

Covenant Theology Series #1

Introduction

Many people, when they hear the word “covenant,” think of its meaning in very simple terms, as in “an agreement between two parties.” Others think in more legal terms, such as a contract. But the biblical meaning is more technical.

Basic Definitions

Biblical covenants come in two types: *parity* covenants and *suzerainty* covenants. Parity covenants are established between two equal parties, with the terms negotiated agreed upon with equal input between both. Suzerainty covenants, the term for which is borrowed from the suzerainty treaties of the Ancient Near East, involve the terms of a relationship between a lord (suzerain) and a *vassal*, or one who is under the authority of the lord. These terms are dictated by the lord without consultation with the vassal. The parties are thus unequal. In our study we will be concerned almost exclusively with the covenants that God makes with His creatures (“divine” covenants), which are always in the nature of the case suzerainty covenants. Some definitions of divine covenants include:

- “an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance” (*Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*)
- “a bond in blood, sovereignly administered” (O. Palmer Robertson, in *The Christ of the Covenants*)
- “a bond which manifests the structure of God how God relates” (Mike Biggs)

Two Senses of Divine Covenants

The concept of divine covenant is sometimes presented in the plural (“covenants”) and sometimes in the singular (*the* Covenant), and we shall see later the reason for this and the relationship between these two usages. For both of these usages, a distinction should be understood between two senses of the concept of divine covenant in the Bible:

1. *The formal sense*—This refers to the covenant as considered from man’s perspective (“from below”), or in other words, as an external arrangement constituted as a means to an end. This is the overwhelmingly predominant way that the term is used in the Bible.
2. *The material sense*—This refers to the covenant considered from God’s perspective (“from above”), as synonymous with the realization of the purpose for which the external arrangement was established, or in other words, as an end in itself.

As we shall see, this distinction is crucial in resolving certain tensions and/or apparent

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contradictions with respect to how the Bible speaks of covenant, such as conditionality/unconditionality, and whether being a covenant member is the same as being “saved.”

Important Major Covenants

There are several biblical divine covenants to which covenant theologians refer by various, and sometimes interchangeable terms, which make the terminology confusing at times. The major ones are:

- *The Covenant of Redemption*—This refers to an intratrinitarian covenant between the members of the Godhead concerning the salvation of mankind. Whether there is such a covenant is disputed among theologians. Examples of passages alleged as a basis for it are Psalm 2 and Psalm 110.
- *The Covenant of Works (also called the Covenant of Creation)*—In classical Reformed theology, especially as reflected in the Westminster Standards, this refers to an original covenant between God and His creation, as represented by Adam, at the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Its violation by mankind and the subsequent condemnation obtained thereby made necessary...
- *The Covenant of Grace (also called the Covenant of Redemption)*—This refers to the covenant arrangement whereby God accomplishes the salvation/redemption of His elect people.

The principle covenants of God with man, including:

- *Adamic Covenant*
- *Noahic Covenant*
- *Abrahamic Covenant*
- *Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant*
- *Davidic Covenant*
- *New Covenant*

are, in covenant theology, seen to be *stages*, or watershed events which delimit the stages, of the overall Covenant of Grace. We shall see the biblical basis for this, and its implications and significance, in subsequent sessions.

For now, it is important to see the centrality and importance of the concept of covenant as an organizing and central principle for rightly understanding the theology of the Bible and how it fits together, which is indicated in part by how frequently it is adduced in Scripture, especially by God Himself (refer to the concordance entries for “covenant” and “covenants.”

Covenant Theology Series #2

Structure of Divine Covenants

As we previously noted, one way to look at covenant is as the structure of how God relates, both to Himself and to His creation. In accord with this, there are certain elements or aspects of covenants which contribute to this structure. James Jordan summarizes these dynamics well:

“The Bible reveals that God’s way of managing history is by making covenants with His people. There is a succession of such covenants in the Bible, each more glorious than the previous, each absorbing and transfiguring the previous, until finally we come to the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. There are two dimensions of these covenants. The first is the activity of covenant making, the sequence of events entailed in bringing in a new covenant. The second is the covenant document that summarizes the content of the newly established covenant, and its order of presentation. Generally speaking, the order of presentation in the covenant document is the same as the sequence of events in the covenant’s establishment.

This order or sequence has been analyzed variously by different scholars. Some have seen three, some four, some five, some six, and some seven aspects of the covenant. We can say that in its fullest manifestations, God’s covenant with man, which we can illustrate from the Mosaic covenant, entails the following steps and aspects:

1. Announcement of God’s transcendence; His laying hold on the situation (Ex. 2:24-25; 20:3).
2. Declaration of God’s new Name, appropriate for the new covenant being installed (Ex. 3:13-15; 6:2-8; 20:2a).
3. Statement of how God brought His people from the old covenant and world into the new one (Ex. 20:2b; Deut. 1:6-4:40).
4. Establishment of the new covenant order, especially the governmental hierarchies thereof (Ex. 18:13-27; Deut. 1:9-18).
5. Appointment of new names for the new finished product (Gen. 1:4-5, 6-8, 9-10; at Moses’ time, “children of Israel” is the new name, replacing “Hebrew”).
6. Grant or distribution of an area of dominion to the covenant steward or vassal (Ex. 3:8; Deut. 1:19-12:31).
7. Stipulations concerning the management of this grant (Ex. 20:23; Deut. 5:1-26:19).
8. Statement of the terms by which God will evaluate man’s performance; promised blessings and threatened curses (Ex. 23:25-33; Deut. 27, 28).
9. Placement of witnesses to report to God on man’s behavior (Ex. 23:20-23; Deut. 4:26; 30:19).
10. Arrangements for the deposition of the covenant documents (Ex. 40:20; Deut. 31:9-13).
11. Arrangements for succession of covenant vice-regents (Deut. 31:7, 14, 23; Deut. 34).
12. Artistic poems that encapsulate the covenant, and that are to be taught to succeeding generations (Deut. 31:14-33:29).

We could probably come up with other aspects as well, depending on how much detail we wished to go into.

This covenant order can helpfully and biblically grouped in more than one way. It is possible and desirable to see the sequence as proceeding from God's sovereign Control (1-3), to manifestations of God's sovereign Authority (4-7), and culminating in revelations of God's sovereign Presence with His people (8-12). This is based on John Frame's work. It is also possible and desirable to see the sequence as having five aspects...

Each of these patterns can be found in the Bible....

Given the fact that the covenant document is just that, a document, we are on solid ground in supposing that these numerical sequences function as literary structuring devices in certain parts of the Bible, and perhaps also in the Bible as a whole, considered as *the* covenant document. We are, accordingly, invited to search for such structures....

To recapitulate: there is a sequence of items that is found in biblical covenants. The overall sequence is almost always the same. There are also in the Bible various ways of grouping this sequence, according to symbolically significant numbers. Scholars have identified groups of three (Trinity), four (world foundations), five (housebuilding), six (man), and seven (sabbath). We might profitably also look for groups of ten (law) and twelve (covenant people). There seems to be a certain prominence to the five-fold arrangement in the Pentateuch, with its five books, perhaps because five is a number associated with housebuilding.”¹

This prominent five-fold sequence is useful for summarizing the structure and aspects of God's covenant relationships, to wit:

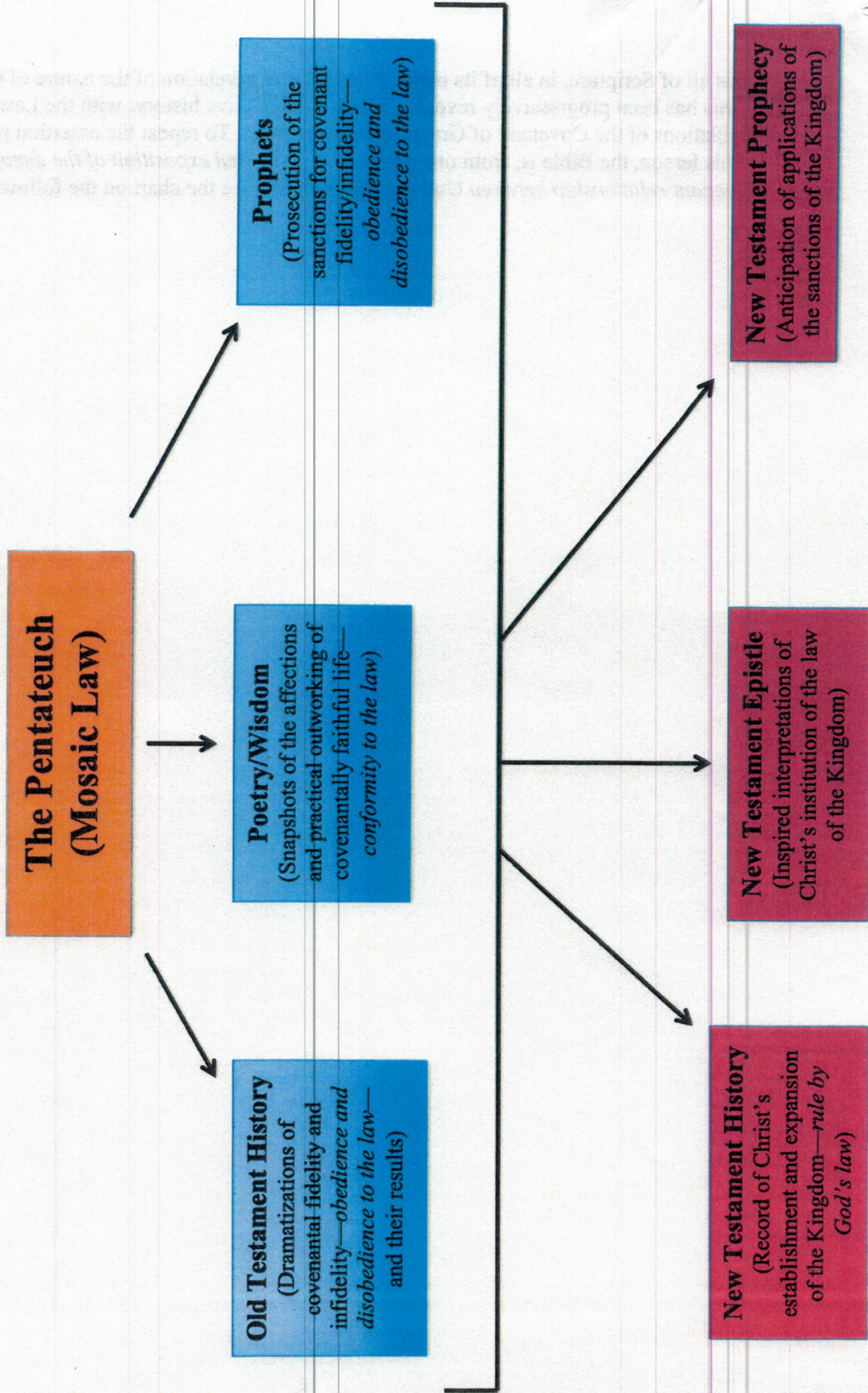
1. *The juxtaposition of transcendence and immanence*—the transcendent and sovereign God draws near (immanent) to His people through a bond the terms of which He sovereignly imposes on His people.
2. *Representative mediation*—God administers these terms through the means of a mediating hierarchy through which God is represented to His subjects and they are represented to Him.
3. *Stipulations*—God obligates/binds Himself by promising certain things to His people and binds them by imposing obligations on them through the revelation of His Law.
4. *Sanctions*—Blessings for obedience to the stipulations and curses for disobedience are pronounced.
5. *Continuity/succession*—Arrangement is made for the continuing of the covenant into the future.

Gary North has provided a helpful way to think of and remember these elements is to think of them in terms of five questions which a new employee might ask of his employer regarding the terms of his employment:

¹ James Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Institute for Christian Economics: Tyler, Texas, 1989).

