is part of the curse God speaks to the serpent after Adam's sin. The first couple has not yet left the Garden of Eden. God speaks a promise to the serpent, who is later revealed as "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev 12:9). In this

[38] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:357–58.
[39] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:176.
[40] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 273.
[41] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 277.

promise, numbering only fifteen words in the Hebrew, God is revealing a covenant promise that will reverberate through the rest of our Bibles.

God begins by saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman." Yahweh here is intervening into the relationship between the serpent and the woman and changes that relationship. God is not letting things take a natural course but is instead sovereignly acting in his creation and among his creatures: "The divine initiative in the work of deliverance" is evident with the emphatic pronoun "*I*."[42] By doing this, in an act of divine grace, the serpent and humanity are not to be allies, but here the woman is restored as an "ally of God."[43] *To be Satan's enemy is to be God's friend*. And with that, the great story of redemption begins. The woman and her offspring are immediately locked into a battle against the serpent and his offspring, a battle that extends throughout all of human history. We will read of this "woman," her "offspring," and this "serpent" even in Revelation 12:

> And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. [2] She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. [3] And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. [4] His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. [5] She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, [6] and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days....And the great dragon

[42] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 42.
[43] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 42.

> was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.
> (Rev 12:1–6, 9)

The "enmity" will also be "between your offspring and her offspring." "Offspring" is from a Hebrew word meaning "seed" (זֶרַע in Hebrew, σπέρμα in the Greek LXX). The noun "offspring" or "seed" can be either singular or plural (collective noun), and here it is actually *both*.[44] It refers to two *peoples*, and also to two *individuals*. As two peoples, the "offspring" of the serpent includes enemies of God. Here we can point to the New Testament's teaching that enemies of Christ are "of your father the devil" (John 8:44), and those who make a practice of sinning are "of the devil" (1 John 3:8), just as Cain was "of the devil" (1 John 3:12). Likewise, the "offspring" of the woman is the godly line that comes from her. This includes Seth and his son Enosh, who are marked as the time when "people began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:26), Enoch who "walked with God" (Gen 5:22, 24), and Noah who "was a righteous man, blameless in his generation" (Gen 6:9). This enduring conflict is evident in Revelation 12 where "the dragon/serpent" makes "war" on the woman's "offspring" (Rev 12:9, 17).

But the singular nature of "seed" is seen in the last clause of Genesis 3:15: "he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The two individuals are the "he" who shall "bruise your head," and the one whose head is bruised. The blow to the head of the serpent is "a mortal, deadly wound," while the blow to the heel is "certainly not fatal."[45] What is promised here is that a person born in the line of the woman shall eventually become the Messianic

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[44] Jonathan M. Cheek, "The Individual and Collective Offspring of the Woman: The Canonical Outworking of Genesis 3:15," *Themelios* 48.1 (2023): 29–46; James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *SBJT* 10.2 (2006): 30–54.
[45] Currid, *Genesis Vol 1*, 130–31.

"snake crusher."[46] From the time of this promise, there is an expectation of a coming "offspring" who will fulfill this promise. That is why there is such emphasis on the "offspring" of Abraham (Gen 22:18; Gal 3:16) and of David (2 Sam 7:13), and why Jesus is introduced in the first verse of our New Testament as "Son of David, Son of Abraham (Matt 1:1; cf. Acts 13:23; 2 Tim 2:8). Christ's defeat of Satan the serpent occurs through his death and resurrection (Heb 2:14) but ultimately through casting Satan into the lake of fire to be punished forever (Rev 20:10).

In other words, what is promised in Genesis 3:15 is a Redeemer, a redemption (in the destruction of the serpent and his people), and a redeemed people. The Redeemer is Christ, and the redeemed people are those saved by his work of redemption.

A key fact about this promise is that it does not only speak of things waiting to be accomplished through the ministry of Christ and at the end of history. It speaks of things which begin to occur *immediately*. This promise begins to work as soon as it is spoken. The first recipients are the first man and first woman. The *Redeemer* will not be revealed until Immanuel is born to Mary (Matt 1:18–25), and his work of redemption will not be accomplished until Christ crushes the serpent and then delivers the kingdom to his Father in heaven (1 Cor 15:23–24), which is not for thousands of years after Yahweh speaks to the serpent. But the Redeemer nonetheless begins his work of redemption immediately. His people do not begin with the nation of Israel or even Abraham. His people begin with Adam and Eve, who demonstrate a level of faith and thus redemption. Adam names his wife "Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20), and this *after* the fall. Eve's faith can be seen as she goes from naming her firstborn "Cain" because, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" (Gen 4:1), naming her third son "Seth" because, "God has appointed for me another offspring" (Gen 4:25). She speaks of only needing "help" with Cain, but with Seth

[46] Andrew David Naselli, *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer*, SSBT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 40.

she knows that it is only because of God's sovereignty that she is given Seth. Speaking of him as an "offspring" also connects with the promise of a coming Redeemer "offspring" who shall destroy the serpent (Gen 3:15). As the redemption continues to unfold, it gets even clearer that God is actively saving his people through faith. When the author of Hebrews looks back at these early generations, he notes the "faith" of Abel who was "commended as righteous" (Heb 11:4); Enoch is commended as one who "pleased God" (11:5); and Noah is "an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (11:7). In other words, long before Abraham "believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6), God's covenant of grace was not just *promised* but *effectually accomplishing the promised redemption*. The fullness of the promise must await the Messiah's coming, but the Godhead was creating his people even in the Garden itself.

