

**An Exegetical and Theological Defense**  
**for a “Covenant of Grace” Beginning with Genesis 3:15**

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## **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Over the last decade or so there has been an impressive amount of scholarship dedicated to the covenants of the Bible. By no means do these scholars come from the same theological perspective. Some of them reject a “covenant theology” but still see the covenants as a vital part of the Bible’s revelation and God’s unfolding storyline.<sup>2</sup> Other writers adopt a “covenant

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<sup>1</sup> My sincere thanks goes to Drs. Ken Casillas and Brian Collins of BJU, who offered excellent feedback on an earlier draft of this article. For Brian Collins’ own perspective on a covenant of grace see his Brian C Collins, “The Covenant of Grace: A Critique of the Concept in Stephen Myers’s God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture,” *JBTW* 3.2 (2023): 35–52.

<sup>2</sup> Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007); Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016); Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021).

theology” that is either paedobaptist<sup>3</sup> or baptist.<sup>4</sup> Those who reject a “covenant theology” often do so because they feel there is insufficient evidence for what has been called a “covenant of grace.” Undoing this plank of covenant theology is really to undo the whole theological framework. This paper is an attempt to provide that evidence, to argue that there is indeed a covenant of grace in our Bible and the first expression of it is in Genesis 3:15, the *protoevangelium*.

Those who affirm a “covenant of grace” tend to align with either the 1647 *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) or the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). In WCF 7.3, we read this description of the covenant of grace:

Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe” (WCF 7.3).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020). Paedobaptist covenant theologians fall in the tradition of the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith, a tradition with roots back to Calvin and Bullinger in the 1530s. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (1960; repr., Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2006), II.10; Heinrich Bullinger, “A Brief Exposition of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God,” in *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition*, trans. Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 99–138.

<sup>4</sup> Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God’s Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2014); Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2018); Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant, and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2020); Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, trans. Mac & Elizabeth Wigfield (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013); Phillip D. R. Griffiths, *Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2022). By and large, baptist covenant theologians fall in the tradition of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith.

<sup>5</sup> The 1689 7.2 repeats this paragraph almost verbatim but does add a few word changes.

This “covenant of grace” is then described as being “one and the same, under various administrations” (WCF 7.6). The 1689 adds this statement to its 7.3: “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 7.3). Some Baptists understand this to mean that the new covenant *is* the covenant of grace and is thus not inaugurated until Christ.<sup>6</sup> Other Baptists subscribe to the 1689 but also adopt a perspective like the adherents to the *WCF*, which is that there are essentially two covenants made with humanity, one a covenant of works and the second a covenant of grace, and that this covenant of grace has one substance “under various administrations” in redemption history after the fall.<sup>7</sup> That is my view. The usefulness of incorporating the 1689 in this discussion is the explicit mention of Genesis 3:15 in 7.3, “the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman.” The argument of this paper is that Genesis 3:15 is, in fact, the inauguration of the covenant of grace. There is a “full discovery” of this covenant in the new covenant, but it is nonetheless inaugurated at Genesis 3:15. This paper will first look at Genesis 3:15 in its context, then address the issue of whether something covenantal began there, and then finally consider how Genesis 3:15 functions as the “essence” of a covenant that remains constant amidst the major Postdiluvian Divine Covenants (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, new covenant).

## **2. Genesis 3:15 in Its Context**

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<sup>6</sup> Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant, and His Kingdom*; Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*.

<sup>7</sup> Nichols, *Covenant Theology*; Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 2016); Earl M. Blackburn, *It Pleaseth the Lord to Make A Covenant of Grace: A Critique of 1689 Federalism* (Elkin, NC: Veritas Heritage Press, 2023).

Genesis 3:15 falls within the words of punishment spoken after the fall by Yahweh to the serpent (3:14–15), the woman (3:16), and then to the man (3:17–19). The harmony and blessing and life of Genesis 1–2 has been devastated by the couple’s decision to eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (3:1–7). It is an important element that the reason the woman ate was because she listened to the word of the serpent, especially the interpretation of God’s word that the serpent gives. Of the man there is only a culpable passivity described: “She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (3:6). It is an unholy alliance between serpent and humanity that leads to the fall. Then follows God’s appearance in 3:8 as an immediate indicator that all is not right after their sin. This verse is commonly read to speak of a hint of pastoral quietude between Creator and creatures, but Jeffrey Niehaus makes a good case that a better translation is a more threatening one: “Then the man and his wife heard the thunder of Yahweh God as he was going back and forth in the garden in the wind of the storm, and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.”<sup>8</sup> Others have affirmed this reading.<sup>9</sup> This ominous entrance is confirmed as Yahweh begins his interrogation. He had threatened death with the eating in 2:17 (“you shall surely die”), and now we will see what this death is to look like. By the end of the chapter, the man and woman are punished in respective ways according to their vocations: the woman’s pain in childbirth is “multiplied” and her role as helper is now marked by rivalry (3:16), the man’s working and keeping of the land is now marked by sweat and opposition and the ground is said to be “cursed” (3:17–19). They are also cast “east of Eden” and barred from returning to the Garden by sword-carrying cherubim (3:23–24). Yet, amidst these

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Niehaus, “In the Wind of the Storm: Another Look at Genesis III 8,” *VT* 44.2 (1994): 265.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, “‘The Cool of the Day’ (Gen 3:8) and ‘the Way He Should Go’ (Prov 22:6),” *BSac* 171.683 (2014): 259–73; John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 87–88.

sobering punishments there is grace. One profound grace is that the death promised in Genesis 2:17 does not come instantly. This should strike us as unexpected and undeserved. Then is the grace of being forbidden to eat from “the tree of life” (3:22)—an action that would be worse than death, since it would mean unending life in a fallen state. But the focus of this paper is on the grace evident in Genesis 3:15, often called the *protoevangelium* since it is “the first good news” in the Bible.

God’s first delivery of punishment is for the “serpent.” He is “cursed” in verse 14 (אָרְרָה) for his actions first in his creaturely form. Whatever form he had originally, now the serpent will do what all vanquished and humiliated foes do in the Bible, get on their bellies and eat dust (see Micah 7:17). Satan is behind the serpent and connected to the serpent to such an extent that Revelation 12:9 refers to Satan as “that ancient serpent,” “serpent” in the Greek (ὄφις) being the same word as used in the LXX in Genesis 3 (vv. 1–2, 4, 13–14).