1. Who's in charge here?
2. To whom do I report?
3. What can I expect (e.g. salary/benefits) and what are my responsibilities/duties?
4. How is my performance or lack thereof rewarded/punished?
5. Does this outfit have a future?

Covenantal Nature of Scripture Foundational Nature of the Pentateuch (Law)



Covenant Theology Series #3

Dispensationalism

Introduction

There are two fundamental approaches to understanding the structure of flow and structure of both redemptive history and God's commentary on it in biblical revelation. One approach is to emphasize the *discontinuity* between the parts and eras associated with these two strands of biblical theology, and the other is to emphasize the *continuity* between these parts and eras. Covenant theology, when considered as biblical theology, emphasizes the continuity and sees this as the essential feature of both redemptive history and biblical revelation, an appreciation of which is crucial for understanding them properly. An extremely influential movement, especially in American Christianity, known as dispensationalism, is the principal *system* of biblical theology competing for dominance in forming a framework for redemptive history and biblical revelation. Although not all non-covenantal theologians (and everyone is a theologian) self-consciously subscribe to dispensationalism, anyone who approaches biblical theology understanding it to any degree as fundamentally discontinuous is to that degree dispensational in his approach to these matters. For that reason, an overview and evaluation of dispensationalism is both proper and necessary at this point in our study.

Historical Background

Dispensational theology as a formal system originated in England around 1830, among an ecclesiastically Separatist group known as the Plymouth Brethren. Its beginnings have questionable aspects, not least the suggestion of an association with occult experiences.¹ It spread to America through the immigration of several members, most notably, J. N. B. Darby and C. I. Scofield. The latter produced, in about 1917, a reference Bible which was one of the first, if not the first, containing interpretive notes on the same page as the text of Scripture. As it was disseminated among the Christian population of America, the interpretive system contained in the notes became associated without distinction with the content of Scripture, often without distinction, thus becoming a powerful inter-denominational influence on the understanding of the Bible among American Christians. Dispensationalism was officially declared a heresy by the American Presbyterian Church in the early twentieth century because of its teaching that there were different ways of salvation set forth in the Old and New Testaments. The New Scofield Reference Bible was produced to address this problem, with the notes revised to remove this assertion. Later as modernism and the rise of liberal theology, with its denigration of the historicity and inerrancy of Scripture, began to be ascendant in many of the mainline Christian denominations, rank and file Christians, who were receiving less and less biblical teaching from their liberal-influenced pastors and churches, became readers of the Scofield Bibles, dependent upon them for their understanding of the Bible, and were thus more and more influenced by the biblical theology of its system, and especially of its system of eschatology. As we will see, a

¹ For more on this, see

salient factor in this process was the contrast between the typically allegorical approach to Scripture, and especially its historical narratives, as “myth” — which actually amounted to unbelief — and the literalistic approach of dispensationalists. As a result, the largest percentage of evangelical Christians not only approach Scripture from a dispensational perspective, especially with respect to eschatology, but also regard anyone who challenges the system to be a theological liberal. In fact, many evangelical Christians have never been exposed to any other eschatological system, not to mention any other way of interpreting and handling Scripture. They simply have never heard anything else.

Overview of Dispensationalism

The essence of dispensationalism can be summarized in terms of three distinctive features, which together are responsible for generating the contents of the system:

1. *A distinctive hermeneutic* — This refers to its approach to the interpretation and application of Scripture, which can be described as *literalistic*. This is to be distinguished from the desirable approach of interpreting Scripture *literally*, which most dispensationalists assert is what they are doing. However, to interpret the Bible literally means to interpret it *as literature*, which involves taking into account the distinctive features of its literary genres (or “types”), often including figurative and symbolic expressions as a common convention.² Dispensational literalism has been defined by dispensationalists themselves as the principal that a given statement of Scripture should be assumed to be a literal statement unless it cannot possibly be understood in this way, although an examination of their interpretations indicates that they are far from consistent in the application of this principle.
2. *A distinctive ecclesiology* — This refers to their understanding of the Church, particularly in terms of its relationship to the nation of Israel. Traditional dispensationalists assert that there are two distinct and separate redemptive communities in Scripture, Israel and the Church, with separate and distinct revelation and promises, and separate and distinct destinies. In other words, there is no *continuity* between Israel and the Church. Dispensationalism sees the Bible’s program as mainly about Israel, and the Church as a “mystery parenthesis” in God’s program. This assertion either leads to or proceeds from a profound “chopping up” of the Bible in terms of its contents and promises, which some dispensationalists proudly claim as their conformity to what II Timothy 2:15 (KJV) describes as “rightly dividing the Word of truth.”
3. *A distinctive redemptive historiography* — This refers to the way in which dispensationalists “write history,” specifically redemptive history as it is revealed in the Bible. “Historiography” is defined as “the writing of history, especially...based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). The salient feature of the way dispensationalists “synthesize” the details of Scripture is in terms of rigidly separate epochs or “dispensations” (hence the term), in which God deals with mankind in radically different ways and in terms of radically distinct requirements which constitute tests of a

² For more on this, see R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*

sort. In each dispensation man fails the test, resulting in God's judgment, the eradication of the former dispensational economy, and establishment of an entirely new economy. The word "dispensation" is a translation of the Greek word οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*), from which we get the English word "economy." In other words, dispensationalists frame the story of redemptive history as a series of radically distinct epochs which are fundamentally *discontinuous*.

Evaluation

We will be addressing what we believe to be the errors of the dispensational approach to biblical theology throughout our study through a positive presentation of the biblical evidence and reasons for structuring our understanding of the Bible and of redemptive history and our relationship to God in terms of covenant theology. However, it is appropriate at the start of that presentation to give an overall evaluation and critique of the dispensational approach.

In the first place, although calling what is clearly meant to be understood as historical narrative "myth" and asserting that it is not literally true, but should be understood and applied allegorically, is fundamentally wrong should be rejected, it must be understood that this is so precisely because of proper literary analysis, that is, because such a procedure violates the nature of Scripture as it presents itself to us: a collection of literary works encompassing multiple genres, some of which cannot be faithfully interpreted in terms of the authors' intents without understanding them literally. But this is precisely the point at which dispensationalists also violate Scripture, since they insist on interpreting as literal statements verses and passages which are, in terms of the genre of literature in which they occur, possibly not literal. In fact, many such passages are interpreted by the inerrant and infallible New Testament Scriptures in non-literal ways. Examples include:

- Ezekiel 34:23,, 24 (compare verse 15) and 37:24, 25 predict that *David* shall be shepherd and rule over the people of God in a future kingdom, but this is universally understood to be fulfilled in terms of the *Son* of David, Jesus, as He claims this role in John 10:11, 16 and 12:34, and in terms of the principle illustrated by Peter in Acts.2:22-36.
- The celestial phenomena in Joel 2:30, 31 are also interpreted by Peter in Acts 2:16-21 in non-literal ways, yet the same terminology as employed in Matthew 24:29 is invariably insisted by dispensationalists to be referring to literal celestial phenomena.
- Jesus frequently spoke in non-literal categories to his disciples and others and was misunderstood because He was speaking in Scriptural categories. Examples are Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 5:39; Mark 9:11-13; John 11:11-13.
- See the next point for overlapping examples of this point.

In the second place, it is clear from multiple Scriptures that Israel and the Church are one and the same entity, and that the *nation* of Israel is simply the covenant community prior to its establishment as an *officially* multi-national, multi-ethnic community. In other words, Israel is the Church of the Old Testament and the Church is Israel in the New Testament. Just of few of the Scriptural proofs of this include:

- Gentiles are specifically grafted into a community (olive tree) which formerly consisted only of Jews (the “natural branches”), some of which were broken of because of unbelief. There is only one olive tree, not two. This can hardly refer too anything other than the covenant community (Romans 11).
- Ephesians 2:11-22 confirms this when it explicitly declares that Gentiles have been made members of “the commonwealth of Israel” (or have received “citizenship in Israel”).
- The word for “church” (called out assembly) is, in Hebrew, using the same Greek word as used in the New Testament for the Church and in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Church.
- The Church is called “Israel” in Galatians 6:16.
- Israel, from its beginnings as a nation, contained persons who were Gentiles or non-Israelites (e.g., Exodus 12:38; I Chronicles 11:10-47).
- The fulfillments of Old Testament covenant promises are explicitly applied to Gentiles in the New Testament (e.g., Romans 4:13; 9:24-26; Galatians 3:26-29)
- The Old Testament declares that Gentiles shall be declared to have been “born in Zion” (Psalm 87:4-6).
- And many, many others.

In the third place, the way that the Old Testament quotes and uses the Old Testament demonstrates that the *fundamental economy* is the same, to wit:

- When the New Testament writers talk about salvation and how God deals with His people, they quote the Old Testament and adduce principles drawn from it (e.g., Romans 4:1-12; Hebrews 3:1-4;11)
- When Jesus appeared, those who observed the child spoke of the significance of His appearance in connection with the fulfillment of Old Testament covenant promises and in terms of His participation in that One Covenant (Luke 1:46-56; 67-79).
- See the connections established in the next study tracing the unity of the Covenant of Grace.

Covenant Theology Series #4

One Economy

Introduction

Covenant Theology, approached in terms of biblical (in distinction from systematic) theology, emphasizes the *continuity* of God's salvation of a people from sin and His accompanying revelation that explains, clarifies, and interprets it. Thus covenant theology can be summarized in the following phrase: *one book, one people, one economy*. We will begin by considering each part of this phrase in reverse order, in summary and overview fashion. First, then, we consider that, fundamentally speaking, God has *one economy* in terms of His activity to save man, and this economy is The Covenant of Grace. By "economy" is meant a system of rules or principles in terms of which a group of people (e.g., a society, nation, or culture) functions and relates to its individual parts. In terms of theology, the most important of these principles concern the rules/principles which govern God's relationship to man.

Essential Framework

The understanding of Covenant Theology to which our church subscribes, as summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, asserts that there are two fundamental covenants that God has made with men. The first is called in our standards the Covenant of Works (sometimes referred to as the Covenant of Creation), and was established with Adam as the head and representative of all mankind. Because Adam sinned under this covenant and brought the sanction of death to himself and all of his posterity (all mankind), God determined to make another covenant, called the Covenant of Grace (sometimes called the Covenant of Redemption), to provide for the salvation of a chosen people from the curse of the Fall and to enable them to fulfill their original purpose under the original covenant and be reconciled to Him. The major covenants of the Bible are seen under this framework not to be separate entities, but rather stages of development within the overall single Covenant of Grace. We will discuss each of these covenants in detail, but for the purposes of the present study we will list and categorize them briefly, as follows:

Universal Covenants

1. Adamic Covenant—Genesis 3:15
2. Noahic Covenant—Genesis 8:20-9:17

National Covenants

1. Abrahamic Covenant—Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-14
2. Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant—Exodus 19-24
3. Davidic Covenant—II Samuel 7; Psalm 89:1-4, 18-37

The Covenant of Fulfillment

Unity of the Covenants in the Covenant of Grace

We will have more to say, in terms of systematic theology, about the unity of the *economy* of the Covenant of Grace. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient for now to establish this unity through a survey of key Scriptures and the ways in which they speak of and deal with these covenants. A consideration of the following establishes two important and complementary features of the major scriptural covenants: first, that they are distinct from one another in that they represent distinct and important changes and progress in God's covenant program; and second, that they are essentially parts of one unified Covenant, the *fundamental* economy and features of which do not change and are seen as expressions of one Covenant.

