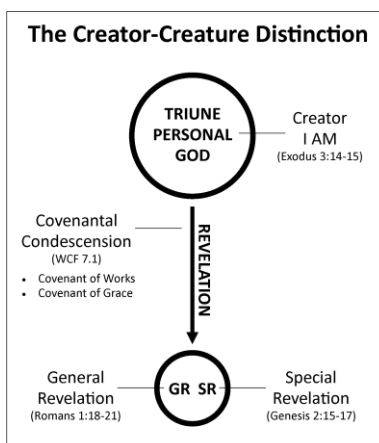


Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: The God who Covenants

- We cannot begin interpretation with a clean, unbiased, me-centered interpretation.
- God gives teachers because guiding and teaching is necessary for proper interpretation of the Scriptures (see Lesson 3). God gives teachers to accurately dispense what is already in the text, and not leave us to just observe, interpret, and apply on our own.
- The Bible's central motif is about God and his movement toward his humanity to save a people for himself through Christ and his work. This overarching movement of God is his *covenantal* nature, and where we receive our doctrine formally called Covenant Theology.
- Westminster Confession of Faith states that the distance between the Creator and his creatures cannot be overcome by us, even though we owe complete obedience to God. We would not know about God in any way profitable to rightly worship him, unless God moves personally toward us.
- God has done this by way of covenant (WCF 7.1). A covenant formally binds two parties together in a **relationship** or **bond** with consequences for keeping or breaking the commitment.
- In Scripture we see God revealing himself to a group of people by covenanting with one who represents them: Everyone else experiences the covenant relationship by virtue of being included *in* that representative person.
- God explicitly enters divine covenants with Noah (Gen 6:18), Abraham (Gen 15:18; 17:4), Israel (Ex 24:8), and David (Ps 89:3). The prophets anticipated a "new" covenant (e.g. Jer 31:31), and Christ uses covenantal language in the last supper discourse (Lk 22:20). Covenantal theology is a major paradigm given by Scripture to set us up for right understanding as we read.



The Covenant of Works

The first covenant God made with man was *The Covenant of Works (Life)*. Life was promised to Adam (representative head). In Adam life is therefore promised to all his posterity under one condition: His perfect and personal obedience to God alone. Adam, being without sin, was able to do right or to do wrong. God commanded Adam that he should not eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:15-17). If obedient, he would have the right to the tree of life and live (2:9). Yet we know that through temptation, Adam failed (3:6).

There are four aspects to this Covenant of Works:

1. God is the one who initiates the covenant with Adam in creation.
2. Adam is the representative head for all humanity (Eve and all posterity).
3. The promise of life is based on Adam's perfect obedience.
4. The promises and the curses of the Covenant of Works are eternal and spiritual by nature.

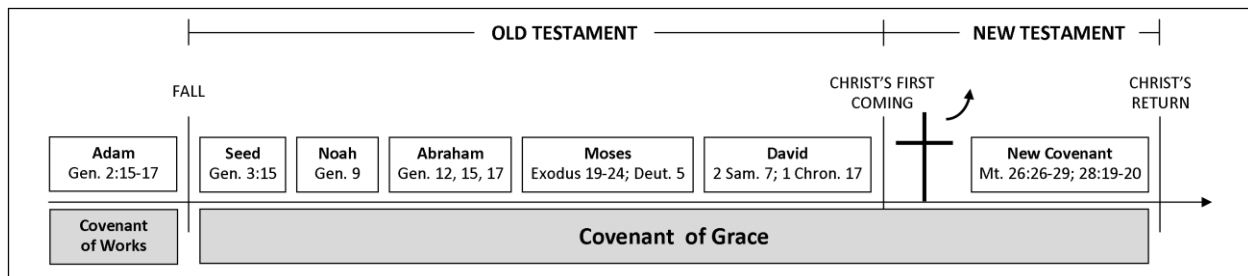
So why does the Covenant of Works matter?

- All of humanity is guilty by way of Adam as breakers of the Covenant of Works (original sin)
- The Covenant of Works reveals God's standards for holiness and justice and demonstrates that we are unable to be faithful covenant keepers.
- Eternal life comes at a price – perfect obedience. Salvation must be merited.
- It helps us understand the depth and scope of the work of Christ Jesus. Not only did he die for our sins (original and actual) as our atoning substitute, but he perfectly obeyed the Covenant of Works which remains binding for all humanity. Christ satisfied its covenant curses against us for breaking the bond in Adam.

The Covenant of Grace

God graciously cuts a new covenant with which we call *The Covenant of Grace*. God condescends to be the covenant-keeper for us. This covenant is unilateral and indissolubly grounded in the merciful promises of God beginning with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15.

- Remember that the Covenant of Works is still binding on all Adam's posterity: "Be perfect and you will live."
- But because of God's Covenant of Grace, we now have, "Christ has done it for you, repent and believe on him."