It was what God says to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 that is especially my focus. I start with a fairly literal translation to capture some of the emphasis and phraseology of the Hebrew: “An enmity I will put between you and between the woman and between your offspring/seed and between her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.” “Enmity” (אִיְבֹרָה) is used only five times in the BHS (the related “enemy,” אֹיֵב, is used 282 times). But in Numbers 35:21–22 “enmity” is used of malicious intent between one person and another, a concept that resonates with Genesis 3:15. In the syntax of the verse, the noun is placed first in the sentence, something that elevates its significance.<sup>10</sup> Vos sees in the syntax “the divine initiative in the work

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<sup>10</sup> John D. Currid, “Adam and the Beginning of the Covenant of Grace,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 104.

of deliverance,” for “the emphasis rests on the pronoun: God says ‘I will put enmity.’ Here is not primarily an appeal to man but a divine promise. Nor does God merely instigate or promote enmity; He sovereignly *puts* it.”<sup>11</sup> A divinely established “enmity” defines the *protoevangelium*.

### 2.1. Three “Enmities” in Genesis 3:15

The “enmity” in Genesis 3:15 is drawn along three lines. Each of these has far-reaching consequences that extend to the last pages of our Bible, but this *sensus plenior* is hardly developed in the Old Testament. Thus, I will refer to relevant passages of the NT to bring out the layered meanings. The three enmities are between (1) the woman and the serpent, between (2) the serpent and a particular offspring of the woman, and between (3) two peoples (the collective offspring of the woman and the collective offspring of the serpent).

First is the “enmity...between you and between the woman.” This is personal grace for Eve. God is saying here that the unholy alliance that resulted in the fall is broken as of this point, and Eve will once again be the “ally of God.”<sup>12</sup> To be Satan’s enemy is to be God’s friend. The story of redemption has thus begun. There is a reprisal of this animosity when Christ the greater Adam is born. His mother is presented as “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev 12:1) who is confronted by “a great red dragon” (12:3), “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (12:9). Revelation 12 will recur in our exegesis of Genesis 3:15.

Second, the “enmity” is between a singular “offspring” of Eve and the serpent: “he [offspring of the woman] shall bruise your head [serpent], and you shall bruise his heel.”

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<sup>11</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1948), 42.

<sup>12</sup> Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 42.

“Offspring” or “seed” is from עֲרֵךְ in Hebrew (σπέρμα in the LXX), and both the Hebrew and the Greek terms are able to be used as singular or collective nouns. This singular/collective duality has gotten much attention in the last thirty years of OT scholarship.<sup>13</sup> Though some argue for it being an individual only<sup>14</sup> and some that it means a people,<sup>15</sup> the best understanding is that עֲרֵךְ refers to *both* a person (Messiah) and a people.<sup>16</sup> I will start with the singular perspective, which is especially in view in the final clause of the verse: “he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The pronouns in these phrases are singular: “he” (הוא) a third masculine singular, “your”/“you” being second masculine singular, the suffix added to “heel” is also third masculine singular (“his”). Between the two individuals is a mutual “bruising,” a rare word not altogether clear in its meaning (הָשַׁח, used here and Ps 139:11; Job 9:17). Early English translations used “tread on” (Tyndale) and “bruise” (KJV) and “breake thine head” (Geneva), and modern ones typically use “bruise” and “strike.” The difference between “head” and “heel” is clear, however, and this seems to imply Eve’s עֲרֵךְ will get the upper hand: “The blow to the serpent is to the head—a mortal, deadly wound. The other combatant’s wound is merely to the heel, one that is certainly not fatal.”<sup>17</sup> Though some see here a description of the basic hostility

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan M. Cheek, “Recent Developments in the Interpretation of the Seed of the Woman in Genesis 3:15,” *JETS* 64.2 (2021): 215–36.

<sup>14</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* 48.2 (1997): 363–67; C. John Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?,” *TynBul* 48.1 (1997): 139–48.

<sup>15</sup> John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 230–35.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> John D. Currid, *Genesis Volume 1 (Gen 1:1–25:18)*, EP Study Commentary (Leyland, England: Evangelical Press, 2015), 130–31.

between humans and snakes,<sup>18</sup> the actual promise is of a Messianic “snake crusher,”<sup>19</sup> a Redeemer. As the OT unfolds, the promised זָרַע appears in two significant places. The first is in connection with Abraham where his זָרַע will bless all the nations (Gen 22:18; Gal 3:16). And the second occurrence is in the Davidic covenant where Yahweh promises a זָרַע who will “come from your body” whose “kingdom” will last “forever” (7:13). This, too, is an explicit reference to the Lord Jesus Christ and why he is introduced in the first verse of the NT as “Son of David, Son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1; cf. Acts 13:23; 2 Tim 2:8). Christ as Serpent-crusher is also revealed in the NT, for “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8), and “through death” he destroyed “the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). It will be Christ and the devil locked in a cosmic battle (Rev 12:1–5) that ends with the devil in a lake of fire forever (Rev 20:10). *In other words, the promise of a Redeemer Serpent-crusher holds within it the entirety of God’s plan of redemption.* Hoekema notes as well that this gives this an “eschatological” element to the entire Old Testament: “From this point on, all of Old Testament revelation looks forward, points forward, and eagerly awaits the promised redeemer.”<sup>20</sup>

The third line of “enmity” in Genesis 3:15 is drawn between two *peoples*.<sup>21</sup> This idea connects to the collective idea of זָרַע, evident in Abraham’s זָרַע, who are promised to be “as the

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<sup>18</sup> Contra Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1961), 90.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew David Naselli, *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer*, SSBT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 40. See also *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 3:15, where the author translates this as referring to a future day of “King Messiah” when God’s people experience the “healing” of restoration to Yahweh but the serpent does not.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Cheek, “The Individual and Collective Offspring of the Woman”; Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15.”



dust of the earth” (Gen 13:16) and as numerous as “the stars” (Gen 15:5). Further, given the nature of the Abrahamic covenant, it is clear that this promised people is an elect people and does not include “every living creature” as the Noahic does (Gen 9:15). Once again the New Testament adds more. Jesus says to the Jews rejecting him, “You are of (ἐκ) your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (John 8:44). And in his first letter John teaches that “whoever makes a practice of sinning” is “of (ἐκ) the devil” (1 John 3:8), and Cain, too, was “of (ἐκ) the devil” (1 John 3:12). These passages tell us that the *people* of/out of the serpent are people who are enemies of God and not simply spiritual beings like demons. As Cheek notes, this is confirmed in the “cosmic drama” of Revelation 12 where “the dragon” identified as “that ancient serpent” (Rev 12:9) makes “war” on the woman’s σπέρμα (12:17), clearly implying a people, since the “male child” born to her has already gone into heaven (12:5).<sup>22</sup> The ὄφις/σπέρμα of the serpent and the woman, then, are not merely biological offspring; they are also spiritually determined.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the *protoevangelium* is God’s promise of a redeemed people who are his and is not simply promising the *Redeemer* himself. Seen in this light, Genesis bears witness to the two peoples. The godly line of Eve can be seen in Abel, who offered worship “regarded” by Yahweh when Cain’s was not (Gen 4:4). Seth and his son Enosh are associated with the godly line since with them, “people began to call on the name of the LORD” (4:26). Even more explicitly, Enoch is said to have “walked with God” (Gen 5:22, 24); and “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (Gen 6:9). Then there are those who are “of the devil” (1 John

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<sup>22</sup> Cheek, “The Individual and Collective Offspring of the Woman,” 43–44.