1. Ephesians 2:12—Salvation to mankind, including Gentiles, is mediated through the “covenants [plural] of promise.”
2. Exodus 2:24; 6:2-9—God pays attention to Israel and raises up Moses *because of Abraham*; a connection is established between the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants.
3. Exodus 34:16-28—The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (and its stipulations) are *reaffirmed* and *amplified*.
4. Leviticus 26:9, 42-45—There are suggestions here of the Adamic, Noahic, and Abrahamic Covenants, but “covenant” is *singular*; the singular covenant is the same with both Abraham *et al* and Israel (cf. I Chronicles 16:14-18).
5. Deuteronomy 4:13, 14, 31 (esp. v. 31)—The Mosaic Covenant is explicitly tied to the Abrahamic promises (Genesis 15:7; 18:17-19); cf. II Kings 13:23. [But consider Dt. 5:2, 3(?)]
6. Deuteronomy 7:9-12 (esp. v. 12)—The covenant promise to the fathers is ratified and received through contemporary faithfulness (see also 8:18).
7. Deuteronomy 29:9-15—This passage establishes: first, the unity between Abrahamic promises and the Mosaic Covenant; and second, the *future expansion* and even *current broadness* of covenant membership.
8. Deuteronomy 29:18-29—The Covenant does not equal salvation; there is responsibility and the possibility of negative sanctions, even damnation, under the Covenant (cf. Joshua 23:15, 16).
9. II Samuel 7:1-29/Psalm 89:1-4, 20-37/Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11/Deuteronomy 17:14-20—The concepts of a *king* and a *kingdom* and central to the Covenant.
10. II Chronicles 6:10, 11, 14-17—These passages establish a link between the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants.
11. Psalm 25:10, 14—There is *one Covenant*!
12. Isaiah 55:1-5—This passage indicates the centrality of the Davidic Covenant to the overall Covenant of Grace.
13. Jeremiah 31:31-34—The common elements in the description of the New Covenant here shows the unity of the overall Covenant, but development and distinction, particularly between the “Old Covenant (from Abraham through the Old Testament)” and the New Covenant in Christ.

14. Jeremiah 33:14-26—The Davidic and Mosaic Covenants are shown here to be both *linked and fulfilled in Christ*.
15. Ezekiel 16:59-63—The New Covenant is prophesied as a stage in “The Covenant,” producing final and efficacious atonement through Christ.
16. Ezekiel 37:24-28/Acts 2:22-36; 15:13-18—The Davidic and the New Covenants are here united. God’s covenant promises to David are represented as fulfilled in Christ.
17. Hosea 6:7—The One Covenant goes back all the way to the Garden. It is the same covenant that both Adam and Israel disobeyed and broke.
18. Matthew 26:28/Exodus 24:1-8/Daniel 9:27—The New Covenant “blood of the Covenant” is the fulfillment of the Old Testament “blood of the Covenant.” Compare Hebrews 9:19-24!!
19. Luke 1:67-79—This prophecy establishes the unity of the Davidic, Mosaic, and Abrahamic Covenants, which of which are alluded to and are referred to in the singular as “the covenant.” They are also shown to be fulfilled in Christ and thus united to the New Covenant.
20. Acts 3:25—The unity of the Mosaic and Abrahamic Covenants is shown, as well as the widespread expansion of covenant membership to Gentiles under the New Covenant.

Conclusion

All of this should serve to establish without doubt that the history of redemption, conceived as covenant, should be regarded as a fundamental unity. A helpful analogy for understanding this fact and its significance is the figure of a growing and developing organism. For instance, Old and New Testaments, whether considered as Scriptures or as eras, should not be understood as two separate organisms or entities (such as a porpoise vs. a man), but as different stages in the development/maturity of a single organism (such as infant vs. toddler vs. adolescent vs. adult). This has numerous, vast, and significant implications for our understanding of both theology and the Christian life, as we shall see.

Covenant Theology Series #5

One People

Introduction

With this lesson we continue our summary analysis of covenant theology viewed in biblical-theological terms with a consideration of Our defining phrase's second element: *one people*. The import of this term is simply the assertion that there is only one community who are designated the "people of God." In other words, there is only one redemptive community, with whom God relates in terms of a redemptive covenant and through whom He imparts salvation, entailing one single, united destiny. As we saw briefly in study #3, this is contrasted with the dispensational approach, which understands there to be two distinct redemptive communities in Scripture, which it designates "Israel" (defined as the ethnic and/or national descendants of Abraham), and "the Church" (a multi-ethnic community established only in the New Covenant era), with separate and distinct identities, promises, obligations, and destinies.

The Dispensational Understanding

Whether or not one self-consciously subscribes to dispensational theology, the basic elements of its approach to the topic of the people of God are present in the thinking of many as they approach the Bible, especially in the way that they relate revelation about Israel to themselves as Christians. Often this is not comprehended in detail, but the dispensational tendencies are seen, for instance, in a confusion regarding how to relate what God says to and records about the nation of Israel to the experience of modern Christians. This results in a reductionistic approach to the Old Testament which limits its application and significance to examples of moral or immoral behavior and the consequences of such. The *theological* content of the Word of God to Israel is divorced from application to Christians in any explicit way. Even if this is not a self-conscious decision on the part of Bible readers, it often is the case because of a lack of understanding of precisely how the *people* of Israel are related to Christians in the era of the New Covenant (i.e., the New Testament), including contemporary Christians, considered both as individuals and as a corporate entity.

Classic dispensational theology answers these questions with the assertion that Israel was from the beginning God's chosen people *as an ethnic entity*, defined literally as the physical and biological descendants (literally the "seed") of Abraham. In this understanding, all of the promises to Israel are based upon this natural generation from Abraham. The promises of Land and Seed (Descendants) repeated to Israel are applicable only to Israel in this literal sense. Some dispensationalists will acknowledge that non-ethnic people can be added to the community through proselyte admission, but this is always the exception rather than the rule (though the theological basis for *any* such exception, given the insistence of literalistic interpretation of the promises, is seldom, if ever, explained). Traditional dispensationalists rightly understand that the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God was always to come through Christ, but wrongly believe that it was originally meant to be applied exclusively to Israel as a nation. According to dispensationalism, when, at Christ's first coming, the leaders of the nation of Israel rejected

Jesus as Messiah and King, they refused the offer of the Kingdom, and God began an alternate program, founding the Church, which is a “mystery” never anticipated, mentioned, or prophesied in the Old Testament (which is concerned solely with Israel). The Church represents a “parenthesis” in God’s program, which is still primarily concerned with Israel, and the Old Testament promises to Israel will be fulfilled solely to Israel. The Church is given separate promises and a separate destiny, apart from God’s dealings with Israel as a nation. Once the number of elect Gentiles have been saved, God will “rapture” the Church out of the world, at which time “the prophetic time clock” begins to tick again and God resumes His program for Israel, which is fulfilled in the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of a Jewish, millennial Kingdom with Christ ruling from Jerusalem for a literal thousand years. Thus the Second Coming is seen as *pre-millennial*, that is, *prior to* the “Millennium” (the Kingdom of God in Christ). Believing Jews may be part of the Church now, but all Jews (nationally and ethnically conceived), whether believers in Christ or not, are still considered part of a community to whom God’s original promises are still addressed and will eventually be fulfilled.

Scriptural Understanding of the People of God

The notion of a people of God begins with the *protoevangelium*, or ‘first gospel,’ recorded in Genesis 3:15. There a “seed” of the woman is prophesied who will crush the head of the serpent, and it is said that the serpent will bruise “*his*” heel. This is, in light of the rest of Scripture, clearly a prophecy which has first and primary reference to Christ, who is injured (crucified) at the instigation of Satan and his “seed” (Pontius Pilate, the Gentile Roman officials, and the apostate Jewish leadership—John 8:39-47; 13:2, 26, 27; 18:3; Acts 2:22, 23; 4:23-28). Paul elaborates on the theme of the “seed” as he asserts the primary significance of Jesus as the singular “Seed” who is the object of the promises to Abraham (Galatians 3:15, 16). But in both of these instances it is clear that the term “seed” is also applied to a corporate body of individuals who are united to and represented by Christ as a covenant head, and to whom the same promises and prophecies apply. This is explicitly asserted when, in an obvious allusion to Genesis 3:15, Paul promises the Roman Christians that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under [their] feet” (Romans 16:20). Paul applies the same principle in the passage from Galatians 3 cited above when, after establishing that Christ was the “Seed” to whom the Abrahamic promises were directed (vv. 15, 16), he unambiguously states that those who have been united to (“baptized into”) and “have put on Christ,” so that they are now “in Christ,” are “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to promise” (vv. 26-29). The term “seed” then, with respect to both biblical prophecy and covenant promises, has reference both *primarily* to a singular individual (Christ), who is a covenant and federal head (representative), and *derivatively* to a corporate body who are united to their head.

This dual reference has its roots, as does most of biblical theology, in associations established in the first chapters of Genesis. The biblical significance of the term “seed” is developed as an outflow of God’s original creation, specifically in Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28; 3:15; 5:1-3. From these verses, it can be seen that the most biblically significant thing about the offspring or “seed” of a living thing is that it partakes of the “likeness” or “image” of its parent; beings reproduce “after their kinds.” This biblical understanding gave rise to one of the most common Hebrew idioms: the ascribing of characteristics to a person or thing by referring to them as

“children” or “sons” or “daughters” of that thing (e.g., Isaiah 57:4; Ephesians 2:2, 3). This is the understanding underlying Jesus’s words to the Jewish leadership in John 8:18, 19, 27-29, 31-47. In these verses Jesus acknowledges that they are *physical* descendants of Abraham, but proclaims that if they were *really* sons of Abraham, they would do the things Abraham did and have the faith of Abraham. They claim to have God as their Father, but Jesus says that if they *really* had God as their Father, they would love Him as the Father does. He states that they are children of the devil and take on his characteristics. The author of the gospel in which this discussion is recorded sums up the same principle with respect to God’s true children in I John 3:1-3, 8-10, where he makes it clear that the true children of God take on His likeness and characteristics, including righteousness and love.

All of this is the foundation of the understanding that, when the covenant promises are made to “the seed,” whether conceived as the seed of Eve, who is named such because she will become the mother of all the living, *spiritually* (Genesis 3:20), or of Abraham through Sarah, or of Mary (the antitype: Christ), they are made to Christ and to all who by faith partake of the nature of Christ and are being conformed to His likeness and image: the Church (Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:1-10, esp. v. 10). It is this Church who is symbolically portrayed in Revelation 12. The Church, as we will see, is the mother of Christ and all who are in Him, the Church typologically represented by all those women in redemptive history who through the miraculous power of God bore children though not naturally able to do so. The true children of God are born through the miraculous power of God’s Spirit, not by natural means. This is why Jesus proclaimed that Nicodemus, presumably a spiritual leader in Israel, should have understood these things (John 3:3-10). It is also the basis of the theology behind Romans 5:12-21, a passage in which Paul portrays both damnation (“condemnation”) and salvation as coming to all, to every existing person, through association and solidarity with at least one of two representative covenant heads: Adam and Christ.

We are now in a position to survey the additional scriptural evidence for the identity and nature of the people of God, as follows:

1. **The biblical term that refers to the covenant community (both in its Hebrew and Greek translations) is used to refer both to the nation of Israel and to the “Church.”** Dispensationalists often assert that the “Church” is absent from the Old Testament and never mentioned, even in prophecy, making it a “mystery” not anticipated in biblical revelation until it is revealed in the New Testament. This is manifestly erroneous from a simple analysis of the term for “church.” The Old Testament word, the term most commonly used to refer to the community of Israel, is קָהָל (*qahal*), which literally means “called out assembly.” This term is translated in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX), by the term ἐκκλησία (*ecclesia*), which is the word translated “church” in our English New Testaments. So the word “Church” is applied to Israel in the Old Testament, a fact obscured by the different ways that translators rendered the same word from the different languages employed in the writing of the Testaments. Accordingly, the Church is called “the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16.
2. **Terms applied exclusively to Israel in Exodus 19:3-6 are applied to the Church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, in I Peter 2:9, 10.**

3. “Israel,” with respect to its relationship to God, is always represented in Scripture as being composed of more members than the ethnic descendants of Abraham.

