

Covenant Theology – A Brief Overview

What is Covenant Theology?

- *“The gospel set in the context of God’s eternal plan of communion with his people; and its historical outworking in the covenant of works and grace.”* - Ligon Duncan
- *“The Bible’s own approach in presenting salvation.”* - Richard Phillips
- **Fundamental meaning of “covenant”:** a commitment that secures a relationship that entails obligation
- **Bible-specific meaning:**
 - *“a bond in blood sovereignly administered”* – O. Palmer Robertson
 - *“a bond that establishes stipulations, makes promises, guarantees blessings, and threatens curses.”* – Kevin Deyoung

Distinctives of Covenant Theology

- **Covenant is the overarching theme that spans the entire Bible.**
- **The Immanuel Principle** – The goal of the covenants repeated throughout Scripture is God’s intention to dwell with His people. “I shall be your God, and you shall be my people.”
 - Ultimate fulfillment expressed in Rev 21:3 – *“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.”*
- **Highlights the sovereignty of God to carry this through**
- **Bi-covenantal Nature:** Covenant of Works & Covenant of Grace

By creation God bound himself to man in covenantal relationship. After man’s fall into sin, the God of all creation graciously bound himself to man again by committing himself to redeem a people to himself from lost humanity. From creation to consummation the covenantal bond has determined the relation of God to his people. The extent of the divine covenants reaches from the beginning of the world to the end of the age. – Robertson

Covenant of Works

- **The bond God made with Adam in the Garden, where obedience was required with the reward being eternal life and the penalty of disobedience being death.**
- Essence of Covenant of Works outlined in Genesis 2:16–17
- Adam & Eve kicked out of Garden as covenant breakers, but not before God institutes another covenant.

Covenant of Grace

- *“The bond between God and the elect sinner (with Christ as the Mediator), where God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience.”* (Berkhof)
- *“The Covenant of Grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed”* (WLC 31)
- The Covenant of Grace is the Gospel: believe in Jesus and you will be saved. Christ fulfills Covenant of Works on your behalf, restores relationship with God.
- Scriptures portray an overarching unity to the Covenant of Grace [Adam <---> Christ]
- Yet there is a uniqueness to each era (administrations, dispensations, epochs) in which God unfolds the Covenant of Grace - Scripture sometimes calls these covenants in their own right.

Covenant of Redemption - Psalm 2:7-9, Luke 22:29, John 6:37-40

- *“The eternal agreement between the Father and the Son to save a people chosen in Christ before the ages began”* (Deyoung).

Administrations of the Covenant of Grace

Adamic Covenant (Commencement): Gen 3:15.

- God initiates the Covenant of Grace in the aftermath of Adam's Fall.
- With a promise made of God's assurance, the Savior is foreshadowed ("enmity"), and the enemy's defeat guaranteed.

Gen. 3:15 - *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.*"

Noahic Covenant (Preservation): Gen 6:18; 9:8-17.

- Connection to covenant with Adam: Be fruitful and multiply (Gen 9:1), dominion (Gen 9:2), image of God language.
- Distinctives: Particularity (Gen 6:7-8), familial structure (Gen 6:18), sanctity of human life (Gen 9:5-6), God's preservation (Gen 8:22; 9:11), and universal dimension (Gen 9:12).

Abrahamic Covenant (Promise): Gen 12:1-3.

- God calls Abraham to leave family/country, go to a new land; promises to give him a great name, make him a great nation, and bless the nations through him.
- Distinctives: Ceremony with blood/cutting (Gen 15), justification by faith (Gen 15:6), offspring, land (Gen 17:7), circumcision sign (Gen 17:10-11).

Mosaic Covenant (Law): Ex 19:1-6, 24:3-8.

- Founded upon promises of Abrahamic Covenant. (Ex 2:24; Gal 3:17). The Mosaic covenant serves as an externalized summation of the will of God (Robertson 172).
- Distinctives: 10 Commandments (Ex 20:1-17), mediation (Ex 24:1-2), Mosaic Law forms Israel into a nation.