<sup>23</sup> On these two seeds read this way see Currid, *Genesis Vol 1*, 145; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 96; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 94.

3:12). John has already mentioned Cain the murderer (4:17–24). Ham the shameless son of Noah is also of this line (10:6–20). Abram (Abraham) will fittingly come from the blessed line of Noah’s son Shem (11:10–26). The way Genesis 3:15 frames the history within Genesis is a critical observation, for it shows that *Genesis 3:15 is not just a far-reaching promise awaiting millennia to be fulfilled; it is also God graciously setting apart a people to be his beginning from this moment*. It is this dimension of Genesis 3:15 more than any other that elevates the verse to the place of being the inauguration of something as significant as a covenant of grace.

With God’s gracious setting apart of a people, his redemption of Eve, and his promise of the greater “seed” of Eve coming with a great redemption, we are tapping into the “grace” of the covenant of *grace*. But what about the “covenant” aspect of the *covenant* of grace? Is it right to speak of this framework as a “covenant”? That is the next topic to unpack.

### **3. Is Genesis 3:15 a “Covenant”?**

The question, *is Genesis 3:15 a “covenant”?*, requires some thought, since it hinges on what is meant by “covenant.” Here I will use the Bible’s own usage to guide us in defining a covenant, and then consider whether Genesis 3:15 as I have understood it can be considered such a covenant.

“Covenant” is a pervasive word and concept in the Bible, the Hebrew (*berit*, בְּרִית) and Greek (*diathēkē*, διαθήκη) found hundreds of times in the OT (287 times in the BHS, 345 times in the LXX) and dozens of times in the NT (33 times in NA28). “Covenants” are made between men and men (Gen 21:27) and by men toward God (Ezra 10:3). Covenants are sometimes referred to by the use of “swear” (שָׁבַע), as in Exodus 33:1 where Canaan is called “the land of

which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Gen 50:24; Exod 6:8; Num 32:11; cf. Luke 1:73). The Decalogue is actually given in the *form* of an ancient covenant and is seen as representative of the covenant with Moses (Deut 4:13).<sup>24</sup> This connects with the “ark” in the tabernacle, which is often referred to as “the ark of the covenant” (Deut 31:9, 25–26; Josh 3:3–17; 1 Sam 4:3–5; 1 Chr 15:26–29), because it contains the Decalogue, which is called “the words of the covenant, the Ten Words” (Exod 34:28), “the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant” (Deut 9:11; see 9:15); and “the covenant of the LORD” (1 Kgs 8:21). The Decalogue is thus seen as a summary of the Mosaic covenant. The whole book of Deuteronomy is even cast in the form of an ancient suzerain-vassal covenant, containing as it does a Preamble (1:1–5), Historical Prologue (1:6–4:49), Stipulations (5–26), Curses and Blessings (27–28), the Covenant Ratification (29–30), Final Arrangements for Succession and Covenant Continuity (31–34).<sup>25</sup>

Important concentrations of “covenant” underscore where God initiates a covenant at key moments of salvation history. We see this with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:9–17); Abraham (Gen 15:18; 17:2–21; Exod 2:24; 6:4–5; Deut 4:31; 2 Kgs 13:23; Neh 9:8; 1 Chr 16:15–18); Moses (Exod 19:5; 23:32; 24:7–8; 34:27–28; Lev 26:9, 15, 25, 42–45; Deut 4:13, 23; 5:2–3; 1 Kgs 19:14; 2 Kgs 17:15; 18:12; Isa 56:4, 6; 59:21; 61:8; Jer 11:1–10; 34:13, 18; Ezek 16:8, 59; Hos 8:1; Mal 2:10; Ps 44:17; 78:10; its renewal in Deut 29:1, 9, 12, 14, 21, 25); David (Ps 89:3, 28, 34, 39); and Christ/new covenant (Jer 31:31–34; 32:40; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:23–26; Heb 8; see also Isa 54:10; 55:3; Ezek 16:60, 62; 34:25; 37:26). These five covenants—Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Christ/new covenant—I will refer to as the Postdiluvian Divine Covenants.

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<sup>24</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Two Tables of the Covenant,” *WTJ* 22.2 (1960): 133–46.

<sup>25</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Dynastic Covenant,” *WTJ* 23.1 (1960): 1–15.

Looking at בְּרִית/διαθήκη throughout the Bible, Paul Williamson and Thomas Schreiner each define what a covenant is in their works. To some extent their definitions cause them to reject a covenant of grace for failing to meet their criterion. Williamson feels that “a commitment solemnly sealed with an oath” or at least the use of the terms בְּרִית/διαθήκη are essential aspects of the biblical covenants, and the covenant of grace lacks such elements.<sup>26</sup> Despite this emphasis on what is explicit, he is honest that the Davidic covenant *lacks both of these elements*.<sup>27</sup> Schreiner defines a covenant as “a chosen relationship in which two parties make binding promises to each other,” but such an egalitarian understanding does not really do justice to the unilateral divine covenants in the Bible and the very ones he discusses (creation, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, new covenant).<sup>28</sup> *In other words, their own definitions actually fail to include the significant divine covenants their works are built upon.* It would seem we need a different approach.

A better approach is to take the five Postdiluvian Divine Covenants above and ask what they have in common.

### **3.1. The Five Postdiluvian Covenants Examined**

To articulate the common elements of the Postdiluvian Covenants I will first identify the primary elements of each covenant.

#### 3.1.1. Noah (Gen 6:18; 8:22–9:17)

- God Initiates/God Speaks his Commitment: “I will establish my covenant with you” (Gen 6:18)

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<sup>26</sup> Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 120–21.

<sup>28</sup> Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World*, 13.

- God Promises: God promises never again to wipe out living creatures in the way that he did with the flood (Gen 8:21–22; 9:10–11).
- God Requires: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (9:1, 7); you shall not eat flesh with its blood or murder (9:4–6)
- God Signifies: The sovereign and gracious nature of the Noahic covenant is underscored by the unique sign of the covenant, which is “the bow in the clouds” (9:12–17).
- God Inaugurates a New Epoch of Salvation History: 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.

