

# Arbor Foundations

## 5 – The Covenants of Redemptive History

### Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

#### Definition & Significance

- A covenant is a chosen relationship in which two parties make binding promises to each other.
  - First, *a covenant is a relationship*, and that sets it apart from a contract.
  - Second, *a covenant is a chosen or elected relationship*.
  - Third, *a covenant relationship includes binding promises and obligations*.
  - Not all the covenants in the Bible are the alike. 358 uses of word “covenant” (321 in OT, 37 in NT)
    - God’s covenants with man can be define as: sovereignly given arrangements by which mankind can be blessed. (Chantry)
- *The covenants of Scripture help us to see the harmony and unity of the biblical message. They play a central role in tracing out the progress of redemptive history – how God’s plan of salvation unfolds in time & space with real people.*

#### Key Covenants in Redemptive History

##### 1. **Covenant of Redemption (God’s Plan To Save):** Agreement between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before the world began to save elect sinners by grace alone.

- Requirements:
  - Father required Son to assume human nature (Ps 40:8, Gal 4:4, Heb 2:10-11, Heb 4:15).
  - Christ was to place himself under the law (Gal 4:4-5, Rom 4:25)
- Promises the Father made to the Son.
  - Anointing of the Holy Spirit (Is 11:1-3, 42:1-4, John 3:34, Acts 10:38). He would support the Son in His work (Is 42:6-7, Luke 22:43)
  - He would deliver the Son from the power of death and place Him at His right hand (Ps 16:8-11, Phil 2:9-10)
  - He would send the Holy Spirit to finish the work of building the church (John 14:26, 15:26)
- Two rewards the Father promised Christ the Son
  - He would draw and preserve the elect into eternal glory (John 6:37-45)
  - He would grant to Christ a seed from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Ps 2:7-8, Rev 5:9)
- So What? Why Does It Matter?
  - God’s plan of salvation was not an afterthought
    - Not *ultimately* a response to Adam’s sin
    - God is not fundamentally responsive to man’s actions
  - God’s covenant with us is rooted in his covenant with Himself
    - Flows from his very nature, and is absolutely sure
  - We recognize that salvation is ultimately not about us!
    - Gives us a sense of humility and perspective
    - Can help us to deal with the problem of evil in the world
  - Points us to the unity of the covenant of Grace (i.e., the various administrations are not independent covenants)

##### 2. **Covenant of Creation (Works + Adamic)**

*But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me. (Hosea 6:7)*

#### **What did this covenant entail? (Genesis 1-2)**

- Blessing was promised for obedience and cursing for disobedience.
- Adam and Eve were made in God’s image to rule the world on his behalf.
- They were to be priest-kings in God’s creation as sons of God.
- They were to represent God on earth and display his righteousness and holiness and goodness in the way they lived and exercised lordship over the garden.

**BUT – THEN – THE FALL**

- Adam & Eve’s sin plunged the world into the abyss where death and sin reign.
- When we look at the biblical narrative as a whole, we see that Jesus Christ is the last Adam who grants righteousness and life to his people (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:21–22).
- Adam as a covenant head brought misery and death to the world, but believers will reign in life (Rom. 5:17) through the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

**BUT – THEN – THE PROMISE – The First Hint of the Gospel – Genesis 3:15**

**3. Noahic Covenant (Universal + Preservation)**

- Key Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17 / Type of Covenant: Royal Grant (Unconditional)
- Participant: Made with Noah and his descendants and every living thing on earth.
- Description: An unconditional divine promise to never destroy all earthly life with some natural catastrophe, the covenant sign (9:13,17) = rainbow in the sky.
- SIGNIFICANCE: Key Take-Home Points
  - The covenant with Noah is a covenant of preservation, signifying a new beginning for human beings and the continuance of life on earth until the time of the end.
  - In a number of ways, the Noahic Covenant is a renewal of the creation covenant.
  - Despite the depth of human wickedness, human beings are still made in God’s image, and God continues to bless them as they are fruitful and multiply on the earth.
  - The flood testifies to what human beings deserve on account of wickedness, and it is a type of the final judgment to come (Matt. 24:36–41; 2 Pet. 2:5).
  - The bow in the clouds, the sign of the covenant, testifies that God has withdrawn his weapons of war, that he will preserve the world until redemption is accomplished. God will not wipe out the world every few years and start over.
  - The covenant with Noah doesn’t provide redemption, but the preservation of creation is the context in which redemption will be realized.

