

Redemptive History: The Covenantal Framework of the Old Testament

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” John 14:6

“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” John 8:56

“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Hebrews 10:1-4

Introduction

What is covenant theology?

Examples of Covenants in Scripture (Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenants*)

1. International treaties (Joshua 9)
2. Clan/tribal alliances (Gen 14:13)
3. Personal/loyalty agreements (Gen 31:44; 1 Sam 18:3; 23:18)
4. Marriage (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14)
5. National legal agreements (Jer 34:8-10)

Elements of a Covenant

1. Elements in minimal form (e.g., Gen 2)
 - Promised blessings
 - Stipulations
 - Sanctions
2. Elements in expansive form (e.g., Exod 20; Deut)
 - Name of the king
 - History of benevolence
 - Stipulations
 - Promised blessings
 - Sanctions or Curses
 - Provisions for transmitting the covenant

Three Structural Covenants of Covenant Theology

1. Covenant of Redemption (this also called the *pactum salutis*)
Definition: “eternal appointment of the Son of God, by way of covenant, to become the incarnate redeemer and head of his adopted siblings” (Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 109).
2. Covenant of Works
3. Covenant of Grace

Two Adam Structure of Scripture: In Adam and In Christ (Rom 5:12-21)

Covenant of Works = In Adam

“The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (WCF 7:2)

The **essential elements** of a covenant relationship between God and Adam are present in Genesis 2.

- (1) **Precept:** Gen 2:16-17
- (2) **Promise:** Gen 2:9; 3:22
- (3) **Penalty:** Gen 2:17

“Historically, the covenant of works was never based upon bad “proof-texting.” Rather, it was the consequence of **biblical-theological exegesis** not only of Genesis 2 but also of Romans, Galatians, etc.” (Richard Muller).

The Covenant of Works and the Work of Christ

Wilhelmus à Brakel: “Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will very readily deny that Christ by his active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect. This is to be observed with several parties who, because they err concerning the covenant of grace, also deny the covenant of works. Conversely, whoever denies the covenant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well” (*The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:355).

Covenant of Grace = In Christ

“Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.” (WCF 7:3)

Covenant Formula

The One Way of Salvation – Justification by Faith

Romans 4

The One Covenant of Grace in Diverse Administrations (Isa 54-55)

Old Covenant Administrations of the Covenant of Grace

Noahic – Gen 9:9-17

Abrahamic – Gen 18:17-19

Mosaic – Exod 20:1-2; Deut; Matt 22:36-40

Davidic – Psalm 89:34-37

New Covenant Administrations of the Covenant of Grace

New Covenant – Jer. 31:31-34

The Fulfillment of the Administrations of the Covenant of Grace: Isa 54-55

Isa 54:1-3: Abrahamic

Isa 54:4-8: Mosaic

Isa 54:9-10: Noahic

Isa 55:3-4: Davidic

Isa 54-55: New Covenant

The Accomplishment of the Eternal Covenant of Peace

Essential Continuity in the One Covenant of Grace

“Unifying strands” (J. I. Packer); One covenant promise; One covenant mediator; One pattern of salvation; One covenant people; One pattern of covenant piety

Administrative Diversity in the One Covenant of Grace

“The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation” (WLC 34).

“Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fulness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations” (WLC 35).

The Differences Between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace

Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* 1:49-50

The Ongoing Significance of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace for the Christian Life

Conclusion

Recommend Resources for Further Reading

Rhodes, Jonty, *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God’s Unfolding Promises to His People*.

Waters, Guy, J. Nicholas Reid, John Muether, eds. *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*.