### 3.1.2. Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 15; 17:1–21; 22:15–18)

- God Initiates: “And Yahweh had said<sup>29</sup> to Abram, ‘Go from your land and from your kindred and from the house of your father to the land which I will show you’ (Gen 12:1, author’s).
- God Promises: the land of Canaan (Gen 12:1, 7); a nation (12:2) as numerous as “the dust of the earth” (13:16; 22:17) and as stars in the sky (15:5; 22:17); and a blessing on Abraham (12:3) and through him to “all the families of the earth” (12:3; 22:18). A profound promise is given in what is often called “the Covenant Formula”<sup>30</sup>: “And 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. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, 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).<sup>31</sup>
- God Speaks his Commitment: In Gen 15:18 God formally “cut” (fr. כָּרַת) the covenant and made a “self-maledictory oath”<sup>32</sup> whereby he took on himself all the punishments if the covenant was to be broken (15:17–18). On the meaning of the oath, see Jer 34:18–19.
- God Requires: “Walk before me and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). Circumcision is another requirement but is also the sign of the covenant.
- God Signifies: The sign of the covenant is circumcision (Gen 17:9–14)

<sup>29</sup> On the translation “had said” pointing to Abram being called while in Ur, see Acts 7:2–4 and Waltke, *Genesis*, 201.

<sup>30</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 307–308, 552–53.

<sup>31</sup> Found in various echoes in a great number of passages: Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12, 45; 25:38; Deut 26:18–19; 29:13; 2 Sam 7:24; 1 Chr 17:22; Ps 50:7; Isa 40:1; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 13:11; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; 34:30–31; Zech 8:8; 13:9; Hos 1:9–10; Rom 9:25–26; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10; Rev 21:3, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888), 2:14; Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 295–97; Nichols, *Covenant Theology*, 167.

- God Inaugurates a New Epoch of Salvation History: the promises of a land, a people, and a blessing define the OT's history but also define typologically the new covenant people of God, who are sons of Abraham by faith (Gal 3:9, 29), like Abraham "seeking a homeland" (Heb 11:14), and are recipients of the promised blessing through Christ (Gal 3:8, 16). The whole redemptive work of Christ is presented in the NT as God being merciful to us because he "remembered his holy covenant" and "the oath he swore to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:72–73).

### 3.1.3. Moses (Exod 19–24 et al)

- God Remembers: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exod 2:24). Israel the nation fulfills the promise of an Abrahamic nation (Gen 12:2; 15:13–14; Exod 12:37; 32:13); Canaan 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.
- God Initiates: "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)
- God Promises: "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);
- God Speaks his Commitment: Exod 19–24. In 19:5 Yahweh refers to "my covenant," and this is the Mosaic and not the Abrahamic. Moses offers "the blood of the covenant" to inaugurate the covenant (24:8), and there is a covenant meal between Yahweh and Moses, Joshua, and 70 elders to consummate the covenant (24:9–11). 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. בְּרִית) a covenant with us in Horeb" (Deut 5:2).
- God Requires: Yahweh's basic stipulation is to "obey my voice and keep my covenant" (Exod 19:5). This gets further developed in the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–17), laws to govern civil dealings among the Israelites (Exod 21:1–23:13), and the priesthood and sacrificial system (Exod 23:14–19). Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy add additional stipulations. Though all these laws have a place in the Mosaic covenant, it is also true that the Decalogue has a unique representational role such that it can be equated with the entire covenant: "And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone" (Deut 4:13).
- God Signifies: While circumcision is still to be practiced, the Sabbath is the sign distinct to the Mosaic covenant (Exod 31:13–17)

- God Inaugurates a New Epoch of Salvation History: The covenant inaugurated at Mt. Sinai endures for 1,500 years until Christ inaugurates the new covenant and makes the first one “obsolete” (Heb 8:13). What aspects of the Mosaic covenant are made “obsolete” requires some reflection. As a covenant and formal definition of Israel’s relationship to Yahweh, it is made “obsolete” in its entirety with the death and shed blood of Christ (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:11–28). And yet, passages like Matthew 9:13; 12:7; 22:37–40; 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 reveal that the moral laws of the Mosaic covenant remain binding on Christians. Further, the language of God’s people being “a kingdom, priests to our God” (Rev 1:6) or “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) remind us that the definitions of God’s people introduced with the Mosaic covenant (Exod 19:5–6) extend to the new covenant.

#### 3.1.4. Davidic (2 Sam 7:8–16; 1 Chr 17:7–14; Pss 89:1–4, 19–37; 132:11–12)

- God Initiates: “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD’” (2 Sam 7:4)
- God Promises: “I will make for you a great name” (2 Sam 7:9); “I will appoint a place for my people” (7:10); “I will give you rest from all your enemies” (7:11); “Your offspring after you...I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (7:13); “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (7:14); “my steadfast love will not depart from him” (7:15); “Your throne shall be established forever” (7:16).
- God Requires: “When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men” (7:14). The obedience expected in the Davidic covenant is that defined by the Abrahamic (“walk before me, and be blameless,” Gen 17:1) and Mosaic covenants.
- God Speaks his Commitment: “I have made (fr. בְּרִית) a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant” (Ps 89:3)
- God Inaugurates a New Epoch of Salvation History: Davidic kings reign for hundreds of years from David until the Babylonian captivity, and thus his “house” is indeed established. And yet, the *eternal* kingdom is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is presented to us in the first verse of the New Testament as the “Son of David” (Matt 1:1). He is the “offspring of David” (1 Tim 2:8) who will reign forever as “King of kings” (Rev 19:16).

#### 3.1.5. New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34)

- God Initiates: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant” (Jer 31:31)
- God Speaks his Commitment: “I will make (fr. בְּרִית) a new covenant” (Jer 31:31)

- God Promises: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (31:33); Covenant Formula: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (31:33); “They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (31:34); “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (31:34)
- God Signifies: The signs of the new covenant are not revealed until the NT. Baptism: “Be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38); The Lord’s Supper: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25)
- God Inaugurates the Covenant: Christ’s shed blood and sacrificial death inaugurate the new covenant like Moses’s sprinkled blood inaugurated the old covenant and a death makes a will effectual (Heb 9:11–28).
- God Inaugurates a New Epoch of Salvation History: Throughout the church age, those who are in Christ experience the blessings connected with regeneration that are defined in the new covenant. And further, in the new heaven and new earth, the promise is consummated that, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3).