As God's covenant of grace continues its work throughout salvation history, it develops. It is not a static relationship only defined by Genesis 3:15. Instead, God adds layers to what it means to be his people and what it means that God himself is our God and Redeemer. In the words of the 1689 London Baptist Confession, "This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament" (*1689* 8.3). These "farther steps" include later covenants God makes with central figures in the Bible's history. We turn now to the next of these "farther steps," the covenant with Noah.

Noah: The Covenant of Preservation

The first covenant after the couple leaves the Garden is made with Noah. As with all the primary covenants God makes, *he* takes the first step: *he* initiates, Noah responds. God promises to make this covenant in Genesis 6:18, "But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and

your sons' wives with you." After the flood, God makes that covenant (8:20–9:17). In it he promises never again to wipe out living creatures in the way he did with the flood (Gen 8:21–22; 9:10–11). The covenant also includes requirements. First "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (9:1, 7). We can hear the echo of God's word to Adam and Eve here (Gen 1:28). Second, God commands humanity not to eat flesh with its blood, and then third, murder is forbidden (9:4–6). The sign of the covenant is unique, a rainbow. The sovereign and gracious nature of the Noahic covenant is underscored by this unique sign, since God *alone* can form a rainbow in the clouds (9:12–17). The covenant with Noah is not only made with him but with "all flesh that is on the earth" (9:17). It begins a new epoch of salvation history. As with all of God's covenants, until he says otherwise, the covenant is in effect and this covenant binds all people. The protection promised in the Noahic covenant is even now in effect. Seeing a "bow" in the clouds remains a sign that God shall not destroy humanity until his redemption is accomplished. And even now, eating blood as described is forbidden and so is murder.

The covenant with Noah is not in conflict with the covenant of grace but is simply a development of it. In this covenant we learn that the people who are the "offspring" of the woman have certain moral obligations—not eating blood, not committing murder, "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 9:4–7). And God also establishes a kind of shield of protection so that his own judgment will not prevent history from continuing until the promised Serpent-crusher can do his work. For this reason, it can be called "the covenant of preservation."

This is something we should not miss. *History continues because of the covenant with Noah*. Without the covenant with Noah, we would rightly expect a continuous cycle of a few generations of humanity and then another flood to wipe them out, then a restart followed by another few generations followed by a flood, repeated forever. Yet, because of the covenant with Noah, God has committed himself to letting human history endure until

the true end of things with the coming of Christ and then the church age and then the final return of Christ.

Abraham: The Covenant of Election

The next major covenant after the fall is with the patriarch Abraham[47] (Gen 12:1–3; 15; 17:1–21; 22:15–18). The covenant with Abraham is not made in a single moment but is made in steps.[48] God will make promises without demands in Genesis 12:1–3, add additional promises in Genesis 15, add the requirement of circumcision in Genesis 17:1–21, and then make additional promises in Genesis 22:15–18. God speaks to Abraham first while he was in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2–3) and tells him to go to "the land which I will show you" (Gen 12:1). That land is Canaan, which will later be conquered by Israel and then renamed "Israel." The land of Israel is central to the Abrahamic promises and the history and storyline of the Old Testament. God's second promise to Abraham is to make him "a great nation" and to "make your name great" (12:2). Eventually Abraham will go from being a childless man to being the father of a great ancient nation, one that numbered over two million people at its peak. The third major promise to Abraham is that he will be a "blessing" even to "all the families of the earth" (12:3; 22:18). This does not happen through the man Abraham or any of his Old Testament descendants but through his greatest son Jesus Christ, who is introduced in our New Testament as "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1).

As the pieces of the Abrahamic covenant puzzle get revealed, one very significant one is what is called "the Covenant Formula" in reference to the covenant of grace. God speaks it in

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[47] Abraham is called "Abram" until his name is changed to "Abraham" in Gen 17:5, but I will refer to him as Abraham for the sake of simplicity.

[48] Though some divide the covenant chapters of Abraham into two distinct covenants, it is best to see them as a single covenant made in successive steps. On this see John Scott Redd, "The Abrahamic Covenant," in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 135–36.

Genesis 17: “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you...and I will be their God” (Gen 17:7, 8). This echoes later in the promise, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:12), and will reverberate throughout the Bible even until the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:3). The Covenant Formula summarizes what God is doing throughout the whole history of Israel and the church. He is creating a people for himself, a people who fully and forever embrace him as their God. Yet, this is really just an extension of the *protoevangelium* spoken in Genesis 3:15, for there, too, a people is promised who shall be God’s people and at enmity with the serpent and his people. The people promised in the *protoevangelium* and in the Covenant Formula *are the same people*.

One profound and unique element with the Abrahamic covenant occurs in Gen 15:18 where God formally “cuts” (fr. כָּרַת) the covenant and makes a “self-maledictory oath” whereby he took on himself all the punishments if the covenant was to be broken (15:17–18). God has Abraham cut animals in two and then God himself goes between these halves. In Jeremiah 34:18–19 we see the meaning of this strange action: “And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts—[19] the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf.” God walking through the halves of the animals, then, is saying, “May I become like these slain animals if I break my covenant promise to you, Abraham.” It is a radical act of mercy and condescension on the part of God—one that vividly anticipates the crushing of the Son by the Father on a Roman cross.

