

COVENANT THEOLOGY RESTATED

About the author

Boon-Sing Poh was born in Malaysia in 1954. Brought up in a pagan background, he was saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ while studying in the United Kingdom. He returned to Malaysia to become a lecturer in a university for six years, founded the first Reformed Baptist Church in the country in 1983, and was imprisoned for his faith from 1987 to 1988 for a period of 325 days. He is pastor emeritus of Damansara Reformed Baptist Church (DRBC) in Kuala Lumpur, a contented husband, a thankful father of four sons, and a happy grandfather. He earned the PhD degree in Electronics Engineering from the University of Liverpool, UK, the Diploma in Religious Study from Cambridge University, UK, and the PhD degree in Theology from North-West University, SA.

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Boon-Sing Poh



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Dedicated to Dr. Robert W. Oliver
and his dear wife Rachel,
who have been our good friends
and encouragers,
over many years of service to the Lord.

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Foreword

by Earl M. Blackburn

Of what value is the study of Covenant Theology? Is it not a slight and insignificant subject confined only to churches of the Protestant Reformation (i.e., Reformed churches) and a few elite theologians that have little else to do than argue minute details of an obscure doctrine? Many think so. Regardless of this ill-conceived thought, Covenant Theology has an indispensable bearing on a correct understanding of the Holy Bible for all people, especially Christians. It unfolds the way of God's salvation from Genesis to Revelation, from eternity past to future glory. It shapes the nature of the church and involvement in it. Instruction for the Christian life, guidance for daily living, including marriage, family, and the home, directions on how to live in society, armament for often-faced spiritual battles, and incentives for fulfilling the Great Commission, along with stern warnings and soul-strengthening promises are all found within its parameters. I repeat, Covenant Theology is indispensable for saving Christianity.

This theological teaching has been around since the early days of the Christian church. After the Day of Pentecost, the early church had only the Old Testament as its Holy Scriptures. From it they preached Christ and the gospel. This is seen most clearly in Paul's definition of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 where he describes how that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day "according to the Scriptures". What Scriptures? Obviously, the Old Testament because the New Testament was only beginning to be written. (This shows the value of the Old Testament for us today and the foolishness of those who tell Christians to "unhitch"

themselves from it.)

After the New Testament was completed and canonized, the church fathers utilized Covenant Theology against the heretical Gnostics, who rejected the Old Testament as the Word of God. Although the Covenant Theology of the early fathers was not fully systematized, they understood and employed the teachings of multiple divine covenants of the Old Testament to prove the unity of both the Old and New Testaments. Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 155-191), one of the great Apologists, wrote a delightful little book entitled *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* (c. 180). In it he gave an overview of the successive divine covenants under Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and unto Christ to show how God revealed progressively the whole plan of salvation through the ages and how the entire Bible fits together. Irenaeus was followed by Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who did not write a formal, systematic Covenant Theology. However, from his writings, it can be seen that he laid the foundation of the Covenant of Works with Adam (the first federal head), inherited original sin, the unity of grace throughout redemptive history, and Christ the Second Adam as the Mediator of the New Covenant and federal head of the elect.

Covenant Theology laid dormant during the Middle Ages, with few contributions from theologians and church leaders. The Protestant Reformation wondrously dawned in 1517, and a systematic formulation of Covenant Theology began. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531) were the first reformers to speak on the subject. Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) wrote what is considered the first Reformation treatise on the divine covenant, followed by John Calvin (1509-1564) in his robust *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book 2:10-11). These were followed by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus in writing the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). Others followed in their steps. The puritan Presbyterians produced the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in 1646, and it was approved by the English Parliament in 1647. This was the first official church confession that organized Covenant Theology around the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. This Confession was followed by the *Savoy Declaration* in 1658 (Congregationalists) and the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* in 1689 (Particular Baptists).

For over three hundred years, Covenant Theology was discussed and debated back and forth across the Atlantic between the Re-

formed paedobaptists and the Reformed credobaptists. Books were written, articles were published, and sermons preached across Europe and North America on Covenant Theology. Its influence began to sweep throughout Africa, South America, Asia, and around the world where Christianity had spread. Around 2010, discussion and debate intensified among the Calvinistic and Reformed Baptists in North America regarding Covenant Theology. Again, books, articles, sermons, conferences, and podcasts erupted. There were push-backs, retractions, clarifications, and refinements on various positions, especially among the Classical Covenant Theology folks, or better known as 1689 Covenantalism (of which I am a part), and the 1689 Federalists, with few concessions and little ground yielded.

In the midst of this seeming stalemate, there emerges this excellent book entitled *Covenant Theology Restated*. It is written not by a European or North American, but by a Chinese Malaysian, who lives halfway around the world from me in Southeast Asia, Dr. Poh Boon Sing [Chinese surnames are placed at the front]. My dear friend has done the Reformed world (both among credobaptists and paedobaptists) a great service in authoring this book. Having done his engineering and theological studies in England and South Africa, he quietly observed for many years the controversy among Reformed Baptists. Rather than joining in the fray among us, he listened attentively, read extensively, and studied carefully the various views. His theological studies, his church planting vision and labors, and his pastoral ministry equipped him for this task. He, then, plotted out conscientiously a course of exegetical and hermeneutical study of both the Old and New Testaments to arrive at this volume. Although I may *slightly* differ with him on his definition of a covenant, his material is sterling. His treatment of how we may refine Covenant Theology, especially his explanation of how we are to understand the two ‘key covenants’ was extremely instructive and helpful to me. His analysis of Paul in Galatians is rich. He helped me to see things more clearly. If read carefully, his chapter on the Covenant of Grace will lift the fog off many minds. The remaining chapters, especially the one on “Where Do We Go From Here?” are pastoral, heart-warming, and challenging. I am convicted by them. With all the chapters, he has “hit the nail on the head”. Many Reformed Baptists who *fully* subscribe to the *1689 Confession*, and other evangelicals, should receive Dr. Poh’s book with gratefulness, even if they disagree with him here and there.

Finally, I must jokingly confess that I am a tad upset with my dear friend. He should have written this book twenty years ago and saved us Reformed Baptists in America a lot of angst, fussing, and writing. But, alas, God's providential timing is always perfect, and it is my unreserved pleasure to heartily commend this book to every reader who is serious about studying the Holy Scriptures, and who wants to understand Christ's perfect salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, via biblical Covenant Theology. May our triune God greatly use this book to glorify Himself, build up His church and people, extend His kingdom, and bring many sinners to repentance and faith in the only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!

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Preface

The adoption of the Five Points of Calvinism (concerning salvation) will inevitably lead to a consideration of Covenant Theology (how salvation unfolds in history). This is because both these subjects belong firmly to Reformed Theology. It is here that many Christians who have embraced the former are thrown into confusion over the latter. Good people seem to disagree about Covenant Theology. There seems to be so many versions of it.

My first exposure to Covenant Theology was when I was attending night classes in Liverpool Bible College in the United Kingdom in the mid-1970s. As a relatively new Christian, the subject did not bother me much at that time. While attending public talks given by the well-known archaeologists at the University of Liverpool, UK – Professor K. A. Kitchen (1932-2025) and Professor Alan Millard (1937-2024) – who happened to be well-respected Christians, I was introduced to the ancient suzerainty treaties and royal grants and their possible bearing on the biblical covenants. This was followed by Professor John Murray’s writings on Covenant Theology, in his four-volumes *Collected Writings* and his book *The Covenant of Grace* which left a deep impression, although I have never been drawn into accepting paedobaptism. The writings of David Kingdon, Paul Jewett, and Palmer Robertson also left their marks.¹ Then came New Covenant Theology that caused some disturbance in me over the subject. While teaching the subject in church, I had adhered to the main outlines of traditional Baptist Covenant Theology, at the same time keeping an eye on development on the subject elsewhere. The spate of writings on the subject in recent years seem to have caused more confusion than helped clarify issues. In these later years, I thought my view, which has crystalised over time, should be made

known to benefit and help others.

I have organised the material under the question-words of Why, What, How, When, Who, Which, Whose, and Where. Some degree of repetition is unavoidable to gradually develop the subject. The aim is to adhere to the teaching of Scripture, as summarised in the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, while making adjustments to the traditional Baptist view of Covenant Theology. This, therefore, is a restatement of Covenant Theology which takes into consideration issues that seem to be overlooked or are inadequately treated by others. The bulk of the material in this book has appeared in my previous work, *World Missions Today*, which is here reworked.

This modest work is sent forth with thanksgiving to the Triune God for His merciful dealings with this unworthy creature, and for His many servants raised up over the centuries who have contributed to the study on Covenant Theology. I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped, in one way or another, in the production of this book.

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May 2026.

¹See References & Bibliography.

One

Why Study Covenant Theology?

A revival of interest in Reformed theology began in the 1960s, which has continued unabated to the present. Those who have called themselves Reformed may be classified under three categories.

Firstly, there are those who are Reformed in the traditional, or classical, sense. They include both Baptists and Paedobaptists who hold to one, or more, of the confessions of faith that have come down to us from the Reformation in the 16th century and the Puritan Age (corresponding to ‘the Second Reformation’ in the Netherlands) in the 17th century. Some well-known confessions of faith from those periods include the *Three Forms of Unity* (encompassing the *Belgic Confession of 1561*, the *Heidelberg Catechism of 1563*, and the *Canons of Dort of 1618-19*), the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1571)*, the *Westminster Confession (1646)*, the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order (1658)*, and the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)*. Churches that declare adherence to one of these historic confessions of Faith are known as ‘confessionally Reformed churches’.

Secondly, there are those who agree with the teaching contained in one, or more, of these confessions of faith but would not subscribe (i.e., declare adherence) fully to these confessions of faith. They might adhere to a short statement of faith, say, of fifteen to twenty points of doctrines. These individuals and churches are described as ‘non-confessionally Reformed’.

Thirdly, there are individuals and churches who have embraced

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Reformed soteriology (i.e., the doctrine of salvation), summarised by the Five Points of Calvinism (also known as the Doctrines of Grace)¹, but continue to adhere to their respective denominational, distinctive, beliefs and practices. Those from Charismatic background would continue to uphold the practice of tongue-speaking, prophecy, and healing. Others would hold to Dispensationalism. Yet others – known as the New Calvinists – from diverse Evangelical backgrounds who practise contemporary worship, are averse to traditional church structures (characterised by its ‘young, restless, and reformed’ ethos)². Many such Christians call themselves ‘Reformed’ when, more precisely, they should be described as ‘Calvinistic’.

As Reformed theology is pursued, Covenant Theology will inevitably come to the fore. Soteriology, ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church), hermeneutics (the interpretation of Scripture), eschatology (the doctrine of the last things), missiology (the study of missions) – indeed, all branches of theology – cannot be separated from Covenant Theology. The doctrines of Scripture are inextricably linked together such that aberration in any doctrine will affect other doctrines in the chain of truth. The importance of Covenant Theology cannot be overstated.

The present writer is of the conviction that Reformed theology is the system of truth closest to the teaching of Scripture. This does not mean that Reformed theology is static or uniform. Scripture is an inexhaustible storehouse from which “every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old (Matt. 13:52).” No sane Christian would claim that he has understood Scripture perfectly. Reformed scholars are constantly labouring to understand Scripture better. It is inevitable that there will be disagreement among them over many matters, including Covenant Theology.

On the other hand, Reformed theology is not fluid, elusive, and unreliable. It is not like the sand dunes which change form and position as the wind blows. Rather, the core of Reformed theology is firmly founded on the solid rock of Scripture while its external appearance becomes more glorious and beautiful as it is sculpted and reshaped by more light from God’s word. Consistent adherence to

¹ A good introduction to the subject is Riddle, J.T. 2019. *The Doctrines Of Grace: An Introduction to the Five Points of Calvinism*, Trumpet Books.

² Examples and instances of this ethos are documented in Williams, E. S. 2014. *The New Calvinists*. Wakeman Trust.

the correct rules of interpretation is essential to arrive at the mind of God on Covenant Theology. As would be expected, this writer adopts a Reformed, contextual-grammatical-historical hermeneutics, which recognises the perspicuity of Scripture, the progressive and cumulative nature of revelation, and the presence of ‘types’ or symbols in Scripture.³ The basic rules of interpretation include: (1) taking the text of Scripture plainly (whether literal or figurative); (2) taking the text in context; (3) comparing a portion of scripture with other portions of scripture, allowing clearer passages to shed light on those less clear (the analogy of scripture); (4) comparing the extracted doctrine with the overall teaching of Scripture, since God’s word cannot contradict itself (the analogy of faith).

Our concern is not over disagreements between Reformed Christians and their non-Reformed brethren, although some of the differences between them will be discussed. Our purpose is to consider the differences between Reformed Christians over Covenant Theology in order to present what is believed to be a more comprehensive and consistent view. We wish to avoid novelties that contradict the clear teaching and spirit of Scripture. We wish also to avoid playing down some scriptural data in favour of others to project a preconceived perspective. It will be seen that the view presented in this book encompasses what has been regarded as the classical/traditional view in its core essence, with some notable characteristics adjusted according to the above-stated principles. The end result is a view of Covenant Theology that is elegant, simple, and readily understood. To what extent the author succeeds in this purpose will be for the reader to judge.

This work is not meant to be an academic treatise loaded with scholarly references. Instead, the objective is twofold. The first is to provide a primer on Covenant Theology for those who are new, or confused, over the subject. The second is to reconcile brethren of all persuasions through a view on Covenant Theology that takes into consideration all the relevant data of Scripture on the subject. It is expected that brethren who hold to different perspectives on Covenant Theology might be unsettled by what is presented here. This writer would plead for a careful consideration of the arguments presented here in the spirit of the Bereans who “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).”

³Berkhof, L. 1990. *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. Baker.

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Constructive criticism and corrections by pastors and mature Christians are welcome.

* * * * *

Two

What Is Covenant Theology?

A careful study of Scripture will reveal that God interacts with mankind through covenants. The study of these covenants – including their nature, character, and purpose(s) – constitute Covenant Theology. Several notable covenants are found, including the ones made by God with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ. These are linked to the covenant that God the Father made with God the Son in eternity past, in which the Holy Spirit also is involved (known as the Covenant of Redemption.) What is a covenant? What are the different views on Covenant Theology encountered among Reformed Christians? What difference does it make to come to a correct view? These are the questions that we seek to answer in this chapter.

2.1 What is a covenant?

The word ‘covenant’ is a translation of the Hebrew word ‘berith’ and the Greek word ‘diatheke’, which basically means a formal agreement between two or more parties that is sealed with an oath, thereby binding the parties together in a special relationship. We are aware that different definitions of a covenant have been given by others but this one should serve well to accomplish our purpose and objectives. There are covenants made between men, e.g. between Abimelech and Isaac (Gen. 26:28), Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:44) and David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:16-17, 42; 23:18). A covenant between God and man differs from that between men in that it is a matter of grace, (i.e., God condescending to show His mercy to man, e.g.

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Psalm 89:28). The word ‘covenant’ is related to the word ‘testament’ (Heb. 9:16-17), which basically means ‘a promise or undertaking’ and carries the additional idea that the promises made by the primary party will come into full operation upon his death.

In the covenants that God made with man, there is the additional idea of a representative head so that the covenant applies to all who are represented by that head. In the covenant that God made with Adam in the garden of Eden, Adam was the representative, or federal, head of his posterity – in other words, all mankind. By his Fall, Adam brought the whole human race into sin (Rom. 5:12-19). In the same way, Jesus Christ is the representative head of those He came to redeem, by His death on the cross. Noah was the representative head of the human race after the flood. Abraham was the representative head of all who descended from him. Moses was the representative head of the nation of Israel. Since these covenants involve representative, or federal, heads, Covenant Theology is also known as Federal Theology.

2.2 What are the different views?

Historically, Covenant Theology falls under two broad categories, namely, Paedobaptist Covenant Theology and Baptist Covenant Theology. From the Reformation of the 16th century to the present time, Paedobaptist theologians developed Covenant Theology in such a way as to accommodate their practice of infant baptism and the idea that children born to believing parents are members of God’s kingdom and, therefore, of the church. There seems to be a sincere belief that such children are elect, until proved otherwise when they grow up. The Paedobaptist (or Magisterial) Reformers of the 16th century may be seen as emphasising the continuity of the Old and New Testaments at the expense of the progressive nature of revelation.

The Anabaptists of the 16th century opposed the idea that the children of believers should be considered members of the church until proved otherwise when they grow up. They emphasised the newness of the New Covenant in which only believers were baptised and joined in covenant to constitute the church.¹ In contrast to the Magisterial Reformers, the Anabaptists (or Radical Reformers) may be seen as emphasising the discontinuity between the New and Old

2.2. What are the different views?

Testaments at the expense of the unity of Scripture.

The second generation of Reformers in the 17th century (especially those in Britain and the Netherlands), developed Covenant Theology to clearly show that there were, firstly, the Covenant of Works God made with Adam and his posterity (Gen. 2:15-17), in which the human race was plunged into sin, guilt, and eternal damnation; and secondly, the Covenant of Grace that God the Father made with the Son of God, by which those chosen from eternity (Eph. 1:3-14) are redeemed, reconciled with God, and given eternal life. The Covenant of Grace was revealed from the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), and progressively through the subsequent covenants, culminating in the New Covenant. The death and resurrection of Christ sealed the Covenant of Grace, and inaugurated the New Covenant age. All the elect of God, whether in the Old or the New Testament ages, are saved by the Covenant of Grace – through faith in the God-appointed Saviour, Jesus Christ. The Covenant of Grace was operative in the Old Testament age and is operative in the New Testament age. These truths were held in common by both the Baptist and Paedobaptist Reformers in the 17th century. They differed in some details, which led to different conclusions about baptism and church membership.

In the 1820s, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and the Plymouth Brethren promoted a view of understanding Scripture which came to be called Dispensationalism. This view became popular among the General Baptists in America through the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible. Classical Dispensationalism claims that there are seven dispensations in human history – the age of *Innocence* when Adam was under probation before the Fall, the age of *Conscience* from the Fall to the Great Flood, the age of *Human Government* from the Flood to the Tower of Babel, the age of *Promise* from Abraham to Moses, the period of *Law* from Moses to the crucifixion of Christ, the age of *Grace* from the Cross to the Rapture, and the *Millennial Kingdom* when Christ reigns on the earth for a literal 1000 years. A strictly literal (which we consider literalistic), historical-grammatical approach to interpreting Scripture is used to accommodate the idea that physical Israel is distinct from the church, that salvation is by different means in the various dispensations, that believers will be taken to heaven (the Rapture) before a seven-year tribulation period,

¹Estep, W.R. 1986. *Renaissance and Reformation*. Eerdmans, p. 219.

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followed by a literal 1000 years reign by Christ on earth.

The recovery of interest in Reformed theology in the 1960s has gradually led to a spate of writings from both Baptists and Paedobaptists. The latter have largely adhered to classical Covenant Theology, with minimal differences between them. Attempts have been made by some of them to answer, and adjust to, criticisms by the Baptists. For example, there are those who claim that the Covenant of Works was revived in some ways in the Mosaic Covenant, while others have acknowledged the newness of the New Covenant but in ways that still retain infant baptism. Baptist writers, on their part, have been active in interacting with the Paedobaptists as well as among themselves. There are those who hold to classical Covenant Theology of the Baptist version, while others have departed from it. The new versions of Baptist Covenant Theology are called by different names. Those who call their view '1689 Federalism' claim that the Old Testament covenants are types of the New Covenant, that the Covenant of Grace is the New Covenant, that the Covenant of Works was revived in some ways in the Mosaic Covenant, and that the majority of the Particular Baptists in the 17th century held to their view. They deny that the Covenant of Grace was operative in the Old Testament period, although claiming that the elect in the Old Testament were saved by grace through faith in the coming Saviour. They are against the idea that the covenants of the Old Testament were an 'administration' of the Covenant of Grace. Those who call their view 'New Covenant Theology' claim that the New Covenant is the Covenant of Grace, that the moral law does not apply in the New Covenant as it has been abrogated and replaced by the 'the law of Christ', which are the commands and teaching of Christ and His apostles. Those who hold to a variant of New Covenant Theology (by their own admission)², called 'Progressive Covenantalism', emphasise the application of Biblical Theology in the study of Covenant Theology. In the process, progression in the revelation of the covenants in their external features is emphasised instead of the progression of revelation of truths. Biblical Theology is unwittingly held higher than Systematic Theology, when the former should rightly be the handmaid to the latter.³ Theirs is an attempt at bridging the gap between traditional Covenant Theology and classical Dispensationalism. The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace as understood in traditional Covenant Theology are denied. Furthermore, the classical threefold division of the Mosaic law – ceremonial, civil, and moral

2.2. What are the different views?

– is denied, and treated as absolutely one, and has been abrogated. The Christian Sabbath, or the Lord's Day, is also denied.

There are other views on Covenant Theology that appeared in recent years but have lost traction, including Theonomy and the Federal Vision. These views were confined largely to Paedobaptist circles, although some Baptists were troubled by them. Theonomy holds to a threefold division of the law, claiming that the ceremonial law has been abrogated while the civil and moral laws remain relevant today. There is the call for Christians to lobby and influence civil institutions such as schools, law courts, local governments, etc., to adopt Christian principles and values. The Federal Vision emphasises the 'objectivity' of the covenant, claiming that those baptised are objectively members of the church. Among them are those who also advocate infant communion, (i.e., that infants should partake of the Lord's Supper). It is believed that justification by faith does not necessarily occur at any point in life and becomes certain only at the return of Christ. We will not consider these aberrant views beyond the brief description about them given here.

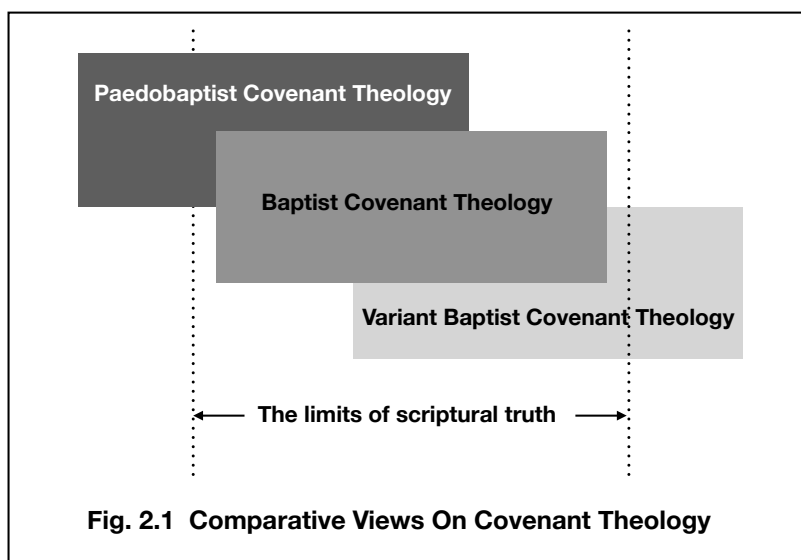
Prominent Paedobaptist theologians have admitted that there is no explicit command for, or example of, infant baptism in the Scriptures.⁴ They have had to rely on their version of Covenant Theology to justify the practice of infant baptism. Baptist writers who advocate versions of Covenant Theology different from the classical Baptist view have insinuated that the latter view is the result of undue influence from the Paedobaptist view. They do not admit that their own views have been constructed to accommodate their denial of the continuing relevance of the moral law, and especially of the Christian Sabbath. It is not for us to question their motive but everyone should be open to being questioned concerning the methodology and interpretation adopted in the study of Scripture, and the conclusions drawn. Their emphasis on the New Covenant (equating it with the Covenant of Grace), and the claim that the moral law has been abrogated, show a similarity with the over-reaction of the Anabaptists to the Covenant Theology of the Magisterial Reformers in the 16th century. Over against these variant views, we contend that the classical Covenant Theology of the Particular Baptists in the 17th century

²Wellum, S.J. and Parker, B.E. 2016. *Progressive Covenantalism*. B&H Academic, pp. 2, 73.