[Diagram 3: The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace]

- Although it has been administered differently at different periods of time (Remember the seed diagram – Week 3), the substance has remained the same – men are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.
- Under the Old Testament the gospel was administered by promises, prophecies, types, and ordinances delivered to God's people over time. The administrations all anticipated (foreshadowed) Christ.
- Under the New Testament through the gospel of Christ now realized, all the promises, prophecies, types, and ordinances have their fulfillment in him. Christ has now ordained certain signs, which are simpler and more expansive (the sacraments), to spiritually point us to the fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace in the historical work of Christ.

The Heart of Covenant

- Let's not reduce covenant to something merely intellectual and legal. It is both, but it is much more than this. At the heart of Covenant is relational fidelity of eternal significance.
- The prophets were the covenant attorneys who brought the covenant lawsuit against Israel for their wicked sin.

- At the core, the deepest relationship of human fidelity to another human is illustrated in the marriage covenant – the most basic and necessarily unit of human flourishing. The union of marriage between a husband and a wife is God’s creational metaphor for describing the heart of his gracious covenant. God’s covenant lawsuit through the prophets teaches us not only God’s anger toward Israel (and Judah) for their covenant breaking, but also, we clearly learn what God does to bring us back to himself through the new covenant in Christ.

“How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers” (Isa. 1:21).

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2).

“But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior” (Hos 13:4).

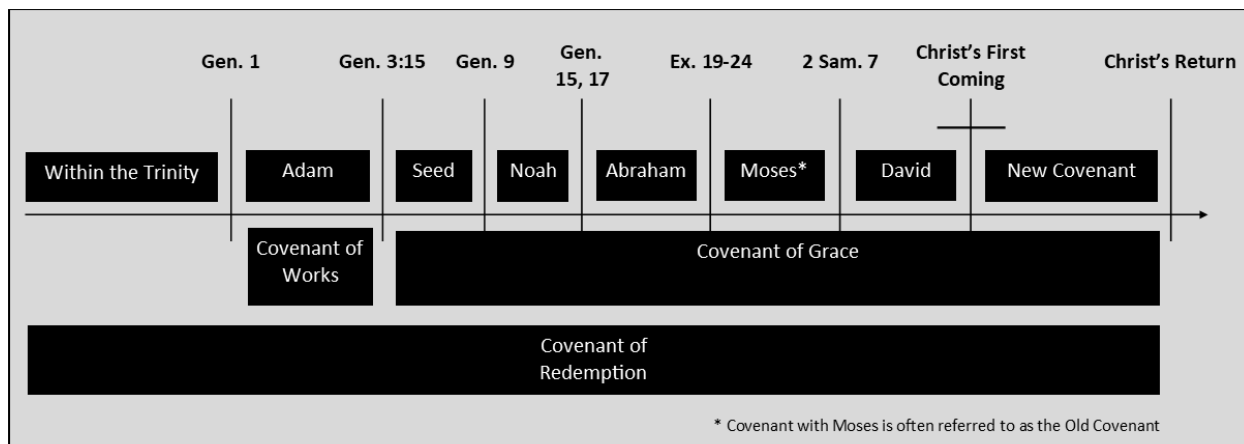
“...my covenant that [Israel] broke, though I was their husband...” (Jer 31:32)

“I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart” (Jer. 24:7).

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

The Covenant of Redemption

- The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace did not come about as God’s *reaction* to humanity. They were established from before eternity within the Godhead.
- The Covenant of Redemption is the inter-trinitarian covenant between the person of God to redeem a people unto himself (Pactum Salutis).



[Diagram 4: The Covenant of Redemption]

- The Covenant of Redemption emphasizes the total agreement between the persons of the Trinity, and it defines the roles of the persons to accomplish redemption: In the economic properties of the persons, the Father decrees, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies.
- Here are three main points to summarize the pact within the Godhead:
 1. God the Father chooses the elect and commissions Jesus to be the means of salvation for the elect: 2 Tim 1:8-10; Eph 1:3-6; Isa 42:1-9.
 2. God the Son willingly submits to the Father and is sent to accomplish salvation for the elect as new the covenant representative (the 2nd Adam): Isa 53:10-12; Phil 2:4-11; Jn 17:1-5; Rm 5:18-19.
 3. God the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the elect by uniting us to Christ: Jn 14:16-17; Eph 1:11-14; 1 Cor 2:14-16; 1 Pt 1:1-2.

So why does The Covenant of Redemption matter?

- It teaches us about the love of God. We learn that it was not in time that God set his love on us, but rather his love was set on us *before* the foundation of the world within the wisdom and counsel of the Triune God (Eph 1:3-6).
- It provides us with comfort and assurance. Though our consciences are laden with besetting sins that often practically manifest themselves, God comforts us with his covenantal heart of love and peace that is not only never ending but *never beginning*.