Abraham’s response of faith to God’s promises (Gen 15:6) is enormously significant. It is this faith that is seen as the essential

and definitive response we are to exercise toward God for his mercy toward us (Rom 4; Gal 3:6–14). Obedience is required, too (Gen 17:1), but this obedience is not separate from faith but really an expression of true and saving faith (James 2:14–26).

Another hallmark of the covenant with Abraham is the sign of circumcision (Gen 17:9–14). A Hebrew boy is to take on this mark of the Abrahamic covenant to indicate that he is part of God's covenant people. This act of physical circumcision is to be matched with a "circumcision of the heart" (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:29), which means an internal cutting off of the world and a total consecration to the Lord. Such a heart change is possible only by the Holy Spirit. And yet, the sign of circumcision is to be given whether or not there is evidence of this changed heart. Isaac *and* Ishmael are circumcised (Gen 17:23–26; 21:4), though Isaac alone is the child of promise and not Ishmael. For paedobaptists, this is a reason why *baptism* should also be practiced on the infants of believers. It is generally assumed that one of the reasons Zwingli adopted his particular covenant theology was in his battles with what he called "Catabaptists" (i.e., those who oppose baptism) or Anabaptists. He wrote against them, "Just as the Hebrews' children, because they with their parents were under the covenant, merited the sign of the covenant, so also Christians' infants, because they are counted within the church and people of Christ, ought in no way to be deprived of baptism, the sign of the covenant."[49] Yet, this is to read too much sameness into the Abrahamic and new covenants. A profound difference with the new covenant is that the new covenant people *do not include* those who have not experienced a "circumcision of the heart" (i.e., regeneration). And thus, baptism is to be given to those who profess such a change of heart (i.e., profess saving faith in Christ). That is why the New Testament connects baptism with faith and union with Christ (Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3–4).

[49] Zwingli, "Refutation of the Tricks of the Catabaptists."

As with the covenant made with Noah, the covenant with Abraham does not deviate from the covenant of grace. Instead, it makes certain elements of the covenant of grace clearer. With Abraham we see that faith is the right response to God's promises (Gen 15:6). Obedience and the covenant sign will naturally follow such faith, but without faith there is no obedience and any taking of a covenant sign is a mockery. The Abrahamic covenant also clarifies that God's people *will be closely tied to the man Abraham*. This happens in an unexpected way. It might appear being a *physical* descendant of Abraham is the key element. But this is not true. It is being a *spiritual* descendant—one who shares in the faith of Abraham but also one who shares in the Greater Offspring of Abraham, namely, Christ (Gen 22:18; Gal 3:8–16). As Paul says in Galatians 3, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29).

This is remarkable, isn't it? Christians are "Abraham's offspring." We live in the good of the promises that God made to Abraham somewhere around 1800 BC. It is not *unbelieving* Jews and certainly not Muslims who are the true children of Abraham. It is Christian believers (Jew or Gentile) who are in Christ, the Greater "Son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1).

Moses: The National Covenant

The most complex covenant in the Old Testament is the covenant with Moses.[50] It is officially inaugurated at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19–24, but the laws it requires are given throughout the rest of the Pentateuch (Exod 25–Deut 34). This matrix of laws is what makes it so complex. How to organize, distinguish, and apply these laws is a challenge that has challenged interpreters for millennia. Yet, there is a way forward in this task if we use God's given means of

[50] This is sometimes called "the Mosaic covenant," since Moses is the mediator of the covenant, but technically, the covenant is made with the whole nation of Israel. More often in theology it is referred to as "the Mosaic covenant," so that is why I have done so.

interpretation, the New Testament. First we need to understand the basics of this covenant.

The covenant with Moses (Israel) at Mt. Sinai is presented to us as being intimately connected to the Abrahamic covenant. Israel is enslaved to Egypt for "430 years" (Exod 12:40), but then we read, "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exod 2:24). It was in remembrance of the covenant *with Abraham* that brought about the Exodus. In fact, all that happens in the Old Testament is really because of God's remembrance of the covenant with Abraham. Israel becoming a nation and not simply "70 persons" (Exod 1:5) fulfills the promise of an Abrahamic nation (Gen 12:2; 15:13–14; Exod 12:37; 32:13). Canaan (later called Israel) is regularly described as "the land sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (cf. Exod 6:8; 13:5; Deut 6:10, 18). This connection between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants is essential to see to understand the Mosaic accurately. *The Mosaic covenant is built on the foundation of the Abrahamic covenant*.

Before God inaugurates this covenant, he intervenes to save them: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exod 19:4). As the covenant itself shows, *God's redemption is first, the law comes second*: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [3] You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:2–3). What God is inaugurating is not a contractual agreement where Israel had a legalistic arrangement with Yahweh. He is establishing a certain kind of *relationship* with Israel that they are called to maintain: "If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6).