### **3.2. The Discontinuous (Not Common) and Continuous (Common) Elements in the Five Postdiluvian Divine Covenants**

#### **3.2.1. The Discontinuous (Not Common) Elements**

Three elements are found in four of the above covenants but not all five. These include,

- Stipulations (“God Requires”): These are given in four of the above, with the new covenant being an interesting exception. The new covenant promises *imply* a life of obedience being displayed, but these are actually presented as promises and not stipulations. The Davidic does not present specific stipulations but it, too, requires a life of obedience by the respective king to walk in God’s blessings. When 2 Sam 7:14 mentions “iniquity,” it is the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants that define what “iniquity” is, so this, too is a covenant built on previous covenants.
- Covenant Signs: These are given in all except the Davidic. The new covenant signs are not given until the covenant is actually inaugurated and thus in the NT.
- Explicit Covenantal Language: This is found in four of the covenants, but in the Davidic it is only *after the fact* that some of the expected covenant terminology is found (2 Chr 7:18; 21:7; Ps 89:3). Of course, the covenant moment has enough of God solemnly committing himself that the reader is fully aware of the covenant being made. But it is nonetheless important that



words like “covenant” and “cut” are absent in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17.

### 3.2.2. The Continuous (Common) Elements

Four elements are found in all five Postdiluvian Divine Covenants. Therefore, these could be said to define what a divine covenant is. That is, if these four elements are present, there is good reason to think in terms of a divine covenant. These include the following:

- **God Initiates:** All five Postdiluvian Divine Covenants are made as unilateral and gracious acts of God. They are not the result of the initiative of man but are entirely God’s own doing.
- **God Speaks his Commitment:** Even if all five do not contain explicit covenant terminology, they do contain a clear moment of God speaking his commitment to a specific person or people. The Davidic covenant is a useful analog to Genesis 3:15, since both contain a combination of God speaking somewhat indirectly (God to Nathan to David in the Davidic; God to the serpent in the hearing of the couple in Gen 3:15) and yet with solemn consequential words.
- **God Promises:** All five of the covenants contain promises. There is significant overlap in what is promised. As an example, the Noahic covenant is foundational to all the subsequent covenants, promising that human history will continue and that no cataclysm like the flood will jeopardize the fulfillment of any of the promises given in the other covenants. The Abrahamic promises the land of Canaan and Abraham’s line becoming a nation, and the Mosaic is defined by these same promises. The Davidic promise of a king means first being a king over the very people promised to Abraham.
- **God Inaugurates a New Epoch of Salvation History:** Another element in all five Postdiluvian Divine Covenants is that each of them begins an *era* or epoch defined by the covenant itself. The covenant establishes a way of relating to God (or God relating to us) that is true not just for the individual but for generations who follow.

### 3.3. Genesis 3:15 and the Four Continuous Elements

The promisory aspect of the covenants is well represented by Genesis 3:15 in its promises of a Redeemer and his redemption, the redemption of Eve, and God’s setting apart of a new people. The other three continuous elements—God initiates, God speaks his commitment, God inaugurates a new epoch—require more discussion.

### **3.4. God Initiates and God Speaks His Commitment in Genesis 3:15**

Two of these, God's initiative and his speaking his commitment, I will look at together. Contained in Genesis 1–3, God's initiative is everywhere on display. It is God's spoken word that creates and then fills that creation. It is God who "formed" the man (Gen 2:7), "made" him a "helper" (2:18), and then spoke to that man and woman their global commission (1:28). God's initiative is on display after the fall, too. When the couple eats forbidden fruit, God is not passive but immediately draws near in judgment. Where God could have justifiably come to kill (Gen 2:17), he does not. Death will come—but not immediately. Grace is present in his allowance of the couple to live full lives and have children. But they will not do this in Eden. They are banished from the Garden and must live exiled "east of Eden" (Gen 3:23–24).

Other aspects of their lives are profoundly affected by what God says to the couple in 3:16–19: childbearing, marital harmony, hardships at work, and returning to "dust" are promised by Yahweh. But it is important to see that none of these words impact the couple's relationship to Yahweh himself. These are all horizontal words impacting social relations and our relationship to the creation itself. None of this touches on mankind's relationship to Yahweh. The distinctive contribution is the way it is God speaking his commitment to the couple—even though the word is spoken directly to the serpent. In Genesis 3:1–7 humanity unknowingly and radically changes its relationship to Yahweh. Sin enters into that relationship and also a new allegiance with Satan. Without God's initiative and spoken commitment in Genesis 3:15, this would simply have continued forever until death overtook them. But with the addition of Genesis 3:15 to the sacred words of Genesis 3:16–19, there is a new redemptive element found nowhere else in this setting. God sets apart a people who will be his and not Satan's, and who will share in a future redemption that the greater "Seed" will accomplish. Above the "enmities" within Genesis 3:15

were examined. Here we simply add that these constitute God’s spoken commitment to the couple.

This spoken commitment, like the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7, is not cast in the technical covenant terminology of later covenants, but there are several aspects of the passage that should be noted. First is what Gordon Wenham calls “elevated prose”<sup>33</sup> and John Collins “heightened speech”<sup>34</sup> in the words of Yahweh throughout Genesis 1–3 and here in Genesis 3:15. This does not mean that every word spoken in Genesis 1–3 is a covenant, but it does infuse God’s word with a sacredness and unique importance. Every word he says and every action he takes will reverberate through the rest of salvation history with great importance.

Second is the emphatic language in Genesis 3:15–16 in the way the first person verbs are spoken: “Enmity I will place/appoint,” “Surely I will multiply.” The “I will surely multiply” phrase in 3:16 will find an exact duplicate in Genesis 16:10 and 22:17, “I will surely multiply your offspring.” The use of the infinitive+imperfect verbal construct is used in such passages to communicate emphatic speech.

Third is the language used later in Genesis with the covenants of Noah and Abraham and the verbs “establish/confirm” (Heb קום) versus “cut” (Heb כָּרַת). The Noahic is “established/confirmed” in Genesis 9:9, 11, but not “cut.” But with the Abrahamic in Genesis 15:18, the LORD first “cut (Heb כָּרַת) a covenant with Abram.” Then in chapter 17 as the Abrahamic covenant is expanded,<sup>35</sup> different verbs are used: “I may make (Heb גַּתַּן) my

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<sup>33</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 10.

<sup>34</sup> C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 45–46.

<sup>35</sup> There has been much discussion on whether Genesis 15 and 17 are the same covenant or reflect two distinct Abrahamic covenants. Given that all the Abrahamic covenantal moments in Gen 12:1–3; 15; 17:1–21; 22:16–18

covenant” (17:2); “I will establish (Heb קוּם) my covenant” (17:7); “I will establish (Heb קוּם) my covenant (17:19); “I will establish (Heb קוּם) my covenant with Isaac” (17:21). These verbs demonstrate a pattern others have noted: “establish” (קוּם) used when the covenant is not new but building on an existing one, and “cut” (כָּרַת) is used when there is a new covenant being inaugurated by the Lord.<sup>36</sup> The verbs point toward Genesis 17 being a “confirmation” of the earlier covenant in Genesis 15 that was “cut.”