³Biblical Theology studies redemption chronologically while Systematic Theology organises doctrines topically.

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is reflected in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. It is upheld by their spiritual descendants, the Reformed Baptists, today although a number of them have departed to New Covenant Theology and the like. There remains for us three basic views of Covenant Theology vying to be the closest expression of the scriptural position. We represent their relative positions in relation to the teaching Scripture by the diagram below.



Some words of explanation are in order. The rectangle representing classical Baptist Covenant Theology is regarded as closest to the teaching of Scripture. It falls within, but does not stretch up to, the limits of scriptural truth because we do not claim to have achieved a perfect understanding of subject. It shares much truths in common with Paedobaptist Covenant Theology and Variant Baptist Covenant Theology. The term 'Variant Baptist Covenant Theology' covers all the views put forward by Baptists referred to above, which differ from the classical Baptist view. No negative connotation is implied, apart from this comparative purpose. Paedobaptist Covenant Theology is seen to lie partially outside the limits of Scripture in one direction, while Variant Baptist Covenant Theology is seen to lie par-

⁴A number of them are listed in Poh, B.S. 2017. *The Keys of the Kingdom*, Good News Enterprise, Sec. 11.3.

2.3. What difference does it make?

tially outside the limits of Scripture in the opposite direction. The various views referred to above may be seen at a glance in the table of Fig. 2.2.

Family	View
Classical/Traditional	Paedobaptist Covenant Theology
Classical/Traditional	Baptist Covenant Theology
Variant Baptist	1689 Federalism
Variant Baptist	New Covenant Theology
Variant Baptist	Progressive Covenantalism
Variant Paedobaptist	Theonomy
Variant Paedobaptist	Federal Vision
Non-Covenantal	Classical Dispensationalism
Non-Covenantal	Progressive Dispensationalism

Fig. 2.2 Various Views In Relation To Covenant Theology

2.3 What difference does it make?

With the plethora of views on Covenant Theology, the reader might wonder whether it is worthwhile attempting to get the issue clarified, or whether it is possible ever to come to a clear view on the subject. This modest attempt to clarify issues and put forward a refined version of the classical Baptist view of Covenant Theology is carried out with the conviction that:

(i) Scripture is perspicuous, (i.e., capable of being clearly understood), although effort is needed to study it, in dependence on the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Psalm 119:105; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is possible for us to come to a reasonably clear view of the Covenant Theology of Scripture.

(ii) All believers are to grow spiritually – in understanding of the truth, in character, and in usefulness (2 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 5:12-13; Eph. 5:25-26). We cannot afford to be wrong on Covenant Theology as that would adversely affect other teachings of Scripture. Since

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doctrine affect practice, our service to God will be affected by our understanding of Covenant Theology.

(iii) Covenant Theology is directly concerned with the salvation of God's people, a clear understanding of which will minister tremendous comfort to believers by strengthening them in their confidence in God's word (Psalm 119:50; Rom. 15:4), in their resolve to live righteously (2 Tim. 2:10; Col. 1:26, 29), and in their hope of eternal blessedness (Rom. 8:28-30, 38-39; Phil. 1:21).

It does matter for us to come to a clear, and correct, view of Covenant Theology. The next step is to show how the classical Baptist view of Covenant Theology may be refined, before we put forward a refined view.

* * * * *

Three

How May We Refine Covenant Theology?

We have defined a covenant as a formal agreement between two or more parties that is sealed with an oath, thereby binding the parties together in a special relationship. The covenants God made with man arose from His mercy towards His undeserving creatures. We have assumed that classical Baptist Covenant Theology is the correct view, the basic tenets of which have been given. We will prove that assumption as we proceed, while fleshing out this view. Before we proceed farther, a few pillars of our case will need to be laid out. It is here that refinements to the traditional Baptist Covenant Theology are seen.

3.1 How should we understand a covenant?

In the study of Covenant Theology, much has been made of the kingdom theme, in which the covenants of Scripture are compared with the suzerain-vassal treaties and royal grants of secular history. All these are interesting and helpful from the academic point of view. While not denying that there is a prominent 'kingdom theme' in Scripture (Matt. 12:28; 21:31, 43; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 22:29; etc.), we contend that the covenants must be seen in the light of the salvation of God's elect through the seed of the woman, as declared in Genesis 3:15 (cf. Gal. 4:21-31), and planned from eternity past

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(Eph. 1:3-14). There is progression in the revelation of truths in the Scripture, and not merely in the revelation of external features of the kingdom. The covenants are vehicles for conveying truths. Our focus should not be on the external features of the vehicle – on what constitute those vehicles and the accompanying rules, instructions, terms, conditions, and promises. Rather, we should be drawing out the doctrines, the precepts, the principles, and the implications – the truths related to God’s plan of salvation, the purposes, and the objectives. The variant Baptist views have subtly departed from the progressive nature of revelation in this respect.

A careful study of the covenants God made with man reveals that each covenant has constituent parts, namely, the *subjects*, the *structure*, and the *statutes*. The *subjects* are the people involved in the covenant, including the federal head and all those represented by him. The *structure*, or framework, includes the visible signs and rituals that mark them out as belonging to that covenanted community of God. The oath that sealed the covenant, whether made verbally only, or in connection with a ritual of worship as often was the case, would fall under the structure. The *statutes*, or precepts, include laws, rules and commandments for righteous living, moral conduct, and faithful obedience to God. These three constituent parts are necessary and sufficient to constitute a covenant made between God and man. The basic definition of a covenant still holds – it is a formal agreement between two or more parties that is sealed with an oath. Furthermore, it is still a matter of God’s grace – God taking the initiative to bind Himself to man with terms and conditions that are set by Himself. We note, however, that each time, the covenant is conveyed by a vehicle/means which consists of these three parts – the subjects, the structure, and the statutes. One covenant is differentiated from another primarily by the subjects involved, and secondarily by the structure and statutes peculiar to that covenant. The elements, or ingredients, that constitute the structure and statutes of one covenant may be found in other covenants, while other ingredients will be unique to a particular covenant.

Consider the first constituent part of the covenant made with Abraham. The subjects were Abraham (the covenant head), and all those under his charge – including his descendants and the servants who belonged to him (Gen. 17:9-14). It is to be noted that not all the people represented by Abraham were his descendants. His servants, and their descendants, were included. A federal head of a covenant

3.2. How many covenants were made with each head?

need not be the biological progenitor of those he represents. The second constituent part of the covenant is the structure which included circumcision of all the males, the worship of Jehovah (by animal sacrifices), and the land of Canaan to dwell in (Gen. 17:8). The third constituent part of the Abrahamic Covenant, the statute, is given in Genesis 17:1, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless." The structural elements of circumcision, burnt offerings, and the land of Canaan were duplicated in the Mosaic Covenant, and expanded with what have been called the ceremonial law and the civil law. The statute of the Abrahamic Covenant is found also in the Mosaic Covenant, where it was augmented by the Ten Commandments, which have been called the moral law. The essence of the moral law was written in the hearts of Adam and Eve from creation (Rom. 2:14-15), and codified on tables of stone in the time of Moses. The threefold division of the law (moral, ceremonial, civil) corresponds to the three offices of prophet, priest and king in the Old Testament, that culminated in the offices of Christ as Head of the church and Mediator between God and man. The moral law reflects the character of God and corresponds with the function of the prophet who reveals God and His will to man. The ceremonial law is concerned with worship and corresponds to the function of the priest who engages in worship. The civil law is concerned with governance and corresponds to the function of a king who rules. As noted above, the moral law belongs to the statutes of the covenant while the ceremonial and civil laws belong to the structure of the covenant, thus justifying further the threefold division of the law of Moses.

It seems that many of the variant Baptist views dismiss the threefold division of the law simply because no explicit statements to this effect are found in the Scripture. To my knowledge, the advocates of the variant Baptist views have not provided convincing arguments, if at all, in support of their denial of this truth. Their sole argument hinges on the abrogation of the Mosaic Covenant, together with the law, upon the appearance of the New Covenant.

3.2 How many covenants were made with each head?

Differences exist over whether one, or more, covenants were made with Adam, Abraham, and Moses. In the case of Adam, it has been

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questioned whether the agreement that God made with him in the garden of Eden was a covenant, and whether it should be called the Covenant of Works. Furthermore, there are differences over whether the revelation of the Covenant of Grace in Genesis 3:15 constitute a covenant made with Adam, apart from the Covenant of Works made with him initially, by which he brought down mankind into sin. In the case of Abraham, there are differences over whether there were two distinct covenants, as Galatians 4:22-31 seem to teach, or two aspects of one covenant – one involving temporal blessings to his physical descendants and the other involving salvation to God's elect, as Galatians 3 seem to teach. Some writers are of the view that there were multiple covenants God made with Abraham.¹ As for the covenant made with Moses, differences exist as to whether it was wholly a Covenant of Grace or of Works, and whether the Covenant of Works was revived in some ways in the basically gracious covenant.

3.2.1 One covenant in Adam

Following the Reformed confessions of faith (e.g. 1689C:20:1), we contend that the agreement made by God with Adam in the garden of Eden was a true covenant. Two reasons for this claim are:

- (i) Although the word 'covenant' is not found in Genesis 1-3, the three parts of a covenant are there. The subjects were Adam as covenant head, and Eve, together with the children who would be born to them (cf. Gen. 3:15; Rom. 5:12). The structure consisted of the dwelling place of the garden of Eden in which was immediate fellowship with God (Gen 3:8, 23-24), and the task of tending the garden (Gen. 2:15). The statutes included the command to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, to have dominion over the creatures (Gen. 1:28), permission to eat from the trees (not the animals, Gen. 1:29 cf. 9:3-4), and the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17).
- (ii) Adam is compared to Christ in Rom. 5:12-21, the comparison of which breaks down if there were no covenant made with Adam in the garden of Eden. (A third reason might be added,

¹e.g. Howell, R.B.C. 1855 *The Covenants*, Triangle Press, pp. 4, 5.

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viz. that the word ‘covenant’ is used in Hosea 6:7, in which the word ‘men’ may be translated as ‘Adam’ so that the verse reads, “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant...”)

What about the revelation of the Covenant of Grace to Adam and Eve immediately after the Fall (Gen. 3:15)? It has long been recognised that Genesis 3:15 is the first revelation of the gospel, called the ‘proto-evangelion’, in which is announced that the woman’s Seed (Jesus) will defeat Satan (bruise his head) by His death (bruise His heel). Some consider this a distinct covenant, calling it the Edenic or Adamic Covenant, making mention that animals were slaughtered to provide a covering for the nakedness of Adam and Eve, corresponding to the sealing of the covenant (Gen. 3:21). If that were the case, there would be two covenants made with Adam, namely the Covenant of Works and the Edenic covenant. However, the so-called Edenic covenant is a revelation of the Covenant of Grace, the head of which is Christ (Rom. 5:14-15). Was Adam the head of the covenant of Eden, just as Abraham and Moses were heads of covenants by which the Covenant of Grace was revealed? There are problems with this view:

- (i) While there is explicit teaching (such as in Rom. 5:12-19 and 1 Cor. 15:45-49) that Adam was the head of the fallen human race, and a type of Christ, there is no explicit teaching that Adam was the head of another covenant, namely, the covenant of Eden.
- (ii) The proclamation of the gospel in Genesis 3:15 was not made directly to Adam but indirectly via the condemnation made to Satan. (We are aware of Andrew Fuller’s attempt to solve this problem, claiming that Adam was not in a suitable state of mind to receive the promise of mercy so that it was conveyed as a threatening to Satan.²)
- (iii) The words of Genesis 3:15 were given before the judgement was pronounced for the breaking of the Covenant of Works in Genesis 3:16-19. In other words, the element of mercy in Genesis 3:15 is part-and-parcel of the judgement that came from breaking the Covenant of Works.
- (iv) The whole transaction, including the sacrifice of the animals to provide a covering for Adam and Eve, occurred in the garden

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of Eden. Following that, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22). Again, it would be better to consider the revelation of the Covenant of Grace as part-and-parcel of the Covenant of Works.

From these considerations, we conclude that only one covenant was made with Adam, namely the Covenant of Works, to which was attached the revelation of the Covenant of Grace. Put another way, the Adamic Covenant is one, being a Covenant of Works, while functioning as a revelation of the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Works consists of two phases, or administrations – the first phase in which Adam was able to keep God’s commandments but failed to do so, and the second phase which extended from after the Fall to the day of judgement in which man is under the judgement and curse of the Fall, and unable to save himself. Traditional Baptist Covenant Theology sees the Covenant of Works as still in operation although fallen man is unable to be saved by it. Here, we introduce the ideas of two administrations of the Covenant of Works and one Adamic Covenant. The Covenant of Works is the way of salvation accomplished by human effort at keeping the law of God, while the Covenant of Grace is the way of salvation accomplished by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

3.2.2 One covenant with Noah

Only one covenant was made with Noah, the subjects of which were Noah and his household (Gen. 7:1; 9:9-11) and all mankind who descended from them. The inclusion of animals and birds does not constitute a problem for the promise of God not to destroy the earth by flood benefits them as well. The subjects of material interest in the covenant are rational humans made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6). The structure of the covenant included the ark, the world-wide flood, the sign of the rainbow (Gen. 9:12-17), and the burnt offerings passed down from the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 8:20). The statutes of the covenant included God’s promise of never again to destroy the earth by flood (Gen. 9:11, 15), the command to Noah and his household to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 9:1, 7), the permission to eat the meat of animals, and the prohibition of murder

²Fuller, A. *Works*, Vol. 3, p. 15, quoted in Howell, R.B.C. 1855. *The Covenants*, Triangle Press, p. 22.

3.2. How many covenants were made with each head?

(Gen. 9:5-6). It was a repetition of the mandate given to Adam (Gen. 1:28), but now in a fallen world.

3.2.3 One covenant with Abraham

As noted above, some writers see more than one covenant made with Abraham, while traditional Baptist Covenant Theology sees two aspects in the one covenant made with Abraham – namely, (i) the external/temporal aspect pertaining to all physical descendants of Abraham, involving the rites of circumcision and the land of Canaan, and (ii) the spiritual aspect pertaining to the elect of God from all nations (in both the Old and the New Testaments) who share Abraham's faith in the promise of the Seed, Jesus Christ.

We would refine this view by postulating that:

- (i) Only one covenant was made with Abram (as Abraham was known at that time), consisting of three phases/instalments executed at different times. The first instalment (Gen. 12:1-3) was given when Abraham was 75 years old (Gen 12:4). The subjects included Abraham, his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and the servants he acquired at Haran (Gen. 12:4-5). The structure of the covenant included a promised land (Gen. 12:1, 5, 7; 13:14-15), and the burnt offering handed down from the days of Adam (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:18). The statutes included the call to depart from his family to go to a distant land, the promise of protection, and the privileges of becoming a great nation and a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:5).
- (ii) The second instalment of the covenant came to Abram ten years later (cf. Gen. 17:23-24) in a vision (Gen. 15:1, 12). God promised Abram that He would be his shield and “exceedingly great reward” (Gen. 15:1). His descendants would be as numerous as the countless stars (Gen. 12:5). The land of Canaan would be his inheritance. There is the prophecy that his descendants would multiply and be oppressed in a foreign land, before returning to possess the promised land (Gen. 15:12-16). An unusual ceremony of ‘cutting the covenant’ occurred in the vision, in which the covenant made with Abram was reaffirmed, or confirmed (Gen. 15:18-20). It is noted that the words of verse 18 are, “On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying...” This should be regarded as

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a reaffirmation, or confirmation, of the earlier covenant instead of a different covenant because the subjects, structure, and statutes remained the same. On this occasion, Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (v. 6).”

- (iii) The third phase of the covenant was given to Abram when he was ninety-nine years old (Gen. 17:1, 24). The subjects of the covenant are the same as declared in the earlier phases – “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you (v. 7).” ‘And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you...(vv. 9-10).” ’ The structure now included circumcision of all the males as a sign of the covenant (v. 11). Furthermore, Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, and Sarai’s name was changed to Sarah. The statutes included the reaffirmation, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless (v. 1).” Abraham would be a father of many nations, and kings shall come from him (vv. 5-6). These promises would be fulfilled through both his sons, Issac (v. 16) and Ishmael (v. 20). This covenant was called “an everlasting covenant” (v. 7), although encompassing both Isaac and Ishmael, but in the next instant the term “everlasting covenant” was applied to Isaac alone – “...you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you... But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year (vv. 19-22).” The significance of this will be discuss under ‘two key covenants’ below.

Suffice for now to say there are not two, or three, or more covenants made with Abraham but only one. The subjects of the covenant were the same. The structure had the same ingredients of the earlier covenants, including the burnt offerings and the promised land, with circumcision added in the third phase. The statutes were the same – the promise of protection, being made a blessing to the nations, having many offspring, and (in the third phase of the covenant) of

3.2. How many covenants were made with each head?

kings coming from Abraham. On the part of the subjects, obedience to God and trust in His promises were required.

3.2.4 One covenant with Moses

The covenant that God made with the nation of Israel may be called the Mosaic Covenant because Moses was the representative head. Some present-day writers claim that Moses was acting as a mediator and not the covenant head.³ We believe it is fastidious to make such a distinction, at least in this case. While it is true that Moses was the mediator between God and the nation of Israel, he was also the representative head of the nation and, therefore, of the covenant made with the nation. Did not God preserve Moses's life as a baby for the purpose of leading the nation? Did not God meet Moses in the burning bush, send him to confront Pharaoh, and give him the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai? Did not God speak to him "face to face" (Num. 12:7-8)? Representation may be mediate or immediate, or both. In the case of Abraham, the representation was mediate. Those represented by Abraham were not physically present with him when the covenant was made. In the case of Moses, the representation was immediate as well as mediate. The covenant was made with the first generation of Israel immediately, with Moses leading the covenanting service (Exodus 24:1-8). This covenant applied mediately to the later generations, as shown by its reaffirmation on the plains of Moab (Deut. 29:1), and the breaking of the covenant by Israel and Judah in later generations (Jer. 11:10). The name of Moses is synonymous with the covenant made with the nation of Israel (Matt. 8:4; 2 Cor. 3:7, 13; etc.). The federal head of a covenant need not be defined as the singular person through whom the covenant is made on behalf of others.

The big question is whether the Covenant of Works, broken by Adam, was revived in some ways in the Mosaic Covenant. In recent years, those who advocate variant Baptist views of Covenant Theology have pressed this point with considerable vigour, claiming the support of the Particular Baptist, Nehemiah Coxe (d. 1689), and the famous Paedobaptist, John Owen (1616-1683). Owen mentioned a number of times in his book that the Covenant of Works was 'revived'

³Example Renihan, S. 2020. *The Mystery Of Christ, His Covenant & His Kingdom*, Founders Ministries, p. 50. Although the book has been withdrawn, the effects of the teaching remain and, therefore, the issues raised need to be addressed.

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in the Mosaic Covenant.⁴ Today, the word used by those who believe in the same idea is ‘republished’. In Paedobaptist circles, the ‘republishment’ idea was revived by Meredith Kline in the 1960s, causing no little controversy. Although John Owen is highly esteemed by the Particular Baptists of the 17th century and by the Reformed Baptists today, especially for his writings on ecclesiology,⁵ his view on the republication of the Covenant of Works was a minority view among the Puritans.

There seems to be three reasons why it has been claimed that the Covenant of Works was revived in some ways in the Mosaic Covenant. The first reason is offered by those who hold to Variant Baptist Covenant Theology today. The last two reasons were offered by John Owen.

- (i) Leviticus 18:5 is seen to be a key passage, “You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.” It is claimed that at least the temporal blessing of living in the land of Canaan, long life, peace, etc., was attained by obedience to the law, while disobedience led to judgement, death and banishment.
- (ii) John Owen says, “By reviving the commands of the covenant of works, with the sanction of death, it put awe on the minds of men, and set bounds to their lusts, that they should not dare to run forth into that excess which they were naturally inclined to.”
- (iii) John Owen further says, “To shut up unbelievers, and such as would not seek for righteousness, life, and salvation by the promise, under the power of the covenant of works, and curse attending it. “It concluded” or “shut up all under sin,” says the apostle, Gal. 3:22. This was the end of the law, for this end was it added, as it gave a revival to the covenant of works.”⁶

⁴Coxe, N. and Owen, J. 2005. *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, Reformed Baptist Academic Press, pp. 189, 192, 197, etc.

⁵Poh, B.S. 2017. *The Keys of the Kingdom: A Study On The Biblical Form Of Church Government*, Good News Enterprise. Also Poh, B.S. 2025. *A Garden Enclosed*, Good News Enterprise.

⁶Coxe, N. and Owen, J. 2005. *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, Reformed Baptist Academic Press, pp. 192, 193.

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The Paedobaptist, Cornelius Venema, who has written extensively on Covenant Theology makes this observation:⁷

Though the republication thesis has been advanced with considerable vigor by some in the Reformed community as an important emphasis in the Reformed theological tradition, I argue that it was a minority viewpoint among writers of the orthodox period, and that in its modern expression reflects the revisions of covenant theology associated with the name of Meredith Kline.

Earl M. Blackburn, while countering the idea of republication, quoted the Reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck on the purpose of the law:⁸

On the one hand, therefore, the law was subservient to the Covenant of Grace; it was not a covenant of works in disguise and did not intend that humans would obtain justification by their own works. On the other hand, its purpose was to lay the groundwork for a higher and better dispensation [administration] of the same covenant to come in the fullness of time. The impossibility of keeping the Sinaitic Covenant and of meeting the demands of the law made another and better dispensation of the covenant of grace necessary.

Was the Covenant of Works revived, or republished, in the Mosaic Covenant? We say, “No! The Covenant of Works has never been abrogated. It did not need to be revived, or republished.” The Mosaic Covenant, just like the other Old Testament covenants, revealed the Covenant of Works just as it revealed the Covenant of Grace. Regardless of the purpose(s) of the law, of which we will discuss below, there is only one covenant made with Moses. The law was part of the structure and statutes of the covenant. It was not “the covenant” but “the words of the covenant” (Exod. 34:28).⁹ Moses is identified with the law and, therefore, with this, one covenant (2 Cor. 3:7, 15 cf. 4-6; Heb. 8:9). That said, what about the covenant made

⁷Venema, C.P. 2017. *Christ + Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants*, P&R Pub. Co., p. xxv.