The covenant itself is given in Exodus 20–23, starting with the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) in 20:1–17. Then follows regulations about how to build an altar (20:22–26), slavery (21:1–

11), crimes and punishments (21:12–22:4), involuntary destruction of property or damage to a neighbor (22:5–15), and then various other laws, some of which are punished with death (22:16–23:9). The covenant continues by mentioning sabbath laws for fields and the workweek and the annual cycle of feasts (Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest or "firstfruits," and the Feast of Ingathering) (23:10–19). The covenant concludes with promises that "an angel" shall go before Israel and empower them to conquer Canaan if they "obey his voice" (23:20–33). After the covenant is spoken to Moses, sacrifices are offered and blood is sprinkled on the altar to consecrate it for the Lord's service (24:5). Moses then reads what is now called "the Book of the Covenant" and the people commit to the covenant. With their commitment, Moses sprinkles blood on them to formally inaugurate the covenant (24:8). Then Moses, along with "Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel" (24:1) go up Mt. Sinai and "saw the God of Israel" (24:10). They then enjoy a covenant meal: "They beheld God, and ate and drank" (24:11). How amazing! After this, the Decalogue is referred to as "the words of the covenant" (Exod 34:28), which serves as a representation of the whole Mosaic covenant. In Deuteronomy, Moses says Yahweh "made (fr. כָּרַת) a covenant with us in Horeb" (Deut 5:2). The language of "cut (fr. כָּרַת) a covenant" ties this moment to Genesis 15 and the slaughtered animals that were "cut" to formalize the Abrahamic covenant.

Truly, this moment in Israel's history is remarkable. It represents a profound new relationship with Yahweh for the entire nation. He has revealed himself dramatically through the ten plagues in Egypt (Exod 7–11) and the parting of the Red Sea (Exod 14–15) and the daily miracle of manna (Exod 16). The Exodus is the central act of "redemption" referred to throughout the Old Testament (Exod 6:6; 15:13; Neh 1:10; Pss 74:2; 78:35). As is true for Christians, redemption is followed by a definition of the relationship. What the Mosaic covenant does is define how Israel is to relate to Yahweh and to one another as God's covenant people.

The Mosaic covenant does not make Israel the people of God, it simply defines how they are to act as God's people. It is having faith like Abraham (Gen 15:6) that makes someone a child of God. The law of Moses then guides the behavior of the one who has turned to the Lord. This is what Paul is getting at in Galatians 3 when he speaks of how the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants relate: "This is what I mean: the law [of Moses], which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. [18] For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise" (Gal 3:17–18). The spiritual "inheritance" promised in Abraham is always accessed by faith and never by works of the law (Gal 3:6–14). The law guides behavior "because of transgressions" (Gal 3:19). But the law is also "holy and righteous and good" (Rom 7:12) and can rightly be called "the law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12). The law of Moses can only be such a law, however, if one lives by faith. Living by faith we turn to the law as a "rule of life" to use the language of the confessions (*WCF* 19.6; *1689* 19.6; *TCOF* 21.6). "Rule of life" means "a guide for life."

The Abrahamic covenant established circumcision as "the sign of the covenant" (Gen 17:9–14), and this continues in the covenant with Moses (Lev 12:3). This is why even John the Baptist and Jesus were circumcised on the 8th day after their birth, just like what was commanded of Abraham (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3; Luke 1:59; 2:21). Yet, the greater emphasis in the covenant with Moses is on the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant (Exod 31:13–17; Ezek 20:12, 20). Perhaps because the nation was more developed into a full-blown economy and theocracy, a greater control of the workweek was now possible. And thus, Israelites were to mark by their weekly routine that they were a people in covenant with Yahweh. His lordship extended to their time, relationships, resources, and thus, all things, and Sabbath-keeping testified to that fact.

With the coming of Christ and the new covenant he inaugurated, the Mosaic covenant formally comes to an end. It can

rightfully be called "obsolete" (Heb 8:13) and the "old covenant" (2 Cor 3:14), because of the distinctly new work and new covenant of Christ. No longer are the people of God "under the law" of Moses (Rom 2:12; 3:19; 6:14–15). Further, in the truest sense we are not "under law but under grace" (Rom 6:14). But we have to be careful here, for the moral laws within the law of Moses still contain a "rule of life" for the Christian. The two great commandments to love God and love our neighbors (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Matt 22:37–40; Rom 13:8–10) and the Ten Commandments remain binding for believers (Rom 13:8–10). Passages like the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus contrasts what "you have heard" with what "I say" (Matt 5:21–48) do not mean the Ten Commandments are no longer binding. Rather, they mean that the reach of the law goes even further than mere physical behavior. There is a heart attitude that must also be pursued. Adultery does not go far enough for the holiness that God requires. Now looking with "lustful intent" is condemned (Matt 5:28). Of course, since the Ten Commandments condemns coveting, looking with "lustful intent" was always forbidden. Jesus only makes this clearer. New Testament passages that make it clear the moral law of the Old Testament is still binding include Matthew 9:13; 12:7; 22:37–40 (and parallels in Mark and Luke); Romans 12:19–20; 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 5:13; Ephesians 4:25–26; 1 Timothy 5:18–19; and 1 Peter 1:16.

Further, there is language used in the New Testament that tells us there is a continuity between the people of God in the Old Testament and those in the new. We are "a kingdom, priests to our God" (Rev 1:6) and in the words of Peter: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9–10). This language mirrors very closely what is said of God's people in the Old Testament: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all

peoples, for all the earth is mine; [6] and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6); "I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God'" (Hos 2:23). Passages like these reinforce that while there has been a great change in how we relate to God from the old covenant to the new, not *everything* has changed.

David: The Covenant of the King

One of the distinctives of covenant theologies since John Murray is a proper inclusion of the Davidic covenant. This is not to say that the kingship or kingdom of Christ was devalued before this, only that this covenant was somewhat marginalized in the various covenant theologies. Yet, it is surely right to include it in a covenant theology for three reasons.