This becomes very interesting when we turn to the Noahic covenant, which uses “confirm” (Gen 9:9, 11) but not “cut.” The Noahic seems to be pointing backwards to a pre-existing covenant structure as well. On this Wenham says of Genesis 6:18, “The phrase ‘confirm my covenant’ is often held to be P’s phrase for *initiating* a covenant, language synonymous with כָּרַת ‘to cut a covenant.’ But this is not so. Whereas ‘to cut’ describes the point of entry to a covenant, ‘to confirm’ is used of ratifying pre-existing ‘words (Deut 9:5), ‘promises’ (2 Sam 7:25), ‘threats’ (Jer 30:24) ‘oaths’ (Gen 26:3), ‘vows’ (Num 30:14), as well as ‘covenants.’...The hiphil of קוּם is used to ratify legal agreements already initiated.”<sup>37</sup> The significance of this idea

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concern the same three promises (land, nation, blessing), it seems best to see these passages as presenting the expansion of the same covenant and not multiple covenants. Those who argue for two include T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 70–74; Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development*, JSOTSup 315 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Griffiths, *Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology*, 44–45. Those who see a single covenant include John Scott Redd, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 133–47; Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World*, 49; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 312–16.

<sup>36</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 187–95. For the view that these verbs are used more interchangeably see Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 69–76; Collins, “The Covenant of Grace: A Critique of the Concept in Stephen Myers’s God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture,” 36–38.

<sup>37</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 175, 194. See also the lengthy and detailed discussion in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 187–95.

is that while Genesis 6:18 or 9:9–11 might be the first time “covenant” is used explicitly, it is not the first covenant made. Given that a previous covenant lacks the formal covenant terminology, it must be deduced what the antecedent is.

Wellum/Gentry argue that the antecedent to Genesis 6:18 is what they call “the covenant with creation,” which they will argue is “foundational” to subsequent covenants.<sup>38</sup> This covenant is not a covenant of works or a traditional covenant of grace but something different. It involves Adam as “God’s image-priest-king” who is required to offer “full devotion, obedience, and covenant loyalty to his Creator and Lord.”<sup>39</sup> However, this approach washes together events in Genesis 1–3 that need to be kept separate. With the fall, death and judgment are all that can be expected from Yahweh toward the couple. The guillotine threatened by Genesis 2:17 is erected after the events of Genesis 3:1–7. This creational history reaches a kind of terminus with the fall. What changes with Genesis 3:15 is the entrance of a whole new narrative of redemption. This is absolutely unknown until this moment. It is this redemption storyline that is preserved by the Noahic covenant and referenced in Genesis 6:18.

A fourth point to make about the absence of covenant language is that this is understandable in the history of revelation. Herman Bavinck deals with this and explains rightly that technical covenant language would make little sense to Adam and Eve in the Garden, before any earthly and human covenants had been made and sin had entered the world.<sup>40</sup> But once human history had progressed and earthly examples of covenants had been experienced, God could begin to utilize this framework explicitly with Noah and then Abraham. Walter Roehrs

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<sup>38</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 211–58, 677.

<sup>39</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 676.

<sup>40</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:203.

makes a similar point and says, “The covenant is a concept borrowed from human relationships to describe God’s dealing with His fallen creature. Like all human terms and concepts, it can be applied to God’s action only by way of an imperfect analogy.”<sup>41</sup> To say God “borrowed” a concept is not quite right. It is more appropriate to say that God embedded such a concept into providential history, and then repurposed this idea for his own revelation. The same would be true for a concept like “father.” God did not “borrow” his self-identification as “Father” from earthly fathers. Rather, he created human fathers that he might reveal himself as “Our father in heaven” (Matt 6:9).

God’s initiative and God’s spoken commitment in Genesis 3:15 connect directly to the fourth covenantal element, *an epoch with identifiable characteristics*.

### **3.5. An Epoch with Identifiable Characteristics**

The Postdiluvian Divine Covenants each establish a new epoch with identifiable characteristics. They inaugurate a new way of relating to God, either a new stipulation (like circumcision in Gen 17:9–14 or the Decalogue in Exod 20:1–17) or there is a new definition or permanence in a relationship that already existed (like the Noahic in Gen 9:1–17). Considered diachronically these eras provide a plotline for salvation history and bring out what Geerhardus Vos has named the Bible’s “periodicity”<sup>42</sup> and others its “epochs.”<sup>43</sup> The vital link between these epochs and “successive *Berith*-makings (Covenant-makings)”<sup>44</sup> is an important observation.

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<sup>41</sup> Walter R. Roehrs, “Covenant and Justification in the Old Testament,” *CTM* 35.9 (1964): 586.

<sup>42</sup> Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 116.

<sup>44</sup> Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 16. See also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 122–25.

The argument of this paper is that Genesis 3:15 also begins an epoch in God’s plan of redemption, one analogous those inaugurated with the Postdiluvian Divine Covenants. This has been hinted at already by the references to a new *people* being set apart with Genesis 3:15. When Eve and her (collective) offspring were said to be an enemy of the serpent (Satan), this automatically made them a friend of God. These two sides can brook no neutrality. Yet, more can be said about this new people, especially how it becomes “righteous.” Something radical and massive is introduced with Genesis 3:15 that should not be understated. Adam possessed a kind of “original righteousness” in his sinless state, but continuing in this righteousness required obedience to the explicit command given in Genesis 2:16–17.<sup>45</sup> Because of Adam’s sin and “trespass” (Rom 5:15) of God’s commandment, righteousness was lost and “condemnation” the result (Rom 5:16). When we get to Genesis 15:6 we learn that Abraham’s faith was “counted” as “righteousness.” This is a distinctly different pathway of righteousness from the original one in the Garden. *And yet, this new righteousness does not begin with Abraham—even if he is the first to explicitly be called righteous by faith.* Hebrews 11 begins its hall of fame of faith with *Abel* and not *Abraham*: “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks” (Heb 11:4). His “faith” overflowed into his “more acceptable sacrifice,” and because of this he was “commended as righteous.” Enoch (11:5) is said to have “pleased God” by faith, and “walked with God” because of that faith. S. M. Baugh says that, “the content of Enoch’s faith, of course, was rooted in the germinal promise

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2020), 48.

represented in Gen 3:15.”<sup>46</sup> Even more emphatically Noah (11:7) is said to have become “an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” Baugh points out that while Noah’s obedience did receive reward in his lifetime, the “perfect righteousness” that brought him a kingdom that could not be shaken (Heb 12:28) he received explicitly as a gift as an “heir.”<sup>47</sup> Abraham’s faith might have been more defined and the object of his faith more specific, but justification by faith had existed among God’s people for over 1,500 years before Abraham—not in name but in reality.