This is clear from the following scriptural examples:

- This is explicitly taught in Romans 9-11, where Paul answers the concern about the promises to Israel by identifying true Israel as the elect, and making the point that many of the actual physical descendants of Abraham were not reckoned as a part of Israel. Jesus affirms that it is God who produces true Israelites by miraculous activity and that He is able to do it from literally anything (even rocks!) apart from biological progeny (Matthew 3:9). He explicitly expounds this truth in His dialogue with the Jews recorded in John 8:33-58, in the context of their prideful claim that they are descendants of Abraham and therefore special, by affirming that they are biological descendants of Abraham while denying that they are true descendants of Abraham because of their unbelief and their actions, calling them rather “children of [their] father, the Devil.”
- The community of Israel redeemed from slavery in Egypt and which leaves there and enters into covenant with God at Sinai is explicitly said to be composed of more than ethnic Israelites, a “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38).
- Psalm 87 predicts that Gentiles born as members of foreign nations will be said to have been “born in Zion” and registered among the peoples as having been born there. Zion is a frequent symbol for Jerusalem and the Temple, and thus for Israel as the covenant people of God. It is a symbol of the Church in Hebrews 12:22-24, which constitutes another blending of Israel and the Church.
- The tribes of Israel are identified with a vast, multi-ethnic throng in Revelation 7, representing a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 15:5. This is seen in the fact that what John initially *hears* is to be identified with what he then *sees* (cf. Revelation 5:1-10).
- As previously mentioned, the children of Abraham and heirs of the covenant promises are explicitly asserted to be determined by their *union with Christ*, whether Jew or Gentile (Galatians 3:26-29).

4. Scripture explicitly teaches that Gentiles are added to the same, already existing covenant community of Israel. This is especially evident in the following passages:

- In Romans 11:11-24, Paul expounds on how believing Gentiles are “grafted into” the same community from which the “natural branches,” ethnic Israelites, have been removed because of unbelief. This community cannot be anything other than the covenant community of Israel, given the context and issue under consideration in Paul’s remarks, namely why Israel has not received the fulfillment of certain promises. Paul’s answer is that those of faith in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are united to Him, are part of Israel, and receive what was promised.
- Paul explicitly reiterates all this in Galatians 3:5-9.
- In Ephesians 2:11-3:13, Paul asserts that there is no longer a *theological* distinction between ethnic Jew and ethnic Gentile, because God has joined the two into one body by making Gentiles part of Israel, giving them “citizenship” in it and making

them heirs of the covenant promises, through faith in Christ, which is the only way Jews can receive them as well. Notice how this is predicted by Jesus in John 10:16.

5. Scripture clearly demonstrates that God has always had only one plan for the salvation of human beings, and that this plan has always included Gentiles.

Consider the following:

- From the beginning, the promises to Abraham always included the Gentiles (compare Genesis 12:1-3 and Galatians 3:8).
- Romans 9-11 discusses how God's one plan included Israel's rejection of Christ so that the Gentiles would come in. The Church was not an alternate community formed by an alternate, "mystery" plan, but God's plan from the beginning, according to this passage.

6. Covenant promises given to Israel are explicitly said in the New Testament to be fulfilled in the Church. Examples include:

- Being the People of God—Hosea 1:6-11; 2:14-23 —> Galatians 3:29; Romans 9:22-26; John 10:16
- Blessing through Abraham—Genesis 12:3 —> Galatians 3:8
- Rule over the nations—Genesis 15:7, 18-21; Psalm 2:7-12 —> Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:16; Matthew 5:5; Revelation 2:26, 27; 3:21
- Amos 9:11, 12; Isaiah 43:1-7; Daniel 9:19 —> Acts 15:13-19

Significance of This Understanding

This truth has significant implications for Christians as they live out their faith, to wit:

1. We have a *covenant identity* and a heritage, the history and nature of which is set forth in the whole Bible, including the Old Testament.
2. Our understanding of our relationship to God must involve an understanding of the totality of Scripture, and our expectations and hope include all of the promises to Abraham and to Israel, as they are amplified and clarified in the New Testament.
3. It is crucial to understand that the reason we are included among the people of God has to do with God (i.e., His election of us as individuals), not anything in us, including our physical ethnicity. Pride concerning anything intrinsic to us is unchristian.
4. The people of God is the community of people in covenant relationship to God. This is what defines their (our) identity.
5. The division of the people of God into two separate redemptive communities is one of the linchpins in the dispensational system of eschatology, which is essentially pessimistic with respect to the prospects of the widespread growth and influence of the Kingdom of God prior to the Second Coming of Christ. This has often become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Emphasis in the ministry of the Church, as it has been influenced by this perspective, has been overly on simply "getting people into the Kingdom," with a neglect of the primary emphasis of the Great Commission, which is the production of mature

disciples of Christ who have been trained to obey Him in all of life. It is obedience to this directive which truly builds the Kingdom of God—ironically, it is only through mature Christian disciples that truly effective evangelism occurs—and changes the world, and this is what is involved in the fullness of the plan of God (I Corinthians 15:20-28; cf. Matthew 28:18-20). This perspective, not some prophetic inevitability, is a major reason for the decline of Christian influence in the West. There is a need to return to a vision of the Kingdom of God which sees Christian thinking dominating every institution and every dimension of society, resulting in God's blessing. But Christians cannot do this if they only know the bare essentials of how to be forgiven of their sins. The Church must return to the ministry of teaching the whole counsel of God with the intention of equipping Christians to "bring every thought captive to Christ" (II Corinthians 10:3-5) and be salt and light with the effect that the world is Christianized in its thinking and practice, albeit with the realization that every individual will not be a true believer (Matthew 13:24-43).

Covenant Theology Series #6

One Book

Introduction

With this lesson we continue our summary analysis of covenant theology, viewed in biblical-theological terms, with a consideration of our defining phrase's third element: *one book*. This part of the phrase is closely related to the other two parts, one people and one economy. It asserts that God's scriptural revelation in the Bible, the 66 various books of the Old and New Testaments, is itself fundamentally a *unity* in terms of both its essential message and its application. In other words, *all* of it is meant to be applied to *all* of God's people of *all* times, though various books, being written at various times throughout redemptive history, which are addressed, when they first appear, to audiences with discrete needs and in discrete historical situations. This is not to say that there are not elements of discontinuity displayed between the various parts of the Bible. These elements of discontinuity mirror the discontinuity, as a function of progressive development, in the history of God's redemption of His people. But this discontinuity is always subservient to the fundamental continuity and unity of the Scriptures. Before consideration of this principle in contrast to the various ways that the books and parts of the Bible are sometimes improperly separated, a word concerning the nature of this unity is in order.

The Progressive Nature of Scripture

It is impossible rightly to understand or apply the Bible without an understanding of its *progressive* nature. God's salvation of a people, which was considered in depth in the previous lesson, was also progressive. In fact, the Bible is, from one perspective, a revelation of the *story* of God's work in history (i.e., "His story") to redeem a people for Himself, a story which has been referred to as "redemptive history." We could say that our defining phrase could easily include another element: *one story*. This is perhaps the reason that the Bible contains more historical narrative than anything else; it is this *narrative*, or story, which forms the superstructure of God's revelation. That revelation parallels the story as both develop together, the *revelation* explaining and commenting on the work of *redemption* which it accompanies. There are many stories in the Bible, but they are all part of one grand *Story* which develops and grows toward maturity, just as a living organism does. Both the work and God's interpretation and revelation of it develop and mature, so that the application of the revelation changes and develops as the history and community of people who are redeemed develop, God giving more and more revelation as appropriate to explain and elucidate the nature and implications of developments in the plan and work of redemption as they occur. Just as the people whom God redeems are essentially one people throughout redemptive history, so the revelation addressed to that people is essentially one, though both the detail revealed and the people's understanding of it grow as the story and plan develop, giving them the context and experience to understand and process more and more as their experience grows.

Errors of Discontinuity in the Understanding and Application of Scripture

Various groups and persons have at times introduced invalid *disjunctions*, or separations, between the books or parts of Scripture, thereby obscuring its unity and thus distorting its message. Some of these are:

1. **A disjunction between *Testaments***—This is the typical separation applied by **dispensationalists** as they handle the Bible. The Old Testament is often viewed as only tangentially applicable to present-day Christians, and then mostly in terms of moral example, but insufficiently in terms of *theology*. Many, if not most, would say that the Old Testament is addressed fundamentally to Israel, not the Church, though some principles carry over because of the commonality of mankind and the fact that there is only one God with whom all have to do. Certainly most, if not all, of the promises of the Old Testament are seen as for Israel and not the Church. The principle often stated for application of the Old Testament, particularly of the Law of God, expressed in Old Testament commands, is that only that which is repeated in the New Testament is applicable to New Testament believers, and whatever is not repeated is assumed to be abolished, except perhaps for ethnic and national Israel.
2. **A disjunction between *theologies***—There are two groups which commonly divide the Bible *theologically*. **Liberal/modernist theologians**, because they deny the supernatural inspiration and authorship by God of the entire Bible which lies behind the work of the authors of its various books and parts, assert that various authors expound different, even contradictory theologies or ways of understanding God and His world, essentially setting forth disparate, *entirely human*, beliefs. Of course, such an understanding is completely contrary to an orthodox, historic Christian doctrine of Scripture. Coming from an entirely different perspective, **orthodox Lutherans** claim that the key to properly understanding and applying the Bible lies in what they refer to as the “Law-Gospel Distinction.” This theological principle asserts that Law and Gospel are fundamentally incompatible, and that the failure to separate these two concepts distorts the message of Scripture.
3. **A disjunction between parts**—The final two disjunctions are errors into which all kinds of genuine Christians fall. One is a tendency to emphasize or dwell upon some *parts* of Scripture to the neglect of others. For instance, many have read stories in Genesis but are completely unfamiliar with the stories of Israel after the return from exile in Ezra-Nehemiah. Some read only the New Testament, not for the reasons under #1 above, but simply because the world of the Old Testament is so unfamiliar. Many never read the prophets. Some seem only to read the book of Revelation, while others ignore it completely out of frustration with their inability to understand it.
4. **A disjunction between genres**—Most Christians have their favorite types of Scripture and exclusively access those, not realizing that all the parts and “genres” (types of literature) of the Bible mutually define and reinforce the message of each other in ways that are crucial to a deep and mature understanding of each. Thus some people only read the stories of Scripture and have never read the Psalms extensively. Perhaps most have never read all of the Law of Moses in the Pentateuch, and although most Christians are fond of the book of Proverbs (because it seems so practical), they would be hard pressed to define “wisdom literature” and typically avoid the other Wisdom books (Job and Ecclesiastes). The solution to both this and the previous error is to see Scripture as *a*

unified exposition of the dynamics of the Covenant relationship between God and His people. We will return to this point later in this lesson.

Scriptural Understanding of Special Revelation

The Bible itself reveals the progressive nature of its revelation and of the application of its commands. The application of certain commands and principles changes as the situation of God's people with respect to the progress of redemption changes. For example,

- In Galatians 3:15-4:10, Paul argues that parts of the Old Testament Law, namely those parts that were symbolic observances uniquely applicable to Old Testament Israel in their redemptive historical context (e.g., food laws, Festivals, circumcision, etc.), functioned in a particular way for them which no longer applies in the same way to believers living after the completion of the work of Christ.
- The main thrust of the book of Hebrews is that the requirement for the observance of Old Covenant (Old Testament) ceremonies and symbols was temporary, because their function was to point to, and instruct in the significance of, the work of Christ and the nature of the fulfillment of covenant promises in the New Covenant. Thus the *development* of redemption in God's plan rendered them of only provisional and limited application, as shadows to reality, advertisements to product (cf. for example, 8:1-13; 10:1-9).