**4. Abrahamic Covenant**

- Key Scripture: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:6-21; 17; 22:1-18 / Type: Royal Grant + Suzerain-vassal
- Participant: Made with Abram
- Description: An unconditional divine promise to provide Abraham offspring, land, and universal blessing. Abraham’s descendants were to be totally consecrated to the Lord as symbolized by the sign of circumcision.

**The Promises of the Covenant**

- And I will make of you a great nation / I will make you be fruitful and multiply (12:2, 17:6)
- I will cause you to prosper, I will bless those who bless you, & will curse ones who curses you (12:3)
- In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed (12:4, 22:18)
- Father of nations/Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky/sand on the seashore (15:5, 17:4, 22:17)
- To your descendants I have given this land (15:18, 17:8)
- I will be your God (17:7)

**The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant**

	Physical Posterity	Spiritual Posterity
Members	Descendents of Abraham/Issac/Jacob	Those who have been justified by faith in the Christ
Circumcision	Physical	Spiritual (Romans 2:29)
Theocratic nation	Hebrew Israel	Christian (True Israel) Romans 9-11
Divine redemption	From Egypt (and other enemies)	From Sin
Divine Inheritance	Canaan	Spirit, heaven, new heavens and new Earth
Perpetuation	Natural generation	Spiritual generation

**5. Mosaic Covenant (Sinaitic)**

- Key Scripture: Exodus 19-24 / Type of Covenant: Suzerain-vassal
- Participant: Israel
- Description: A conditional divine pledge to be Israel's God (as its protector and guarantor of its blessed destiny); the condition: Israel's total consecration to the Lord as His people (His kingdom). Set apart.

**Summary of Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19:3-6)**

- Foundation: Divine redemption from Egypt (v. 4) / Mediator: Moses (v. 3) /Partakers: Hebrew Israel (vv. 3, 6) / Promise: Theocracy (vv. 5-6) / Condition: Obedience (v. 5)
- Ratification with blood (Exodus 24:8)

**SIGNIFICANCE: Key Take-Home Points**

- The covenant with Israel was gracious, for the Lord freed his people from Egyptian slavery. In some ways, it was an extension of the covenant with Abraham and Adam, for Israel was called as God's son and as a kingdom of priests to display the righteousness of the Lord to the world as they kept the covenant stipulations.
- Blessings were promised for obedience and curses for disobedience. (Deut. 28-29)
- Israel was called as a theocracy to live under Yahweh's lordship, and that demanded the submission of every member of the nation, for he had entered into covenant with the entire nation.
- NOTE: We see in the history of Israel that they failed to abide by the covenant stipulations, summarized in the Ten Commandments, and thus they were sent into exile.
- The prophets declared in covenant lawsuits, which detailed Israel's violation of the covenant, that judgment was coming. Jeremiah and others, however, also prophesied a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), one in which the law would be inscribed on the heart.
- The covenant with Israel had a built-in obsolescence and focused on Israel as a nation; it did not transform the heart of those who heard the covenant demands. The prophets promised that a new day was coming, a new covenant would be realized, and thus there would be a new exodus, a new David, and a new creation.