With respect to faith it is helpful to note that 3:15 is the first explicit statement where the right and specific response on the part of God’s people is to *believe* something. Earlier divine words like Genesis 1:28 and 2:16–17 are to be believed in a general sense, but the more specific response is to *obey* them. The punishments meted out to the woman and the man will be proven true with or without faith (Gen 3:16–19). But the word to the serpent contains *a promise to be believed*. Justifying faith has a specific object with the speaking of this verse. Along these lines it is interesting to notice the subtle difference between Genesis 4:1 and 4:25: “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD’” (4:1); “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him’” (4:25). In verse 1 Eve speaks of merely receiving “help” from Yahweh with the “man” she bore, but in verse 25 her faith is expressed by saying God has unilaterally “appointed” for her a עֶזְרָא, the same word as spoken in Genesis 3:15.<sup>48</sup> Even Seth’s name, which is related to the Hebrew for

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<sup>46</sup> Steven M. Baugh, “The Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews 11,” *WTJ* 68.1 (2006): 126.

<sup>47</sup> Baugh, “The Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews 11,” 128–29.

<sup>48</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 101; Currid, *Genesis Vol 1*, 158.



“appoint” (תִּשָּׂא), calls attention to the divine promise behind her words. All this is to say there is some evidence even with Genesis 3 itself for the faith that Hebrews highlights.

The new justification begun at Genesis 3:15 is important also for our discussion, because there is a connection between the concepts of justification and covenant, something highlighted by Roehrs.<sup>49</sup> He looks at the covenantal dimension of justification, where after the fall

God came to the rescue of His forlorn creatures. He announced and began to put into effect a plan whereby man might be reunited with Him. It is like a covenant because it demonstrates that a new relationship is established and exists. It is like a covenant also because God binds Himself as in a contract to very definite promises and man agrees to accept these promises on terms as set forth in a covenant.”<sup>50</sup>

This comparison seems right, especially when one considers the very personal and even relational side of justification. Though justification is a forensic concept, it is one that arises out of a Jewish law-court situation where a judge and not a jury is the one to decide the righteousness or unrighteousness of the plaintiff. And in the case of Yahweh judging his people righteous, this carries along with it Yahweh’s own commitment to bless and protect and commune with that righteous person. There is something inherently relational in Yahweh’s justification. It is *more* than relationship, but it is not less.

A final aspect to note with this epoch begun in Genesis 3:15 is that it is never altered or made “obsolete” by a later covenant. The Mosaic covenant is made “obsolete” with the arrival of the new covenant (Heb 8:13), but no such event occurs to discontinue the promise of a Redeemer

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<sup>49</sup> Roehrs, “Covenant and Justification in the Old Testament.”

<sup>50</sup> Roehrs, “Covenant and Justification in the Old Testament,” 588.

or his redemption, and to somehow interrupt the setting apart of the offspring of Eve who are righteous by faith. The Redeemer in Genesis 3:15 is the Bible's only "Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5), and the righteousness established here is the Bible's only available righteousness to fallen humanity. It is the same righteousness as that preached by David (Ps 32:1–2), Jesus (Luke 18:9–14), Paul (Rom 4:1–8; Gal 3:6–29), and the author of Hebrews (Heb 11). It seems clear, then, that Genesis 3:15 begins an identifiable epoch and is far more than a particular word limited to the serpent or the first couple.

### **3.6. A Definition of the Covenant of Grace in Genesis 3:15**

Given that Genesis 3:15 reflects God's initiative, God speaking his sacred commitments and promises, and the inauguration of a new people who relate to God in a new way, it seems reasonable to see in Genesis 3:15 a "covenant of grace." A way to define this "covenant of grace" could be the following: *The covenant of grace revealed in Genesis 3:15 is a covenant God inaugurates to graciously set apart a new people who are righteous by faith and redeemed through the Messianic seed of Eve—who is also the seed of Abraham and seed of David.* This covenant people begins with Adam and Eve and includes all the redeemed for the rest of salvation history. This covenant salvation through the Messianic Redeemer is the only way of salvation for the rest of salvation history. No subsequent covenant renders this covenant "obsolete." But covenantal theology argues for more than simply some kind of "covenant of grace." It also affirms a certain relationship between this covenant and the Postdiluvian Divine Covenants. The relationship of Genesis 3:15 to the Postdiluvian Divine Covenants is where we now turn.

#### 4. The Genesis 3:15 “Essence” and the “Accidents” of the Postdiluvian Divine Covenants

As we turn to the idea of Genesis 3:15 being administered by subsequent covenants, it is helpful to revisit an important concept in covenant theology. Rooted in Calvin’s own thinking on the covenants, the Reformed have spoken of there being one “substance” that remains constant even when they “they differ in the mode of dispensation.”<sup>51</sup> 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).”<sup>52</sup> If I use myself as an analogy, my “substance” (essence) as a man made in the image of God did not change when I got married. I made a new covenant with a new party (Anne) that involved promises and stipulations and so my “accidents” were altered, but my “substance” was unchanged. And when we had our children, still my “substance” was unchanged even though I took on further promises and stipulations as a father and altered again my “accidents.” Something similar is occurring with the covenantal framework inaugurated at Genesis 3:15. There is a “substance” that remains constant throughout the diverse Postdiluvian Divine Covenants. These covenants offer a variety of “accidents,” but for the people of God these do not change the essential relationship that God has with them: *Under each covenant, God graciously sets apart his people to be in a special relationship with him and causes them to share in the redemption that the greater Seed of Eve will accomplish.* I will offer a few comments about each of the Postdiluvian Divine Covenants to show how this is true.

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<sup>51</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.10.2.

<sup>52</sup> Cornelis P. Venema, “The Mosaic Covenant: A ‘Republication’ of the Covenant of Works?,” *MidAmJT* 21 (2010): 40.

#### **4.1. Genesis 3:15 and the Noahic Covenant**

The Noahic covenant is a good example of this substance vs. accidents distinction. It is clear from Hebrews 11 that a righteousness obtained by faith is a constant of the people of God beginning with Abel (and really, Eve—see Gen 4:1 in contrast to 4:25). And yet, with Noah, this righteous people enters into a new covenantal framework where a new commitment of protection is expressed by God and where two prohibitions are given (eating blood, murder). Though the covenant is made with all creatures and so also with the people of God, the essential relationship of God's people to him is unaltered. There is the slight change in the prohibitions and protections begun with Noah, but these do not affect God's relationship to his people. These are "accidents" which are added but which do not change the "essence" of the people of God as a people who relate to God on the basis of faith and imputed righteousness.