⁸Blackburn, E.M. 2023. *It Pleased The Lord To Make A Covenant Of Grace: A Critique of 1689 Federalism*, Veritas Heritage Press, p. 32.

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with Moses in Moab “besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb [Sinai] (Deut. 29:1)”⁹? As in the case of the Abrahamic Covenant, we must see this as the second phase of the Mosaic Covenant. The subjects of the covenant were the same, although the first generation of Israelites had died during the wilderness wandering (Deut. 29:10-19). The law was the same as in the first phase of the covenant (Deut. 29:20-22). The land promised was still the same (Deut. 29:23-28). A good thirty-eight years lay between the two phases of the covenant, but that should not constitute a problem for “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8).” In the Covenant of Grace, the promise of the Saviour was given way back in Genesis 3:15, and was fulfilled thousands of years later, “when the fullness of the time had come (Gal. 4:4)”.

3.2.5 How should we see the Davidic covenant?

Some writers make much of the Davidic covenant, treating it as distinct from the Mosaic Covenant. Was there a covenant made with David? Yes, indeed, there was a covenant made with David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:8-16; 23:5; and 1 Chronicles 17:11-14. This covenant is referred to in Psalm 89:3, 28; 2 Chronicles 7:18; 21:7; and Jeremiah 33:21, 25-26. There was also the Levitical covenant made with Aaron, and extending to Phinehas (Lev. 24:8-9; Num. 25:10-13). It seems best to treat the Davidic covenant and the Levitical covenant as subordinate covenants of the Mosaic Covenant, for the following reasons:

- (i) The Davidic and Levitical covenants had the purpose of revealing the coming of the Saviour who would be High Priest and King (Heb. 7:1-2; Luke 1:32-33), rather than administering the Covenant of Grace – a point of contention that will be discussed below.
- (ii) Although kingship in the nation came later, unlike the priesthood which was established in the lifetime of Moses, the law given through Moses already anticipated the appointment of kings, and the behaviour expected of them (Deut. 17:14-20).

⁹John Owen made a slip here, calling the law “the covenant”. See Cox, N. and Owen, J. 2005, p 202.

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Narrowing down from the nation of Israel (under the Mosaic Covenant), to the tribe of Judah, to the family of David, the Messiah was going to come – in fulfilment of the ancient prophecy of Genesis 49:10, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”

- (iii) Moses is regarded as the culmination of revelation in the Old Testament, and not David, in Romans 5:14, “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

We believe it is more convincing to consider the Davidic and Levitical covenants as subordinate to the Mosaic Covenant.

3.2.6 How should we see the New Covenant?

The New Covenant is distinct from the Old Covenant. The two covenants are compared, and contrasted, in 2 Corinthians 3:6-9; Galatians 4:24-26; and Hebrews 7:22; 8:7-13; 9:15-20. The Old Covenant is identified with the Mosaic Covenant by some, but with all the Old Testament covenants considered together, by others. It is identified with the Mosaic Covenant because it is often referred to as “the law”. On the other hand, it is considered a reference to all the Old Testament covenants because the plural word ‘covenants’ is used in Romans 9:4 and Ephesians 2:12 – “...Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises (Rom. 9:4)...” and “...that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12).” It is to be noted that these two verses not only use the plural word ‘covenants’ but also link it to the promise of salvation in Christ – the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) and the Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). It seems best to take the Old Covenant as a reference to all the covenants God made with man in the Old Testament, culminating in the Mosaic Covenant, all of which revealed the Covenant of Grace progressively.

The New Covenant was instituted by Christ during the last Passover feast that He shared with His disciples, which was also the first ever Lord’s Supper instituted for the church (Matt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24;

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Luke 22:13-20). The subjects of the New Covenant are those regenerated (born again) by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 8:10-12; 10:16-25; John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5-6), who repent and profess faith in Christ (Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:10-12), and are baptised (Acts 2:39; Matt. 28:19-20). The children of believers are excluded from membership in the Covenant of Grace, until they are converted. This is true in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Believers alone are members of the church, the New Covenant community of God's people. The structure of the New Covenant is the local church (1 Cor. 12:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rev. 1:20) – including an explicit church membership, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the keeping of the Lord's Day, worship that is regulated by Scripture, church discipline, etc. (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Tim. 3:15). The statutes of the New Covenant include the completely written word of God – including the New Testament and the Old Testament, interpreted correctly. Church membership, baptism, and the Lord's Supper are limited to those who profess faith and show a credible profession of faith (Rom. 10:10-13, 17; Acts 2:38-39, 41). The arguments of Paedobaptist Covenant Theology for the inclusion of children in the Covenant of Grace cannot be accepted because:

- (i) The Abrahamic covenant, which included the promise “to you and your descendants after you (Gen. 17:7)” delimited the subjects of that covenant, which are different from those of the New Covenant.
- (ii) The claim that circumcision is replaced by baptism cannot be sustained because circumcision is a type which is fulfilled by regeneration, “the circumcision made without hands (Col. 2:11-12; Rom. 2:29)”. Baptism is a new sign, of the New Covenant. The outward sign of circumcision cannot point to another outward sign of baptism. A type or symbol that is physical, points to something that is spiritual. By definition, the antitype that answers to the type must be a spiritual, inward, reality.
- (iii) The assumption that the households that were baptised in the New Testament must have included infants cannot be sustained because no infants are mentioned. Instead, there is explicit mention of believers in the households that were baptised (Acts 16:33-34; 1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15). The Paedobaptist position is

3.3. How should we understand the two 'key covenants'?

a case of building a doctrine-and-practice from the silence of Scripture, while ignoring what is explicitly taught.

3.3 How should we understand the two 'key covenants'?

Variant Baptist Covenant Theology opposes the idea that the Covenant of Grace is administered both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Instead, the Covenant of Grace is equated with the New Covenant. Although it is claimed that the elect in the Old Testament were saved by grace through faith in the coming Saviour, it is not made clear how that came about under the different Old Testament covenants. In this, they seem to be following Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen.¹⁰ We may summarise Owen's view under the following points:

- (i) It is acknowledged that the Covenant of Grace is commonly understood to be "the only way and means of salvation to the church [the elect], from the first entrance of sin (Owen, p. 185)."
- (ii) It is claimed that the promise of salvation in the Old Testament was not strictly a covenant since: (a) it lacked the solemn confirmation and establishment by the blood of the sacrifice which belonged to it (in other words, Christ had not yet died to establish the covenant); and (b) it lacked "the spring, rule, and measure of all the worship of the church" (in other words, it lacked the structure of a covenant, Owen, p. 185).
- (iii) The Old Covenant is the Sinaitic Covenant described in Exodus 24:3-8 and Deuteronomy 5:2-5, while the New Covenant is promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:40 and mentioned in Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24. These two covenants, or testaments, are compared one with another, and opposed one to another (2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 4:24-26; Heb. 7:22; 9:15-20) (Owen 186-187).
- (iv) The conclusion is that there are two distinct covenants, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant (Owen, p. 187). Owen acknowledges that "all believers were reconciled, justified, and saved, by virtue of the promise, while they were

3. HOW MAY WE REFINE COVENANT THEOLOGY?

under the (old) covenant (Owen, p. 188)”, and “the covenant of grace was contained and proposed only in the promise, before it was solemnly confirmed in the blood and sacrifice of Christ... (Owen, p. 193)”. The Covenant of Grace is effectively equated with the New Covenant.

Both traditional Baptist and traditional Paedobaptist Covenant Theology believe that the elect in the Old Testament and the New Testament were/are saved in the Covenant of Grace administered differently in the Old Testament and New Testament. The Covenant of Grace does not comprehend the reprobate. The various administrations of the covenant do. The administrations of the covenant are the arrangements through which the elect are called out of the world into the kingdom of God. Some Paedobaptist writers err by confounding the administrations of the covenant with the covenant itself, arguing that the children of believers who are under the administration of the New Covenant are in the Covenant of Grace until proved otherwise when they grow up.¹¹ In traditional Baptist Covenant Theology, there is also the belief that the Covenant of Works has not been abrogated, although fallen man is no longer able to be saved by obedience to the commands of God. That being the case, there is no necessity to say that the Covenant of Works was revived, or republished, in the Mosaic Covenant. By so saying, it is implied that the Covenant of Works was not in operation at all before the Mosaic Covenant.

It is here that we propose the ideas of two ‘key covenants’, each with a dual revelation and a dual administration.

Two key covenants: The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace are two key covenants, as shown by Romans 5:12-19 where Adam is compared with Christ. Adam is declared to be a type of Christ. Adam brought eternal death to all who are physically descended from him. Christ gives eternal life to all who are spiritually united to Him by faith. Adam is the federal head of the Covenant of Works, while Christ is the federal Head of the Covenant of Grace. Christ sealed the Covenant of Grace by His death on the cross. We may say Adam sealed the Covenant of Works by his death/Fall in the

¹⁰Coxe, N. and Owen, J. 2005. *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, Reformed Baptist Academic Press.

¹¹e.g. Hanks, H. 1981. *We & Our Children*, Reformed Free Publishing Association.

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garden of Eden. The Covenant of Works is the way of salvation by human effort, the Covenant of Grace is the way of salvation by God's mercy. The two ways of salvation, found in the two key covenants, are illustrated by the two sons of Abraham – Ishmael and Isaac – in Galatians 4:21-31. While the Old Covenant is contrasted with the New Covenant in Scripture, they are not the key covenants – unless one equates the Old Covenant with the Covenant of Works, and the New Covenant with the Covenant of Grace. However, following traditional Covenant Theology, which we believe to be correct, we reject these equations. The two key covenants revealed in Scripture are the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. The question may be asked, "Are the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace true covenants?" The federal heads are clear. So are the subjects. What constitute the *structure*? We answer – the structures of all the other covenants of Scripture, considered together, constitute the structure of both the Covenants of Works and the Covenant of Grace. What constitute the *statutes* of the Covenants of Works and the Covenants of Grace? We will show later that each of the other covenants has two aspects to its statutes – the temporal aspect and the evangelical aspect. The Covenant of Works offer salvation by saying through the temporal aspect, as it were, "Do these and you shall live (cf. Lev. 18:5)", while Covenant of Grace offers salvation by declaring "the just shall live by faith (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11)" through the evangelical aspect.

A dual revelation of the two key covenants: We know that the Covenant of Works was in operation even after the Fall because many perished in their sins while attempting to be saved by works. Cain was lost, while Abel was saved (Heb. 11:4). Similarly, Esau was lost while Jacob was saved (Rom. 9:13). "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come (Rom. 5:14)." To be noted is the fact that while the Covenant of Grace was progressively revealed, so was the Covenant of Works. The revelation of the Covenant of Grace began in the garden of Eden – immediately after the Fall (Gen. 3:15), and before Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden (Gen. 3:22-24). We have noted that the revelation of the Covenant of Grace should rightly be considered part-and-parcel of the Adamic Covenant. Just as the Covenant of Grace was progressively revealed in the subsequent covenants, so also was the Covenant of Works – culminat-

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ing in the New Covenant. This is shown in the two passages that contrasts the two key covenants. After comparing and contrasting Adam with Christ, we are told in Romans 5:20-21, “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In Galatians 4:24-26, we are told, “...For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” The giving of the law in the Mosaic Covenant is the culmination of revelation of sin, and of the impossibility of being saved by works, at the same time that it points to the coming of Christ who alone can save. Revelation, however, did not stop at the Mosaic Covenant, which is the culmination of revelation *in the Old Testament*. The New Covenant comes next, which is the culmination of *all God’s revelation*. Since the Covenant of Works has never been abrogated, it follows that it receives its clearest revelation in the New Covenant as well. Here is another reason why the New Covenant should not be identified with the Covenant of Grace. The New Covenant reveals most clearly the Covenant of Grace, i.e., the way of salvation by grace, through faith in Christ alone. It reveals at the same time, most clearly, the sin and guilt of fallen man, and the impossibility of being saved by works. For example, the teaching of the apostle Paul on salvation by grace in the books of Romans and Galatians reveals at the same time the guilt of man and his inability to be saved by works.

A dual administration of each of the two key covenants: How were the elect in the Old Testament saved? By grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone! The gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8) – and by implication to Moses. We have seen that the ‘proto-evangelion’ was proclaimed in the garden of Eden, and the sacrifice of animals was involved in covering the nakedness of Adam and Eve. We are not surprised, therefore, when Abel offered up animals to God, whose offering was accepted because he offered them in faith (Heb. 11:4), and blood was shed for remission (Heb. 9:22). Similarly, Noah offered up animal sacrifices immediately after the flood (Gen. 8:20). Animal sacrifices also are seen in the Mosaic Covenant. The animal sacrifices foreshadowed the coming of Christ, who offered Himself as

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the perfect sacrifice for His people (Heb. 9:15). "He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself... Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many (Heb. 9:26, 28)." The Old Testament covenants were vehicles/means by which the gospel was preached, while administering the Covenant of Grace to the elect. The temporal elements such as animal sacrifices and the law were necessary to give form to what might be called the evangelical aspect of the covenants, by which the gospel was made known. The elect of God were given the ability to discern and understand the gospel in order to be saved. Salvation was by virtue of the Covenant of Grace administered *through* the Old Testament covenants, and not *by virtue of* the Old Testament covenants themselves.

Two illustrations from the parables of the Lord Jesus Christ will help to make this clear. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), a lawyer (i.e., a scribe expert in the law of God) tested the Lord by asking, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life (v. 25)?" This sets the context of the parable, which is about salvation, and not merely about who constitutes our neighbour. In the parable, the man who fell among thieves was wounded and did not receive help from a priest and a Levite. Instead, a Samaritan had compassion on him, bandaged him, set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, the Samaritan gave two denarii to the inn-keeper, saying, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you." Was the wounded man truly taken care of by the Samaritan and the inn-keeper? Did the inn-keeper not take care of the wounded man because the full sum of money was not paid upfront by the Samaritan? The answer is that the wounded man was truly taken care of by the Samaritan and the inn-keeper, even though the full sum of money was not paid immediately. In the same way, the elect of the Old Testament were truly saved by the Lord who would come later to make full payment for the sins of His people by His death on the cross. The Covenant of Grace was operative in the Old Testament even though the Lord had not sealed it by His death on the cross.

Another illustration is from the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). Again, it is not difficult to see that this parable is about salvation. Although the focus is on the repentance of the younger son who was lost in prodigal living, we may learn something about the administration of the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament. The parable begins with the son saying to the father, "Father, give me

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the portion of goods that falls to me.’ The son was asking for his portion of the inheritance from the father even before the father died. Did the son truly receive a portion of the inheritance? Yes, indeed! This, in fact, is a common practice everywhere, where a father might distribute his inheritance before, or near, his death. Upon the death of the father, it is often the case that there is more property to distribute! Our salvation and, therefore, the Covenant of Grace, is often called, or compared to, an ‘inheritance’ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:1; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 6:17; 11:7). The Old Testament saints truly received their inheritance, the richness of which became more obvious upon the death of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. The New Testament believers receive the fullness of their inheritance because Christ has died to seal the Covenant of Grace. There are two administrations of the Covenant of Grace – one in the Old Testament, and the other in the New.

We agree with John Owen that “no reconciliation with God and salvation could be obtained by virtue of the Old Covenant [the Mosaic Covenant], or the administration of it.”¹² However, what we are claiming is not salvation *by virtue of* the Mosaic Covenant, or the other covenants of the Old Testament. What we are claiming is that the Old Testament covenants *efficaciously administered* the Covenant of Grace to the elect of God. We take ‘the Old Covenant’ as referring to all the Old Testament covenants considered together, and exemplified by the Mosaic Covenant because the plural word ‘covenants’ is used in reference to the promise of salvation in Christ in Romans 9:4 and Ephesians 2:12. The Old Covenant is distinct from the New Covenant because the latter is a covenant in its own right, and is the culmination of the revelation of the Covenant of Grace of the former. Just as is the case with the Old Covenant, the New Covenant in itself does not save. Its purpose, like all the previous covenants, is to administer salvation on the basis of the Covenant of Grace. It has two objectives, like the previous covenants – namely to reveal the Covenant of Grace so that the elect may be saved, and to reveal the Covenant of Works so that everyone is warned against trusting in self-effort to be saved. The newness of the New Covenant, in contrast to the old, lies in many aspects:

- (i) in it, the sealing of the Covenant of Grace by Christ’s death took place compared to its mere proclamation in the Old Covenant;
- (ii) the subjects of the covenant are made up only of those who are

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regenerate;

- (iii) the new sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are introduced;
- (iv) the clearest revelation of both the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Works is found compared to in the Old Covenant;
- (v) redemption is fully accomplished by the Saviour, with the greater enabling grace of the Holy Spirit in believers to obey God's word; and
- (vi) the calling of elect from all the nations into God's kingdom through the execution of the Great Commission takes place.

One Purpose, two objectives: Arising from the above considerations, we conclude that all the covenants, apart from the two key covenants, have a purpose and two basic objectives. The purpose is to function as vehicles for the administration of the Covenant of Grace so that the elect are saved. The objectives are: (a) to reveal salvation by grace so that the elect may be saved; and (b) to reveal the sin and guilt of man while warning them against trusting in works for salvation. Traditionally, the law of God – first written in the heart of man at creation and later on tables of stone in the time of Moses – is said to have three uses: (a) *the civil use*, i.e., to restrain sin; (b) *the pedagogical use*, i.e., to confront sin and act as a school master to point us to Christ; and (c) *the didactic use*, i.e., to teach believers how to live righteously. This is so far as the law is concerned. The law functions together with other elements of the covenants – e.g. the burnt offerings, circumcision, baptism, the Lord's Supper – to accomplish the two objectives, expressed in passages such as Galatians 3:21-22: "Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

¹²Coxe, N. and Owen, J. 2005. *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, Reformed Baptist Academic Press, p. 187.

3.4 Summary

A refinement to traditional Baptist Covenant Theology is made by a number of proposals which are argued out from Scripture. These proposals do not contradict the main tenets of traditional Baptist Covenant Theology, but constitute additional new concepts and different perspectives of old ones. These pillars are laid out in preparation for fleshing out Covenant Theology proper in the next chapter.

Every covenant God made with man has a covenant head. Each covenant is made up of three component parts – the subjects, the structure, and the statutes. The subjects are the people encompassed by the covenant. The structure are the physical signs and rituals that characterise the covenant externally, marking out the people concerned from other people. The statutes are the rules, regulations, and promises that require trust and obedience from the subjects.

There are two key covenants – one is the Covenant of Works by which salvation is gained by human effort, while the other is the Covenant of Grace by which salvation is offered by God through faith in the Saviour. There is a dual revelation of the two key covenants from creation to the end of the world. As the Covenant of Grace is progressively revealed, so is the Covenant of Works. There are two administrations to the Covenant of Works – namely, the administration before the Fall when Adam and Eve were able to obey God but failed, the other the administration after the Fall when fallen man is no longer able to be saved by works while remaining under the judgement of God. There are two administrations to the Covenant of Grace – one before the coming of Christ when salvation by grace was revealed and effectually applied to the elect, and the other after the death of Christ when salvation in all its fullness is proclaimed and effectually applied by the Holy Spirit.

All the other covenants have a purpose and two basic objectives. The purpose was to act as the vehicle to administer the salvation of the Covenant of Grace to the elect. The two objectives were – firstly, to reveal the gospel in order that the elect might be saved, and secondly, to reveal sin while warning against attempting to be saved by works. These covenants, therefore, progressively revealed both the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Works. Since salvation is accomplished by the Covenant of Grace, while damnation is the result of the Covenant of Works, salvation and damnation in the Old Testament age did not occur by virtue of those covenants. The New

Covenant, like the Old Covenant, do not save by virtue of itself but by virtue of the Covenant of Grace. It is the clearest revelation, and completes the revelation, of the Covenant of Grace but it is not the Covenant of Grace.

To accomplish the purpose and the two objectives, each covenant has a temporal aspect and an evangelical aspect to it. This we shall develop next.

* * * * *

Four

When Did The Covenant Of Grace Begin?

The framework of Covenant Theology has been erected earlier, in which a number of ‘pillars’ (i.e., supportive concepts) have been planted. That framework needs to be fleshed out so that the fullness and beauty of God’s plan of salvation stands out. Covenant Theology is basically the study of how God provides salvation for His chosen people. Put another way, we may say that Covenant Theology lies at the base of missions, which is the execution of the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and other parts of Scripture. God saves the elect by entering into covenants with fallen man, all of which constitute the unfolding of the Covenant of Grace. When did the Covenant of Grace begin?

4.1 God’s eternal purpose

When Charles Simeon (1759-1836) lay dying in Cambridge with his eyes closed for many hours, he suddenly said to his friend, “If you want to know what I am doing, go and look in the first chapter of Ephesians from the third to the fourteenth verses; there you will see what I am enjoying now.”¹ Charles Simeon was an able preacher who influenced many lives in Britain and, indirectly, many lives on the missions field. His recommendation of chaplains was sought and acted upon by the East India Company. He was a good friend of

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Henry Martyn (1781-1812), the well-known missionary to India and Persia (now Iran). Taking the cue from Charles Simeon, we will begin this part of our study of Covenant Theology with Ephesians 1:3-14.

Ephesians 1:3-14 gives the sweep of God's plan of salvation for His chosen people from eternity past to eternity future. There are three sections, each ending with "to the praise of His glory (vv. 6, 12, 14)". The first section focuses on the role of God the Father who predestined the salvation of His people (vv. 3-6). It is revealed that the election, redemption, and adoption of God's people in Christ will redound in praise to the glory of God for His grace (v. 6).

The second section focuses on the role of the Son of God in redemption. It is by His blood (i.e., by His death), that redemption is accomplished, resulting in forgiveness of sins, all according to God's abundance of grace to His people (vv. 7-8). It has been revealed to the apostles the mystery of God's will, that "in the dispensation of the fullness of the times" – that is, in this gospel age (cf. Heb. 1:1-2) – all things that are in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, will be gathered together. This is all "according to the counsel of His will (v. 11)", i.e., according to God's plan from "before the foundation of the world (v. 4)". The redemption of the elect is to be "to the praise of His glory (v. 12)".

In the third section (vv. 13-14), the focus is on the role of the Holy Spirit. Those who have heard the gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ are sealed by the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in them. The 'sealing' conveys the ideas derived from a document or letter that is sealed, showing; (i) its authority; (ii) its authenticity; (iii) its security, and (iv) its ownership. The elect on earth have been purchased by Christ and will arrive safely in heaven to enjoy their inheritance in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:16-17). This will be "to the praise of His glory (v. 14)".

Two issues of importance must be settled in the discussion on missions: first, what is the end, or goal, of God's plan of salvation, and second, what is the 'mystery' that had been revealed to the apostles? The answers to these questions, and failure to provide convincing answers for them, have implications on the objectives of missions, the motives and motivation of missions, the methods and methodology adopted, as well as on other issues. These matters we

¹Moule, C. G. H. 1965. *Charles Simeon*, The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, p.174.