First, it is one of the explicit covenants in the Bible, named a "covenant" in several passages (Pss 89:1–4, 19–37; 132:11–12) and presented as a covenant in clear ways (2 Sam 7:8–16; 1 Chr 17:7–14).

Second, this covenant had a massive impact on how the Old Testament saints related to God. This covenant is closely tied to the way God's people established human kings to govern the theocracy. While a human king was initially a sign of a rejection of God's rightful place as Israel's king (1 Sam 8:1–7), it was also a development integral to the plan of God. We can see this in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 where Yahweh regulates how a king is to govern God's people, and also in passages like 1 Samuel 2:10, where Hannah prophesies, "The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed." While Saul will become Israel's first king (1 Sam 9), it is David the second king who would become the father of a dynasty lasting centuries and even more important as the father of the line of Christ himself. This is no accident. David was in the tribe of Judah, where Saul was from the line of Benjamin. It was Judah who

was prophesied over by Jacob in Genesis 49, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Gen 49:10). "The obedience of the peoples" would be *partially* fulfilled with King David, but with Christ this prophecy comes to final and glorious fruition. It is Christ who is not only a king but "King of kings" (Rev 17:14; 19:16).

Third, the explicit and emphatic connection between the Davidic covenant and Christ is a reason why we need to include the Davidic covenant in our covenant theology.

The actual covenant with David is made after he becomes king over the whole nation (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17). David desires to build "a house" for Yahweh, but Nathan his prophet-advisor gets a word from the LORD about God's greater plan. Instead of David building a "house" for Yahweh, Yahweh will "make...a house" for David (2 Sam 7:11). This "house" is not a physical dwelling place but speaks to God establishing the line of David and especially a specific "offspring" (7:12) that God will "raise up" (7:12). The critical aspect of this "offspring" for salvation history is the idea that he will reign as king *forever*: "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (7:13). With that promise we know we are not to expect a fulfillment in any King Solomon or Hezekiah or any other merely human figure. Someone Greater is promised here. God also promises, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" (7:14), and "my steadfast love will not depart from him" (7:15). Yes, indeed, he would be "a son"! We read of this coming Son in Romans 1:3–4, where Christ is described as "descended from David according to the flesh" but also "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead." The Son promised to David is the Son of God.

Passages like Ezekiel 34 tell us of the importance of the Davidic covenant. God here and elsewhere promises that *the coming Messiah will also be the Davidic king*: "And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. [24] And I, the LORD, will

be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken. [25] "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods" (Ezek 34:23–25). We can also hear this in the great prophecy of Isaiah 9:6–7, which so clearly points to Christ: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [7] Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

These passages are why it is so powerful when our New Testament opens by announcing Jesus as the Christ but also the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic promises: "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1). And throughout the ministry of Jesus, we will hear often the refrain, "Have mercy, Son of David!" (Matt 9:27; 15:22; 20:30). And when Jesus enters Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, the cry goes up, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matt 21:15). Further, we expect our ascended King to one day be the returning King. One day he shall break through the clouds and every eye will see him (Rev 1:7; 19:11–16) and then shall come the end when Christ and his saints reign on earth forever (Rev 22:5).

The Davidic covenant is why Christ comes not just as Messiah, not just as Savior, and not just as the Son of God, but also as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16). It is also why being part of God's people is not only having a new relationship with our Creator God, but it is also to be in God's "kingdom," now and forever (Matt 5:3, 10; 6:33; 7:21; 11:11; Mark 4:26–32; John 3:3, 5; Acts 14:22; Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Col 1:13; Heb 12:28; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 11:15; 12:10).

The New Covenant: The Covenant of the Christ

The "new covenant" is the highwater mark in the biblical covenants, because it speaks most fully to the redemptive work accomplished by Christ and experienced by his people. The new covenant is promised when Israel is in one of the darkest moments of its history (Jer 31:31–34), but it is inaugurated at one of the most glorious moments of all human history (Luke 22:20). We call it "the new covenant," because that is the name given to it by prophecy (Jer 31:31), by Jesus's teaching (Luke 22:20), and by apostolic teaching (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:13; 9:15; 12:24).

The new covenant is first spoken in Jeremiah 31:31–34 in what is often called the prophet's "book of consolation" (Jer 30–34), named for the encouragement throughout these chapters and the command for Jeremiah to write these words "in a book" in 30:2:

> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, [32] not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. [33] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [34] And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.
> (Jer 31:31–34)

Several observations need to be made about this promise. *First*, we note God's gracious initiative once again. It is no man or

woman who initiates this covenant but God who says he will break into history once again, just like he did with the Egyptian Exodus.

Second, we note that God promises, "I will make (fr. כָּרַת) a new covenant" (31:31). "Make" is better translated as "cut" (fr. כָּרַת), a word found in Genesis 15:18 when God passed through the animal carcasses as an act of self-malediction—taking on himself the punishment of becoming like one of the carcasses were he ever to break the oath. In the new covenant, it is once again God who is taking on himself the full weight of the oath-promise.

Third, God's promises here are just that, promises and not conditions. He is not requiring faith and repentance before he grants these blessings, but he is promising grace that will effectually accomplish these profound and spiritual blessings. Of course, faith and repentance will be a human means that are part of the application of these promises, but it will be God's effectual grace that actually brings about the faith and repentance involved. That is the point of God saying, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (31:32).