Nevertheless, *all* of this revelation (especially God's Law) is *always* applicable to *all* of God's people of *all* times, as borne out by the following Scriptures:

- In II Timothy 3:14-17, specifically referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul tells Timothy that all Scripture comes from God and is profitable to instruct God's people in the way they should live.
- In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus indicates that New Testament people, who live in the Kingdom, should be taught to observe and obey the Old Testament Law.
- The very Old Testament laws the applicability of which to believers after the New Covenant is most questioned, are applied in the New Testament to Christians, including Gentiles (e.g., I Corinthians 5:6, 7; 9:7-12; II Corinthians 6:14-7:1), albeit *in different ways*.

Therefore, *all Scripture is a unity which applies to all of God's people of all times, with necessary distinctions which flow from the progress and development of redemptive history.* There is both continuity and discontinuity, but the fundamental emphasis is on the continuity.

Significance of This Understanding

This truth has significant implications for Christians as they live out their faith, to wit:

1. All Christians must understand that all of the Bible applies to them, and seek both to understand and to apply every part of it to their lives.
2. Christians must develop skill in interpreting and applying all of the various parts and genres of Scripture, which have unique and complementary functions in fostering growth and sanctification in them.
3. Christians must grasp the total scope of the history of redemption and of their place in it in order rightly to handle the Bible.
4. Christians must focus on knowing and applying those parts of Scripture with which they are least familiar and toward which they least gravitate, so that they might be fully mature and well-rounded in their relationship to God.

Understanding the Covenantal Nature of Scripture

The chart on the next page represents an overview of the various parts of Scripture and how they relate to the central concept of *covenant*, to which they all relate and which gives to each its essential function and meaning. This can be summarized as follows:

1. The Pentateuch (the *Law*) centers around the initial and most comprehensive revelation of our obligation to God as His covenant people (His stipulations to us as Lord of the Covenant). The narrative parts of this provide the context and rationale for this Law.
2. Old Testament *history* dramatizes (and thus *impresses* upon us) the demands, but especially the results, of covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness in obedience or disobedience.
3. Old Testament *wisdom* provides example of application of the Law of God in the practical situations of life, illustrating what faithful obedience to its general principles *looks like* as we live out our covenant relationship to God.
4. The Old Testament *prophets* act as covenant lawyers, assessing the covenant faithfulness, or lack thereof, of God's people, and proclaiming the appropriate sanctions (blessings and/or curses) of the Covenant to them with respect to particular situations at particular times in the history of redemption, ultimately pointing to Christ as the one through whom the promises and blessings of the Covenant would come to the faithful, through the re-establishment of the Kingdom of God (God's rule through His image-bearer, man; lost in the Fall but restored through the second Adam, the God-man, Jesus).
5. New Testament *history* records Christ's *establishment* (gospels) and *expansion* (Acts) of the Kingdom, the definition of which is God's covenant rule through His Law, as administered through His people (in whom His image is restored progressively).
6. New Testament *epistles* (letters) provide inspired interpretations of Christ's institution of the Law of the Kingdom (*essentially* the Old Testament Law) in application to specific congregations (churches) and individuals with respect to various situations, needs, and problems.
7. New Testament *prophecy* (the book of Revelation) anticipates and foretells the application of the covenant sanctions of the Kingdom on rebels against that Kingdom, first on those in the Covenant (Jews) and then on all mankind.

Thus all of Scripture, in all of its parts, is unified as a revelation of the nature of God's covenant, as this has been progressively revealed through redemptive history, with the Law, the stipulations of the Covenant of Grace, as its foundation. To repeat the assertion presented earlier in this lesson, the Bible is, from one perspective, *a unified exposition of the dynamics of the Covenant relationship between God and His people*. [See the chart on the following page.]

#7

THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION

HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

Covenant Theology Series #8

The Edenic Covenant (Protoevangelium)

Introduction

With this lesson we will do an in-depth analysis of redemptive history as it is structured through various covenants, which are seen as watershed developments which distinguish the various stages in the development of the one overall Covenant of Grace. As we have already seen, these covenants are:

- **Universal Covenants:** Edenic (Adamic); Noahic
- **National Covenants:** Abrahamic; Sinaitic (Mosaic); Davidic
- **The Consummative Covenant:** New

We begin with the covenant established in the Garden with all mankind *after the Fall*, as represented by Adam: the *Edenic*, or *Adamic*, Covenant. It is important to remember that the Covenant of Grace (to which some refer as the “Covenant of Redemption”), which begins with this covenant, is to be distinguished from the Covenant of Works (to which some refer as the “Covenant of Creation”). Mankind fell under the Covenant of Works and in terms of its stipulations; mankind (i.e., the elect) is redeemed under and through the Covenant of Grace. With respect to Adam, confusion is easy since both begin at the time of Adam, and he is involved in both as our federal head.

Proper Distinction between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace

As expounded in the Westminster Standards, Genesis records the establishment of two covenants. It is important to keep in mind that the Covenant of Works is not *replaced* by the Covenant of Grace; rather, the Covenant of Grace provides for the redemption of mankind through the *fulfillment* of the terms of the Covenant of Works. This relates to the question of how the Covenant of Works relates to the various covenants outlined above, a question that is debated among covenant theologians. Some maintain that the “Old Covenant” should be taken to refer to everything prior to the establishment of the New Covenant, and are “republications” of the Covenant of Works. Others regard some of the covenants established in the Old testament to be expressions of the Covenant of Works, while others are expressions of the Covenant of Grace. This is somewhat to oversimplify the issue, but it is mentioned to point out that covenant theologians are divided with respect to how they organize the scriptural material theologically. *The position taken in this study will be that all of the Old Testament covenants after Genesis 3:15 are part of the overall Covenant of Grace, but that this is not to say that they have no relation whatsoever to the Covenant of Works*, which establishes some fundamental aspects of God’s relationship to man, and to which the Covenant of Grace has reference in significant ways.

There are key realities that are established by each of these covenants and which have abiding significance for all people today, as follows:

- **The Covenant of Works:**

1. Established mankind's fundamental *responsibility* before God, particularly the responsibilities to rule over God's creation as His representative (the definition of the Kingdom of God), through the expression of His character as summarized in His Law,
 2. Established mankind's *identity* as, on the one hand, a creature infinitely inferior to and dependent upon God, and on the other hand, the pinnacle of creation endowed with the status and nature the image of God, which both qualified and equipped man to rule, and
 3. Established the default *status* of mankind before God both before the Fall, as *children* communing with God in love and fellowship, and after the Fall, as both *guilty* and *corrupt*, unable to fulfill his responsibilities and due only the wrath of God.
- **The Covenant of Grace:**
 1. Provides a means for redress of the fallen status of man, remitting his guilt and healing his corruption, and restoring his relationship to God,
 2. Provides a restored identity as God's image-bearer, child, and representative, and
 3. Provides the means whereby man can fulfill his responsibility and purpose as created by God.

The various covenants which comprise the Covenant of Grace have reference to and are thus related to the Covenant of Works, but are not stages nor parts or expressions of it.

Our Procedure

As we trace the development of redemptive history (the Covenant of Grace) as it is structured by the covenants of Scripture, we will make reference to the elements of covenant which were discussed in Study #1. We will also seek to present how each covenant moves the plan of redemption forward, and what development occurs between each covenant. This will serve to clarify the progressive development of God's work, a work predestined before creation, for the revelation of His glory.

Elements of the Covenant as Seen in the Edenic Covenant (Genesis 3:15ff)

1. **Transcendence/Immanence**—God, in Genesis 3:15, establishes the fundamental conflict between two categories of man, which He also establishes (“I will put enmity between...”). God makes clothes for Adam and Eve. God prevents the perpetuation of the corruption of man by driving him from the Garden and access to the Tree of Life.
2. **Mediation/Representation**—The two categories of mankind are represented by the Woman (as typologically symbolic of the Church), “the Seed” (singular, cf. Galatians 3:16), and Satan.
3. **Stipulations**—God promises that the Satan's work will be defeated (his head crushed) through the agency of the seed (singular and plural) in whom *He* puts enmity with Satan

and his seed; the seed of the Woman (plural) are to crush the head of the Serpent (cf. Romans 16:20).

4. **Sanctions**—The curses of the Covenant will come upon the Seed (singular) through the agency of the Serpent (Satan) and his seed; Satan will be judged and crushed by the Seed of the Woman (singular) through this cursing somehow.
5. **Continuity**—This reality is established as the fundamental conflict which defines the nature of history going forward.

Role of the Edenic Covenant within the Covenant of Grace

This covenant, in seed form, establishes the entire progress of redemptive history, including its climax and consummation. Everything which happens from thence is an outflow of this fundamental covenant and promise.

#9

THE NOAHIC COVENANT
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

Covenant Theology Series #10

The Abrahamic Covenant (Covenant of Promise)

Introduction

The Abrahamic Covenant marks the formal beginning of God's work to redeem a people for Himself. It is a formal beginning because God was at work to redeem individuals (e.g., Enoch, Noah) before Abraham. But it is here that God announces explicitly His intention to bless a people in terms of redemption from the curse of the Fall. This multi-faceted promise is the most prominent feature of the covenant with Abraham, thus it is often referred to as the Covenant of Promise. It is significant that God's formal program begins with promise, as we shall see (cf. Galatians 3:15-18).

Redemptive-Historical Progress Since the Last Major Covenant (Noahic)

The Noahic Covenant established the foundation of stability, through common grace institutions and providential orderings, necessary for the plan of redemption to occur in history without God's righteous judgment destroying the world and preventing it. God had again directed man to "fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). In Genesis 10 we have a record of the nations which came from the three sons of Noah, and it is said that they "spread abroad on the earth." Genesis 11:1-9 indicates that they did not do this out of obedience. In fact, they were effectively one people who had one language. They gathered together in the area which later became Babylon and manifested characteristics of confidently arrogant defiance of God and human autonomy. God's assessment was that "nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them." God's concern was not that they were becoming omnipotent, but that they would be so filled with humanistic pride and confidence that they would turn inward to themselves and ignore God, and failing to realize their dependence upon Him, and that they could never really be independent of Him. God confused their language into many languages, and thereby scattered them throughout the earth. According to the apostle Paul in Acts 17:24-28, He did this so as to break their confidence and cause them to seek Him out of a renewed sense of their dependence upon Him for "life, health, and everything." These developments, then, paved the way for the formation of a people who would reveal the one true God to the nations and call them to Him for salvation from their rebellion and the misery it produced. The formation of this people begins with the call of one man: Abram, who was later to be called Abraham.

Key Passages with Respect to the Abrahamic Covenant

Although, as we shall see, there are a number of passages in Genesis and in the rest of Scripture relevant to the Abrahamic Covenant, the key passages regarding its establishment are:

1. Genesis 12:1-3, 7—The call of Abraham and the initial statement of the Promise of the Gospel.
2. Genesis 15:1-21—The formal covenant-making ceremony between God and Abraham.