#### **4.2. Genesis 3:15 and the Abrahamic Covenant**

With the Abrahamic covenant, the new "accidents" are significant. Now the people of God will be connected to a person (Abraham) in a way not expressed before. Further, we learn that the Serpent-crusher is actually to come from his line (Gen 22:18; Gal 3:8, 16) and from no other. But, God's people still relate to him by faith, as is finally expressed explicitly with Abraham himself: "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). The essence of the people of God is *explicit* here, but it is not changed with this statement. Abel, Enoch, and Noah are righteous in the same way as Abraham. With Abraham we also get the explicit reference to "the Covenant Formula": "I will be your God, and you will be my

people.”<sup>53</sup> This promise is the most consistently repeated element in the various covenants, found in the Abrahamic (Gen 17:7), the Mosaic (Exod 6:7; Lev 22:33; 26:12; Deut 29:10, 12–13; cf. Deut 26:16–19), the Davidic (2 Sam 7:24; 1 Chr 17:22; cf. 1 Sam 12:22), and the new covenant (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10; see also 1 Kgs 6:13; Ps 50:7; 95:7; 100:3; 144:15; Isa 40:1; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 13:11; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; 34:30–31; Zech 8:8; 13:9; Hos 1:9–10; Rom 9:25–26; 2 Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3, 7).<sup>54</sup> The frequency and prominence of the covenant formula is remarkable. The reason to mention the Covenant Formula is to underscore another echo of the idea that the substance of the people of God (“I will be your God, and you will be my people”) is unchanged across the covenantal landscape.

#### **4.3. Genesis 3:15 and the Mosaic Covenant**

With the Mosaic covenant we get the most dramatically new set of “accidents” with the people of God. The tabernacle, priesthood, and civil legislation take “the law” of the pre-Sinai people of God (Gen 9:4–6; 17:1, 9–14; 26:5) and build on it significantly. And yet, it is only when an Israelite possesses the same righteousness as Abraham that he is part of the true people of God (Rom 2:28–29; 9:6; Gal 3:9, 29). As with the new covenant, obedience matters under the old covenant (note Heb 12:3–17 and Pro 3:11–12; 1 Peter 3:8–12 and Ps 34:12–16). And while the Levitical structure of the Mosaic does indeed become “obsolete” (Heb 8:13), the essence of the people of God holds true throughout the Mosaic dispensation.

#### **4.4. Genesis 3:15 and the Davidic Covenant**

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<sup>53</sup> E.g., Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), ix; Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 167; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 307–8.

<sup>54</sup> On the phrase see Ingvar Floysvik, “A Look at the Formula ‘I Will Be Your God, You Will Be My People’ in the Old Testament,” *Taiwan Journal of Theology* 24 (2002): 77–95.

With the Davidic covenant, the connection of the people of God to their Redeemer is clarified. Now it becomes clear that we are not just connected as a people and their God, and not just as a people and their Redeemer, but we are also connected as a King and his subjects. Our Redeemer is a King, even the Davidic “King of kings” (2 Sam 7:12–13; Isa 9:7; Matt 1:1; Rev 5:5; 17:14; 19:16). Our God-Creator-Redeemer is thus revealed as our God-Creator-Redeemer-*King*. Further, God’s people are “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) and “a kingdom, priests to [Christ’s] God and Father” (Rev 1:6). But this is really a change of “accidents” and not of essence. God’s people remain those who are graciously set apart and given God’s own righteousness by faith. David himself will make this clear as he becomes one of the Old Testament’s great prophets and teachers of a righteousness received by faith and not of works (2 Sam 12:13; Ps 25:6–7; 32:1–2; Rom 4:6–8; Ps 40:6–8 and Heb 10:5–7).

#### **4.5. Genesis 3:15 and the New Covenant**

The glory of the new covenant is that shadow becomes fullness and type becomes antetype and the hidden becomes revealed. The Serpent-crusher Messiah is now known by the name, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his work of redemption is unpacked in exquisite detail. But once again, the essence of the people of God is unchanged. As the apostle Paul labors to show, the righteousness that God demands and we need, we receive as a gift in the same way that Abraham did (Rom 4; Gal 3:6–29). Our “accident” has changed in the new covenant with the new experience of the Holy Spirit and a new fullness of life in Christ (Rom 8:9–11, 15; Eph 3:19; 5:18), but our essence as the people of God has not changed. This is why Paul can also speak of Jew and Gentile becoming “one new man in place of the two” (Eph 2:15). This is also why Paul can speak of Christians as entering into the Covenant Formula originally spoken over Abraham and his offspring and the Israelites themselves:

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are (ἐσμεν—even Gentile Corinthians!) the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor 6:16-18, which cites Lev 26:11–12; Isa 52:11; 2 Sam 7:14)

#### **4.6. Genesis 3:15 and the Postdiluvian Divine Covenants**

There is obviously much more that could be said about the changing “accidents” of the Postdiluvian Covenants and the one “essence” or “substance” of the covenant of grace. Yet, the above traces in a simple manner how this can be true. The Postdiluvian Covenants should not be minimized just because they do not alter the substance of how God relates to his people. They each add profound revelation to our understanding of God and his relationship to us and his creation. Yet, amidst this new revelation is an idea that remains constant throughout the history of redemption. This is helpfully described as the covenant of grace.

### **5. Summary**

The argument of this paper is that Genesis 3:15 does indeed inaugurate the covenant of grace, which can be defined as *God graciously setting apart his people to be in a special relationship with him and causing them to share in the redemption that the greater Seed of Eve will accomplish*. To arrive at this position, the first part of the paper looked at Genesis 3:15 itself and examined three “enmities” present there. The first was between the serpent and the woman (thus promising her redemption), the second was between a Messianic “seed” of Eve and the

serpent who would crush the serpent (Christ and the devil), and the third was between Eve's descendents and the serpent's descendents. Christ's work of redemption is thus promised in this verse as well as a godly line of Eve. This is the "grace" promised in the covenant of *grace*.

The second part of the argument was to consider whether Genesis 3:15 is a covenant in the same way that the five Postdiluvian Divine Covenants were (section 3). The method chosen was to see what elements these five covenants had in common and then to examine whether Genesis 3:15 has these same elements (section 3.1–2). The four common elements were God's promises, God's initiative, God speaking his solemn commitments to his people, and God inaugurating a new epoch of the people of God (section 3.3–5). The presence of these elements in Genesis 3:15 points to it being a covenant in the way that 2 Samuel 7 is a covenant, a passage that also lacks explicit covenant language.

The third step in the argument was to show briefly how the "essence" of Genesis 3:15 is maintained throughout the varying "accidents" of the five Postdiluvian Divine Covenants and is administered by these covenants (section 4). The Postdiluvian Divine Covenants have their own distinctives, but it was shown that they do not alter the essence of God's true people as a people graciously set apart and given a righteousness by faith.

If the above are sound, then yes, there is an exegetical and theological basis for a covenant of *grace*.