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have dealt with quite extensively in a previous work.²

In seeking to answer the first question, what is the end or goal of God's eternal plan, we note that the salvation of the elect is due to God's grace and initiative. The manifestation of the glory of God is the supreme end of redemption (cf. 3:21; 1 Cor. 10:31). The elect and all the good angels will be singing praises to God in heaven because of the wonder of His grace shown in the salvation of undeserving sinners (10 cf. Rev. 5:8-14). God is glorified not so much in the praises sung by His creatures than by the salvation of undeserving sinners by His grace. The singing is the expression of gratitude and wonder. The singing does not, and cannot, add glory to God who is already perfect. The worship by His creatures is the response to the manifestation of God's glory in the salvation of the elect. The response of the saved is not to be confused with the end, or goal, of salvation which is to manifest the glory of God in the salvation of the undeserving. We emphasise this because there are those who make the worship of God in heaven the end of missions, thus shifting the focus to a subjective activity from the objective salvation of the elect.³ Similarly, this would shift the objective of missions which is the planting of local churches, made up of saved and sanctified people, to the personal enjoyment of God of those saved (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:13, 16, 19; 12:1; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:1-2, 27).

Another way of putting it is that God takes pleasure in His children – the elect, who are the redeemed of the Lord – regardless of whether they pray, or sing praises to Him. It is expected of them to pray and to sing to His praise, but He takes pleasure in them simply because they are His and are with Him. A father is pleased simply because he knows that his children are well, have ready access to him, and are safely gathered together on appointed occasions. The apostle Paul says to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:8), “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” The apostle says, in Romans 8:38-39, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God

²Poh, B.S. 2023. *World Missions Today*, Good News Enterprise.

³Piper, J. 2010. *Let The Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, Baker Academic.

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which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Worship is part of, and probably the main, activity engaged in by the elect in heaven, together with all the good angels (Rev. 4, 5, 7). We are told in Revelation 7:9-10, ‘...a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ’ The redeemed people of God worship together with the angels in heaven. They serve God in other ways as well. Indeed, all that they do in heaven will be acts of worship to God. There will be no more marriage in heaven. We will still recognise one another, and the fellowship between us will be lifted to a level beyond what we have experienced, or are capable of understanding, while on earth. There are many mansions in heaven, and there will be a place for everyone (John 14:1-4). The Parable of the Talents suggests that there will be responsibilities assigned to us in heaven, of varying degrees: “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord’ (Matt. 25:21, 23)”, “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away (Matt. 25:29 cf. Rev. 22:12).”

Coming back to Ephesians 1:3-14, we note that after declaring God’s eternal purpose (1:3-14), Paul proceeds to expound on how that purpose unfolds in history. We are saved by the same mighty power of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father with authority over all creation. This is covered in Chapter 1:15-23. In Chapter 2:1-10, Paul shows that God is rich in mercy and love, saving undeserving sinners by grace through faith in Christ, so that we share in Christ’s inheritance. To be noted is the statement (2:7), “...that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” The end of missions is the manifestation of the glory of God in His grace, and not the worship offered by the redeemed. The salvation of the undeserving, the begetting of sons from all the nations, manifests the glory of God (cf. 2 Thess.1:12; 2:14).

In Ephesians 2:11-22 the mystery that had been revealed to the apostles is explained briefly (cf. 3:3). The Gentiles who were “aliens

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from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise” are now brought near by the blood of Christ (2:11-13). The same gospel is preached to “those who were near”, namely the Jews, so that the elect among them will be saved by the same method (17 cf. 11). Together, Jewish and Gentile believers become members of the household of God, who grow together into a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (19-22). In Chapter 3:1-13, Paul explains that this was the mystery revealed to himself, the apostles, and the prophets, namely “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel (v. 6)”. Paul has been sent to preach to the Gentiles, “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places... (vv. 10-11)”. Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles is to fulfil in part the manifold wisdom of God in bringing the Gentile and Jewish elect together as the church of Jesus Christ. This mystery is explained at length by the same apostle in Chapters 9 to 11 of Romans.

As the apostle proceeds with the unfolding of God’s eternal plan of salvation in the gospel age, he is lifted up in ecstasy, saying (Eph. 3:14-19),

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height– to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Like an orchestra playing a masterpiece (perhaps like Handel’s *Messiah*), the crescendo is reached. Our hearts are lifted up like Paul’s, all our emotions have been bundled together, ready for that grand finale...(Eph. 3:20-21),

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power

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that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We can imagine the drums beaten with the last bang, the cymbals clang a last time, the stringed instruments that had been sawn with increasing vigour ending with the last drawn out note. All the members of the orchestra, including the conductor, freeze. There is deathly silence. All our emotions are spent. Our hearts glow with euphoric satisfaction. The doctrinal part of the epistle is finished, to be followed by the practical part. For our purpose, we note that the end of missions is the manifestation of God's glory in the church – by Christ Jesus, to all generations ahead of us, until we are all gathered on the new earth, in the new heavens, to serve God – forever and ever.

4.2 The Covenant of Redemption

We are now ready to formulate the principles involved in the salvation of God's chosen people from eternity past to eternity future. The terms "eternity past" and "eternity future" make sense to us as creatures who are limited, and confined, by time. God created all things, including the concept of time. He is Himself not bound by time. The Bible reveals that all official transactions, whether between God and men or between men and men, were carried out by means of covenants – *berith* in the Old Testament, and *diatheke* in the New Testament. We have defined a covenant as a formal agreement between two or more parties that is sealed by an oath, thereby binding them together in a special relationship. We have also noted that a covenant will have subjects, structure, and statutes. Another way of looking at it is that there are terms and conditions (rights and obligations, demands and promises) agreed upon by the parties concerned. In the case of the covenants made by God with men, He takes the initiative and He exercises His right as the Creator to impose the terms and conditions. The divine initiative and the right to impose the terms and conditions upon man are expressed in the *1689 Confession* as follows (1689:7:1),

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures [creatures capable of reasoning] do owe obedience unto him as their Creator,

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yet they could never have attained the reward of life,
but by some (a) voluntary condescension on God's part,
which he hath been pleased to express, by way of covenant.
(a) Luke 17:10; Job 35:7, 8

The eternal purpose of God in the salvation of His people is described by the Covenant of Redemption which stretches from eternity past to eternity future. It is also known as the Eternal Covenant. God's eternal purpose of salvation did not stop with the agreement made in eternity past between the persons of the Trinity. By definition, expressions such as "eternal purpose" and "predestination" must stretch from eternity past to eternity future. In Ephesians 1:3-14 we saw the divine plan of salvation stretching from eternity past to eternity future. We saw that it encompasses the calling in of the elect by the gospel and the building up of the church of Jesus Christ, which comprises elect from among the Jews as well as from among the Gentile nations. The Covenant of Redemption, therefore, encompasses the Covenant of Grace which is the unfolding of God's eternal purpose in history.

If the Covenant of Redemption is conceived as stopping where the Covenant of Grace begins in history, how would we describe the salvation of the elect once the Covenant of Grace ends with the judgement of the world? Is there another covenant made between God and the glorified saints in heaven? Such a covenant has never been postulated by anyone and is not found in Scripture. Furthermore, is the Covenant of Grace different in essence from the Covenant of Redemption? If it were, the Covenant of Redemption is grotesquely broken, with the Covenant of Grace joining the parts in eternity past with that in eternity future. Or, the Covenant of Grace will have to be conceived as running parallel with the Covenant of Redemption in history, since they are different in essence. The plain teaching of Scripture is that the two covenants are of the same essence and, indeed, they are one covenant with only that part that emerges in history being called the Covenant of Grace. The *1689 Confession of Faith* expresses this truth as follows (1689:7:3),

This Covenant [of Grace]... is founded in that (*) eternal covenant transaction, that was between the Father and the Son, about the redemption of the elect..
(*) 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2

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The *1689 Confession of Faith* mentions only the Father and the Son who were engaged in the Covenant of Redemption. However, the two Scripture references, namely 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2, only show that the covenant was made in eternity, “before time began”, without revealing all the Persons involved. We are told in John 10:26-30,

But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.

Eternal life is given by the Son through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. The Holy Spirit is promised to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9-11; Ezek. 36:26-27). Since the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, the covenant made in eternity must have involved the Holy Spirit as well. We are told in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14,

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have seen in Ephesians 1:3-14 that all three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in our salvation. The plan of our salvation was made in eternity past. All three persons of the Trinity work in harmony with one another, each having His respective role. The Father chose certain people to be saved and gave them to the Son. The Son of God agreed to come to earth to redeem them by His death on the cross. The Holy Spirit agreed to apply the saving benefits of the Son to the elect to effect their salvation. The Holy Spirit is also present in heaven in all His fullness, described as “the seven Spirits of God” in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). It seems best to consider the Covenant of Redemption as a covenant made by all three Persons of the Holy Trinity, while that part of the Covenant

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of Redemption that appears in history, called the Covenant of Grace, is the agreement made between the Father and the Son, but with the participation of the Holy Spirit. After all, the Covenant of Grace is compared and contrasted with the Covenant of Works in Romans 5:12-21, with Christ as Head of one covenant, and Adam as head of the other.

The Covenant of Redemption spans human history, and will be completed in eternity future, when all the redeemed of the Lord are gathered together after the judgement of the last day. The present universe will be melted down by fire, and the new heavens and the new earth will be created (2 Pet. 3:10-13). The plural word “heavens” is used in 2 Peter 3:10 according to the Greek concept to include the air around us, the outer space, and the invisible dwelling place of God. Heaven where God dwells is already qualitatively perfect and incapable of being improved upon. It is in God’s plan, however, that His dwelling place should include the renewed universe in which is the new earth, where righteousness dwells. Heaven will be on earth, and earth will be in heaven. All the redeemed of the Lord will be living on the new earth, which is part of the new universe. The gathering together of the elect on the new earth is called “the marriage of the Lamb”. There will be tremendous rejoicing and celebration, known as “the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-10)”. The Lamb’s bride is described in Revelation 21:9-14,

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The bride of the Lamb is the church, as we learn from Ephesians

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5:22-33, which will be perfect and complete in heaven. The perfection and completeness of the bride is represented by the heavenly city of Jerusalem which is cubic in dimensions. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel represent the elect of God of the Old Testament period, while the names of the twelve apostles represent the elect of the New Testament period. It should be noted that the twelve apostles – not the twelve tribes of Israel – form the foundation of the city. The Scripture, consisting of both the New Testament and the Old Testament, reveals Christ as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19-22; Matt. 16:18). Worship in the Old Testament was visible, consisting of various rituals such as the offering of animal sacrifices and the cleansing rites. The coming of Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the Old Testament types (Heb. 9, 10), so that believers today worship God “in spirit and truth (John 4:23)”. The relationship between the New Testament and the Old Testament has been well-described thus: “The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is by the New revealed” (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 45-47).

In heaven, none of God’s elect will be missing. This has been promised by the Lord (John 6:37, 39), and is a promise of the gospel (Rom. 8:38-39; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The toil and tears, sorrow and pain of earth will be no more for (Rev. 21:3-4),

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

The blessedness of the redeemed in heaven is described in Revelation 22:1-5,

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There

shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

What becomes of the non-elect – the reprobates and the apostates? Their end has been made clear already (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:30, 41; Heb. 6:8; Gal. 5:21-21). The last traces of God's image upon them would be erased as they are consigned to the eternal suffering of hell. We are told in Revelation 21:7-8,

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

The eternal state of believers is stupendously blessed, while that of the unbelievers is horrendously awful. The Covenant of Redemption is to be considered from its beginning in eternity past to its end in eternity future.

4.3 The Covenant of Grace

Having established the Covenant of Redemption, we need only to draw out the corollary. The Covenant of Redemption is one, stretching from eternity past into eternity future, the substance of which is the eternal purpose of God in the salvation of His chosen people. That portion of the Covenant of Redemption that emerges in history is called the Covenant of Grace, the Head of which is Christ. As the name implies, salvation is by grace (i.e., by God showing His mercy to those who are undeserving), through faith in Christ. As a covenant, there are terms and conditions attached, but these are the concomitants of a true covenant, without which it would cease to be a covenant. It is, therefore, inappropriate to regard a covenant as conditional or unconditional. A covenant is different from a contract, which also has terms and conditions attached, but the nature and purpose of which are different from those of a covenant. The terms and conditions of a contract are legally binding, whereas those of a covenant are morally binding. A contract is concerned with employment, tenancy, and sales-and-purchases, while a covenant is

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concerned with relationship. The Covenant of Grace consists of two basic stages – that of revelation, known as the Old Covenant, and that of fulfilment, known as the New Covenant. Furthermore, the Covenant of Grace includes two aspects – the temporal or ritual aspect, and the evangelical or spiritual aspect – in both the revelatory and the fulfilled stages. In the Old Covenant, the temporal aspect involved the giving of the law of God, of land, of descendants, and of ritual worship – all to give form and direction to God's people, while typifying spiritual realities of the New Covenant, which were still future. The evangelical aspect consisted of promises – of salvation by grace rather than by works, of the coming of a Saviour for sinners, and of the permanent indwelling of Holy Spirit in the believer.⁴

The two stages of the Covenant of Grace may also be considered under two administrations – to fulfil its purpose, which is the salvation of God's elect. Salvation by grace, through faith in the coming Saviour, was administered through the Old Testament covenants before the coming of Christ, and through the New Covenant after the coming of Christ. The elect are saved not by virtue of these covenants, but through the instrumentality of these covenants. They are saved by virtue of the Covenant of Grace revealed by all these other covenants. The Covenant of Grace was planned and agreed upon in eternity within the Holy Trinity. It appears in history inseparably connected to the Covenant of Redemption, and will never be separated from the Covenant of Redemption at its ending. It is, in fact, that part of the Covenant of Redemption that appears in history.

The covenants that reveal the Covenant of Grace, making it efficacious in the salvation of the elect, also confirm the non-elect in their condemnation. This is because each of the covenants has two objectives – one of which is to declare salvation by grace in order that the elect will be saved, and the other to expose sin and warn against any attempt to be saved by works. The condemnation of the non-elect is not by virtue of these covenants but by virtue of the Covenant of Works. After all, the natural descendants of Adam are

⁴The terms 'temporal' and 'evangelical' have been carefully chosen to convey the intended meanings. 'Temporal' means 'confined to time, pertaining to this world' while 'evangelical' means 'of eternal significance, pertaining to the gospel of salvation by grace'. The terms 'physical' and 'spiritual' are not so appropriate for it may be argued that the physical activities such as offering animal sacrifices and keeping the Sabbath are spiritual activities as well, while the life of faith is not merely subjective in nature but involves physical acts of obedience to God's word.

guilty in the sin of their covenant head, and they are guilty of their own sins, arising from the sinful nature they are born with. Just as the Covenant of Grace was planned in eternity past, so also the Covenant of Works was planned in eternity past. The sovereign God knew that man would fall in Adam. According to the good pleasure of His will, He has chosen those destined for eternal blessedness to be saved by the Covenant of Grace, condemning others to perish in eternal hell as they deserve, by the Covenant of Works. This is a deep mystery. We can only bow in adoration and praise of God who has shown His mercy to undeserving sinners like us, who are saved.

We have noted that the salvation of the elect is not by virtue of the covenants that reveal the gospel, but by virtue of the Covenant of Grace. Similarly, the condemnation of the non-elect is not by virtue of those covenants, but by virtue of the Covenant of Works. Those other covenants serve the two key/primary covenants – namely, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.

4.4 Summary

Ephesians 1:3-14 shows that the salvation of God's chosen people was planned in eternity past, among the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. It is not made with man, but about man. This has been called the Covenant of Redemption. The passage also shows that the Covenant of Redemption will stretch through human history and extend to eternity future. The last two chapters of the book of Revelation reveal that the elect will be gathered together in blessed fellowship with God, to worship and serve Him for ever. The Covenant of Grace is that part of the Covenant of Redemption that appears in history. The Covenant of Grace was made between the Father and the Son, with the participation of the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of the Covenant of Grace is the salvation of God's elect, which is administered through the covenants of the Old Testament, and through the New Covenant which was inaugurated by the coming of Jesus Christ. These covenants fulfil the dual objectives of revealing the gospel of salvation by grace in order that the elect might be saved, and exposing sin in order to warn fallen man against relying on works to be saved. These covenants serve the two key/primary covenants – namely, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.

Five

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All the covenants of Scripture have one purpose and two objectives. The Adamic Covenant has the purpose of revealing the way of salvation by works, and the two objectives of showing that salvation could have been obtained by human effort before the Fall, and of revealing the alternative way of salvation by grace after the Fall. All the subsequent covenants – collectively called the Old Covenant, and exemplified by the Mosaic Covenant – have the purpose of revealing salvation by grace because man was already fallen and unable to be saved by works. These covenants have the two objectives of warning against attempting to be saved by works, and revealing salvation by grace. The two objectives gave rise to two aspects of the covenants – the temporal aspect and the evangelical aspect. The temporal aspect was necessary to give form/structure to the covenants, since every covenant consists of subjects, structure, and statutes. The evangelical aspect refers to the proclamation of the gospel arising from the structure and statutes of the covenants.

The Old Covenant consisted of various stages of progressive revelation of the Covenant of Grace, with each stage centred around an individual, namely Noah, Abraham, and Moses. These stages may be called dispensations, which should not be confused with the teaching of Dispensationalism. The stages also may be regarded as different administrations of the Covenant of Grace. The Adamic Covenant was primarily a Covenant of Works made with Adam and

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his posterity, with himself as the head, and secondarily a revelation of the Covenant of Grace which has Christ as its Head. The Noahic Covenant was made with Noah as the federal head, the subjects of which included Noah's wife, the three sons and their wives, and the human race that came from them after the Flood. The Abrahamic Covenant was passed down to Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob. The Mosaic Covenant had a number of subordinate covenants, each progressively revealing the Covenant of Grace – the Sinaitic Covenant (Exod. 19-24; Deut. 5-28) which consisted of the temporal aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, the Moabite Covenant (Deut. 29-30) which revealed the evangelical aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, the Aaronic/Levitical Covenant (Lev. 24:8-9; Num. 25:10-13) which typified the high-priesthood of Christ, and the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:8-16; 23:5; Jer. 33:21, 25-26) which typified the kingship of Christ.

5.1 The Adamic Covenant

The revelation of the Covenant of Grace in the Old Covenant was made in stages, gradually, and cumulatively. This revelation was first made with Adam as the representative head of the human race (Rom. 5:12-14). The temporal aspect of the Adamic Covenant was revealed in the Garden of Eden even before the entrance of sin. The *1689 Confession* states this as follows (1689:19:1 cf. 4:2; 6:1),

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience, (a) written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him, and his posterity to personal entire exact and perpetual (b) obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and (c) threatened death upon the breach of it, and indued him with the power and ability to keep it.

(a) Gen. 1:27; Eccl. 7:29; (b) Rom. 10:5; (c) Gal. 3:10-12

Perfect obedience to God's law was required to remain in fellowship with God, and to enjoy the greater blessedness that would have been unfolded in the mandate given to Adam had he not sinned: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion

over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Gen. 1:28).” The growing blessedness of fellowship with God was symbolised by the tree of life which was present in Eden together with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9; 3:22). While forbidden to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam was allowed to eat from every tree, including the tree of life, until driven out of Eden (Gen. 2:16; 3:22). Although the word ‘covenant’ is not used, this has all the characteristics of a covenant and has been called the Covenant of Works. Eternal life was to be attained by human effort, namely that of obeying the law of God. Adam failed to remain in his state of innocence, upon the instigation of Satan who appeared as a serpent, thus bringing the whole human race into sin and the condemnation of the law. Death entered, including the breaking of fellowship with God, physical death, and eternal damnation in hell. The Covenant of Works has never been abrogated, as is recognised in Chapter 19:1 of the *1689 Confession*, quoted above. In Galatians 4:21-31, the apostle Paul contrasts the Covenant of Grace with the Covenant of Works by using the two women (Sarah and Hagar), the two sons (Isaac and Ishmael), and the two places (the Jerusalem above, or heaven, and the earthly Jerusalem). The earthly Jerusalem is also associated with Mount Sinai in Arabia where the law was given to Moses. Those who attempt to be saved by keeping God’s law must keep it perfectly to attain to eternal life. This, however, is no longer possible after the Fall, since we are guilty in the sin of Adam, and we have inherited the sinful nature of Adam and Eve which makes the perfect keeping of the law no more possible. Romans 3:20 says, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

The evangelical aspect of the Adamic Covenant was revealed after the Fall in the ‘proto-evangelion’ in which was declared that a Seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent while the serpent would bruise His heel. Christ, by His death and resurrection, has destroyed the power of the devil by conquering his last stronghold, which is death (Heb. 2:14-15). 1 Corinthians 15:56-57 says, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are told in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” The ‘all’

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who are made alive in Christ are the elect. Adam was the representative head of the fallen human race, while Christ is the representative Head of the redeemed race (Rom. 5:12, 17-19). Although the words of the 'proto-evangelion' were directed at Satan, Adam and Eve were present in that judicial setting where God was the Judge. The words applied to Adam and Eve, as much as they applied to Satan. After all, it was the Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head. The 1689 Confession recognises the 'proto-evangelion' as a revelation of the gospel by stating, in Chapters 20 and 7 (1689:20:1; 7:2, 3),

The Covenant of Works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, (a) the Seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance; in this promise, the (b) gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and therein effectual, for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

(a) Gen. 3:15; (b) Rev. 13:8)

Moreover, man having brought himself (b) under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a Covenant of Grace wherein he freely offers unto sinners, (c) life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and (d) promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (b) Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 3:20, 21; (c) Rom. 8:3; Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:16; (d) Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 6:44, 45; Psalm 110:3

This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first to Adam in the promise of salvation by the (e) Seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until (f) discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament...

(e) Gen. 3:15; (f) Heb. 1:1

Adam and Eve were saved by believing in the promised Saviour – the Seed of the woman. Their sins would be atoned for by the death of the promised Seed, as indicated by the animals that were killed

by God for the covering of their nakedness immediately after the pronouncement of the 'proto-evangelion' (Gen. 3:21). All this took place in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve were expelled from there. To the law of God given in the Garden of Eden was added the system of animal sacrifices made familiar in Israel in later days through Moses. That was why, not long afterwards, God accepted the offering of Abel for it involved the laying down of the life of an animal and the shedding of its blood (Gen. 4:3-5). That was why Cain's offering was rejected as it did not involve the right sacrifice. From Adam to Moses, the law of God was written in the hearts and passed down orally (Rom. 5:13-14). We are not surprised, therefore, to read that Noah built an altar to offer up burnt offerings after the flood (Gen. 8:20). For the same reason there was the observance of the Sabbath rest when Israel gathered manna in the wilderness, even before the Ten Commandments were given to the nation at Sinai (Exod. 16:22-23). The observance of the Sabbath rest was a creation ordinance (Gen. 2:2-3), and was a part of God's law to man (Exod. 20:8-11), written in the heart of man (Rom. 2:15).