3. Genesis 17:1-27—The implementation of the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Elements of the Covenant as Seen in the Abrahamic Covenant

1. **Transcendence/Immanence**—God, from the beginning of His dealings with Abraham, dictates the terms of the relationship. He draws near and binds Himself to Abraham by making promises to Him which He alone initiates. He commands Abraham to leave His country and go to a distant land (Genesis 12:1); He requires him to “walk before [Him] and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1); and He indicates that He has chosen Abraham, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice....” (Genesis 18:17-19).
2. **Mediation/Representation**—A significant aspect of the covenant with Abraham is the promise that God will bless all the nations (or “families”) of the earth through Him. Abraham’s faith will bless all peoples, and this is said by the apostle Paul to be God’s announcement of the Gospel to Abraham (Galatians 3:8). The promise is also made to Abraham’s “Seed,” and, as we have seen in previous studies, this does not primarily refer to the biological progeny of Abraham, but to the One descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ, who will be a new covenant head representing a new humanity, who are united to Him by their sharing in the faith of Abraham.
3. **Stipulations**—The Abrahamic Covenant is often said to involve only promise with no stipulations. In accord with this understanding it is sometimes said to be an unconditional covenant, in which the performance of no conditions are required in order to receive the promises. This view is clearly incorrect. The passages cited above in Genesis 17:1, 2 and 18:17-19 both explicitly state that Abraham is required to live righteously and to instruct his children to do the same *so that* they will inherit the promises. In addition, the most quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament, Genesis 15:6, indicates that it was Abraham’s faith that was the vehicle by which God *credited* him with righteousness. His faith was thus the fundamental thing that God required of him, and the thing that the rest of Scripture indicates is the quality that produces obedience and good works (Romans 1:5; 16:26; James 2:14-26).
4. **Sanctions**—The curses of the Covenant will come upon the Seed (singular) through the agency of the Serpent (Satan) and his seed; Satan will be judged and crushed by the Seed of the Woman (singular) through this cursing somehow.
5. **Continuity**—This reality is established as the fundamental conflict which defines the nature of history going forward.

Role of the Abrahamic Covenant within the Covenant of Grace

This covenant

#11

THE MOSAIC COVENANT
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

#12

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

#13

THE NEW COVENANT
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

Covenant Theology Series #14

Covenants through Redemptive History

The following outlines the progress of redemptive history as structured by the various lordship covenants in Scripture. Each covenant represents a watershed transition and a significant step forward in the progress of redemption. There is also progress between the covenants, setting the stage for the each successive covenantal development.

I. Covenant of Creation (or Covenant of Works)

A. Purposes

1. Defined the purposes and nature of mankind and the world.
2. Set forth the proper understanding of the relationship between man and God.
3. Established the role and destiny of mankind under God's lordship.
4. Established the Kingdom of God.

B. Nature and Effect

1. A gracious covenant — endowed mankind with life, fellowship, status (kingship) and ability/qualifications (*imago dei*)
2. A punitive covenant — exposed mankind to the prospect of death without remedy within the provisions of the covenant

C. Sign: The Tree of Life

II. Covenant of Grace

A. Purposes

1. To redeem man as mediator of God's rule.
2. To reestablish the Kingdom of God.

B. Progress

1. Adamic Covenant (Covenant of Initiation)
 - Set forth in seed form the outcome, nature, recipients, and agent of redemption.
 - Established two fundamental categories of human persons.
 - Described the conflict of the history of redemption.
 - Sign: clothing.

2. Inter-covenantal Progress

- Mankind exercises sinful dominion as a means of gaining independence from God and autonomy.
- Tyrannical dictatorships are established in pursuit and centralization of power.
- The earth becomes filled with violence.
- Sin is allowed to grow and metastasize.
- Sinful autonomy and the expression of sin is centralized in the establishment of cities.
- The full ugliness, misery, and destructiveness of unaddressed sin is manifested.
- The justice and necessity of judgment for sin is clarified and executed.

3. Noahic Covenant (Covenant of Preservation/Common Grace)

- The earth, the stage on which redemption is to be played out, is preserved through promise.
- Human government is established to restrain evil so as to avert God's judgment until the Last Day.
- Sign: The rainbow.

4. Inter-covenantal Progress

- Three basic divisions of mankind are defined in Noah's prophecy.
- The continuing rebellion and sin of mankind is manifested at Babel.
- The foundation is laid for the announcement and initiation of the redemption of all mankind through the scattering of them and the establishment of nations and different languages, creating a situation in which the autonomous confidence of artificial unity and consolidation of power at Babel was broken, and mankind more disposed to reach out for God in dependence upon Him (Acts 17).

5. Abrahamic Covenant (Covenant of Promise)

- The promise of the gospel is clearly stated, relating it to the Kingdom of God in reference to the Cultural Mandate, involving *rule* (dominion) by *ordering* (stewardship over the Land, typologically representing the whole earth, Romans 4:13) and *filling* (propagation of seed/descendants, with Christ, *the Seed*, as the Head, Galatians 3:15-29).
- A discernible Covenant People of God is established for the first time, initially constituted as a *family*.
- Sign: Circumcision

6. Inter-covenantal Progress

- The history of the patriarchs in the Land and outside of it constitute an *orientation to the Promise*, involving numerous principles and aspects.
- Israel, the Covenant People, becomes a *nation* rather than a family, preparing for their constitution as a People or Nation in the next covenant.
- The migration of the Covenant family to Egypt creates the situation which:
 1. demonstrates God's faithfulness to the Promise (providing both a provisional Land — Goshen — and a numerous seed), and
 2. sets the stage for the context of the Mosaic Covenant in the redemption of Israel from bondage.

7. Mosaic Covenant (Covenant of Law)

- The Law is given and codified (written down) as a comprehensive (i.e., involving *normative, existential, and situational* aspects), objective revelation of the will of God not only for Israel, but also for mankind in general.
- The symbolic, *existential* ("ceremonial") aspects of the Law become the distinctive cultural markers of the Covenant People of God until the fulfillment of the Promise.
- The symbolic aspects of the Law become an incessant reminder of the obligation to obey the Law completely to be close to God, both *apart* from its provision of atonement (Romans 10:5, cited from Leviticus 18:5), and *through* that provision (Romans 10:6-10, citing Deuteronomy 30:12, 13).
- The Law thus becomes an indicator of the guilt of sin, the need of a Savior, and the provision of God in Christ.
- The Law also thus becomes a rule of life for the redeemed People of God.
- Sign: the Sabbath (multiple "sabbaths," including the Sabbath day).

8. Inter-covenantal Progress

- The nature of the corporate people of God as a *nation* constituted to be a holy army of God, taking the Land which God gave them as an inheritance, is clarified in the events recorded in the book of Numbers. Their status as protected and blessed by God, and their requirement to trust God's power even as they exercise their responsibility to do battle in holy war with those they are disinherit, are also clarified.
- Both the requirements of holiness and covenant fidelity and the sovereignty of God in the dispensation of the particular distribution of the inheritance to discrete tribes and individuals, are clarified in the events recorded the conquest of the Land led by Joshua in the book bearing his name.

- The need of a king both to subdue the people to the Law of God in order for them to receive and manage their inheritance, and to lead the people in the holy war against God's and their enemies, are clarified in the events recorded in the book of Judges.
- The contrast between a king "like the nations have," exemplified by Saul, and a king who is "a man after God's own heart," exemplified by David, is clarified in the events recorded in the books of Samuel. These events dramatize the difference between the kingdom of Satan, implemented by human rulers/kings, whose rule is autonomous, arbitrary, selfish, and tyrannical, and the Kingdom of God, implemented by the Davidic king(s), whose rule is an administration of God's Law.
- The coronation of David establishes the Old Testament type of the Kingdom of God, beginning with David.
- David prepares for the essence of the Old Testament type to be realized, through two actions: the conquest of Jerusalem from the Jebusites to be the capital of Israel and the central locus of his (and God's) rule, and the bringing of the ark and the throne of God represented by it to Jerusalem.

9. Davidic Covenant (Covenant of the Kingdom)

- David and his seed (ultimately Christ) are identified as the locus of the monarchy and the legitimate kingship for God's people.
- David and future Davidic kings are identified as "sons of God."
- God promises His special and unalterable commitment to David and his line as possessing the kingship, establishing the principle that the Davidic kingdom will ultimately be everlasting.
- God's throne in heaven is united and identified with the throne of the Davidic king in Jerusalem.
- God promises that the "Son of David" (proximately Solomon, ultimately Christ) will build the Temple (the "house" for God) and establish God's permanent dwelling with His people, fulfilling the heart of the Covenant of Grace.
- The establishment of a *kingdom* as the remedy for the effects of the Fall and the curse of the Covenant of Works, the restored fulfillment of the Cultural Mandate, and the essential dynamics of the Kingdom of God are typologically, though imperfectly, set forth in the establishment of the Davidic Kingdom.
- The Abrahamic promise that "kings would come from" Abraham, and that God's redemption of a people would be achieved through the establishment of a *kingdom*, alluded to in the Law of Moses (which outlined requirements for a king in Israel), is fulfilled.
- Sign: Anointing of the Davidic King.

10. Inter-covenantal Progress

- The needs for the king to be in the line of the Davidic dynasty and to be committed to the rule of God as signified by the Temple in Jerusalem and implemented through God's Law as codified by Moses and applied through the prophetic Word, are clarified in the events recorded in the books of Kings.
- The consequences of the king's obedience/disobedience to God's covenantal Law in the administration of the kingdom, and thus the covenantal nature of the kingdom, are also clarified through the above mentioned events.
- The consequences for God's people of whether the king is representative of the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God, as expressed in the above obedience/disobedience, are clarified in the same manner as the above.
- The events of the exile and the *provisional* return from exile, and particularly the interpretation of these events by the prophets and their writings, clarify several important things about the status of God's people at this point in redemptive history, including:
 - a. Without true repentance and conformity to God's Law, the people can only expect judgment.
 - b. With repentance and righteousness, there is hope for the realization and experience of covenantal blessing through the restoration of the Kingdom.
 - c. The provisional return from exile under Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel was *not* a restoration of the Kingdom because there was not a true king and Israel was still under foreign domination.
 - d. That return and the events associated with it, through the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, as recorded in the books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, established that true restoration must follow the model of fidelity to the Law of God and particularly the worship of God, epitomized in the Davidic kingship.
 - e. The post-exilic prophets, particularly Malachi, and the record of Ezra-Nehemiah, as well as Daniel 9, indicate that the people did not truly repent at the time of the provisional return, which is why there was no king, and the restoration of the Kingdom was postponed by a multiplication of the duration of the Exile (70 years) by seven (resulting in 490 years before the coming of the restoration of the Kingdom), in accord with Leviticus 26:18, and as outlined in its fulfillment in Daniel 9.
 - f. The inter-testamental period, with its "400 years of silence" (i.e., no prophetic revelation), produced a rise of the domination of the Levitical priesthood as the ruling body in Israel, and its failure to be faithful to God, leading to the situation obtaining at the advent of Christ, the true King.

11. New Covenant

- Christ, as Prophet, comes to reveal the Law of God and its proper application definitively and finally, with perfect accuracy, to God's people, and to mediate its covenantal *sanctions*: both blessing to the elect, and cursing to the reprobate (Revelation 5:1-10; 11:17-19).
- Christ, as Priest:
 1. achieves perfect righteousness for His people and provides atonement for their sins as their representative and *covenant surety*, interceding on their behalf to God, and
 2. provides the perfect and final revelation of and instruction in the Law of God as the perfect image of God.
- Christ, as King, sends forth the Holy Spirit to subdue His people to the Law of God and empower the defeat of all His and their enemies.
- Christ, as Mediator of the New Covenant, and the representative of His people, establishes their status as prophets, priests, and kings (II Corinthians 5:20; Revelation 5:9, 10 *et al*).
- Christ, in His person and in His people, reestablishes the Kingdom of God through all His work, culminating in His ascension to the throne of God at His right hand, thus reversing the Curse of the Fall through the restoration of the image of God in His people and their empowerment to exercise dominion with Him forever (Romans 5:17; II Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26, 27 [cf. Psalm 2], 3:21; 5:10; 11:15; 20:6; 22:5).
- Signs: Baptism (Covenant *initiation*); the Lord's Supper (Covenant *appropriation*)

#15

COVENANT AND SCRIPTURE
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

#16

COVENANT AND WORLD VIEW
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

Covenant Theology Study #17

Covenant and Family

The family is the foundational and first institution of society as created by God. A covenantal understanding of it and its implementation in family life is essential to a proper experience of family, and to the blessing of God on the total life of mankind. The following is an exposition of some of the elements of this understanding, informed by the five-fold elements of biblical covenant which have been laid out previously.