Fourth, the promises made in this passage are promises related to regeneration and not the hope of future regeneration. In other words, to be a member of the "new covenant" people described, a person needs to have experienced this transformation. That is one of the most significant differences between this "new covenant" and the Mosaic covenant that is called "the old covenant." In "the old covenant" and even in the Abrahamic covenant, one could be a member of the covenant people *without having had a work of regeneration in the heart.* Of course, the covenants had as their great intention to see a change in the heart and not just the body. That is why there is mention of "circumcision of the heart" alongside mentions of "circumcision of the body" (Deut 10:16; 30:6; cf. Rom 2:28–29). But when the 8-day old baby boy was circumcised, he was circumcised as a covenant child and not because he had experienced "circumcision of the heart." Many of those circumcised boys would grow up and show they had no

such transformation of the heart. In this way, the people of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants were a mixed people.

But with the new covenant, this mixed dynamic is altered. Now the people of God are a regenerated people. No others have experienced the law being written on their heart, a personal knowledge of God, and forgiveness of sins—all of which are promised in the new covenant (31:33–34). The new covenant people are equivalent to how Paul describes the true Jew in Romans: "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. [29] But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God" (Rom 2:28–29).

Fifth, we should not miss the use of the Covenant Formula in this new covenant promise: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (31:33). As that promise echoes throughout the Bible it gets richer and deeper and more wonderful. With the new covenant we realize that having God as our God and being his people means we have the ability to obey his good and holy laws, a personal and true knowledge of him, and a complete solution for our sins and not just a hope for one. There is continuity with the first time this promise is spoken to Abraham in Genesis 17:7–8, but there is also a profound intensification of it as God's revelation unfolds.

There is more to the new covenant that is not mentioned in Jeremiah 31 and could not be, since the Son of Man had not yet come. Christ will reveal an important dimension of this covenant at the Last Supper when he speaks of the cup: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). The meaning of this idea is not explained by Jesus, but in Hebrews 9–10 we get more insight into what Jesus means. One aspect is in 9:16: "Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established." Here the author is working with the double-meaning of "covenant," which can mean a covenant in the Old Testament sense or "testament" as in a "last will and testament." In this second sense, a person must die before the "last will and testament" goes into effect. Christ's death is that death. With his death, the "last will and

testament" of the new covenant goes into effect. But the blood of Christ does more. The author of Hebrews then points to the sprinkling of blood by Moses on the altar to cleanse "the copies of the heavenly things" (Heb 9:18–22; cf. Exod 24:6–8). Christ's blood is even greater, because it cleanses not the early copies but the heavenly realities (Heb 9:23–24). This heavenly offering of blood brings what the old covenant never could: forgiveness of sins. His sacrifice was effectual and so only needed to be offered once, not like the offerings of all those high priests in Israel who had to offer blood "every year" (Heb 9:25). Christ's offering was "once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26). And thus, the forgiveness of sins promised in the new covenant is fully ours in Christ: "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (Heb 10:19).

A final observation to make about the new covenant has to do with the new "sign of the covenant." No longer is circumcision or the Sabbath the definitive sign of the covenant. These fit the Abrahamic (circumcision) and Mosaic (Sabbath) covenants. With the new covenant we are given the new sign of baptism. The connection between circumcision and baptism is made in Colossians 2:11–12: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, [12] having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." The "circumcision made without hands" is the one we have received, and this is ours "through faith in the powerful working of God." No physical ceremony is required. But note the way baptism is described. Our union with Christ connects to our baptism, since we have been "buried with him in baptism," language that echoes Romans 6:3–4. Circumcision is most definitely not required for the people of God with the new covenant (Acts 15:1–21), and yet baptism is (Acts 2:37–38; 8:12, 36, 38; 19:5). These two acts are initiation acts, ones done at the beginning of one's Christian life. For the Christian, baptism is the sign of cleansing by the blood of

Jesus (1 Peter 3:18) and also our death, burial, and resurrection in Christ (Rom 6:3–4).

Along with noting baptism as the new "sign of the covenant," we should remember that the Lord's Supper is the new covenant meal. Jesus said we are to take the cup in this Supper and say, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). His words are a reminder that taking the bread and the cup are a "meal" like the meal that Moses and the others shared with Yahweh after the covenant was made at Mt. Sinai. At that earlier meal, "They beheld God, and ate and drank" (Exod 24:11). The inauguration of the covenant meant that they could enjoy a new communion with their God. Likewise, Christ's sacrifice and our union with him marked by our baptism grants that we, too, can commune with our God at this sacred meal.

A distinctive of the new covenant is that it is never to be superseded by another covenant. It is the final covenant action in salvation history until all the great final episodes of our redemption when Christ returns, the dead are raised, humanity is judged, and we are vindicated. The promises of the new covenant will not be changed, only intensified as we live forever in their fullness.

With the new covenant we reach the end of the biblical covenants that go from Adam to Christ. These are all knitted together as expressions of the covenant of grace, but they also reflect a progress of revelation. The new covenant is clearer in many ways than the cryptic words of Genesis 3:15, but there is nonetheless an essential connection between these. There is one covenant left to explain, the intra-Trinitarian covenant of redemption. This is the foundational one that is the bedrock and surety of all the other covenants.