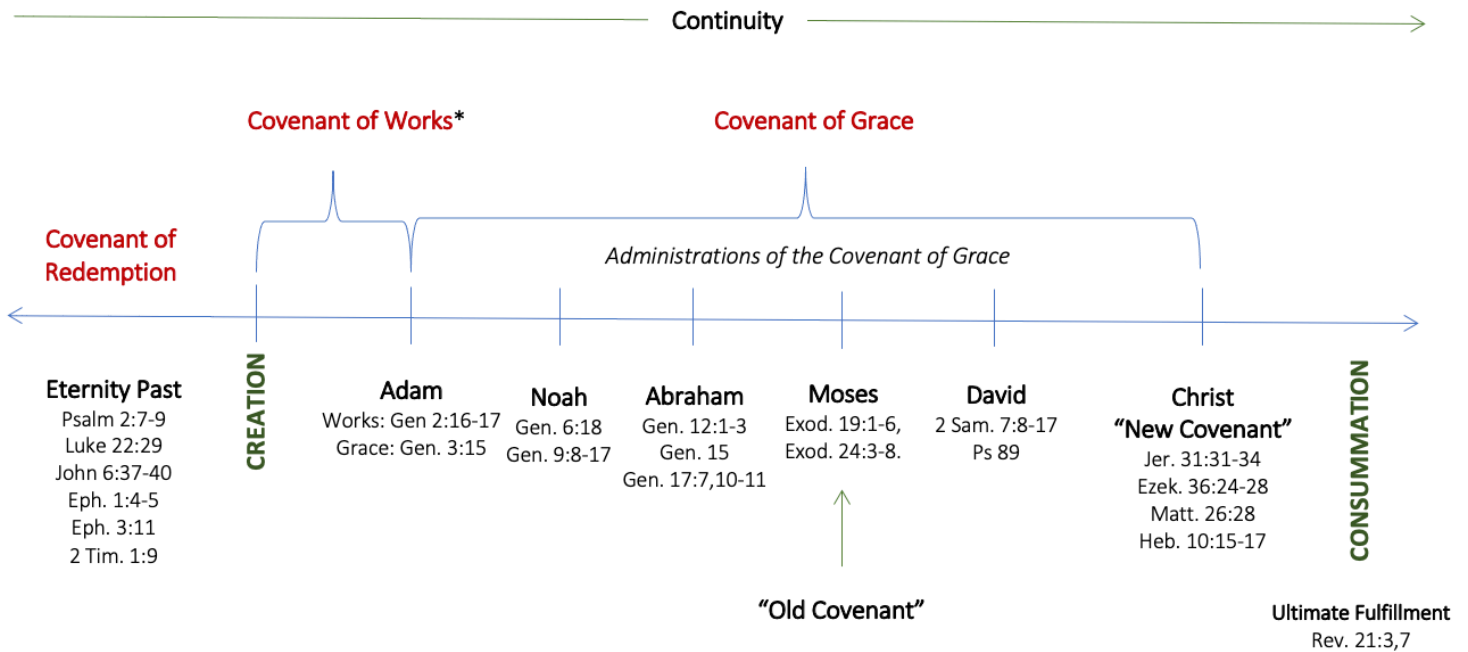
Davidic Covenant (Kingdom): 2 Sam 7:8-17; Ps 89.

- Earthly Kingdom foreshadows Messianic Kingdom.
- Distinctives: Land (2 Sam 7:10), Davidic king always on the throne (2 Sam 7:16).

New Covenant, Covenant of Christ (Consummation): Jer 31:31-34, Matt 26:28, Heb 10:15-17.