Transcendence/Immanence

The transcendent God makes Himself known and draws near to mankind through the institution of family in several ways:

1. God's relationship to His people is signified in the ordained relationship between one man and one woman in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33).
2. God's essential trinitarian nature as both Father and Son is manifested, taught, and experienced in the relationship between fathers and sons, and indeed between parents and children in the nuclear family.

Mediation/Representation/Hierarchy

The institution of family exhibits essential features which display God's means of applying His lordship through mediatorial representation:

1. The authority of the husband in the family is derived from and a means of the application of God's authority over mankind in families.
2. The authority of parents over children is derived from and expressive of God's authority.
3. Parents represent God to their children, and bear the accompanying responsibility to do so accurately and faithfully.
4. The exercise of God's authority and His work among mankind (e.g., in the Church, government, etc.) begins with and is fundamentally experienced in and through families.
5. God's fundamental command in the establishment of the Kingdom of God through the Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:26-28) is realized through families ("male and female" as part of God's image; the responsibility to "multiply" and "fill the earth").

Stipulations: Promise and Law

God's promises relate to and are intimately bound up with the concept of family:

1. The fundamental covenant promise, that of God's presence, entailing union and communion with Him, are in essence an inclusion of human beings in the trinitarian life

of God (not becoming God, but participating in the sharing and mutual indwelling of life and love), which is revealed in familial terms.

2. One of the fundamental promises of the Covenant of Grace is that of a “seed” or “descendants,” pointing ultimately to the establishment of a worldwide family.
3. The promise of eternal life is essentially the reestablishment of familial relationships among people who were all originally related in Adam, but who through the sin inherited from him have been alienated from one another and from God the Father through death imposed because of that sin.

The obligations of God’s people, expressed in God’s Law, are applied in and related to the institution of the family in several ways:

1. The definition, nature, and activity of family and family life is defined, determined, and governed by God’s Law-Word.
2. The exercise of authority in the family is to be governed by and an expression of the Law of God, regulated by His commandments.
3. The family is to be a training ground for discipleship in terms of the Law of God, unto godly dominion of those trained therein, thus establishing the Kingdom of God.

Sanctions: Blessing and Cursing

God’s blessings are bestowed in terms of and through families:

1. God declares the Gospel to Abraham as His blessing coming through Abraham to “*all the families of the earth*” (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:7, 8).
2. The basis for the blessing of the faithful is their acquired status as members of God’s family, born and adopted as His sons and daughters, His “seed” or offspring (John 1:12, 13; Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 3:7; 3:26-4:7; Ephesians 1:5; I John 3:1, 2).
3. The blessings of life in the Church are referred to in familial terms (“fathers,” “brothers,” “sisters”).
4. Being raised in a faithful Christian family is one of God’s greatest blessings and is signified through the application of the initiatory covenant sign to children.
5. The covenant community is both established and expanded through nurture in covenant families.
6. Covenant blessing is produced by faithful discipleship and training of covenant children in the context of family life.

God’s curses are applied in terms of and through families:

1. Unbelief, disobedience, and apostasy affects families and family lines (Exodus 20:5).
2. Consequences for covenant unfaithfulness are sometimes applied through disinheritance.
3. The curses of God’s covenant are experienced through the unbelieving response to the witness of families to the truth of God and the Gospel.
4. The raising of children must and should include discipline that is often painful and uncomfortable to parents, including corporal punishment.

Continuity

The continuity of God's program to establish His Kingdom through the Covenant of Grace is displayed and largely accomplished through families:

1. The promises of the Covenant of Grace are constantly "to you and your children ("seed")," indicating a continual work of God throughout history in His people.
2. The constant commands to instruct children in the Law of God so that they might receive blessing points to a continual renewal and expansion of the Kingdom and the covenant community through the discipleship of children in families as its means.
3. The ultimate blessings of the Covenant are referred to as an "inheritance," indicating that the fullness of God's grace is received in the future, and that God's program must endure until that inheritance is realized.

Some Implications and Applications

1. God's people must remain committed to both obedience to and propagation of God's revealed will in His Word concerning family, sexuality, sex roles, etc. in the face of stout opposition from the world.
2. God's people must commit themselves to family worship and the catechesis and discipleship of children, realizing that this is a primary, if not the primary, means of expansion of the Kingdom.
3. The family has the essential responsibility for the education and training of children and cannot allow government to usurp this role and responsibility.
4. Schools apply and are subject to the authority of parents in the education of children. They represent parents *in loco parentis*.
5. Parents must apply their authority in light of the fact that it is derived from and a mediation of God's authority.
6. The communication and enforcement of the above point to children is an essential component in their nurture.
7. It makes a crucial difference in the Christian nurture of children that they be regarded at the outset as members of the covenant community, with all its privileges and responsibilities, and not as outsiders before or until they make a conscious profession of faith.
8. Parents should realize that they have a responsibility to apply sanctions, both blessings and curses, faithfully in the covenant nurture of their children, and that both are important.
9. Parents should realize their responsibility to leave an inheritance, both spiritual and, if possible, material, to their children.
10. God's people should not neglect covenant family nurture, or consider it secondary to the establishment and expansion of the Kingdom of God or as an arena of evangelism in deference to outreach to non-covenantal persons. Both are essential, and covenant nurture should probably be the primary concern.

Covenant Theology Study #18

Covenant and State

Covenant theology has had an enormous impact on the conception and practice of civil government in history. A salient example is the practice in Geneva at the time of John Calvin, which in turn had a formative impact on Western republics and eventually on the unique “experiment” of the American nation. But the truth is that a biblical conception of government as ordained by God is at its roots *covenantal*. The following is an exposition of some of the elements of this understanding, as informed by the five-fold elements of biblical covenant which we have laid out previously.

Transcendence/Immanence

God rules His world in part through civil government, an entity which was instituted by God under the rubric of the Noahic Covenant, as we have seen. In this way the transcendent God makes Himself known and draws near to mankind through this institution in several ways:

1. God’s care for His creation is indicated through the *preservative* and *restraining* purpose and effect of civil government (Genesis 9:5, 6).
2. The justification and rationale for the existence of civil government is found, rather than in the possession and application of *power*, but instead in the fact that God ordains civil government to accomplish His purposes in redemption and to bless mankind in common grace.

Mediation/Representation/Hierarchy

The institution of civil government exhibits essential features which display God’s means of applying His lordship through mediatorial representation:

1. Government officials are called God’s “ministers” who serve the best interests of those under their authority (Romans 13:4).
2. The authority of government officials is delegated by God (Romans 13:1, 2) and expressive of His authority over mankind.
3. Government officials represent God to the people under their authority, and are thus obligated to carry out their responsibilities in accord with His character and will.
4. People are obligated to obey the lawful, righteous, and legitimate requirements of civil government officials, since they represent God and are applying His authority (I Peter 2:13, 16, 17). Rebellion against legitimately applied civil government is rebellion against God (Romans 13:2).
5. The biblical conception of civil government includes the covenantal concept that those under authority are represented to God through the mediation of government officials. This is the basis for democratic elections as the means whereby government officials obtain their positions of authority.

6. Flowing from point #5 above, the biblical conception of civil government involves the principle that authority is *decentralized*, that is, that it flows “from the bottom up,” expressing a vital connection to the people who are being ruled.

Stipulations: Promise and Law

God’s promises relate to and are intimately bound up with the institution of civil government:

1. The promise of the Noahic Covenant, which provided the context for the establishment of civil government, was that God would not destroy the earth again by a flood. The fulfillment of this promise was enabled and ensured through the provision of civil government.
2. The promises of both blessing and cursing (covenant sanctions), as detailed below, are fulfilled to a significant degree through civil government.

The requirements of God’s Law relate to civil government in several essential ways:

1. God’s Law, rather than the arbitrary will of rulers, is the standard that should be applied in the requirements of government officials for society and individuals in the conduct of their authority. Ultimately it is God who rules through the laws of a society, which should conform to God’s Law. This is the principle of *lex rex* as opposed to *rex lex*, and is a fundamental difference between the operating principles of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.
2. God’s Law regulates rulers and government officials as well as those under authority.
3. The administration of God’s Law and its application to the people is one of the two primary responsibilities of civil rulers. They are to hold the people accountable to God’s Law as a means of promoting a righteous civil society.
4. God’s Law thus forms the substance of a *covenant* between rulers and those ruled, to which both are accountable before God, whether they recognize it or not.

Sanctions: Blessing and Cursing

God’s blessings, as we have seen, are bestowed in terms of and through civil government:

1. The righteous conduct and application of civil government results in profound good and blessing to a society and to individuals (Romans 13:3; I Timothy 2:2; I Peter 2:13, 14).
2. God blesses nations who govern their people according to righteousness as defined by God’s Law (Psalm 33:12; Proverbs 14:34).

God’s curses are applied in terms of and through civil government:

1. The primary role of civil government is to apply *punishment*, including the “power of the sword,”—capital punishment—to evil persons and thus restrain evil in society (Romans

13:3, 4). This, ironically enough, is the means whereby it applies the blessings mentioned above (I Timothy 2:2).

2. In accordance with #2 above, civil government is *not* an agency for the application either of *grace* or of *provision* of life needs.
3. God's judgment of *nations* in history as well as on the last day is performed in terms of and on the basis of the application of God's covenantal curses, which come on those who have covenantal responsibilities and exercise them wickedly or irresponsibly (see, for instance, the book of Zephaniah).

Continuity

The continuity of God's program to establish His Kingdom through the Covenant of Grace is displayed and significantly accomplished through civil government:

1. God declares that, with the accomplishment of the work of Christ in His first Advent, "the kingdom of the world have become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." (Revelation 11:15).
2. Therefore, the effects of the Gospel in its permeation of the world (as described in Matthew 13:31-33) should result in ever more righteous government, as the nations submit to God's Law through the making of disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). The application and ministry of the Gospel *must and should* include political transformation.
3. This *process* inevitably culminates in the reestablishment of the government, dominion, and rule of man over God's creation, through the establishment of the rule of the man Christ Jesus, and His people in Him, which extends into eternity (Revelation 11:15; 22:5).

Some Implications and Applications

1. The legitimacy of government is fundamentally *theological*, not sociological or political. Therefore, such expressions of man's relationship to civil government as *anarchy* and *libertarianism* are illegitimate and mistaken.
2. Religion generally, and God's Law specifically, far from being separate from politics, should form the basis for its understanding and practice.
3. Government was instituted by God for a very limited and specific function and purpose. It should *not* be involved in providing for the needs of people, the allocation of wealth or resources, the education of children, etc., except so as to enforce the principles of God's law with respect to such arenas.
4. The opposition to and elimination of capital punishment *per se* is unbiblical and results in judgment upon a society and a nation.
5. The punishment of evil by civil government is an *obligation* and must be pursued through the application of *justice alone*. It is not the role nor prerogative of civil government to dispense grace.
6. The proper operation of civil government is essential to the propagation of the Gospel and the program of God for the redemption of His people.

7. Individuals are obligated to become involved in political activity, support for the adoption of righteous policies by government, and selection of political leaders. To fail to be involved is to be unfaithful to God.
8. The people in a society must fundamentally govern themselves according to the Law of God in order to avoid God's judgment, especially as it is applied by civil government. This is the foundation of all proper civil government.
9. Accordingly, tyranny flourishes where evil is rampant in a society. Rebellion against God always results in the bondage of a people to sin and Satan, often in the imposition of tyrannical and painful dominion by evil rulers.
10. The power of civil government, given that it is exercised without exception by sinners in a fallen world, must be *decentralized* and subject to *checks and balances*. This was largely the genius of the original, constitutional form of American government.

