

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	9
Abbreviations.....	13
Chapter 1: Introduction to Covenant Theology	15
The Difficult Nature of Covenant Theology.....	15
The Importance of Covenant Theology.....	17
The Definition of Covenant.....	18
The Covenant of Redemption.....	19
Covenant in Historical Perspective.....	20
Chapter 2: The Covenant of Works	23
The Evidence for the Covenant of Works in Genesis 1–3.....	24
The Elements of a Covenant in Genesis 1–3.....	24
Hosea 6:7: A Reference to a Covenant with Adam?.....	27
Major Issues in the Covenant of Works.....	28
The Name of the Covenant.....	28
The Role of Grace in the Covenant of Works.....	31
The Covenant of Works and the Gospel.....	33
Chapter 3: The Initiation of the Covenant of Grace	37
Genesis 3:15: The Protoevangelium (the first gospel).....	38
The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.....	41
Issues related to the Covenant of Grace.....	42
The Condition of Faith.....	42
The Unity of the Covenant.....	43
The Parties to the Covenant of Grace.....	44
The Historical Administration of the Covenant.....	45
Chapter 4: The Noahic Covenant	47
The Triumph of Sin.....	48
The Judgment of the Flood.....	50
The Common Grace and Redemptive Elements in the Noahic Covenant.....	50
The Use of ‘My Covenant’ in Genesis 6:18.....	51
Preparations for the Flood.....	52
The Preservation of the Godly Line through the Flood.....	53
God’s Covenant with Noah.....	54
The Continuing Problem of Sin (Genesis 9:18-29).....	55
The Noahic Covenant and the Covenant of Grace.....	56
The Typological Elements of the Flood.....	57

Chapter 5: The Abrahamic Covenant	61
Genesis 12: The Promises of God.....	61
Genesis 15: The Establishment of the Covenant.....	63
Genesis 17: The Confirmation of the Covenant	66
The Meaning of Circumcision	69
The Emphasis on Offspring.....	72
Chapter 6: The Mosaic Covenant	75
The Historical Context of the Mosaic Covenant.....	75
God’s Promises to Abraham.....	75
God Remembered His Covenant with Abraham.....	76
The Setting of the Covenant (Exodus 19)	77
The Ratification of the Covenant (Exodus 24).....	79
The Giving of the Law (Exodus 20:1–23:19).....	80
The Conquest of the Land (Exodus 23:20–33).....	81
The Covenant Ceremony (Exodus 24).....	81
Deuteronomy: Covenant Renewal	84
The Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant.....	87
The Distinctive Nature of the Mosaic Covenant.....	88
The Blessings and Curses of the Mosaic Covenant.....	93
Chapter 7: The Davidic Covenant	97
God’s Promises to David (2 Samuel 7).....	98
Background and Setting	98
The Dynastic Oracle	99
The Implications of the Davidic Covenant.....	103
Differences between 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17.....	106
The Culmination of God’s Covenant Promises	108
The Development of the Idea of Kingship.....	108
Fulfillment of Earlier Covenant Promises	111
The King as Mediator of God’s People.....	112
Chapter 8: The New Covenant	115
Israel’s History of Disobedience.....	115
Will the Davidic Promises Be Fulfilled?.....	117
Where is God’s Covenant Faithfulness (Psalm 89)?.....	117
The Restoration of the Davidic King (Psalm 132).....	118
The Promise of a New Covenant	120
The Fulfillment of the Covenant Promises	127
Chapter 9: Major and Minor Variations to Covenant Theology	139
Minor Variations to Covenant Theology.....	139
O. Palmer Robertson, <i>The Christ of the Covenants</i>	139

John Murray: ‘The Adamic Administration’	141
Major Variations to Covenant Theology	145
W. J. Dumbrell, <i>Covenant and Creation</i>	145
Paul R. Williamson, <i>Sealed with an Oath</i>	149
Evaluation of Williamson’s Views	154
Federal Vision	156
Conclusions: Key Doctrines Related to Justification by Faith	163
Chapter 10: Meredith Kline: Covenants as Administrations	
of God’s Kingdom	165
Covenant and Kingdom	166
The Covenant of Creation	166
Common Grace Covenants	168
The Noahic Covenant	170
Redemptive Covenants	171
The Covenant of Genesis 6:18	171
The Abrahamic Covenant	173
The Mosaic Covenant	175
The New Covenant	179
Chapter 11: Evaluation of Kline’s Views of the Covenants	181
The Covenant of Works	181
The Covenant as Treaty	184
The Administration of the Covenant	185
The Mosaic Covenant	186
Common Grace Covenants and Two Kingdoms	190
A Comparison of Murray and Kline	196
Chapter 12: Confessional Baptists	199
Introduction	199
Confessional Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology	202
The Covenantal Structure of Scripture	202
The Covenant of Works	203
The Covenant of Grace	204
The New Covenant	207
Confessional Historic Baptist Covenant Theology	021
The Covenant of Works	211
The Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace	211
The Noahic Covenant	212
The Covenant of Grace	213
The Covenant of Circumcision	214
The Mosaic Covenant	218

The New Covenant	220
Comparison and Evaluation of the Views of	
Confessional Baptists	221
The Abrahamic Covenant: One Covenant or Two?.....	221
The Mosaic Covenant as a Covenant of Works	226
Chapter 13: Progressive Covenantalism	233
Introduction	233
The Noahic Covenant	235
The Creation Covenant	236
The Abrahamic Covenant.....	237
The Mosaic Covenant	238
The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31.....	240
The Genealogical Principle	242
Evaluation of Progressive Covenantalism	243
The Nature of the New Covenant Community	244
The Warning Passages and the ‘Already, Not Yet’	
Character of Salvation	247
The Administration of the Covenant.....	248
The Genealogical Principle.....	250
Chapter 14: The Benefits of Covenant Theology: Legal,	
Personal, and Corporate.....	259
A Review of the Covenants	259
A Brief Evaluation of the Different Views of	
Covenant Theology.....	266
The Fullness of Salvation	267
Appendix 1:	
Covenants in the Context of the Ancient Near East.....	271
Appendix 2:	
The Question of ‘Testament’ in Hebrews 9:16-17	277
Selected Bibliography	283