The Covenant of Redemption

The final covenant we need to look at is generally called "the covenant of redemption" or sometimes in more technical language the *pactum salutis* ("a covenant of salvation"). Louis Berkhof

defines it this way: "The covenant of redemption may be defined as the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given Him."[51] Berkhof's definition is a good one, provided that we remember the place of the Holy Spirit. All three members of the Trinity are involved in this covenant and the redemptive work it brings about. Like the covenant of grace, it is one derived from various passages which do not often mention the word "covenant" but which point to the idea in really clear ways. Charles Hodge provides another good summary of this covenant:

> When one person assigns a stipulated work to another person with the promise of a reward upon the condition of the performance of that work, there is a covenant. Nothing can be plainer than that all this is true in relation to the Father and the Son. The Father gave the Son a work to do; He sent Him into the world to perform it, and promised Him a great reward when the work was accomplished. Such is the constant representation of the Scriptures. We have, therefore, the contracting parties, the promise, and the condition. These are the essential elements of a covenant.[52]

It seems strange to speak of a covenant between members of the Trinity, but numerous Bible passages point to such a commitment on the part of the Father toward the Son, the Son to the Father, and the involvement of the Spirit as well. Several are in Isaiah. In the Servant Songs, there are clear references to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in such covenantal terms. In Isaiah 42:1–7, the passage begins, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations" (v. 1). The Father's love for the Son is clear in the passage, as well as his intentions for the Son. Yet, the Spirit's part is explicit as well. Then in verse 6, the

[51] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 271.
[52] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:336.

Father commits to the Son, "I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." This prophecy is spoken centuries before the incarnation and so reflective of pre-incarnational commitments within the members of the Trinity (really, eternal ones). Similarly in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 the prophecy speaks of the redemptive work of the Son who will also "be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted" (52:13). He will be "pierced for our transgressions" (53:5). The Son's redemptive work involves the Father, however: "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6). Such atoning work was "the will of the LORD" (53:10). The Father will see this sacrifice "and be satisfied" (53:11). As a result, "many" will be "accounted righteous" (53:11) and the Son will be rewarded with "a portion" and "the spoil" (53:12). The passage has profound intra-Trinitarian dynamics that are understood in a covenantal fashion.

Psalm 2 is a Messianic Psalm that also possesses covenantal language, hinting at an eternal covenant between the members of the Trinity. In verse 6 we hear the Father's commitment, "'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.'" Without the rest of the Psalm, we would naturally assume this is a human, Davidic king. And yet, the Psalm's intention becomes clear that this "King" is also "the Son" who will rule over the nations of the earth and be the "refuge" for the people of God (v. 12). The Father's "decree" is explicit in vv. 7–8, "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.'" This "begotten" moment is not referring to Christ's conception and certainly not to his being created at a moment in the past. Instead, it refers to a step in his work as Mediator, his resurrection. For it is this moment when he was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 1:4). No more was he the Son of Man in weakness. With the resurrection he is "begotten" as the Son of God "in power." But as the Begotten

One, he is to receive a "heritage" (Ps 2:8), which is covenantal, promisory language.

Psalm 110 has covenantal ideas as well. There is the Father promising to the Son, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool" (v. 1). But then in more explicit covenantal language is the use of "sworn" in v. 4, "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'" This is all pre-incarnational, intra-Trinitarian language. The persons of the Trinity are presented as in a conversation, as it were, filled with promises and commitments and even oaths (Ps 110:4).

Turning to the New Testament, the gospel of John is filled with this type of covenant language. In John 10:18 Jesus is referring to his sacrificial death and the Father's love for the Son because of it. He ends by saying, "This charge I received from my Father." Later in that chapter Jesus speaks of the Father as the one "who has given them to me," referring to the elect who will not be snatched "out of the Father's hand." Note, though, that the Father "has given" the elect to the Son, a reference to a past and eternal event and not a future one. There was a covenant promise on the part of the Father to give these elect to the Son. This idea is also in Christ's prayer in John 17: "the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me" (17:6); "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (17:24).

In Luke 22:29 we have another testimony of the eternal covenant. Jesus speaks of the Father's intention by saying, "I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom" (Luke 22:29). This speaks of an ancient designation between the members of the Trinity that is in the shape of a covenant promise. Berkhof notes that the verb "assign" here (*diatithēmi*) is related to the Greek for "covenant" (*diathēkē*).

Hebrews 10 speaks of the Son's intention to do "the will" of the Father. Quoting from Psalm 40, the author says regarding

Christ, "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book'" (Heb 10:7). Where all previous mediators (Moses) and priests failed to the will of God perfectly, the Son accomplished the Father's will impeccably. Yet, the covenant idea here is the way the Son determines to fulfill what is asked of him by the Father, a "will" that is revealed in the past in the Psalms.

But the will of God reaches further back than this, for there are numerous passages that point to the elect being chosen "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 1:2). These are important, because they tell us that this intra-Trinitarian commitment must have occurred in eternity past.

One important element in these Old and New Testament passages is the personal nature of them. They point to very personal words and promises and commitments by members of the Trinity toward one another. These are not the cold workings of natural cause-and-effect but eternal promises that result in redemptive acts.

Bavinck notes that such an understanding of the covenant of redemption took time to develop. As the historical covenants were considered and the covenant of grace developed, it was clear that the outworking in history of God's plan of salvation had its origin in eternal commitments and intentions in the Godhead:

> The Reformed church...sought and found for these covenants in time a stable, eternal foundation in the counsel of God, and again regarded this counsel—conceived as aiming at the salvation of the human race—as a covenant between the three persons of the divine being itself (*pactum salutis*, counsel of peace, the covenant of redemption).[53]

[53] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 3:212–13.