The temporal aspect of the Adamic Covenant was made up of a number of elements, namely the law, having many descendants, and the system of worship involving the offering of animal sacrifices. The temporal aspect was necessary to give form to the evangelical aspect, which consisted of the promises. The law restrained the people from sin, exposed their sinfulness, and drove them to seek salvation by believing in the coming Saviour (Rom. 7:7; Gal. 3:23, 24). From the many descendants of the woman would come the Saviour of the world, and the elect who would be saved by faith (Gen. 3:15). The system of animal sacrifices pointed to the necessity of the death of the Saviour to make atonement for sins (Heb. 10:9-10). The temporal aspect was as much part of the revelation of the Covenant of Grace as the promises which constituted the evangelical aspect. When the temporal aspect of the Adamic Covenant was kept as a Covenant of Works, i.e., relied upon for salvation, it killed.

The Covenant of Grace was not formulated after the Fall. Rather, it arose from, and is part of, the Covenant of Redemption that was made in eternity past, and made its appearance in history, after the Fall. The Covenant of Works was *made* with Adam, while the Covenant of Grace was *revealed* to him. The Adamic Covenant therefore consisted of the revelation of both salvation by works before the Fall, and salvation by grace after the Fall. With Adam, while in

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his integrity, there was the ability and the possibility of attaining to everlasting life by obedience to the law of God. However, after the Fall, this was no more the case. Adam, and all his posterity, were no longer able to be saved by works, i.e., by the keeping of the law. Instead, salvation is to be by grace through faith in the promised Saviour. Adam's salvation did not mean that the whole human race was saved, for the Covenant of Grace has its Head in Jesus Christ, and not in Adam. Salvation would be granted to Adam's fallen race individually, when each person comes to faith in Christ.

5.2 The Noahic Covenant

Noah may be considered the second Adam, for from him the human race propagated after the flood. Jesus Christ is called "the last Adam", for with Him the revelation of the Covenant of Grace ended in fulfilment. Jesus Christ is called "the second Man", for He came from heaven to redeem for Himself a people, while the first man, Adam, was made of dust and led his progeny into dust. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49,

And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

The revelation of the Covenant of Grace was taken a step farther with Noah. The failure of the Covenant of Works to save is shown in Genesis 6:5-12,

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry

that I have made them.” But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

God’s covenant with Noah was a revelation of the Covenant of Grace, as shown by the subsequent verses (Genesis 6:13-14, 18),

And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch... But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.

While this covenant was announced before the flood, it was ratified after the flood when Noah offered up burnt offerings on the altar he had built. The word ‘covenant’ is mentioned seven times on this occasion (Gen. 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). The waters that destroyed the world in judgement was the same waters that saved Noah and his family in grace. This was symbolic of the salvation to be effected by Christ in His death and resurrection, pictured by the New Covenant sign of baptism. We are told in 1 Peter 3:18-22,

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone

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into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

The evangelical aspect of the covenant made with Noah is seen in the favour of God towards Noah and his family, in the action of saving them in the flood by the ark, and in the declaration of God's mercy shown by the rainbow. Noah understood the message of salvation by grace committed to him, which made him "a preacher of righteousness". As he preached, the Spirit of Christ was confronting the wicked people whose spirits were imprisoned by sin. We are told in 2 Peter 2:4-5, "For if God... did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly..." We have noted that there was a temporal aspect to the covenant made with Adam, which when kept as a Covenant of Works became deadly. The temporal aspect continued to be seen in the Noahic Covenant. Noah had to keep the law of God, to offer up animal sacrifices, and to have many descendants. Not only would the Saviour come from among the many descendants, the elect would be saved from among them. To aid in the fulfilment of the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, God gave a law against murder (Gen. 9:6-7). Animals could now be eaten as food (Gen. 9:2). God promised never to destroy the human race the way He did in the days of Noah, namely by flood.

The covenant made with Noah was "everlasting", just as that made with Abraham (Gen. 17:7), Phinehas (Num. 25:10-13), David (2 Sam. 23:5), and the New Covenant (Jer. 32:40). Clearly, the term "everlasting" does not mean "stretching to eternity" but is to be understood as meaning "for as long as this covenant is in force". The covenant made with Noah will last until Christ returns to judge the world, when the earth and the universe will be melted down by fire and remade (2 Pet. 3:10-13). The sign of the covenant is the rainbow, which will continue to appear in the sky until the last day.

5.3 The Abrahamic Covenant

As the human race multiplied and scattered around the world, departure from the faith and the teaching of Adam and Noah took place. The likes of Melchizedek, the High Priest of God who must have ministered to many godly families, were still around. Righteous Job is reckoned to have lived in the time of Abraham. However, idolatry

had obviously defiled many homes. Laban, the cousin of Isaac, accused Jacob of stealing his household gods (Gen. 31:30-35). Under such circumstances, God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. Although the word covenant was not used, the characteristics of a covenant could be seen in the the call of God to Abram. The covenant made with Abram, who was 75 years old at that time, is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3,

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

To this call was added a promise (Gen. 12:7), "To your descendants I will give this land." This covenant was ratified later in a vision, recorded in Genesis 15. Animals that were ceremonially clean – a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove, and a pigeon – were used in the ceremony to ratify the covenant. Except for the birds, the animals were cut in two and placed in two rows. In the darkness of a deep sleep, God announced that Abram's descendants would be afflicted in a foreign land for four hundred years before returning with great possession. When the sun set, a smoking oven and a burning torch could be seen passing between the animal pieces. This was to indicate the solemnity of the undertaking, which carried the penalty of death (cf. Jer. 34:18-20). On that day, Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, promising him many descendants who would occupy the promised land of Canaan.

God initiated that covenant, and set the terms and conditions, as seen by the whole procedure of ratification. Abram was the recipient of grace. He was promised many descendants, which he understood to include the Seed who would bruise the serpent's head, as promised to Adam. We are told that Abram believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). This is quoted in Romans 4:3 to show that Abraham (the new name of Abram) was saved by grace, and not by works. It is also quoted in Galatians 3:6 to show that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham, as explained in Galatians 3:7-9,

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Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

This passage tells us that the gospel was preached to Abraham. He understood that the covenant made with him and his seed included the greatest of his descendants, Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:16-18 says,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Abraham was saved by believing in the promised Saviour, not by works such as keeping the law or getting circumcised. His circumcision came later, after he believed and was reckoned as righteous (Gen. 15:6). Circumcision was a seal, or confirmation, of his faith (Rom. 4:11). Circumcision did not secure for him salvation. Faith did. Subsequent generations of Abraham's descendants who were circumcised as babies could not claim circumcision as a seal of their faith, for they had none when circumcised. Circumcision, like all the other elements of the temporal aspect of the covenant, performed the purposes of marking out the people of God from other nations and of pointing to spiritual realities in the New Covenant. Only those who have faith in Jesus Christ – whether Jew or non-Jew – have Abraham as father in the Covenant of Grace. We are told in Romans 4:9-12,

...For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be

the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Similarly, we are told in Galatians 3:26-29,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Abraham must have been much troubled by the command from God to offer up his son as a sacrifice. He, however, overcame whatever doubts there were, believing that "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering (Gen. 22:8)". He was willing to sacrifice his son, even though he could not figure out how God would fulfil His promise to pass on the covenant to this son (Gen. 17:19). He was acting in faith, believing in the promises of God. God indeed provided a ram to replace Isaac. This was an affirmation that 'the Lord will provide' – 'Jehovah Jireh (Gen. 22:14)'. God renewed the covenant promise to Abraham, saying, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice (Gen. 22:18)".

The evangelical aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is clear. Justification is by faith in the coming Seed, not by works. The Seed had been promised, and His atoning death was portrayed in the animal sacrifices handed down from the days of Adam and Noah. The message of redemption by grace – of justification by faith – was reinforced in the provision of the ram for sacrifice, in the place of Isaac. The animal sacrifices constituted the temporal aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was expanded with the addition of the promise of land and the circumcision of the males. The land was a type of the kingdom of God brought by Jesus Christ, which would be in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). Circumcision was a type (or symbol) of regeneration by the Holy Spirit – "the circumcision made

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without hands (Col. 2:11; Rom. 2:28-29)". Those descendants of Abraham who attempted to be saved by trusting in the temporal aspect would be trusting in the Covenant of Works for salvation. They would be no different from Ishmael, or other non-elect, who rely on self-effort for salvation. They are doomed to fail.

Ethnically, Abraham is the father of the Jews.¹ Spiritually, he is the father of all those who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles. The Covenant of Grace was revealed to Abraham as the way of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. The Abrahamic Covenant was reaffirmed in Genesis 17:18-22 when a son was promised to Sarah through whom would be passed down the covenant. The covenant made with Abraham was passed on to Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5), and then to Jacob (Gen. 28:10-17), and then to the twelve sons of Jacob who would constitute the nation of Israel (Gen. 49). The twelve sons of Jacob were also referred to as "the patriarchs" by the Jews (Acts 7:9; Gen. 35:22-26). That Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons received basically the same covenant is indicated in 1 Chronicles 16:16-17, "The covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel for an everlasting covenant..."

5.4 The Mosaic Covenant

When Jacob brought his family down to Egypt, it was another step forward in the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham. The descendants of Abraham who had multiplied in Egypt were oppressed by the Egyptians when a new king arose. A deliverer was raised up by God in the person of Moses. The nation was now poised for the next stage of their history. After the manifestation of Jehovah's power in the ten plagues, Israel was allowed to go out of Egypt. As they headed for the promised land, a stop was made at Horeb, where God entered into a covenant with the nation (Exod. 19-24). The Mosaic Covenant was made with the nation of Israel, with Moses as the mediator (Exod. 20:18-19; Deut. 5:5; Gal. 3:19). In the covenant made with Moses was added the written law, the tabernacle, and the priesthood. The law exposed sins and drove man to seek salvation

¹The Arabs also would claim descent from Abraham, through Ishmael and the other sons of Keturah (Gen. 25:4). Our concern, however, is with the passages at hand, namely Romans 4:9-12 and Galatians 3:26-29.

in Christ (Rom. 7:7; Gal. 3:23-24). The tabernacle was a type of the church of Jesus Christ in which God is present with His people (1 Pet. 2:9-10). The Aaronic priesthood anticipated the better priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:11-15). The covenant was ratified by a worship service in which the law was read out, animals were sacrificed, and the blood of the animals was sprinkled (Exod. 24:1-8). This has been called the Sinaitic Covenant which, in fact, was the temporal aspect of the Mosaic Covenant. The Sabbath rest, which was a creation ordinance (Gen. 2:2-3; Exod. 16:23-29), was now made a sign of the covenant (Exod. 31:12-16). While the gospel was typified in the temporal aspect, the evangelical aspect was yet to be revealed.

From Sinai the nation moved to Kadesh. Twelve spies were sent out to spy out the land of Canaan. Of the twelve spies, only Joshua and Caleb gave a positive recommendation to enter into the land, in obedience to Jehovah's command. The other ten spies discouraged the people and stirred them up to such fear and anger that they rebelled against Moses and the leaders. The LORD sentenced the nation to thirty-eight more years of wilderness wandering, which was characterised by their constant murmuring and the manifestation of God's grace in supplying all their needs. In the fortieth year after the exodus from Egypt, they arrived at the plains of Moab. Here, Moses expounded, elaborated upon, and applied the law to the nation, in preparation for them to enter Canaan. This is recorded in the bulk of Deuteronomy – "the Book of the Law" (Deut. 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26).

This Book of the Law takes on a distinctly different tone from Chapter 29. We are told in verse 1, "These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb." These words are often glossed over without doing justice to what is clearly stated. There is a reference to a covenant besides the one God had made with the nation in Horeb. The Sinaitic Covenant made in Horeb had been expounded in detail in the earlier chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. It consisted of the Ten Commandments and the accompanying "statutes and judgments (Deut. 5:1)". This was a revelation of the temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace. It served the functions of revealing future spiritual realities by types, and of driving the nation to seek salvation by grace in the promised Saviour. The prophecy had been given in Chapter 18:18-19, "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you

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from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” The temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace, when turned into a Covenant of Works, would bring death. This was the big mistake made by Israel.

Believing in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, and taking the words of Deuteronomy 29:1 plainly, we see here the making of a covenant different from the one made in Horeb. It was made by oath (29:14), and has to be seen as an extension of the covenant made in Exodus 24:1-8. It, in fact, was the evangelical aspect of the Covenant of Grace which revealed the gospel. Just as the Adamic Covenant was a revelation of the Covenant of Grace in its twofold aspects, namely the temporal and the evangelical aspects, so also was the Mosaic Covenant. In the Adamic Covenant the temporal aspect was revealed at the same time that the Covenant of Works was made with Adam – including the need to be fruitful and multiply, tending to the garden, to eat from the trees (not animals), and the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A period of time elapsed, the duration of which could have been quite long, before the evangelical aspect was revealed after the Fall – concerning the coming of a Seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent while being bruised in His heel. The covenant made with Abraham was similarly drawn out in time – it was announced in Genesis 12, ratified in Genesis 15, expanded in Genesis 17 with the promise of a son, and confirmed in Genesis 22 with Abraham’s willingness to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. The Abrahamic Covenant was passed on to Isaac, Jacob, and then to the twelve sons of Jacob – over a period of years. Progressive revelation was involved. The time taken to completely reveal a covenant is not an issue, for “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8).”

Understood this way, the Mosaic Covenant is seen as consisting of two parts, the Sinaitic Covenant which constituted the temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace, and the Moabic Covenant which constituted the evangelical aspect of the Covenant of Grace. The evangelical aspect is revealed in Chapters 29 and 30. The remaining chapters of the book should, in fact, be regarded as completing the Moabic Covenant and, therefore, the Mosaic Covenant. Israel was reminded of the need of a work of grace to open their eyes and ears

so that they could understand all that the LORD had done for them in the wilderness (29:4). This verse is quoted in Romans 11:8 to show that the spiritual blindness had continued with Israel down the centuries. The gospel revealed in the Moabite Covenant required every individual to make a commitment to walk with God (29:10-20). This included the leaders, the elders and officers, all the men, the little ones, the wives, and the foreigners in their midst (29:10-11, 14, 20). A transformed life had to be seen in keeping the law (29:9), failing which the curses of this Book of the Law would be poured out upon the individual (29:20-28). The emphasis on the individual, as in contrast to the community, must be noted (29:18, 19, 20, 21).

The well-known words of 29:29 must be seen in its context, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” The promises and threats of the law were to be heeded, while expecting the LORD to reveal more of His way of salvation in the future. The curses of this Book of the Law set the lower terminus of the period at the end of the Old Testament age, coinciding with the beginning of the New Testament age. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant extended from Moses to Christ. The Levitical Covenant made with Aaron, and extending to Phinehas (Lev. 24:8-9; Num. 25:10-13), and the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:8-16; 23:5; 1 Chron. 17:11-14), were subordinate covenants in the Mosaic Covenant. These revealed the coming of the Saviour who would be High Priest and King (Heb. 7:1-2; Luke 1:32-33).

The prophecy concerning captivity, under the Assyrians and then the Babylonians, given in Chapter 28:45-68, was reaffirmed, followed by the return of the remnant (30:1-6). There would be repentance leading to wholehearted commitment to the Lord (30:6, 8, 10). The circumcision of the heart needed for this commitment pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament age (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:15; Col. 2:11). It would be a work of grace, for “the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants (30:6)”. The choice of life or death was dependent upon how one kept the law – either as a means for salvation, or as the fruit of a circumcised heart. This is expressed by the words of Deuteronomy 30:11-14,

For this commandment which I command you today is
not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not

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in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

The apostle Paul quoted these words in Romans 10:6-8 to refer to "the righteousness of faith" that comes by responding to the gospel, in contrast to the "the righteousness which is of the law (Rom. 10:5)". The Mosaic Covenant was an extension of the Abrahamic Covenant, in which was revealed that the attempt to gain righteousness by the law would lead to death while having faith in the promised Saviour would lead to life. This is expressed in the closing words of Deuteronomy 30:19-20,

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

Proceeding on, Chapter 31 reaffirms Joshua as the successor to Moses (31:1-13), with the prophecy that Israel would go astray from their God (31:14-29). The Song of Moses in Chapter 32 recounts the unfaithfulness of the nation (32:1-6) despite God's covenant with them (32:7-14). The Lord would heap disasters upon them for their idolatry (32:15-35) until they come to their senses and realise that no other gods could help them (32:36-38). The true God would show forth His power and mercy, pouring forth His vengeance upon the enemies (32:39-42), and – lo and behold! – the Gentiles are called upon to rejoice with His people, for "He will provide atonement for His land and His people (32:43)". This verse is quoted in Romans 15:10 and Hebrews 1:6 (Septuagint translation) in reference to Jesus Christ. In Chapter 33 Moses blesses the tribes of Israel in a manner reminiscent of Jacob passing on the covenant blessing to his sons (Gen. 49). In the last chapter, Moses is allowed to survey

the land of Canaan from atop Mount Nebo in the Pisgah range. He is reminded that “This is the land of which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...(34:4).” The Mosaic Covenant must be seen as an extension of the Covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses died on Mount Nebo and was supernaturally buried by God. Joshua was the immediate successor of Moses but not the ultimate successor. The book ends with the note, “But since then there has not risen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face...(34:10).” This points to the Prophet greater than Moses who is to come (cf. Deut. 18:15-18) – who is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 4:25-26; Acts 3:22-23).

The Mosaic Covenant consists of the temporal aspect, given at Mount Horeb/Sinai, and the evangelical aspect, given in the plains of Moab. Both the Sinaitic and Moabite covenants together completed the Mosaic Covenant, the culmination of revelation of the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament. Israel largely failed to keep the Old Covenant – a reference to all the Old Testament covenants which culminated in the Mosaic Covenant. Put another way, the Mosaic Covenant was representative of all the Old Testament Covenants that were broken by Israel.

5.5 Summary

Each covenant made after the Fall had a clear covenant head. All the covenants revealed the Covenant of Grace progressively. The Covenant of Grace was revealed by the temporal elements that mark out the subjects of the covenant as the people of God. The temporal elements also typified spiritual realities and the salvation given by grace through faith in the coming Saviour. In other words, they also proclaimed the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel in the temporal elements, as well as the more explicit teaching of it, constituted the evangelical element. In the Adamic Covenant, the temporal elements were the law written in the heart, the many descendants, the task of tending the garden, and the prohibition to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To these was added the animal sacrifices after the Fall. The evangelical aspect consisted of the gospel typified in the temporal elements, as well as the announcement of the Seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent while being bruised in His heel. In the Noahic Covenant, the same tem-

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poral elements of the Adamic covenant were carried over, but now added with the permission to eat meat, while murder was specifically prohibited. The sign of the rainbow was also given. The evangelical aspect of the Noahic Covenant was the same as that of the Adamic Covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant, the temporal elements remain the same as those of the earlier covenants but expanded to include circumcision. The message of “justification by faith” was seen in Abraham who believed God’s promise of a Seed who would be the Saviour of the world. The Mosaic Covenant consisted of two phases – the Sinaitic Covenant and the Moabite Covenant. In the Sinaitic Covenant, the temporal aspect of the previous covenants was expanded considerably – including the written Ten Commandments, the ceremonial and civil laws, and the Sabbath rest as a covenant sign. In the second phase, which was the Moabite Covenant, the evangelical aspect was laid out, with prophetic indications of the coming of a greater Prophet who would “provide atonement for His land and His people”.

The time was coming soon when the fullest revelation of the Covenant of Grace would be given.

* * * * *

Six

Which Is The Covenant Of Grace?

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...” What had been progressively revealed in the Old Testament was ready to be fulfilled, according to God’s will, by the coming of the promised Saviour. Galatians 4:4 says, “...when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons...” The Saviour would fulfil the requirements of the law on behalf of those who are unable to keep it perfectly. His death on the cross would be the perfect sacrifice to pay for the sins of His people. This had been typified by the animals sacrificed in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)”. By faith in Christ, the punishment of the elect under the law is considered borne by Christ when He died on the cross. By the same faith, Christ’s righteousness is reckoned to them so that they are justified (i.e., declared not guilty but treated as righteous instead, 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21-26).

The coming of the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, fulfilled the promises of the Seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, the Seed of Abraham in Genesis 22:18, and the Prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18.

6.1 The New Covenant

The New Covenant, declared at the institution of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:19-20), was ratified by the death of Jesus Christ, and sealed on the day of Pentecost by the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; Ezek. 36:26-27). Salvation is now to be proclaimed to all the nations (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:18-20). Elect Jews and Gentiles will be saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10). They are all sons of God, Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise through faith in Christ Jesus (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26, 29; Rom. 2:28). Together, they become one flock (John 10:16), one holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21), one nation of priests (1 Pet. 1:9-10). Together, they are the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 11:26), a people circumcised in the heart by the Holy Spirit, which is regeneration (Rom. 1:28-29; Col. 2: 11; Tit. 3:4-7). In the New Covenant, entry into the kingdom of God is on an individual basis although many might be brought in at around the same time, and in the same locality (Ezek. 18:20; Luke 17:21; Acts 2:38-39). When the latter occurs, a revival is said to take place. Each believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9; 1 Thess. 4:7-8). Each believer will be transformed from within, so that the law written on the heart will no longer be suppressed but obeyed (Rom. 2:14-16; Heb. 8:10-12; 2 Cor. 3:3). Although believers are not able to live a perfectly righteous life due to remaining sin in them, the power of sin is broken (Rom. 7:24; 8:1-2). In the New Covenant age, "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved (Acts 2:21)". The coming of the New Covenant meant that the Old Covenant had become obsolete and was ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13). The Old Covenant did not abruptly vanish, but gradually disappeared as the New Testament church was weaned away from dependence on the temple, the animal sacrifices, the dietary laws, and the keeping of holy days (Acts 1:8; 15:6-11; Col. 2:16-17).

In the book of Hebrews (Chaps. 8-10), the Old Covenant is the Mosaic Covenant – consisting of the law of Moses, the Aaronic priesthood, the tabernacle of worship, and the animal sacrifices. In the book of Romans (Chaps. 4, 5), the Old Covenant is extended to include the covenants made with Abraham and Adam. In Galatians, the Old Covenant covers the covenants made with Abraham and Moses. It says in Galatians 3:16-18,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

As in the book of Romans (Rom. 5:14; 10:5), Galatians contrasts the evangelical aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant with the temporal aspect of the Mosaic Covenant. Why Abraham and Moses, and why the evangelical aspect of one and the temporal aspect of the other? Firstly, the promised Saviour was clearly announced to Abraham, who “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness”, and he became the father of all those who are of faith (Gal. 2:6-7). Secondly, at the time of writing, the Jews were keeping to the Mosaic law as the way of salvation (i.e., they were using the law as a Covenant of Works and not as a revelation of grace). In 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle contrasts the New Covenant with the law of Moses, saying, “...our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:5-6).” The ministry of the apostle involved the law written on the heart by the Spirit of the living God, while the ministry of Moses involved the law written on stones, which brought death for those who kept it as the means of salvation (2 Cor. 3:3, 7). The glory in the ministry of Moses was subordinate to, and derived from, the glory of Christ revealed in the gospel. The glory of the Old Covenant, represented by the glory on the countenance of Moses, was passing away, while the more glorious ministry of the Spirit in the preaching of the gospel remains (2 Cor. 3:8-11).