**6. Davidic Covenant**

- Key Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:5-16 / Type of Covenant: Royal Grant / Participant: Made with King David
- Description: An unconditional divine promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel to provide it forever with a godly ruler.
  - 2 Samuel 7:12-16 – David's son will build the temple; David's throne will be established forever
  - Psalm 89:3-4 – Will establish David's seed forever
  - Psalm 89:26-37 – God will punish David's sons if they don't obey Him. However, He will not violate His covenant with David
  - Acts 2:29-31 – Given an inspired indication that David understood God's promise to be referring to Christ

**SIGNIFICANCE: Key Take-Home Points**

- The covenant with David stands in continuity with previous covenants.
  - The rule over the world originally given to Adam would be realized through a Davidic king.
  - The promises of offspring, land, and blessing given to Abraham would be secured through the Davidic ruler.
  - In a similar way the blessings promised in the Mosaic covenant would come to fruition under faithful Davidic kings, but if they strayed from the Lord, then the curses would come.
    - Some of the kings in Judah were godly ... ultimately the curses of the covenant came upon the people and their king, and the defection of the kings from the Lord played a decisive role.
- The covenant with David had both conditional and unconditional elements.
  - Since the covenant was conditional, kings who departed from the Lord were judged, and after the exile we no longer see Davidic kings on the throne.
  - Despite the conditional elements, the covenant with David was ultimately unconditional.

## **Arbor Foundations**

## **5 – The Covenants of Redemptive History**

- God guaranteed a Davidic king on the throne, and the covenant promise would be fulfilled only by an obedient king. And that King is Jesus. OT Prophets foretold.
- We see in the New Testament that Jesus is consistently proclaimed to be the Messiah and Lord as the crucified and risen one. As David's Son He is now reigning at God's right hand and will come again to consummate his reign. When he returns, all of God's covenant promises will be fulfilled.

## **7. The New Covenant**

- Key Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34 / Type of Covenant: Royal Grant
- Participant: Made with rebellious Israel in midst of exile (covenant curse)
- Description: An unconditional divine promise to unfaithful Israel to forgive its sins and establish God's relationship with it on a new basis by writing His law "on their hearts" – a covenant of pure grace.
  - "Not like" the Mosaic covenant (vv. 31-32)
  - God will write his law upon their heart (v. 33)
    - He will be their God; they will be his people (v. 33) This is the same as the old covenant
  - All of the covenant members will know God, from the least to the greatest (v. 34)
    - Pointing forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit
  - Involves true forgiveness of sins (v. 34) & It is NOT conditional!

### **PROMISES of the New Covenant Apply to Church (Believers Today)**

- Hebrews 8:1, 6-13 – Christ is the mediator of the new covenant (quotes Jer 31:31-34)
- Hebrews 9:14,15 – Again, Christ stated to be the mediator of the new covenant
- Heb 10:10-19 – Christ one-time-for-all sacrifice compared to repeated animal sacrifices (and is superior!) Jer 31 is quoted again
- Heb 12:22-24 – Speaks again of Christ as the mediator of the new covenant
- Luke 22:20: And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.
- 1 Cor 11:25: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."
- 2 Cor 3:5-8 – Apostles were ministers of the new covenant

### **SIGNIFICANCE: Key Take-Home Points**

- The new covenant is the consummation and fulfillment of all the previous covenants.
- All Christians today are part of the New Covenant.
- Read the Bible with an understanding and a belief that all that God has revealed in redemptive history through His covenants points to Christ & His Work for His Glory.  
(Luke 24:13-35)

## **Resources for Further Study**

Earl M. Blackburn, editor, *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive*, Solid Ground Christian Books (2012)

Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, Hansebooks (2017)

Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology - A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God's Covenants*, Solid Ground Christian Books (2011).

J.I. Packer, "Introduction to Covenant Theology" <https://www.monergism.com/introduction-covenant-theology>

"Kingdom, Covenants & Canon of the Old Testament" Online Course, ThirdMill, TGC Learn Online

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/kingdom-covenants-canon-old-testament>

Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology*, Baker (2006)

O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, Presbyterian and Reformed (1980)

Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, Crossway (2012)

Peter J. Gentry and S. J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology*, Crossway (2015)

"The Biblical Story Course", Online BibleMesh Course <https://courses.biblemesh.com/biblical-story-project>

Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, Crossway (2017)

William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology*, Paternoster (2013)

NIV (D.A. Carson) & ESV Study Bibles