The Eight Covenants in their Chronological Order

The above discussion treated the covenants of the Bible in the order of their appearance within the Bible. Aspects of their interconnection and overall logic make more sense when seen chronologically:

The Covenant of Redemption: The covenant of redemption is the eternal covenant made between the members of the Trinity to save the elect through the mediatorial work of the Son and the empowering role of the Spirit. It was "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4) and set in motion all the subsequent covenants and guaranteed their efficacy.

The Covenant of Works: The covenant of works was made between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:16–17). It promised life for obedience and threatened death for disobedience to the law of God. Adam was the federal head of this covenant, and his actions would impact the destiny of all humanity (Rom 5:12–21).

The Covenant of Grace: Adam's failure to keep the covenant of works brought about sin, death, and God's curse (Gen 3:7–19). Yet, in the wake of this devastation, God instituted the covenant of grace, speaking this promise first in Genesis 3:15. This covenant was made between God and the elect and promised to save them through the Mediator Jesus Christ. Faith is the means by which the elect receive the benefits of the covenant promises (Gal 3:6–29; Heb 11:4–7).

The Covenant with Noah: The increasing depravity following the fall of Adam led to the flood of Noah. After the flood, God established a covenant with Noah (8:20–9:17). This has been called "the covenant of preservation" since it guaranteed the preservation of the human race until the history of redemption is complete.

The Covenant with Abraham: The next significant covenant was made with Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 15; 17:1–21;

22:15–19). This has been called the "covenant of election," since it is really the beginning of God's elect people. Here we have the first time God speaks "the Covenant Formula": "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (cf. Gen 17:7–8). Significantly, the Abrahamic covenant is not superseded by another one (Gal 3:17–18).

The Covenant with Moses/Israel: About four hundred years after Abraham, God makes the covenant with Moses/Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19–24). While it endures until the new covenant is made, it does not replace the covenants with Noah or Abraham. Thus, faith (Gen 15:6) and circumcision remain vital to Israel's right response to God even during the Mosaic economy.

The Covenant with David: The Davidic covenant impacts how God's people live as a society. They are to be a kingdom led by a king and not simply a theocracy governed by priests and judges. The Davidic covenant creates the expectation that the promised Messianic "offspring" to come (Gen 3:15; 22:18) will be a king and not simply a great man.

The Covenant with Christ/New Covenant: The last covenant in our Bible is the new covenant inaugurated by the cross and resurrection of Christ. It creates the people who are defined by the transformation described in Jeremiah 31:31–34. Christ is the mediator of this covenant. It will be the ruling covenant throughout the church age and even into the new age.

Benefits of Covenant Theology

We end this lengthy discussion by noting six benefits of having a working theology of the covenants.

First, covenant theology reminds us that our God is a *personal* God. Covenants are only possible when there are *persons* and not things involved. Covenants involve commitments of the mind and heart that are carried out by deliberate actions of the covenant parties. A loving and personal God is behind these profound biblical covenants.

Second, covenant theology provides a solid way to see our Bible as a single work by a single Author with a single purpose. The covenant of grace acts as a distinct thread woven throughout every era and section from the Garden of Eden to the new creation. The covenants help us to see that all of God's people are sons of Adam by creation, children-heirs of Abraham by conversion, royal saints in the kingdom of David's Greater Son, and joyfully fulfilled as new covenant believers who embrace God as their God and who are embraced by this God as his people.

Third, covenant theology helps us to interpret our Bibles. It is critically important when you are handling a passage to grasp where in the flow of the covenants the passage falls. A passage before the covenant at Mt. Sinai needs to be handled very differently than a passage after the covenant with David. A passage after the new covenant needs to be handled differently from a passage from the era of the old covenant.

Fourth, covenant theology helps us to see the shape of salvation history from creation to new creation, from "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4) to untold ages in the future. History does not happen in a seamless, never-changing manner. There are important milestones along the way that radically alter how God's people relate to him. The covenants help us map out this history.

Fifth, covenant theology helps us understand what it means to be the people of God at various points along the way of salvation history. What faith and repentance look like develops over time as the covenants unfold. To glorify the God of the covenants, we need to know what he requires of us today versus during prior covenant ages. Sometimes what is required is unchanging (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37), but sometimes what God requires changes significantly (Deut 14:18; Mark 7:19).

Sixth, covenant theology helps us to understand better the person and work of Christ. Each covenant reveals something about Christ and his work. The covenant with Adam shows us what it means for Christ to be our representative and substitute (Rom 5:12–

21). The covenant of grace as revealed in Genesis 3:15 shows us what the result of Christ's work as the promised "offspring" will be. The covenant with Noah models for us what deliverance through the righteousness of a single person looks like. The covenant with Abraham reveals the shape of the spiritual promises Christ will eventually fulfill. Further, the promised "offspring" is now revealed to be the "offspring" *of Abraham* (Matt 1:1). The covenant with Moses shows us what it means for Christ's shed blood to cleanse us of our sins, what his priesthood is like, and defines his perfect obedience under the law. The covenant with David reveals that our Christ is also the King of kings. The new covenant reveals the profound result of Christ's redemptive work (Heb 8:1–10:18).

With all this said, may we never weary of celebrating the Lord's Supper by reciting the profound words of our Savior, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).