

God of Promise

The Beauty of Covenant Theology

The Covenant of Grace (4)

The Administrations of the Covenant of Grace (cont.)

While certain features vary in each covenant administration, the substance of each remains the same. O. Palmer Robertson writes, “The Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants do not supplant one another; they supplement one another.”¹

Covenant of Redemption	Covenant of Works	Covenant of Grace				
Intra – Trinitarian	Adam	Noahic	Abrahamic	Mosaic	Davidic	New Covenant in Christ

4. Davidic

- 2 Samuel 7:1-17

[10] And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, [11] from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. [12] When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. [13] He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. [14] I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, [15] but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. [16] And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (vv. 10-16)

Though the word covenant is not used in this text, it is clear that God is establishing a covenant with David. Elsewhere, the Bible explicitly states that God inaugurated a covenant with David. For example, Psalm 89:3-4 states, “I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to David, My servant, your seed will I establish forever and build up your throne to all generations.” Psalm 132 also states that God made a covenant with David.

Like the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses, the covenant with David is not separate from but an administration of the covenant of grace.

There is an interesting principle at work in the unfolding of the various administrations which must be considered. As the formal elements of the covenant were added under Moses the nature of

¹ Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology*, (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2004), 161.

the covenant became obscured as the sinful minds of God's people grappled rather unsuccessfully with the fundamentally gratuitous nature of the covenant.

As a consequence, 2 Samuel 7 records an even more specific unfolding of God's gracious promise. This time the covenant of grace is administered through a promise of David. This covenant is referred to in Psalm 89:3, 4, 28, 34. Like Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant involves clear stipulations or expectations. But also like the Mosaic covenant, these stipulations do not undermine the fundamentally gracious nature of the covenant.

In the covenant, God promises specific blessings to David:

A. David's heir will occupy the throne.

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom" (vs. 12).

B. David's heir will build a temple for the Lord.

"He shall build a house for My name..." (vs. 13).

C. David's heir will have a unique relationship with God.

"I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son..." (vs. 14).

- Those of us who live in the days of the new covenant in Christ have the privilege of relating to God as his sons and daughters. But for Hebrews in the days of the Old Covenant, calling God Father would have been radically new. Not until the covenant with David do we see an individual so clearly identified as a son of God.

D. David's heir will be disciplined for sin but will not be cast away.

"When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you" (vv. 14b-15).

- The promise of discipline is a further application of the Father and Son relationship that God is establishing with David's heir.
- It is worth noting the remarkable duration of David's dynasty. His descendants ruled Judah for over four hundred years, longer than the greatest Egyptian dynasty. The reign of the Davidic Dynasty also stands in stark contrast to the various ruling families of the Northern kingdom (Israel). It is likely that there has never been a longer reigning single dynasty in history than David's four-hundred-year dynasty.

The Davidic Covenant, however, was not that David's house would reign for a long time, but that the dynasty would reign forever. The prophets understood this and prophesied that the covenant would be fulfilled in the Messiah. That is precisely what Jesus and the apostles affirmed. The eternal reign promised to David was to be fulfilled by David's greatest Son, Jesus Christ. The eternal rule of David's house, was always intended to be a Messianic rule. Therefore, the Davidic Dynasty was a type, a shadow pointing forward to an eternal reality.



And this, by the way, is one of the classic examples of why we should not allow the Old Testament pattern of description to determine our understanding of the New Testament reality. If so, we end up believing with the Dispensationalists that one day, David is going to be reestablished on the throne in literal, earthly Israel. Of course, the New Testament in passages like Hebrews 1:5, makes it clear that the Davidic reign was prophetic of Christ's reign. The reality is, by definition, clearer than the shadow. So we must interpret the shadow in light of the reality, not the reality in light of the shadow. The Davidic reign was a foreshadowing of a greater and ultimate reality fulfilled in the person and reign of Christ.

Prior to the Davidic covenant, the Lord God dwelt among his people by means of the tabernacle; a traveling temple. In this new administration, God's promise is that he will establish his reign in a permanent locale. Rather than ruling his people from a mobile structure, God will rule from the throne of Mt. Zion through an everlasting King.

Under David, then, both the Kingdom and King may be said to have come. "The Abrahamic faith and the Abrahamic promise are thus the Davidic covenant clarified, deepened, and focused on one who will descend from King David."

These Davidic promises are therefore directly Messianic in character. "It is in Christ that David's seed is established forever and his throne built up to all generations." The whole point of this covenant is that it is made with David in his kingly office; in this way God establishes the manner in which he will reign over his people, by a king of his own appointing, who will appear from the house and lineage of David (Gen. 49:10; Jer. 33:14ff; Isa. 11:1).²

5. The New Covenant in Christ

Through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus brought to complete fulfillment all the requirements of the covenant of grace.