Pooling together the contrast made between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant in the books of Hebrews, Romans, Galatians and 2 Corinthians, we conclude that the Old Covenant culminated in, but was not limited to, the Mosaic Covenant. The Old Covenant included the covenants made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. These covenants progressively revealed the Covenant of Grace, until replaced by the New Covenant, in which was fulfilled what was formerly revealed. Note the plural, ‘covenants’, in Eph-

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esians 2:11-13,

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The Old Covenant consisted of temporal elements which were types of New Covenant realities, as well as gospel promises which saved those who believed. Those who kept the temporal elements as a means of salvation, in fact, were attempting to be saved by the Covenant of Works, which is still in force. The New Covenant has its own sets of temporal elements, to give form to the church and to express the faith of believers. It has as subjects those who are born again of the Spirit (i.e., those “circumcised without hands, John 3:3, 5; Col. 2:11”). It has as its structure (or temporal elements) baptism (Matt. 28:19), the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26), pastoral care (Acts 20:28), preaching and teaching (Acts 20:27; Matt. 28:20; Eph. 4:11-16), worship (John 4:24), keeping the Lord’s Day (Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10), and church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:4-5). It has as statutes the teaching of the whole of Scripture, since the revelation of God has been given progressively and cumulatively, and is now complete. When the temporal elements are kept as a means of salvation, the Covenant of Works is being relied upon for salvation, instead of the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace reveals that “The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17).” The law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them (Gal. 3:12).”

6.2 The two Israels

One other matter needs to be settled, which is, what becomes of Israel in the age of the New Covenant? We have noted that the Covenant of Grace – in its revelatory part as the Old Covenant, as well as in the fulfilment part as the New Covenant – consists of two aspects, namely the temporal and the evangelical. This is true of

all the covenants, including the Mosaic one. The temporal aspect of the Mosaic Covenant is clear, but many miss out on the evangelical aspect. The gospel promises were revealed symbolically by the temporal elements, and explicitly declared on the plains of Moab by Moses in Deuteronomy Chapters 29 and 30. The apostle Paul quotes from this portion of Deuteronomy in Romans 10:5-13, saying,

For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, *“The man who does those things shall live by them.”* But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, *“Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ”* (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) or, *“ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ”* (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”* (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, *“Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”* For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For *“whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

Verse 13 of this passage, ‘For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”’, is from Joel 2:32 in reference to the gospel age (cf. Acts 2:21). The gospel is to be preached to all alike – to both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 10:14-17). Just as not all Gentiles will respond to the gospel call, so also the Jews. This we learn from 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, which says,

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

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The Jews have a distinct advantage over the Gentiles, for to them “*pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God (Rom. 9:4-5).*” “Salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22).” However, this does not alter the fact that the gospel must be proclaimed to them as much as to the Gentiles (Rom. 10). They are the natural branches of the cultivated olive tree, mentioned in Romans 11. A hardening of heart has happened to the Jews at large, resulting in their blindness to the gospel (Rom. 11:7 cf. 9:18). This has resulted in the gospel being preached largely to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11 cf. 15:27-28). As many Gentiles are saved, the Jews will be provoked to jealousy so that some among them will seek to be saved by the gospel (Rom. 11:11, 14). The Jews will be provoked to jealousy simply because “salvation has come to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11)”, and not because the Gentiles have to prove themselves in some ways to provoke jealousy in the Jews. This process will continue until the return of Christ. Paraphrasing Paul, if the fall of the Jews is riches to the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more would the riches be if all the elect Jews are saved (Rom. 11:12)? If they being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but the end of the age when Christ comes to resurrect the dead (Rom. 11:15)?

The elect from among the Gentile nations are like branches of the wild olive tree, while the elect from among the Jews are like natural branches from the cultivated olive tree. The cultivated olive tree is spiritual Israel (i.e., the church, consisting of all God’s elect). The wild olive tree is the fallen race of Adam. The root of the cultivated olive tree is God’s eternal plan of salvation (i.e., the Covenant of Redemption). When both the wild branches and the cut-off natural branches are grafted to the cultivated olive tree, they partake of “the root and fatness of the olive tree (Rom. 11:17)” – they enjoy the blessings of salvation found in the Covenant of Redemption, which is manifested in history as the Covenant of Grace. Paraphrasing Paul again, blindness in part has happened to the Jews until the full number of the elect from among the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25). The remaining elect from among the Jews would then come in (cf. Rom. 11:11, 14-15). And so all Israel (i.e., God’s people or spiritual Israel), will be saved (Rom. 11:26). Note also that it is “And so” and not “And then”. The manner of salvation of spiritual Israel is meant,

not the timing of the salvation of natural Israel. The “And so” relates back to the mutual effects between the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles and to the Jews. It does not relate back to “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” of the earlier verse.

With the arrival of the Saviour, and the advent of the New Covenant, the purpose for the nation of Israel has been fulfilled. The elect from Old Testament Israel have been saved by believing in the promised Saviour. The Old Covenant has passed away with the introduction of the New Covenant. There is no value in resurrecting the temple, the priesthood, and the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. If the Jews are to be saved, they must repent and believe in Jesus Christ. In Matthew 3:9-10, John the Baptist said to the religious leaders, “...do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Was John referring to the Jewish religious leaders only or to the whole nation of Israel? Matthew Poole commented on this verse as follows: “...whether it be understood as of the judgment common to all unbelievers, ...or the particular destruction of this nation of the Jews, I shall not determine, though I rather judge the latter probable.”¹ The vine and the fig tree are often used as types of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament (Psalm 80:8; Isa. 5:2, 7; Hos. 9:10; Nah. 3:12; Zech. 3:10). It would seem that John the Baptist was referring to the nation of Israel. One thing certain is that mere physical descent from Abraham will not save anyone. Another passage of relevance is Matthew 9:16-17, “No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” The rituals of the Old Covenant were not fit for the new wine of life in the Spirit in the New Covenant era (cf. Col. 2:16-17). The new had come and the old was ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13). With the completion of Scripture, the old has vanished away (Heb. 8:10-11 cf. Eph. 2:19-3:7).

¹Poole, Matthew. *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 15, MacDonald Pub. Co.

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The modern, political, nation of Israel is not to be equated with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. We do not question the right of the Jews to exist as a country. We do not deny the reality of the Holocaust in which some six million Jews died under the Nazis. We do not support anti-Semitism, neither do we support philo-Semitism. Our understanding of Covenant Theology requires the gospel be preached to all the nations, including the Jews, without which there would be no salvation, for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).”

6.3 The two Key Covenants

It bears repetition that there are two key covenants in the Scripture – the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. This is shown by two passages, namely Romans 5:12-19 and Galatians 4:21-31. In the first passage, Adam and Jesus Christ are compared and contrasted. One brought death and condemnation to the human race, the other gives eternal life and reconciliation with God to the elect. In the second passage, the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, are compared and contrasted. Both were the sons of Abraham, both were under the Abrahamic Covenant, but one was the son of a bond woman, corresponding to Mount Sinai and the earthly Jerusalem. The other, Isaac, was the son of the free woman, corresponding to the Jerusalem above, i.e., heaven (cf. Heb. 12:22-24). There are two ways of salvation revealed in Scripture – the way of works, and the way of grace. Ever since the Fall, the way of works has not been able to save fallen man. The way of grace was revealed immediately after the Fall – in the covenants made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ (or the New Covenant). The covenants made after the Fall – namely the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants – had to have the purpose (or end) of administering salvation to the elect because all mankind was already fallen. It is to be noted, however, that the Covenant of Works has not been abrogated. It still administers death to those who attempt to be saved by works. It makes sense that just as the Covenant of Grace is progressively revealed, so is the Covenant of Works. The clearer the light of the gospel shines, the clearer is sin revealed in fallen man. The louder grace is offered to sinners, the stronger is the warning heard that death will follow those who insist on self-effort to be saved.

When was the Covenant of Grace planned? Ephesians 1:3-14 reveals that the Covenant of Redemption was made between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity in eternity past, which then unfolds in human history, and will stretch to eternity future. The Covenant of Grace is that part of the Covenant of Redemption that appears in history. These two covenants are unseverable (i.e., cannot be severed or divided, not just 'inseparable' which can mean existing together). The Covenant of Grace was made between God the Father and God the Son. It required that God the Son be born incarnate so that, as perfect Man, He could be the Federal Head of the Covenant of Grace. This is emphasised in the Romans 5 passage – “For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many (v. 15)...”; “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life (v. 18)...”; and “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous (v. 19).” The necessity of the Son of God becoming Man is seen also in such passages as 1 Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...” and 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, 28, “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet... Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”

Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is the Head of the Covenant of Grace, and of the New Covenant. Just as the Adamic Covenant was primarily the Covenant of Works with the revelation of the Covenant of Grace attached to it after the Fall, the New Covenant is primarily the Covenant of Grace with the revelation of the Covenant of Works attached to it. Christ was “born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5)”. The New Covenant should not be equated with the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace encompasses both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. It was administered in the Old Covenant, and it is administered in the New Covenant. The Covenant of Grace is truly a covenant, just as the Covenant of Works is truly a covenant. The Covenant of Grace has the elect of

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God as its subjects, the structures of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant as its structure, and the whole of Scripture as its statutes. The death of Christ on the cross sealed the Covenant of Grace. The New Covenant is a covenant in itself, revealing most clearly and administering most effectively, the Covenant of Grace. In the New Covenant, the message of salvation by grace is most clearly revealed while the warning against salvation by works is most loudly proclaimed. Some instances of this dual revelation are:

- (i) The Lord's message to the rich young ruler should be seen in this light (Luke 18:18-29). The ruler did not recognise Jesus Christ as Messiah, the promised Saviour (v. 19). He was relying on law-keeping to gain eternal life but failed (vv. 18, 23).
- (ii) The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was both the sealing of the Covenant of Grace and the overturning of the condemnation from the Covenant of Works. "For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator (Heb. 9:16)." "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Col. 2:13-15)."
- (iii) Paul's proclamation of "The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17)" goes alongside the warning of God's wrath "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness (v. 18)."
- (iv) The message of life through faith in Christ is given alongside the warning of death in Adam (Rom. 5:12-21).
- (v) Justification by faith is laid out alongside the warning against reliance on law-keeping in Galatians 3:10-11, 'For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*" But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "*the just shall live by faith.*"'

- (vi) Then comes the climatic passage of Galatians 4:21-31, in which the two key covenants are set forth – “...For these are two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage... and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is... but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all...”. The two covenants that are contrasted cannot be limited to the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant. Rather, it is a contrast between two ways of salvation – the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.
- (vii) The two key covenants will continue to run their courses to the day of judgement. Eternal life and eternal damnation are by virtue of these covenants. Revelation 21:6-7 sets forth eternal life, ‘And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and He shall be My son.” ’ The next verse sets forth eternal damnation, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

If the Covenant of Grace was planned in eternity past by the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Covenant of Works must have been planned also simultaneously. It could not be that God was going to redeem fallen man without knowing that they would be fallen. The sovereign God is all-knowing: “Remember the former things of old, for I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure...(Isa. 46:9-10).’ ” Just as the Covenant of Grace was progressively revealed by the Old Testament covenants, culminating in the clearest revelation, by the New Covenant, the Covenant of Works was progressively revealed, culminating in the clearest revelation in the New Covenant.

Much is often made of the contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant which, no doubt, is found in Scripture itself. However, it is often overlooked that there is a greater contrast made between the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Works. Indeed, the contrast between the latter is often unwittingly confused with the

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contrast between the former. Furthermore, the Covenant of Grace is equated, wrongly in our opinion, with the New Covenant. The New Covenant has as its purpose the administration of the Covenant of Grace, and the objectives of drawing the elect to Christ for salvation and warning fallen man of the danger of trusting in works to gain salvation.

6.4 Summary

The Covenant of Grace should not be equated with the New Covenant. The Covenant of Grace spans the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, while the New Covenant is a covenant in and of itself. The New Covenant is primarily an administration of the Covenant of Grace with the revelation of the Covenant of Works attached to it. The Old Covenant included the covenants made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. These covenants progressively revealed the Covenant of Grace, until replaced by the New Covenant, in which is fulfilled what was formerly promised. At the same time, the Covenant of Works was progressively revealed in the Old Covenant, culminating in its clearest revelation in the New Covenant. The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace are two key covenants planned by God from eternity past which appear, and operate, in human history.

* * * * *

Seven

Whose View Is Correct?

It will be good to stand back and assess the view of Covenant Theology we have put forward, and to compare it with the prevailing views. The view that is correct would have taken into consideration all the relevant data of Scripture, explained best the controversial points, and displayed a certain consistency not found in other views.

7.1 A Reformed Baptist view

A schematic representation will never be able to fully and satisfactorily portray the Covenant Theology presented here. It will, nevertheless, help us see the salient features at a glance. Ours is a Reformed Baptist view, and not *the* Reformed Baptist view, for there are nuances among Reformed Baptists on this subject.

Figure 7.1 shows that the Covenant of Redemption (or Eternal Covenant) has its genesis in the three Persons of the Godhead, in eternity past. It appears in history as the Covenant of Grace, consisting of two parts – the Old Covenant which is revelatory in nature, and the New Covenant which is the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Covenant. Both parts consist of a temporal aspect and an evangelical aspect.

Before the Covenant of Grace was revealed, God entered into a Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden of Eden. The Covenant of Works is not of the essence of the Covenant of Redemption but serves to disclose and highlight the Covenant of Grace. The law of God was already written in the heart of Adam so that there was a

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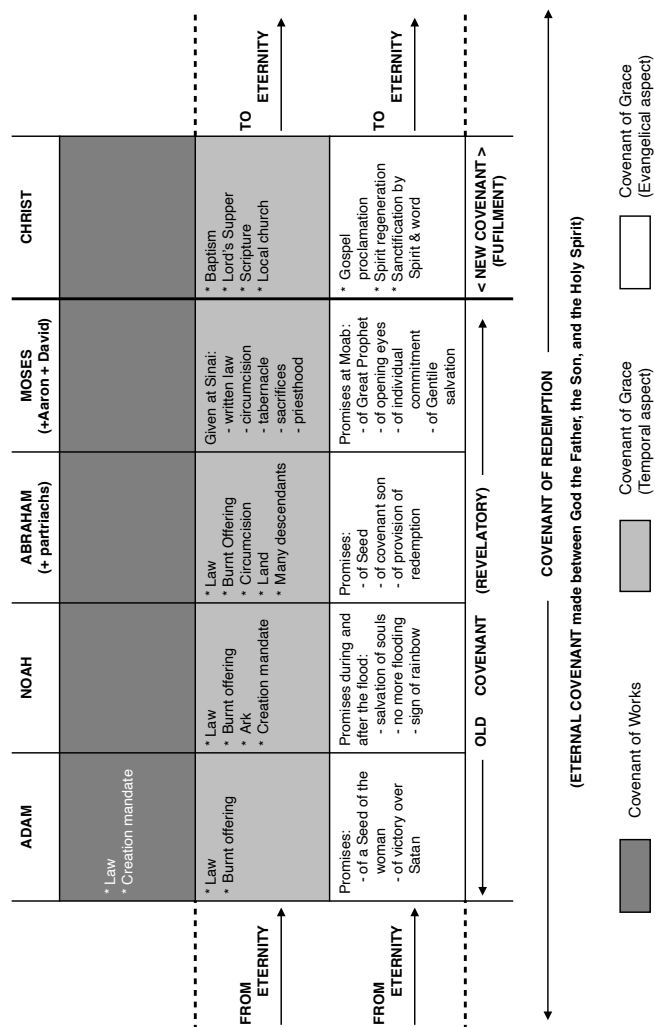


Fig. 7.1 A Schematic Representation Of Covenant Theology

sense of right and wrong in him. The creation mandate was given to him, with full provision of his needs, except for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen.1:28-30; 2:16-17). Since the Covenant of Works was made with Adam and his posterity, it is still

in force. However, unlike Adam before the Fall, there is no possibility of his posterity keeping the covenant to gain eternal life.

After the Fall, Adam and his posterity continued to be under the law, which is written in the hearts of man (Rom. 2:15). The Covenant of Grace was revealed to Adam by the promise of the coming of a Seed of the woman, in the ‘proto-evangelion’ of Genesis 3:15. This is the evangelical aspect of the covenant, as revealed to Adam and Eve. Added to the law written in the heart was the ritual of the burnt offering – first shown when “the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them (Gen. 3:21)”. Abel’s offering of “the firstborn of his flock and of their fat (Gen. 4:4)”, which was accepted by God, shows that the burnt offering had been instituted as the temporal aspect of the covenant.

Noah offered up burnt offerings to the Lord when the flood subsided (Gen. 8:20). The law continued to function in the days of Noah, for he was “a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5)”. The word ‘righteousness’ basically means the keeping of God’s law. Noah was specifically told he could eat flesh but not with its blood (Gen. 9:4-5). Furthermore, the law against murder was highlighted. The creation mandate of being fruitful and multiplying was renewed, with Noah as the second Adam (Gen. 9:7). The law, the building of the ark, the burnt offering, and the creation mandate constitute the temporal aspect of the Noahic Covenant. The ark would have stood as a reminder of God’s deliverance from the flood for the future generations, probably to the days of Abraham. The evangelical aspect consists of the promise of salvation for his household, the promise that there would be no more worldwide destruction by flood, and the giving of the rainbow as a sign.

To Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons were given circumcision and the promised land of Canaan as additional elements of the temporal aspect of the covenant in which he was the federal head. The evangelical aspect of the covenant consisted of the promises of a Seed who would be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:3, 7; Gal. 3:8, 16), a son of the covenant from whom the Saviour would come (Gen. 17:19), and provision for redemption by a sacrifice (Gen. 22:15-18).

To Moses was given the written law, the Sabbath day, the tabernacle, the animal sacrifices, and the priesthood of Aaron and his sons – in addition to the promised land and circumcision handed down from Abraham. These constituted the temporal aspect of the

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Mosaic Covenant, given at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24-40). When the children of Israel arrived at Moab, the law was expounded in which the promise of the coming of a prophet greater than Moses was made (Deut. 18:18). The evangelical aspect of the Covenant of Grace was formally announced (Deut. 29-34), consisting of promises that eyes would be made to see (Deut. 9:4 cf. Rom. 11:8; 2 Cor. 3:7-18), individuals would be saved (Deut. 29:10-20; 30:6, 8, 10), and the Gentiles would be called (Deut. 32:43).

The temporal aspect of the Old Covenant was intended to be a revelation of New Covenant realities. Together with the promises which constituted the evangelical aspect, these progressively revealed the coming of the promised Saviour who would make atonement for the sins of His people, by His death and resurrection. The Jews, however, missed the message of the evangelical aspect and wrongly relied on the keeping of the temporal aspect for salvation. When the elements of the temporal aspect were kept as a way of salvation, they were wilfully relying on the Covenant of Works, and rejecting the Covenant of Grace. As noted time and again, ever since the Fall none can be saved by the Covenant of Works.

The types of the Old Covenant have been fulfilled by the anti-type, namely Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead. He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)”. The hearing of the gospel is the means of salvation for souls (Rom. 10:17). The Holy Spirit is promised to all who repent and believe, sealing the believer unto salvation (Acts 2:38-39; Eph. 1:13). The word of God continues to be used by the Holy Spirit to sanctify the believer for the day of redemption (Matt. 4:4; Eph. 4:30; 5:26). The New Covenant also has its set of temporal elements. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are given to the church as new ordinances of the New Covenant. The completed Scripture – when read, preached, and taught – is used by the Holy Spirit to sanctify believers and the church. The local church – with all its teaching, ordinances, and discipline – is used by the Lord to give form to what would otherwise be a formless, or invisible, church. Herein lies a snare – when the temporal aspect of the New Covenant is relied upon for salvation, it kills (2 Cor. 3:4-6). The Roman Catholic Church errs by making the temporal aspect of the New Covenant a means of salvation – including the mass, penance, baptism, membership in the visible church, etc. Those who believe in baptismal regeneration (i.e., that baptism saves), commit the same error.

Throughout the Old Covenant period, Satan was free to act as “the ruler of this world (John 12:31)”. With the death and resurrection of the Lord, he has been “cast out”, and bound for “a thousand years” (Rev. 20:1-3). Close to the return of Christ to judge the world, Satan will be let loose such that there will be rampant persecution, false teaching, and worldliness. The faith of many will be shaken, while unbelief and apostasy will be rife (Matt. 24:9-13, 24; Luke 18:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). Christ will suddenly appear to expose and destroy the lawless one (2 Thess. 2: 8). The great judgement will take place when all the dead are raised and given their physical bodies. Those found without the righteousness of Christ will be cast into the damnation of hell forever, together with Satan and his agents. The present universe will be melted down and the new heavens and the new earth will be made (2 Pet. 3:11-13). The gathering together of all the redeemed of the Lord, to serve Him for all eternity, constitute the end of God’s plan of redemption.

7.2 The Paedobaptist view

Historically, the Reformed Baptists had understood Covenant/Federal Theology differently from the Reformed Paedobaptists, while sharing certain things in common. In each camp, there was no uniformity of understanding on the subject. The Baptist position, in its main outline, was enshrined in the 1689 Confession, while that of the Paedobaptist was enshrined in the Westminster Confession. Both groups saw the Covenant of Works as being propagated in parallel with the Covenant of Grace through history. The first area of difference between them lay in the Paedobaptist understanding of how the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace apply to the children of believers. It was assumed that such children are in the Covenant of Grace and need to be taught Bible truths (by catechising them) to confirm them in the faith. The Baptist position was that all children are born under the law (i.e., under the Covenant of Works). The elect among them are saved by the Covenant of Grace when the Holy Spirit effectually applies the gospel to them, through the means of grace (by catechising them, praying for them, etc.). The Paedobaptist position is plagued with obvious problems. Firstly, the claim that the children of believers are in the Covenant of Grace contradicts the abiding validity of the Covenant of Works. The teaching

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of Scripture is clear – “That which is born of the flesh is flesh... (John 3:6).” Using the circumcision of the Abrahamic Covenant to justify the inclusion of the children of believers in the Covenant of Grace is stretching credulity too far. Only male children in the Abrahamic Covenant were circumcised while paedobaptism includes both male and female children of believers. Circumcision was a type (or symbol) of regeneration, not baptism (Col. 2:11). Baptism is a new sign of the New Covenant (Col. 2:12). Secondly, the claim that the children of believers are in the Covenant of Grace contradicts the gospel of ‘justification by faith’ (Rom. 3:21-26; 10:17; Gal. 3:2). Salvation is by grace through faith *of the individual*, not that of his parents (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 10:10-14, 17). The exceptional situation of elect infants dying in infancy should not be allowed to cloud the issue at hand. Thirdly, paedobaptism leads to a mixed church membership, and other associated problems such as the practice of confirmation, and whether paedocommunion should be allowed.

