

Covenant Theology

The covenants as the framework of redemptive history

What Is a Covenant?

Genesis 9:9-11

[9] And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you;
[10] And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. [11] And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

Genesis 15:18

In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

Exodus 24:7-8

[7] And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. [8] And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

Hebrews 9:15-17

[15] And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. [16] For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. [17] For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

A covenant is a solemn, binding agreement establishing a relationship with promises, conditions, and consequences—God's chosen means of relating to His people. God established His covenant with Noah, promising never again to destroy the earth with a flood.

The LORD made a covenant with Abram, promising land, seed, and blessing. Moses read the book of the covenant, and the people responded, 'All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.' Christ is the mediator of the new testament (covenant), that by means of death, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Covenants involve parties (God and man), promises (what God pledges to do), stipulations (what man is required to do), signs (visible tokens like circumcision or baptism), and sanctions (blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience). Unlike contracts between equals, divine covenants are sovereignly administered by God, who sets the terms and graciously binds Himself to keep them.

Covenant is the unifying theme of Scripture—the Bible is organized into Old Covenant (Testament) and New Covenant, with God progressively revealing His redemptive purposes through successive covenants.

The Covenant of Works

Genesis 2:16-17

[16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: [17] But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Hosea 6:7

But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.

Romans 5:12-19

[12] Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: [13] (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. [14] Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. [15] But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one

man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. [16] And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. [17] For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) [18] Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. [19] For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

1 Corinthians 15:22

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

God established a covenant with Adam in Eden, promising life upon obedience and death upon disobedience—Adam represented all humanity as their covenant head. 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' Adam, like men, transgressed the covenant (Hosea 6:7, alternate reading).

By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. In Adam all die.

Adam stood as the federal (covenant) head of humanity—his obedience would have secured life for all; his disobedience brought death to all. The covenant of works established the principle that eternal life requires perfect obedience to God's law.

Since Adam failed, and in him all humanity failed, no one can now be justified by works—the law brings only condemnation to fallen sinners. This covenant demonstrates human inability and prepares for the gospel: Christ, the last Adam, succeeded where the first Adam failed, earning righteousness for His people through perfect obedience.

The Covenant of Grace

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Galatians 3:8

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Hebrews 13:20

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

Romans 4:13-16

[13] For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. [14] For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: [15] Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. [16] Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

After the fall, God established the covenant of grace—promising salvation through faith in Christ, not through human works. The first gospel promise came immediately after the fall: 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham.

The God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. The promise is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.

The covenant of grace encompasses all God's saving dealings with humanity from the fall to the consummation. It is one covenant with various administrations—the substance remains constant (salvation by grace through faith in Christ), while the form develops through biblical history.

Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant are not separate

covenants of grace but progressive unfoldings of the one eternal covenant. Christ is the covenant's mediator, securing its promises by His blood.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis 12:1-3

[1] Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: [2] And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: [3] And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 17:7

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

Galatians 3:16

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

Galatians 3:29

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

God's covenant with Abraham established the pattern for all subsequent covenants—promising land, seed, and blessing to Abraham and his descendants. 'I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. The Abrahamic covenant promised:

1. numerous descendants
2. the land of Canaan
3. blessing to all nations through Abraham's seed.

Its ultimate fulfillment is in Christ, the true Seed, and in His church, Abraham's spiritual descendants.

Circumcision was its sign, faith was its condition for receiving the promises, and its scope was universal—all families of the earth would be blessed.

The Mosaic Covenant

Exodus 19:5-6

[5] Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: [6] And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Exodus 24:7-8

[7] And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. [8] And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

Galatians 3:24

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Romans 10:4

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

God established a covenant with Israel at Sinai, giving the law to reveal His holiness, expose sin, and point to Christ. 'If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.' Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of

the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Christ is the end (goal/termination) of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

The Mosaic covenant governed Israel as a nation—civil, ceremonial, and moral law. Its purpose was not to provide a way of salvation (no one is justified by law-keeping) but to reveal God's standards, expose human sinfulness, and point forward to Christ.

The sacrificial system pictured substitutionary atonement. The tabernacle pictured God dwelling with His people.

The law's demands, impossible to fulfill, drove sinners to seek grace. Christ fulfilled the law perfectly and abolished the ceremonial requirements, while the moral law remains as a guide for Christian living.

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34

[31] Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: [32] Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: [33] But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. [34] And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 8:6-13

[6] But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. [7] For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been

sought for the second. [8] For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: [9] Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. [10] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: [11] And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. [12] For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. [13] In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Luke 22:20

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

2 Corinthians 3:6

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

God promised a new covenant surpassing the old—writing His law on hearts, providing complete forgiveness, and granting intimate knowledge of Himself. 'Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...

I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.' Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, established upon better promises. Jesus took the cup saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.' God hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

The new covenant brings what the old could not: internal transformation, complete

forgiveness, the Spirit's indwelling, and direct knowledge of God. Christ's blood ratified this covenant eternally.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are its signs. The church—Jew and Gentile united in Christ—constitutes its covenant community.

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