In the case of the new covenant in Christ, the word "new" does not mean entirely different. As J.I. Packer points out: "Even the new covenant is not so called because it is contrary to the first covenant, but because there is a clear and fuller manifestation of the gratuitous adoption which the Abrahamic covenant revealed and the Mosaic confirmed."³

Jeremiah 31:31-34:

[31] "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, [32] not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. [33] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [34] And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

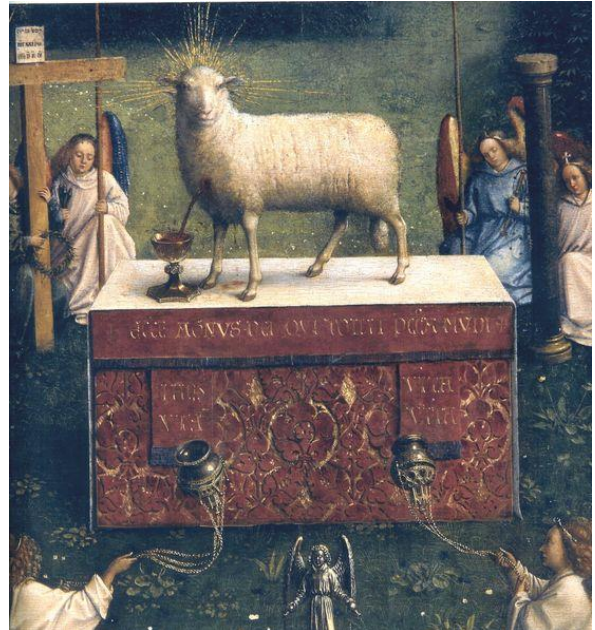
² Golding, 160

³ Golding, 162

The new covenant in Christ is contrasted with the Mosaic Covenant, not the Abrahamic. The ceremonies and regulations of the Mosaic covenant were types and shadows. They pointed beyond themselves to Christ and were never intended to be permanent. In contrast, the Abrahamic covenant was not a shadow pointing to Christ but a promise fulfilled in and by Christ. So when we speak of the old and new covenant we are not referring to the covenant with Abraham now giving way to the new covenant in Christ. Remember, the covenant of grace (first announced in Genesis 3:15 and solemnized with Abraham) is one. The newness of the covenant in Christ is contrasted to the old regulations and ceremonies attached to the Mosaic covenant.

The sacrifices prescribed under Moses could not actually atone for sins. Rather, they functioned provisionally until the Messiah shed his blood for the sins of the elect. Likewise, the law prescribed under Moses could not save sinners nor was it designed to. The law can only save one who is born sinless and remains perfectly sinless; something beyond the reach of humankind. But as our Second Adam, Christ fulfilled the law of Moses perfectly; obeying in our stead.

In Christ, therefore, the law of God is engraved upon the hearts of God's people by the Holy Spirit rather than being imposed from without. For God's people the law of God no longer threatens since its demands have been fully met. Rather, the law of God functions as a means to instruct believers how to live in such a way as to glorify God.



Conditional Grace?

Many who are new to covenant theology stumble over the fact that God's covenant of grace has conditions attached to it. In Genesis 17 God makes it clear that there are requirements if his people are to receive the covenant blessings. Following the announcement of the covenant (Gen 12) and its inauguration by ceremony (Gen 15) God said to Abraham:

As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you (Gen 17:9-11).

How can grace have conditions? It seems incongruous that God would say of the covenant of *grace*, "You shall keep my covenant." We have already seen in the inauguration ceremony described in chapter 15 that it is God who keeps the terms of the covenant; he has pledged himself to his people. Man has repeatedly proven to be incapable of keeping the covenant requirements.

Nevertheless, as J.I. Packer has written:

The God-given covenant carries, of course, obligations. The life of faith and repentance, and the obedience to which faith leads, constitute the covenant-keeping through which God's people receive the fullness of God's covenant blessing. "I carried you on eagles'

wings and brought you to myself. Now *if you obey me fully and keep my covenant*, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Ex. 19:4 f.). Covenant faithfulness is the condition and means of receiving covenant benefits, and there is nothing arbitrary in that; for the blessings flow from the relationship, and human rebelliousness and unfaithfulness stop the flow by disrupting the relationship. Israel's infidelity was constantly doing this throughout the Old Testament story, and the New Testament makes it plain that churches and Christians will lose blessings that would otherwise be theirs, should covenant fidelity be lacking in their lives.⁴

In Genesis 17 God made it clear to Abraham that the covenant blessings were contingent upon circumcision. At first glance this seems downright weird, if not a bit painful. It may even seem a bit arbitrary for God to require this. How can the covenant of grace be conditioned upon a rather crude and bloody procedure?

To understand what God is up to in this arrangement one must understand that circumcision was always intended to be a sign pointing beyond itself. Paul wrote that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom 4:11). So, circumcision is not ultimately about flesh but faith. Just like the new covenant in Christ, the covenant with Abraham was conditioned upon faith. Abraham "believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6).

This then is the vital distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The former was contingent upon obedience to God's command while the later is conditioned upon faith in God's promise.

⁴ Packer's introduction to Witsius' *Economy of the Covenants*