The second area of difference was that the Baptists saw the New Covenant as different in substance and administration to the Old Covenant, while the Paedobaptists saw both covenants as consisting of the same substance but different in administration. To the Baptists, the Old Covenant only progressively revealed the Covenant of Grace. It was this revelation that constituted the substance of the Old Covenant. The revelation was made by promises as well as by the types of the temporal elements. Salvation was effectually administered to the elect by the Holy Spirit through this revelation. Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:6).” The Covenant of Grace was in operation but it was not yet ratified by the death and resurrection of Christ, nor sealed by the Holy Spirit. “For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator... it has no power at all while the testator lives (Heb. 9:16, 17).” The Covenant of Grace was operative in the Old Testament period by promise. It is operative in the New Testament age by fulfilment of the promise. (We are reminded of the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the Parable of the Lost Son, in Chapter 3.) As noted already, the temporal elements of the Old Covenant included the law, the promised land, a multitude of descendants, circumcision, the Sabbath day, the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the animal sacrifices. We do not regard these as constituting the substance of the Old Covenant, much less that of the Covenant of Grace. Similarly, we would not call the elements

of the New Covenant – including preaching the gospel, teaching the word of God, prayer and praise, baptism and the Lord’s Supper – the substance of the Covenant of Grace. Rather, the substance is salvation, forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and the indwelling of the Spirit, administered by the Holy Spirit through the temporal elements.

The Westminster federalism may be summarised by “one Covenant of Grace under two administrations”, while that of the 1689 Confession may be summarised as “one Covenant of Grace revealed progressively and concluded formally under the New Covenant”.¹ It might be thought that this is a mere matter of differences in definition, when in reality the differences extend into serious practical implications. The Baptists regard the revelation of the Covenant of Grace as the substance of the Old Covenant which is different from the fulfilment in the New Covenant, while the Paedobaptists regard the promises of the Old Covenant as ‘substantially’ the same as the New Covenant and only ‘accidentally’ different in form (i.e., the differences are unimportant and only incidental to the respective periods of time). Salvation was effectually administered through the types and promises.² Since the Paedobaptists equate the Mosaic Covenant with the Sinaitic Covenant, and treat it as a gracious covenant – while overlooking the contrast made with the New Covenant (especially in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews) – the New Testament church is seen as a continuation of the Old Testament church. Due to the adoption of this “flat theology”, they are able to say that the children of believers today are “covenant children” who should be given baptism, just as the (male) children of the Israelites were given circumcision. Furthermore, the New Testament church government is made hierarchical in some form, similar to that in the Old Testament.

¹Denault, P. 2013. *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth-century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, Solid Ground Christian Books. Denault seems to have shifted to the position of equating the Covenant of Grace with the New Covenant, in Barcellos, R.C. (Ed.) 2014.

²In this respect, the view of Paedobaptist Covenant Theology is no different from the newer Dispensationalists like C. C. Ryrie, which contrasts with that of the older Dispensationalists like L. S. Chafer, in which is found divergent ways of salvation in the various dispensations. The difference between the Neo-Dispensationalism and Paedobaptist Covenant Theology is in the content of faith of the saints in the Old Testament. Paedobaptist Covenant Theology would say the content was “Christ crucified” (i.e., the gospel), while Neo-Dispensationalism would

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Paedobaptist Covenant Theology fails to give due attention to the discontinuity between the Old Testament dispensation of prophecies, types, and promises and the New Testament dispensation of fulfilment of these prophecies, types, and promises. It does not distinguish between the Sinaitic Covenant and the Moabite Covenant in the Mosaic economy. In recent years some Paedobaptist writers have posited the idea that the Covenant of Works was in some sense republished in the Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant – calling it an “application” of the Covenant of Works but is not the Covenant of Works – taking cognisance of the teaching of the New Testament on the contrast between the Old and the New Covenants.³ This has been rebutted by others who uphold the traditional Paedobaptist view.⁴ In whichever way it is formulated, it would seem that the Federal Theology of the Paedobaptists has been crafted to support infant baptism and a mixed church membership. The Federal Theology of the Baptists, in contrast, leads to the baptism of believers and the gathered church principle (i.e., a regenerate church membership and the autonomy of the local church).

7.3 The Dispensational view

The federal theology of the Reformed Baptists stands in contrast to Dispensationalism, which claims that God deals with mankind differently in each of the distinct, typically seven, dispensations. Dispensationalism claims that the Bible is to be interpreted literally, with each word taken to mean what it would normally mean in everyday language. Although allowance may be made for symbols, figures of speech and types, a deliberate attempt is made each time to determine the literal meaning. The one thousand years in Revelation 20 is taken literally as a thousand years of Christ’s reign on earth when He returns. Dispensationalism also teaches that God has two distinct peoples – Israel (i.e., the Jews) and the church. Israel has forfeited the blessing of God by disobedience and is currently replaced by the

say it was faith in God manifested in diverse ways. See Crenshaw, C.I. & Gunn III, G.E. 1989. pp. 343-344.

³Kline, M. 2000. *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundation for a Covenantal World-view*, Two Edge Press. Estelle, B.D. et. al. 2009. *The Law Is Not Of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, P&R Publishing Company.

⁴e.g. Venema, C.P. 2017. *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on election, republication, and the covenants*, P&R Publishing Company.

church. However, when Christ returns to reign for one thousand years, Israel will be the focus of His attention again. Most Dispensationalists are Arminian in soteriology, believing that Christ's death was for the sin of everyone in the world, and prevenient grace makes man able to decide to believe in Christ. Some Dispensationalists are Calvinist in soteriology, holding to the Five Points of Calvinism, as well as to Premillennialism. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ for all nations, but Israel will be particularly blessed because of the covenant made with Abraham.

Among those who hold to Dispensationalism are the philo-Semitists who condemn Replacement Theology for its claim that the church has replaced Israel as God's people and that the blessings promised to Israel have been transferred to, or are being fulfilled in, the church. The philo-Semitists would attempt to convince others of the necessity to support the modern nation of Israel by putting things in an absolute "either-or" situation, with no possibility of neutrality – either one is philo-Semitic or anti-Semitic⁵. Passages such as Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-7 ("a circumcision made without hands", "they are not all Israel who are of Israel"), Galatians 4:21-31 (Sarah contrasted with Hagar, Isaac with Ishmael), Ephesians 2:14-18 (Christ has broken down the middle wall of separation), and Matthew 9:16-17 (new wine in old wineskins) are ignored or glossed over, and conclusions are made based on assumptions and speculations. Covenant Theology, whether of the Baptist or the Paedobaptist kinds, repudiate Replacement Theology. Covenant Theology holds to the view that there are two Israels – physical Israel and spiritual Israel. Spiritual Israel is made up of the elect from among the Jews and the Gentiles, in both the Old and the New Testament age/dispensations (using the word not in the Dispensational sense). Those who hold to Covenant Theology are neither philo-Semitic nor anti-Semitic. The love of Christ compels them to bring the gospel to the Jews as they would to other nations. Replacement Theology was dominant in the early church until the Reformation of the 16th century (some would say until Augustine, AD 400), when Covenant Theology took over. Covenant Theology developed into two strands – the Baptist strand and the Paedobaptist strand. From the mid-19th century, Dispensationalism became popular among Evangelicals, while those who are Reformed continue to hold to Covenant Theology.

⁵Glashouwer, Willem J.J. 2001. *Why Israel?* Christians For Israel International.

7.4 The variant Baptist views

Several Baptist views of Covenant Theology have arisen in recent years that are at odds with traditional Baptist Covenant Theology – the more prominent of which are New Covenant Theology, Progressive Covenantalism, and 1689 Federalism. We take issues with them on a number of fronts – in hermeneutics, the denial of the abiding relevance of the moral law, the claim of republication of the Covenant of Works in the Mosaic Covenant, and equating the Covenant of Grace with the New Covenant. While it is not our intention to tar them with the same brush, one or more of these points do appear in each of these views.

New Covenant Theology, in particular, holds to the strange idea that unless a particular commandment is quoted in the New Testament, that commandment has been abrogated. This is an alien rule of interpretation which is applied to the Fourth Commandment – in which is claimed that the Sabbath law no longer applies to the church. In response, we would point out that the Sabbath rest is referred to in Hebrews 4:9, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” Here, the word ‘rest’ is ‘Sabbath’, unlike in the other verses of the chapter. Furthermore, the word ‘Sabbath’ is found in the expression “the first *day* of the week” (Mark 16:2, etc.) on which the Lord was risen from the dead. The word ‘day’ is not in the original Greek, and the word for ‘week’ is ‘Sabbath’ in the plural. The expression may be translated, “on the first of a series of Sabbaths” the Lord was risen, showing that the Sabbath is not only applicable to the church but also has been changed to the first day of the week.⁶ This accounts for why the early church met on the first day of the week to worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), a fact that should not be glossed over.⁷

It will not do to relegate the ‘rest’ of Hebrews 4:9 to the eschatological future, as is done in Progressive Covenantalism. Context matters, and so is Systematic Theology (not just Biblical Theology), in the interpretation of Scripture. For context, we need to look back some verses where we are told, “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not

⁶Lee, F.N. 1966. *The Covenantal Sabbath*, The Lord’s Day Observance Society.

⁷There are those who claim that Paul also kept the Jewish Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 17:2; 18:4) when, in reality, he was evangelising the Jews in the Jewish meetings. He was not worshipping as a Christian in those meetings.

profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it (Heb. 4:2)". The "us" is a reference to believers in the church age, while "them" refers to those who died in the wilderness wandering in the days of Moses (Heb. 3:16-19). Those who have found rest for their souls (i.e., salvation) through faith in Christ (Heb. 4:3) must keep to the creation ordinance of six days of labour followed by the seventh day of rest (Heb. 4:4). Systematic Theology is the end result of applying the principles of 'the analogy of faith' and 'comparing scripture with scripture' to interpretation. Systematic Theology shows that the Sabbath rest is a creation ordinance (Gen. 2:2-3), like marriage (Matt. 19:4-6), meant to be kept by all mankind for all time. Biblical Theology shows that it was one of the commandments of God ignored by the vast majority of mankind who chose to live ungodly lives. The godly had kept this commandment all through the centuries, as indicated in Exodus 16:22-26, where the Sabbath was observed even before the Ten Commandments were given in Exodus 20. When the Ten Commandments were given, the Fourth Commandment was supported by a reference to God's rest after creation (Exod. 20:8-11), showing that Sabbath keeping is a creation ordinance. We are not surprised that it became a covenantal sign in the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 31:12-17). Among Reformed Christians, there is no uniformity in understanding how the Lord's Day is to be kept. All are agreed, however, that customary work and recreation are to be avoided under normal circumstances, while works of piety, mercy, and necessity should continue (cf. Matt. 12:1-14).

Not only is the Sabbath law denied by some forms of Variant Baptist Covenant Theology, the whole law of the Mosaic Covenant is regarded as abrogated except those mentioned in the New Testament. The claim is that the law of the Old Covenant has been replaced by "the law of Christ" which is vaguely equated with the teaching of Christ found in the New Testament. The traditional view that there are three categories of law – namely, ceremonial, civil, and moral – is dismissed with no convincing proof given, if at all. Traditionally, the ceremonial law pertaining to worship in the Old Testament is regarded as fulfilled in the coming of Christ, and the civil law pertaining to the theocratic nation of Israel is regarded as abrogated except for the underlying principles of justice and mercy. The moral law is regarded as a reflection of the moral character of God and is of abiding relevance to Christians today. By positing a sharp discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, Variant

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Baptist Covenant Theology dismisses the continuing relevance of the law, claiming that it ended with the Old Covenant. In our exposition of Covenant Theology, we have shown that certain elements in a previous covenant may be carried over to the subsequent covenants, often with new ones added. By the same reasoning, the moral law continues to be of abiding relevance in the New Covenant, despite the fact that the temporal elements of the Old Covenant have been abrogated. Furthermore, the threefold division of the law, also dismissed by Variant Baptist Covenant Theology, should be seen in the light of the three offices of the Mediator and Head of the church that were gradually revealed in the Old Testament, and fulfilled perfectly in Christ.

Then, there is the claim made by 1689 Federalism of republication of the Covenant of Works in the Mosaic covenant. We have shown that the Covenant of Works has never been abrogated. Instead, the requirement of perfect obedience to the law, and the condemnation of failure to do so, continue to apply to all mankind after the Fall. A difficulty seems to arise from the sharp contrast made between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in passages such as Romans 7, 2 Corinthians 3, and Hebrews 8. We have shown that the plural word ‘covenants’ is used in Romans 9:4 and Ephesians 2:12, which is linked to the promise of salvation in Christ. Romans 9:4 says, “...Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises...” and Ephesians 2:12 says, “...that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” All the covenants of the Old Testament were “covenants of promise”, revealing the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. To these passages may be added Galatians 3:8 and Hebrews 4:2 which show that all the covenants in the Old Testament revealed the gospel. Galatians 3:8 says, ‘And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”’ Hebrews 4:2 says, “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.” Instead of seeing the Covenant of Works republished, it would be better to see that all the covenants of the Old Testament have a temporal aspect and an evangelical aspect, arising from one purpose

and two objectives. The temporal aspect typifies spiritual realities of the New Covenant, while the evangelical aspect proclaims salvation by grace. When the temporal aspect is misunderstood and kept as a means of salvation, the Covenant of Works is adopted, which leads to death. In the Adamic Covenant, the purpose is to reveal the way of salvation by works, which Adam failed to achieve. In the other covenants, the purpose is to minister salvation by grace arising from the Covenant of Grace. In all the covenants, the twin objectives are firstly, to warn against attempting to be saved by works, and secondly, to guide the elect to salvation by grace.

One final point concerning Variant Baptist Covenant Theology is equating the Covenant of Grace with the New Covenant. Traditional Baptist Covenant Theology, in common with Variant Baptist Covenant Theology, sees the Covenant of Grace progressively revealed in the Old Covenant, culminating in the New Covenant in which the promises of the Old Covenant are fulfilled. That is different from saying that the New Covenant is one and the same as the Covenant of Grace. There is a subtle, but significant, difference between the two. This is where the use of the term 'administration' may be confused with how it is used in Paedobaptist Covenant Theology. It is like the way we use the word 'dispensation' to refer to the Old Testament age and the New Testament age, which can be confused with how the word is used in Dispensationalism. In traditional Baptist Covenant Theology, it is sometimes claimed that there is one Covenant of Grace with two administrations – one in the Old Testament age and the other in the New Testament age. What is meant is that the Covenant of Grace was truly in operation in the Old Testament age, saving the elect by grace through faith in the coming Saviour, while in the New Testament age the elect are saved also by grace through faith in the same Saviour who has already come. The way of salvation is one, not many as in Dispensationalism. For that reason, the Covenant of Grace cannot be equated with the New Covenant for it would imply that the elect in the Old Testament age were not saved by grace. Variant Baptist Covenant Theology, just as traditional Paedobaptist Covenant Theology, struggles with how to explain the salvation of the elect in the Old Testament age. We overcome these difficulties by positing that there are two administrations of the Covenant of Grace – one of progressive revelation of the gospel and the other of fulfilment of the promises. We also posit the one purpose and two objectives of the covenants – the two objec-

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tives giving rise to the temporal aspect and the evangelical aspect of the covenants. Furthermore, we propose that the Covenant of Works should be seen as consisting of two administrations as well – one before the Fall when Adam was able, but failed, to obey the law, and the other after the Fall when man is no longer able to be saved by works although the Covenant of Works is still in force.

7.5 Summary

The present contribution to Covenant Theology may be summarised by the following points:

- 1 The Covenant of Redemption is seen as stretching from eternity past to eternity future, having as substance the eternal purpose of God in the salvation of the elect.
- 2 The Covenant of Grace is that portion of the Covenant of Redemption that emerges in history. It consists of two parts, the revelatory part in the Old Testament age called the Old Covenant, and the fulfilment part in the New Testament age known as the New Covenant. The Old Covenant consists of a number of covenants centred around individuals to whom the revelation concerning the New Covenant and, therefore, the Covenant of Grace also, was progressively given.
- 3 The Covenant of Grace is seen as consisting of two aspects. In the Old Covenant, the temporal aspect consists of the law, a promised land, many descendants, the tabernacle/temple, the priesthood, animal sacrifices, circumcision, and the Sabbath rest which typify New Covenant realities. The evangelical aspect consists of promises of salvation by grace, of the coming of the God-appointed Saviour, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit to help in the life of faith. In the New Covenant, the evangelical aspect consists of gospel proclamation of the Saviour who has come, the offer of salvation by grace through faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers. The temporal aspect includes the word preached, the special ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, the singing of praises to the Triune God, and local church order. The temporal aspect gives form to the church and the means of sanctification to the believers.

- 4 The Covenant of Works made with Adam and his posterity is seen as operating in parallel with the Covenant of Grace through history until the return of Christ to judge the world. These constitute two key covenants that are revealed simultaneously in Scripture. From the Fall of Adam, man could no longer be saved by keeping the law. Salvation is found only in the Covenant of Grace, through faith in the promised Saviour.
- 5 The Mosaic Covenant is seen as consisting of two main parts. The first is the Sinaitic Covenant which is the temporal aspect, while the second is the Moabite Covenant which is the evangelical aspect. The Jews made the fatal mistake of using the Sinaitic Covenant as a Covenant of Works.
- 6 There are two posterities of Abraham – natural Israel and spiritual Israel. The beneficiaries of the Covenant of Grace are the spiritual children of Abraham. The gospel is to be proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles until Christ returns to judge the world.
- 7 The New Covenant operates within the gospel age which began with the coming of Christ to fulfil the promises made in the Old Covenant, and will end with the return of Christ to judge the world and to make all things new. The New Covenant involves the execution of the Great Commission, which is what constitutes the work of missions. Covenant Theology also provides the framework for the interpretation of Scripture. It gives us an understanding of the underlying message of Scripture, which is the unfolding of God's eternal purpose. Missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God.

The present contribution on Covenant Theology has the advantages of being simple, concise, and yet precise. Of course, our hope is that it has been convincing. It does not overlook differences with the Paedobaptist and variant Baptist views on the subject, and stands in stark contrast to Dispensationalism.

* * * * *

Eight

Where Do We Go From Here?

The teaching of Scripture constitutes a system. All the doctrines are interlinked. Traditionally, doctrines have been classified as those that are fundamental to the Christian faith and those that are non-essential. The difficulty lies in where to draw the line between the fundamentals and the non-essentials. The historic Confessions of Faith come in handy to help us spell out what our church regards as fundamentals of the faith. The danger lies in treating an important teaching as non-essential to the faith. Covenant Theology is an important branch of study of the Scripture. It affects our understanding of salvation, the interpretation of Scripture, the doctrine of the church, missions, and much more. Here, we draw out some practical implications from our study of Covenant Theology.

8.1 Beware of the later-generation syndrome!

The later-generation syndrome is the tendency to become unclear and lax about true conversion in the children of believing parents. It has direct bearing on Covenant Theology. A covenant is made up of the subjects, the structure, and the statutes. The subjects of the New Covenant are clearly those born again by the Holy Spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:5-8; Heb. 8:10-12). Under normal circumstances, they would repent and profess faith upon hearing the gospel (Rom. 10:12-13, 17). Only those who show a credible profession of faith are to be baptised and accepted into the membership of a church (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:11-12). All the examples of bap-

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tism in the New Testament show, or indicate, immersion as the mode (Matt. 3:13, 16; John 3:23; Acts 8:38-39). We would, therefore, not accept infants for baptism nor consider sprinkling true baptism. In Scripture, the 'households' who were baptised do not mention the inclusion of infants. Instead, a number of such passages clearly indicate that the households were made up of those who had believed. There was Cornelius's household who were baptised when "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word (Acts 10:44)", the Philippian jailer and all his family who were baptised, "having believed in God with all his household (Acts 16:34)", and the household of Stephanas who were baptised and "have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints (1 Cor. 1:16 cf. 16:15)". The traditional argument for a mixed church membership from the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matt. 13:24-30) has long been discredited, for the explanation given by the Lord (vv. 37-43) shows that "the field is the world (v. 38)" and not the church.

The later-generation syndrome affects all Christian denominations. The first generation of believers often have a sharply discernible conversion experience. If they are not careful in bringing up their children under the sound of the gospel, the children might grow up assuming that they are already in the faith. Of course, it is legitimate to regard one's religion as 'Christian' compared to others of other faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam. It is another thing to think that the children are already converted when they are not. Christian parents should faithfully pray for their children's salvation and expose them to daily worship at home, weekly worship in church, and the Sunday School for children. God often honours the effort of the parents and bless their children with genuine conversion. Often, their conversion experience will not be as dramatic as that of their parents'. That does not constitute a problem, for no two conversion experiences are the same. However, in all true conversions, there will be repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ – regardless of whether the experience is gradual or sudden. The tendency to be lax in bringing up children under the sound of the gospel becomes more pronounced in the third, and subsequent, generations. Often it is that nominalism (i.e., being Christian only in name) sets in by the third and fourth generation. This is not helped by denominations that apply the term 'covenant children' to the children of believers. In our opinion, their attempt to address the later-generation syndrome through reminding the children that they are

‘covenant children’ is misguided.¹

Some General Baptist churches (not to be confused with Reformed Baptist churches) practise what is dubbed ‘delayed infant baptism’ in which children of believers who have reached ‘the age of discretion’ (normally at 12 years old) are baptised. While we do not deny that children can come to true faith in Christ from an early age, it is never wise to baptise them too early because children tend to have a faith which is an extension of their parents’ faith. In other words, the children have not matured to the point where the will operates independently from that of the parents’. When does this happen? Each child is different. Some mature faster than others. Generally, it is wise to wait till they are in their late teens. What we are looking for is a *credible profession of faith*, which the church has to determine in consultation with the believing parents.

Beware of the later-generation syndrome!

8.2 Commitment to the local church

The covenants of Scripture lead to the concept of the church covenant. A local church is founded when baptised believers bind themselves together with an oath during a covenanting service, to worship and serve God in the way prescribed by Scripture. This is the church covenant. There would be a Church Constitution that is adopted, in which the beliefs and practices of the church are spelled out, and the church covenant is attached. Individuals who join the church subsequently, either by baptism or transfer from another church, will be made to understand that their acceptance into church membership involves their commitment to the church by way of the church covenant. Scripture teaches the principle that ‘the local church is central and unique in the purposes of God’. The Lord anticipated the founding of local churches (Matt. 18:15-18; John 17:20-26). The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is a mandate given to the local church to plant other local churches. This is exemplified in the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul in the book of Acts. The epistles in the New Testament are addressed to local churches or individuals connected to local churches. The last book of Scripture is

¹e.g. Hanko, H. 1981. *We & Our Children: The Reformed Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Hendriksen, W. 1984. *The Covenant of Grace*, Cushing-Malloy Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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addressed to “the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 1:4, 11)”, which is symbolic of all local churches in the New Testament age.

It is expected of all believers to be integrated into the life of a local church, to spiritually grow in the local church, and to serve the Lord through the local church. There is no better way to glorify God than to be involved in the life of a good local church.

Covenant Theology requires that we appreciate, and commit ourselves to, the covenant of the church.