- *"Jesus' redemptive work is seen as a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise"* (Ligon Duncan, Luke 1:55, 72-75).
- Prior administrations point to Covenant of Christ (Luke 24:27).
 1. He is the last Adam (1 Cor 15:22)
 2. Abraham's seed (Gal 3:16)
 3. Fulfills Mosaic law (Matt 5:17-20)
 4. The true Davidic King (Matt 1:1)
 5. The embodiment of Immanuel; leads to ultimate New Covenant fulfillment (Rev 21:3, 7)

Visual Chart of Covenant Theology



**In a sense, the obligation to the Covenant of Works continues for those who do not trust in Christ, the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace is the unfolding of Christ fulfilling the Covenant of Works on behalf of the God's elect. Those who trust in Christ are under grace and the various administrations of the Covenant of Grace reveal God's progressive plan to carry out His promise in the wake of Adam's fall.*

Why does all this matter?

1. We are called New Covenant Church! It's a good idea to have a decent grasp on CT.
2. CT helps you understand the Bible's own framework of salvation history.
3. CT helps you understand Christ's atoning work in his death on the cross.
 - a. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." - Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24
 - b. "the new covenant in my blood" - Luke 22:20 & 1 Cor. 11:25
 - c. Fulfillment of Exodus 24:8 - *"And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."*
4. CT puts the focus on God's faithfulness to make good on His promise.
5. CT points to confidence/assurance in God – Heb. 6:13
6. Frees us to trust in Christ as our covenant keeper & NOT ourselves!
7. It provides the basis for covenant/infant baptism
 - a. Reflects the continuity of the Covenant of Grace
 - b. Covenant sign associated with Abraham (circumcision), linked to the covenant sign associated with Christ (baptism).
8. It highlights the personal relationship with "our" God. He is "our" God, we are "His people."

Jonathan's Summary of WCF 7

- 7-1: God's intention has always been to dwell with His people. His means of relation is covenant.
- 7-2: God blesses man greatly, promising further blessing upon obedience to the Covenant of Works.
- 7-3: In the wake of man's fall, God graciously established the Covenant of Grace to restore His relationship with man through Christ. Requiring faith in Christ, God provides faith by His Spirit.
- 7-4: Christ's atoning sacrifice in His death pays the penalty of sin, achieving for man what he could not do himself.
- 7-5: The elements of the covenants before Christ foreshadowed their fulfillment in Christ.
- 7-6: Christ is the substance and fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace and gives the covenantal ordinances and sacraments as a means of grace for the benefit of the elect from all nations.

Text of the Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 7

7-1: *The distance between God and the creature is so great (Is 40:13-17), that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator (Lk 17:10), yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension (Ps 113:5-6) on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant (Gen 2:16-17).*

7-2: *The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works (Gen 2:16-17), wherein life was promised to Adam (Gen 3:22); and in him to his posterity (Rom 5:12-14), upon condition of perfect and personal obedience (Gen 2:17).*

7-3: *Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second (Gen 3:15), commonly called the covenant of grace (Rom 3:20-21; 8:3); wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16); requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved (Rom 10:9), and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life (Acts 13:48) his Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27), to make them willing, and able to believe (1 Cor 12:3).*

7-4: *This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator (Heb 9:16-17), and to the everlasting inheritance (Heb 9:15), with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.*

7-5: *This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel (2 Cor 3:6-9): under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come (Heb 8-10; Rom 4:11; Col 2:11-12; 1 Cor 5:7); which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah (1 Cor 10:1-4; Heb 11:13; John 8:56), by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament (Gal 3:7-9,14; Ps 32:1-2,5).*

7-6: *Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance (Col 2:17), was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word (1 Cor 1:21), and the administration of the sacraments of baptism (Matt 28:19-20) and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23-25): which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy (Heb 12:22-24; 2 Cor 3:9-11; Jer 31:33-34), to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament (Luke 22:20). There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations (Gal 3:8-9,14,16; Rom 3:21-22,30; 4:3,6-8; 16-17,23-24; Gen 15:6; Ps 32:1-2; Heb 4:2).*