Covenant Theology Study #19

Covenant and Church

Covenant theology is essential for understanding the biblical nature of the institution of the Church, as well as its proper organization, practices, mission, and ministry. The Church is the covenant community of the people of God in the world. One understanding of its definition is that it is all true believers (the so-called “Invisible Church”); another is the outward, visible community of all professing believers and their children (the so-called “Visible Church”). This distinction itself is generated by the dynamics of covenant theology, which we will see below, as we describe how the various aspects of the idea of “covenant” condition how one should think of the institution of the Church.

Transcendence/Immanence

The Church is defined, in its practical essence (that is, the Visible Church), as the outward community of God’s people, as distinct from the world, who have professed faith in the God of the Bible through Jesus Christ, together with their children, and thus have entered into a covenant relationship with God. The dynamics of this covenant relationship generate a community within the outward community (that is, the Invisible Church), the reasons for which will become clear below. The nature of this Covenant (the Covenant of Grace) defines the nature and structure of the relationship of God with His people. The ways that the transcendence/immanence aspect of the Covenant is manifested in the Church include:

1. God, as the sovereign and transcendent Lord of the Covenant, has no obligation to enter into any relationship with His creatures. He thus does so out of His own freedom and according to pure grace and love.
2. We could not know or relate to the uncreated Creator God at all if He did not accommodate our creaturehood and reveal Himself to us and take the initiative to relate to us.
3. The making of the Covenant itself constitutes a condescension on God’s part, in order to draw near (immanent) to those in the Covenant.
4. Any Covenant between God and man is thus a relationship in terms of which the transcendent God *draws near* and accommodates our creatureliness, which makes it possible for God truly to relate to His people in a way in which they can participate in the relationship. All of God’s interaction with His people is therefore *covenantal*.
5. The Kingdom of God, defined as God’s rule over His creation (transcendence) through man, His image-bearer (immanence), begins with the Covenant of Works, through which it is lost when mankind fell in Adam, and continues in the Covenant of Grace, through which it is reinstituted. The Kingdom of God is thus also fundamentally *covenantal*, and the concepts of Kingdom and Covenant are intertwined inseparably.
6. The distinction between the members of the Visible and Invisible Church is determined sovereignly by the Lord of the Covenant in election. It is not negotiated or conditional.

Mediation/Representation/Hierarchy

The institution of the Church exhibits essential features which display God's means of applying His covenantal lordship through mediatorial representation:

1. Redemptive *history* is a mediatorial tool and avenue through which God, as Lord of the Covenant, reveals Himself and the character of His relationship to His people. This is one reason why so much of the Bible is historical narrative. The record of His mighty and gracious acts on behalf of the covenant community demonstrates His commitment, greatness, and grace. In this way written revelation is parallel to the history of redemption, although it is probably best to refer to these two as parallel forms of revelation, the former being a record and interpretation of the latter.
2. The context of the establishment of the Covenant of Grace, and the backdrop against which salvation and redemption are meaningful, is the Covenant of Works (or the Covenant of Creation), in which Adam is the mediatorial representative of all of mankind. This is why all mankind is under the judgment of condemnation and needs salvation (Romans 5:12-21; John 3:18).
3. God ordained *officers* in His Church from the beginning of its constitution as a people (beginning with Moses). Although a case could be made for Abraham in this regard, Moses was (arguably) the first authoritative mediatorial representative (I Corinthians 10:1, 2) in the Covenant of Grace. Under him the book of Deuteronomy, a covenant document whose outline follows the five-fold nature of covenant, in its second section (the historical prologue or mediatorial section) relates the establishment of a hierarchy of mediatorial representation and authority under Moses in the establishment of the office of elder (Deuteronomy 1:9-18). The book of Exodus also records the same event.
4. Subsequently, three Old Testament mediatorial offices, *priest, prophet, and king*, were established in that order, each functioning in distinct ways as representative applications of God's relationship to His people. Moses embodied the functions of all three, but other individuals occupied the formal offices, with Aaron as the first official priest, Samuel as the first official prophet, and Saul as the first official king.
5. The three Old Testament offices were typological anticipations of the One who would fulfill and fully and perfectly accomplish the purposes and ministries of these three offices in His single Person: Jesus Christ.
6. Christ is then the ultimate and final true Mediator of both the New Covenant (the covenant of fulfillment) and the overall Covenant of Grace, and the surety and guarantor of the inheritance of all true believers (the Invisible Church) in the Covenant of Grace. In this way, God deals with all mankind through two ultimate mediators: Adam and Christ (Romans 5:12-21).
7. In Christ, the re-establishment of the Kingdom of God occurs through our union with Him as King, in which our original dominion as *kings* under God (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:5-8) is restored, and God rules through His image-bearers. The image of God is progressively renewed in Christ through conformity to His image (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:13, 15), which is the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3), in the salvation process (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:9, 10; Revelation 5:10).
8. Through union with Christ, we also become *priests* who represent God to the world and the rest of creation (I Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10).

9. Through union with Christ, we also become *prophets* through whom God's covenantal sanctions are mediated to the world (Psalm 149:6-9; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17; II Corinthians 2:14-16; 5:18-21).

Stipulations: Promise and Law

God's promises relate to and are intimately bound up with the institution of the Church:

1. The Visible Church is the institution through which salvation from the curses of the Covenant of Works is available to the world (as seen in the above section). The Invisible Church constitutes those who receive salvation *through faith in the covenantal promises of God*. Salvation is thus only properly and fully understood in *covenantal terms*.
2. Salvation, throughout Scripture, is presented as a covenantal *inheritance* (e.g., Matthew 5:5; Hebrews 1:14; 9:15; I Peter 1:4).
3. The promises of salvation all serve the interest of the re-establishment of the Kingdom of God and His covenantal rule through man. Even forgiveness of sins/justification and sanctification, which most people consider the heart of salvation, are meaningful because they enable man to function as God's image-bearing vice-ruler over Creation, restoring both his *ability* and his *right* to rule in the Kingdom.
4. Adoption as an aspect of salvation also ties into this because it is God's *children*, who become His children as part of salvation, who are entitled to a covenantal *inheritance*.

The requirements of God's Law relate to the Church in several essential ways:

1. The blessings of God in salvation are represented throughout Scripture as coming through obedience to God's covenant stipulations for us, His Law, which obedience, albeit imperfect, is a manifestation of the *faith* which is the true means of receiving the blessings (Genesis 18:17-19; Deuteronomy 11:8, 9; Romans 1:1-5/16:25, 26; 2:6; Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26 *et al*).
2. The Visible Church is to be reflective of God's renewing grace by living holy lives in obedience to God's law. In this way the Church displays the glory of God and wins unbelievers to the Faith (I Peter 2:9-12).
3. Conformity to God's law is represented repeatedly as the *purpose* of salvation (Romans 8:3, 4; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14; I John 3:3, 4 *et al*).

Sanctions: Blessing and Cursing

The Church is given the "Keys of the Kingdom" (Matthew 16:18, 19), that is, the ministry of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments, which are the means whereby individuals are admitted to the Kingdom through faith in the message of God's promises which they convey, and the practice of discipline, which can be a means of conveying and administering salvation, but also a means of shutting out people from the arena of God's blessing through expulsion from the Church (excommunication). Accordingly,

God's blessings, as we have seen, are bestowed in terms of and through the Church:

1. The way of salvation is ordained by God to be proclaimed to all nations, and is the way that all people to be saved are eventually brought into obedience to His covenant sovereignty (Matthew 28:16-20; II Corinthians 5:18-21).
2. The Church is the arena of God's blessing, both to believers ("wheat") and unbelievers ("tares")—cf. Hebrews 6:4-9. Believers are eternally blessed; unbelievers receive temporal blessing. No one *ordinarily* receives salvation outside of the Church.

God's curses are also applied in terms of and through the Church:

1. As shown above, the preaching of the Gospel to the nonelect results in unbelief and rejection, which is a means of mediating judgment and condemnation to them.
2. Members of the covenant community who respond to the promises of the covenant with unbelief and some measure of consequent disobedience, whether overt or not, are eventually judged more strictly because of the unique covenantal privileges they enjoy (Matthew 10:14, 15; 11:20-24).

Continuity

The continuity of God's program to establish His Kingdom through the Covenant of Grace is displayed and significantly accomplished through the Church:

1. The unconditional inclusion of the children of professing believers in the covenant community points to the fact that this community and its structure is intended to be a phenomenon that continues throughout history and, indeed, eternity.
2. The evidence that God's grace in salvation and blessing (e.g., Genesis 12:3/Galatians 3:8), as well as covenantal cursing (e.g., Exodus 20:5), is intended to be applied to *family lines*, as a general rule, is an expression of the continuity of the Covenant.

Some Implications and Applications

1. Children should be raised as members of the covenant community who have a covenant heritage, not as pagans, until they make a conscious profession of faith. This rubric colors and affects the whole approach to the nurture of children within the Church.
2. The sign of covenant *initiation*, baptism, should be applied to children as well as professing believers, in accordance with the universal biblical practice.
3. The sign of covenant *appropriation*, the Lord's Supper, should be available upon the first manifestation of genuine and intelligently discerning faith in children. Since its symbolism (that is, what it communicates as a sign) includes a conscious, deliberate taking hold of Christ's benefits by faith, with understanding of how the sacrament signifies these, its participants should be restricted to those who have reached an age of cognitive development which allows this.

4. The mission of the Church in *extensive* growth, evangelism, should be expressed in a covenantal understanding of the message of the Gospel. It must include the entire message of the Kingdom of God, as well as a call to obedience to God's Law, not as the means of justification, but as the requirement of God for those in covenant relationship to Him.
5. In accordance with the above, salvation must be viewed as a *relational bond* with a sovereign king, not simply as the bestowal of escape from eternal wrath for sin, though that is certainly involved.
6. The mission of the Church in *intensive* growth, as an expression of the progressive development of the Kingdom of God, must include instruction in the whole counsel of God, leading to conformity to God's Law (Matthew 28:20). This is the primary role of the Church, because it is what equips the Church to carry out evangelism and promote extensive growth. The mission of the Church is *to make disciples* of King Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20).
7. The above understanding of the Church's mission rules out many activities and foci which distract the modern Church from the accomplishment of its true mission, which must be covenantally understood.
8. Love for God in terms of our covenant bond with Him is of the essence of salvation. We are made for intimate communion and fellowship with God, and the covenant is the means for the establishment of that communion. The promise of union and communion is the heart of the Covenant of Grace.
9. The way that we show our relational love for and bond with God is obedience to His covenant stipulations (Law). The Law of God and its teaching are fundamental to the life of God's people. The Law is not something which has been dispensationally made irrelevant to God's people; it is the tool of covenant dominion in the Kingdom, the substance of the nature of God and thus of our nature as image-bearers, and the means of achieving and promoting fellowship with Him.
10. Our hope for the future is a *covenantal* hope; that is, it is founded upon the covenant promises of a covenant-keeping God. Thus the Covenant is the basis of our *confidence* in our future.

Covenant Theology Study #20

Covenant and Science

We continue with this study our exploration of the implications of Covenant Theology for various intellectual and cultural disciplines and aspects of life. In this study we will consider science/technology, and how an understanding of the Covenant as a worldview framework informs one's approach to and interaction with this sphere of life. As always, our analysis will be organized in terms of the five aspects of the biblical concept of Covenant, as they have been previously articulated.

Transcendence/Immanence

The Church is defined, in its practical essence (that is, the Visible Church), as the outward community of God's people, as distinct from the world, who have professed faith in the God of the Bible through Jesus Christ, together with their children, and thus have entered into a covenant relationship with God. The dynamics of this covenant relationship generate a community within the outward community (that is, the Invisible Church), the reasons for which will become clear below. The nature of this Covenant (the Covenant of Grace) defines the nature and structure of the relationship of God with His people. The ways that the transcendence/immanence aspect of the Covenant is manifested in the Church include:

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#21

COVENANT AND ART
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

#22

COVENANT AND EDUCATION
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS

#23

COVENANT AND KINGDOM
HANDOUT IN PROGRESS