8.3 Comfort in trials and facing death

A clear understanding of Covenant Theology ministers tremendous comfort to believers in sickness, in trials, and when facing death. Salvation is not seen in a piecemeal fashion – whether in the doctrines of election and predestination, or in the Five Points of Calvinism, or in the Order of Salvation (‘ordo salutis’) – helpful as these might be. When salvation is seen as effected by the Covenant of Grace, rooted in the Covenant of Redemption, and extending to eternity future, our hearts are moved to look forward to that great day when all the redeemed of the Lord will be gathered together in that better place, to praise God and serve Him for all eternity. When under trials, we know that the sovereign God is in control. When in sorrow, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. When facing death, we may revel in the words of Ephesians 1:3-14, as Charles Simeon did.

Covenant Theology is practical theology.

8.4 Involvement in missions

The connection between Covenant Theology and Missiology seems to have been overlooked by those who handle these subjects, respectively. Covenant Theology looks at the salvation of the elect from the divine perspective. Missiology considers the salvation of the elect from the human perspective. Missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. It is not too strong a statement to say that a church that loses the vision for missions will fossilise. It took less than fifty years for the literal seven churches in Asia to spiritually decline to such an extent as to warrant the admonition of Revelation 2 and 3. A healthy church should be involved in local outreach and wider

church-planting. It should be involved in home missions as well as foreign missions. Since the spirituality of a church seldom rises above the spirituality of its leaders, it is expected of church leaders to lead in missions. Teaching on missions must be given. News on missions must be disseminated and prayed over. Organised outreach and church-planting must be engaged in. Visits and contributions to overseas missions must be made. Church members must be encouraged to be involved.

That said, the local church should be the priority, for without a strong base to operate from, missions will founder. When does a church get involved in missions? Our answer is, “As soon as it comes into being.” Missions begins with local outreach, extending to wider church planting, and involvement with foreign missions. When small, and with limited resources, we do little. When we stretch ourselves in faith, the Lord gives more opportunities and the ability to do more. The Parable of the Talents teaches us that “to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away (Matt. 25:29).” Much can be accomplished in missions when like-minded churches work together in fellowship.

The privilege and satisfaction of being involved in missions cannot be overstated.

8.5 Unity among brethren

We acknowledge that the last word on Covenant Theology has not been said. The present contribution attempts to take into consideration issues and scriptural data that are perceived to have been overlooked or inadequately handled. This restatement of Covenant Theology does not depart from the main tenets of traditional Baptist Covenant Theology, while refining it in ways that, we hope, have been convincing. It is built upon the labours of others, with grateful acknowledgement due to them. We echo the words of the great scientist, Isaac Newton (1643-1727): “If I have seen farther it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” Our desire is for brethren in the faith to be drawn together in unity over the truth of Scripture. If our esteemed reader has doubts over what is presented here, it is respectfully suggested that you read over this book again. Before you reject any point presented, please consider whether you have a

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better explanation for it. We end with the words of Psalm 133:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
It is like the dew of Herman,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

* * * * *

Appendix 1: Hanko's Straw Fortress

[Hanko's Straw Fortress: A critique of the book *We & Our Children*, by Herman Hanko, 1981. Reformed Free Publishing Association. This article was first published in 1994, then in 2015 on the Gospel Highway website, www.gospelhighway.net.]

Preface

This article was first published in the hardcopy edition of the Gospel Highway, Issue No. 3, 1994. The substance of the article was incorporated into the book, *The Keys of the Kingdom: A Study On The Biblical Form Of Church Government*, published by Good News Enterprise, in 1995. That was the age of the desktop computer, when the laptop and the internet were beginning to see the light of day. It did not seem too long ago. In the decades that have passed, a number of individuals have questioned me on the concept of 'covenant children' held by our Paedobaptist brethren. A recent inquiry spurred the reappearance of this article, with the end-notes a little updated. May it help all concerned parties to come closer to the truth of Scripture on the subject.

Foreword

Baptists have always maintained that the word 'baptism' in the Bible actually means 'immersion', and that only believers are to be so baptised. Paedobaptists, however, claim that infants born to believers should also be baptised, and sprinkling is an acceptable mode of

baptism. Paedobaptists have always accused Baptists of not understanding Covenant Theology which undergirds infant baptism. David Kingdon wrote his book, *Children of Abraham*, to show that Reformed Baptists have always upheld a true Covenant Theology that is consistent with their view on baptism. Herman Hanko wrote the book, *We & Our Children*, to refute Kingdon. Of necessity, the present article is technical in nature. The reader is urged to read it through slowly and carefully. The content can be followed even if the two books in question have not been read.

Introduction

It would not be difficult to make a detailed critique of Hanko's book, *We & Our Children*. The exercise would be a tedious one. Time and effort are better spent doing something more basic and positive in the advancement of the gospel.

However, it would be irresponsible to leave this book unaccosted. First published in 1981, it continues to be widely circulated despite the fact that the book it attempts to refute, *Children of Abraham* by David Kingdon, is long out of print. Kingdon's book was published and reprinted in 1973 and 1975, respectively.¹

When first published, Kingdon's book was severely censured by Dr. John R. de Witt in the Westminster Theological Journal (1975). Kingdon had effectively responded to de Witt's strongly worded review in *Reformation Today*, No. 39 (1977).² To our knowledge, Hanko's book has not been responded to.³

Questionable Methodology

The general approach adopted by Hanko is opened to question for a number of reasons.

Firstly, he assumes a narrow definition of the word 'Reformed' and a broad definition of the word 'Baptist'. To him, the 'Reformed' are those who, "while adhering to the truths of Calvinism, developed also the whole federal idea in the theology and the organic idea in the covenant (p. 11)." In other words, those who hold to the continental confessions of faith are alone 'Reformed'. Those who hold to the Westminster Confession he calls 'Presbyterian'. While he acknowledges that "there have been a significant number of Bap-

tists throughout the post-Reformation history of the church who have taken a different position on these questions (of Arminian soteriology and premillennial dispensationalism)", Hanko is intent on lumping the Reformed Baptists with the Arminian Baptists. His claim is that Calvinistic Baptists and Arminian Baptists have in common this characteristic: "both hold to an individualistic conception of salvation in particular and of God's dealings with men in general (p. 12)." From his narrow definition of who are the 'Reformed' he can make the guarded statement, "I do not know of a single Reformed theologian of note who maintains that the children of believers are saved (p. 48)." In his book, Kingdon was dealing with Paedobaptists of all shades, and of necessity had to range over their views generally. Hanko, on the other hand, wished to engage Kingdon on his (Hanko's) own terms, by his own rules!

Secondly, Hanko is fond of making sweeping charges and assumptions of his opponent's position. He charges Kingdon of "implicit dispensationalism", but fails to prove that. Statements like "Kingdon fails to understand the true nature of the Old Testament economy" abound. To Hanko, only two positions are possible: either one holds to the 'Reformed' position of upholding the unity of the Bible, or one is a Dispensationalist who treats the New and Old Testaments as disjointed. It does not occur to him that there is a third position, that of Reformed Baptists, which maintains the unity of the Bible as well as recognises the progressive and cumulative nature of biblical revelation. In fact, the quarrel of Reformed Baptists with the Paedobaptists is that they hold to a 'flat theology'. Paedobaptists err by equating the Old Testament with the New, while Dispensationalists err by exalting the New above the Old. This is not to say that men like Hanko totally ignore the progressive nature of revelation. They do recognise the principle, but in an inconsistent way, and begin to hedge when results of biblical studies do not favour their preconceived ideas!

Thirdly, Hanko has the habit of interspersing his arguments for infant baptism with statements and doctrines which the Reformed Baptists themselves would affirm, thereby unfairly insinuating that Reformed Baptists do not hold them. He would then make an assertion of the Paedobaptist position as though that is a proven fact. For example, in chapters 1 & 2, arguments that Reformed Baptists would have no problem with are given first: there are different administrations of the one covenant of grace; the Old Testament ad-

ministration of the covenant was in types and shadows; the essence of the covenant and the promise of the covenant remained the same; believers in the Old Testament and the New Testament constitute one church. The sudden assertion is then made of identifying circumcision with baptism (pp. 40-41)! It is claimed that Kingdon had admitted to this identity, when in fact he had only claimed the existence of an analogy between them. An analogy is different from an identity. Another example of Hanko's dubious approach will suffice. Hanko expounds at length Galatians 3 in a way that is totally acceptable to Reformed Baptists (pp. 109 ff.), concluding with the statement: "So then the children of Abraham in every age are those who are of faith... If Christ is the seed, centrally, of Abraham, then it is also true that all those who belong to Christ are also seed of Abraham whether they be Jew or Greek, whether they live in the old dispensation or the new. And belonging to Christ, they are all heirs according to the promise (p. 118)." The seed of believers have thus far been correctly identified as those who are of faith, those who belong to Christ. The sudden twist is made when Hanko asserts infant baptism by assuming a different definition of the seed of believers, taking it now to mean all children born to believers!

Questionable doctrines

These are as far as the general methodology goes. We now consider the crux of Hanko's arguments for infant baptism. Three interlinked doctrines are proposed: baptism in the New Testament is to be equated with circumcision in the Old Testament (chapter 2); God saves by the line of generations (chapter 3); and, God saves His people by dealing with them as an organism (chapter 4).

Baptism and circumcision

The dubious method employed by Hanko to identify baptism with circumcision has been mentioned above. He admits throughout that the promises given by God to Abraham belong to "the dispensation of types and shadows (pp. 37, 45)". He quotes favourably Herman Hoeksema that "circumcision belongs to the time of shadows (p. 41)". Yet, he adamantly identifies circumcision with baptism! Hanko believes that in the Old Testament, "the reality was there... under the form of the type... (p. 38)". If the "was there" is under-

stood figuratively, in the sense that the type was a sign, or pledge, of the reality, there would have been no problem. This is not the case with Hanks, however. He takes the “reality” as literally there, but covered, or camouflaged by the sign! He can do that only by using the word “reality” in the qualitative sense of “being real, true, not false”. That, surely, is not the correct way to use the word in the context of discussing “types and shadows”.

Properly speaking, in theology, types and shadows point to some definite, inward, spiritual fulfilment in the future. It is the fulfilment that is known as the reality. The reality was promised to Abraham. It had not been realised yet at that time. The promised Messiah had not come. Calvary was still future. Just as hope that is seen is not hope, so also promise that is realised is not promise (Rom. 8:24). If the reality was there already, there would have been no need for the promises. See Galatians 3:15-18 and Hebrews 11:13. Louis Berkhof said this of types: “A type always prefigures something future... it is necessary to have due regard to the essential difference between type and antitype. The one represents truth on a lower, the other, the same truth on a higher stage. To pass from the type to the antitype is to ascend from that in which the carnal preponderates to that which is purely spiritual, from external to the internal, from the present to the future, from the earthly to the heavenly.”⁴

The newness of the New Testament administration is emphasised in Hebrews 8:7-8. The old sign of circumcision was for the purpose of indicating membership in the Old Testament community of God’s people, namely the nation of Israel. The new sign of baptism is for initiating a believer into the New Testament community of God’s people, namely the visible (local) church. The old sign was a type, which foreshadowed the New Testament reality of regeneration (Col. 2:11-12). Regeneration, “the circumcision of the heart”, is symbolised by the totally new sign of baptism. The outward sign of circumcision cannot point to the outward sign of baptism. By definition, the antitype that answers to the type must be a spiritual, inward reality. The physical land of Canaan pointed to the spiritual church of Jesus Christ. The physical seed of Abraham pointed to the spiritual seed of Abraham. The physical blessings given to Abraham and his physical descendants pointed to the spiritual blessings of all those who come to faith in Christ. Circumcision must point to the spiritual, inward reality of regeneration. It is not possible to equate baptism with circumcision.

Salvation along generations

The next doctrine proposed by Hanko is that God saves by the line of generations. By this is meant that God saves believers *and their seed*. In a confusing manner, he acknowledges that not all children of believers are saved (pp. 48-49). At the same time, throughout chapter three, he affirms that God does save the children of believers.

That God does save the children of believers no one would deny. The question is, does God save them simply because they are born to believers? Is natural descent the cause of their salvation? Hanko would give the correct answer, "No!" to these questions. He affirms that only elect children are saved, and they are those for whom Christ died, and that they are saved by God's sovereign grace (p. 49). Why then posit the idea that God saves by the line of generation, as though natural descent is the cause of salvation? If taken as the cause of salvation, the doctrine of "God saving by the line of generation" is wrong and heretical! There is only one way of salvation, and that is by the grace of God through faith in Christ.

Hanko's basic problem lies in his failure to distinguish between the *cause*, the *ground*, the *means*, and the *scope* of salvation. The cause of salvation is the grace of God. The ground of salvation is Christ's finished work on the cross. The means of salvation is faith that comes by the hearing of the gospel. The scope of salvation covers the elect from all nations.

We discuss first the *scope* of salvation. Genesis 17 is not the only passage that records the covenant God made with Abraham. The seed of Abraham mentioned in Genesis 17:7 must not be interpreted as the direct descendants of Abraham alone, much less as infants. The verse has to be interpreted in the context of the whole covenant made with Abraham, and in the context of all the records of that covenant. In fact, we would go farther and say that it has to be interpreted in the context of the Covenant of Grace as revealed in the whole Bible. The covenant with Abraham is, after all, only one expression (or administration) of the Covenant of Grace. Comparing Genesis 17:7 with Genesis 17:2, 4; 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14, we come to the conclusion that the seed of Abraham, who are to receive the blessings of redemption, encompasses believers from all nations. Romans 4 and Galatians 3 show us that all who have the same faith as Abraham are his seed. Romans 4:16 and Galatians 3:29 show that the seed of Abraham mentioned in Genesis 17:7 is not limited to just

Jewish believers but includes also believers from other nations. The scope of salvation encompasses elect from all nations.

Paedobaptists have generally posited a sharp dichotomy between pagans who hear the gospel for the first time and the children of those who are already believers. To the former, the gospel is to be preached. To the latter, Christian truths are to be taught. The former need to repent and believe in Christ before they are admitted to the covenant community, the church. The latter are considered to be in the covenant community already and only needs to be educated and disciplined. This is the view held by Hanks (pp. 84, 96, 98). The problem with such a view is that it, in effect, teaches salvation by works. The children of believers need to be *educated* into the kingdom of God instead of saved by the hearing of faith! Hanks would insist that only elect children are saved, and that they are saved by God's grace. But his view on the children of believers minimises the universality and seriousness of original sin, and under-emphasizes 'justification by faith'. It has been forgotten that the watchwords of the Reformation were 'sola scriptura', 'sola gratia', and 'sola fide' (Scripture alone, grace alone, and faith alone)!

When we correctly differentiate the *cause*, *ground*, *means* and *scope* of salvation, we are able to understand correctly Acts 2:38-39, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." The *cause* of salvation is the grace of God in election: "as many as the Lord our God will call". The *ground* of salvation is the finished work of Christ: hence, "in the name of Jesus Christ". The *means* of salvation is "repent, ...and be baptised", on hearing the gospel proclaimed. The *scope* of salvation is "you, your children (meaning the subsequent generations), and all who are afar off". The "children" mentioned in Acts 2:38 are not "the immediate children of believers", much less "infants born to believers". God saves the children of believers, but He also saves the parents of believers, and their grandparents, and their more distant relatives, and their friends and neighbours!

We repeat: the *scope* of salvation must never be confused with the *means* of salvation. Also, no amount of emphasis on the *cause* (God's grace) and the *ground* (Christ's death) of salvation should be allowed to eclipse the *means* (repentance and faith) and the *scope* (elect from all nations in all generations). Acts 2:38-39 occurs, after

all, in the context of Pentecost, the beginning of a new era in which the Great Commission is to be carried out (Acts 1:8), and in which the prophecy of Joel is being fulfilled: "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21)." In today's jargon, we would say that God saves from among all, in space or time. God saves from among those who are afar of as well as those who are near. God also saves from among those of the future generations, not just from the present generation. That, we maintain, is the correct interpretation of Acts 2:39.

The doctrine that "God saves His church and establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations (Hanko, p. 49)" is, at best, a red herring, and at worst, a distortion of the gospel.

Organism of the covenant

The third doctrine proposed by Hanko is that "God saves His people by dealing with them as an organism." This is put forward to justify the inclusion of infants of believing parents as members of the church. Let us analyse Hanko's procedures. Three basic steps are involved.

First, he proposes the idea of an organism, giving the definition: "an organism is an organized and unified system, composed of many diverse parts, but united by a common principle of life (p. 78)." Various examples are given of what constitutes an organism: the church, the human race, nations, and cities.

In the second step, Hanko transposes the nation of Israel directly upon the church of the new dispensation (pp. 81-84)! The assumption has been made that Israel is the same organism as the church, which, in a sense, it is. But he fails to give due allowance for progression and fulfilment. He begins by acceptably stating that Israel was a *type* of the church of Christ. But he identifies the antitype with the type, so that the external features of the type – including a mixed membership – are transported into the antitype. The butterfly has been identified with the caterpillar, without due allowance given to the process of development! All the Bible passages quoted by Hanko to support the idea of mixed church membership in fact teach the contrary: the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), the church as the vine (Jn. 15), the figure of the olive tree (Rom. 11); and the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13).

In the third step, Hanko extends the idea of a mixed membership

to the Covenant of Grace (pp. 85-90). Here, he confuses the *administration* of the covenant with the covenant itself. He was obviously referring to the administration (the manifestation, or outworking) of the covenant when he says,

“As the covenant develops in all time, the covenant develops in such a way that, born into the covenant lines, there are both elect and reprobate. Or, to put the matter slightly differently, the purpose of God in sovereign predestination is realized in such a way that election and reprobation cut through the line of the covenant (p. 85).”

Laboriously, he attempts to swamp the reader with many trite and irrelevant examples (the flow of the river Mississippi, a stalk of wheat, a field of wheat, Hebrews 6:4-8). In the next breath, he unmistakably claims that the *covenant of grace* itself includes the reprobate! He says:

“But the question still remains: why does God will that all the children of believers be baptized? We have already answered that question in part. We have answered that children as well as adults are comprehended *in the covenant of grace*. Believers and their seed are saved. And the seed of believers are saved as children. God has promised that He will gather His elect from us and from our children – and from new believers and their children when new branches are grafted into the olive tree. But we know that all children of believers are baptized. And we know that these children are not all elect.” (Italics added. The “all” in this last sentence was actually placed before “these children”. We have changed its position so as to convey what we think Hanks meant to say.)

“So it is *within* the covenant. *Within* that covenant are both elect and reprobate seed (p. 89).” (Italics added.)

We would register the strongest protest against such a construction of the Covenant of Grace. In charity, we would take it that Hanks had not been too careful to differentiate between the *administration* of the covenant and the covenant itself, which he did earlier on in his book (p. 36). He nevertheless enters dangerous ground by suggesting that the Covenant of Grace itself encompasses

both elect and reprobate seed. That would be a serious perversion of the covenant, for, *per definition*, the covenant is the arrangement whereby God through grace alone has bound Himself to save man from the just consequences of his sin. The Covenant of Grace does not comprehend the reprobate. The various *administrations* of the covenant do. The administrations of the covenant are the arrangements through which the elect are called out of the world into the kingdom of God. This is true in the old administration (the Old Covenant) as well as in the new (the New Covenant).

We are not given to know who are the elect and who are not. Only those who have come to faith may know that they are elect. We are to proclaim the gospel to all alike. "We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life (2 Cor. 2:15-16)." In the same family, there may be those who are saved, and there may be those who are lost. God often uses the salvation of one to beneficially influence the others in the family (1 Cor. 7:14; 1 Pet. 3:1-2). Some of those so influenced might come to salvation in Christ. In these ways, the *administration* of the covenant grace encompasses the elect and the reprobate.

It bears repetition that while the *administrations* of the covenant comprehend the reprobate as well as the elect, *progressive development* must be recognised in them. According to prophecy, Israel will give way to the visible churches of the New Testament dispensation. The type will give way to the antitype. Israel as a nation consisted of the reprobate and the elect. The new covenant community is to be made up of people who have "a new heart, a heart of flesh, with a new spirit within them (Ezek. 36:24-28)". They will have God's law in their minds, written on their hearts (Jer. 31:31-34). In practice, we cannot avoid the unwitting admittance of some who are unregenerate into church membership. But that is different from the deliberate admittance of the unregenerate into church membership, which the Paedobaptists have been doing, and which Hanko is advocating.

In his zeal to discredit the Reformed Baptists, Hanko misrepresents their position and claims that they fail to properly take into account the truth of total depravity (p. 96). He goes to the extent of saying, "Total depravity, after all, means that one who is totally depraved is not only completely devoid of the grace of God, *but such a one is actively opposed to the things of God.*" (Italics added). The

conclusion drawn by Hanks is that those who are actively opposed to the things of God are not to be given Christian instruction, while others who are not actively opposed to the things of God, and are receptive to Christian instruction, are to be considered converted already. Children of believers are such, according to Hanks. But this is a frightening distortion of the doctrine of total depravity. It is no wonder that those of Hanks's communion have been charged with the age-old error of Hyper-calvinism!⁵

The *total depravity* of Calvinism means that there is a total inability on the part of man to gain, or contribute to, his own salvation. The "total" is a reference to the *extent* of his person that is depraved, not to the *degree* of his depravity. And it is in regard to his *salvation* that the totally depraved man is unable to do anything about, not in regard to his reception of biblical instruction. The children of believers who are receiving Bible teaching are as totally depraved as the children of pagans. Children, whether of believers or pagans, who are able to sing psalms and hymns, and pay outward allegiance to the worship of God, are totally depraved. When converted, they remain totally depraved. Their nature is changed by degrees to become holier and holier by the Holy Spirit, but that is different from saying they have ceased to become totally depraved.

Conclusion

Hanks has failed to refute the Reformed Baptist understanding of Covenant Theology. His complicated, confusing, and even erroneous arguments will only serve to give a false sense of security to the members of his, and other like-minded, churches. The members of these churches will be made to think that the Baptist position has been demolished, and theirs upheld. They will think it a waste of time to find out what exactly the Reformed Baptists believe. In effect, Hanks has succeeded to surround Paedobaptists with a fortress that appears formidable. That fortress, however, is not impregnable. It is only made of straw!

Notes:

- 1 Some used copies *Children of Abraham*, by David Kingdon, are on sale at www.Amazon.com. Readers might be interested in an-

other book on the subject entitled *Infant Baptism & The Covenant of Grace*, by Paul K. Jewett (Eerdmans, 1978). Books on Covenant Theology from the Baptist perspective are easily sourced out on the internet. (We are glad to announce that a new edition of David Kingdon's *Children of Abraham* is in print.)

- 2 A Review Reviewed, David Kingdon, <http://www.searchingtogether.org/articles/kingdon/review.htm> Accessed on 2 May 2015.
- 3 The book *We & Our Children*, by Herman Hanko (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004) is still in circulation.
- 4 *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, by L. Berkhof (Baker, 1990), pp. 145, 147.
- 5 David Engelsma has attempted to refute the charge of Hyper-Calvinism levelled against those who deny “the free offer of the gospel”, in *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980). Tom Wells has shown the fallacy of the arguments against “the free offer of the gospel” in a booklet entitled, *Notes on the Free Offer Controversy*, available from The King's Chapel, 7365 West Chester Road, West Chester, Ohio 45069, USA.

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