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Covenant Theology



The Difficult Nature of Covenant Theology

COVENANT theology is a vast and complex topic. It is easy to get lost in the various approaches and the different emphases of covenant theologians. Part of the confusion comes from the fact that scholars who approach the topic from similar viewpoints use different terminology to describe the components of covenant theology. Is there a covenant in Genesis 1–2 and what should it be called (Covenant of Works, Covenant of Life, Covenant of Creation)? Are there two basic overarching covenants in Scripture (bi-covenantal) or is there only one (mono-covenantal)? How should the Mosaic Covenant be understood? Is it part of the Covenant of Grace? Is it a republication of the Covenant of Works? How does the principle of works operate in the Mosaic Covenant (Lev. 18:5)? Major players in covenant theology have not always agreed on these questions. Various emphases within covenant theology have developed associated with certain individuals – it is not unusual to find those who follow John Murray or Meredith Kline.

The work of such men is greatly appreciated, but there is a need for a book that explains covenant theology according to the Westminster

Confession of Faith (WCF). This confession is the standard for several denominations and so it makes sense to begin with what the WCF has to say about covenant theology. The goal of this book is to explain covenant theology as it is presented in the WCF. This approach will not solve all the questions related to covenant theology, but it hopes to give clarity to some contested issues. Covenant theology, as presented in the Westminster Standards, is the starting point for understanding reformed covenant theology. This confession is the culmination of reformed thinking going back to the Reformation. The doctrine of the covenant is one of the distinctive features of the Westminster Standards because it is not merely a peripheral issue but is central to the system of doctrine taught in the confession.¹ In fact, it was the first confessional standard to use the terms Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace.² In addition, this confessional standard is the creed used by conservative Presbyterian denominations all over the world.³ Many who read this book will have taken vows to uphold the Westminster Standards. Thus, one of the purposes of this book is to help seminary students, elders, and lay people understand covenant theology and to navigate the various approaches to it that are prominent today. Then, other approaches will be compared to the viewpoint of the Westminster Standards.

1. Geerhardus Vos, 'The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,' in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 239. He comments, 'The Westminster Confession is the first Reformed confession in which the doctrine of the covenant is not merely brought in from the side, but it is placed in the foreground and has been able to permeate at almost every point.'

2. Morton H. Smith, 'Federal Theology and the Westminster Standards,' in *The Covenant*, eds. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and C. N. Willborn (Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press, 2005), p. 18. Cornelius P. Venema argues that there is no substantive difference between the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity on the doctrine of Christ and the covenants (*Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* [Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017], p. 16, n. 21).

3. Besides the ARP, PCA, and OPC in the U.S.A., the Free Church of Scotland, the International Presbyterian Church (a family of churches spread across Great Britain, Europe and Korea since 1954 that affirm belief in either the WCF or the Three Forms of Unity), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, The Presbyterian Church of Brazil, and the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico, among others.

The Importance of Covenant Theology

John Stek has questioned whether the concept of ‘covenant’ has been too heavily overloaded with an enormous weight of theological importance. Covenant is used so much that it comes to have a life of its own outside the Scriptural data.⁴ There may be some truth to this in circles where the word ‘covenant’ becomes an adjective appended to almost anything. Yet one cannot read Scripture for very long before it becomes obvious that covenant is a key concept in the Bible.⁵ The central place of covenant theology in the Bible is expressed well by Packer when he calls covenant theology a hermeneutic, ‘a way of reading the whole Bible that is itself part of the overall interpretation of the Bible that it undergirds.’⁶ Horton calls covenant the architectural structure of the Bible that holds together biblical faith and practice. Like the architecture of a building, the covenant is largely hidden from view.⁷ Thus the covenant structure is always there even if it is not recognized or noticed.

Packer shows how covenant theology undergirds the structure of Scripture by the story it tells, by the place it gives to Jesus Christ, by the specific parallel between Christ and Adam, and by explicitly declaring the Covenant of Redemption in John’s Gospel (He has come to do the Father’s will and is given a particular people to save).⁸ There are many concepts in Scripture that cannot be understood properly without understanding the covenant. Jesus used covenant terminology

4. John H. Stek, ‘Covenant Overload in Reformed Theology,’ *CTJ* 29 (1994): pp. 12-41. For other objections to covenant theology, see Ligon Duncan, ‘Recent Objections to Covenant Theology: A Description, Evaluation and Response,’ in *The Westminster Confession of Faith into the 21st Century, Volume Three*, ed. Ligon Duncan (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2009).

5. Craig G. Bartholomew, ‘Covenant and Creation: Covenant Overload or Covenantal Deconstruction?’ *CTJ* 30 (1995): pp. 11-33. He seeks to answer the arguments of Stek. See also John Bolt, ‘Why the Covenant of Works is a Necessary Doctrine,’ in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, eds. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), pp. 171-90. He interacts with both John Stek and Anthony Hoekema.

6. J. I. Packer, ‘Introduction: On Covenant Theology,’ in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* (2 vols., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1990), n.p.

7. Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), pp. 13-14.

8. Packer, ‘Introduction,’ n.p.

at a Passover to explain the significance of His death (Luke 22:20). Paul uses the language of covenant curse in explaining the importance of participating in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner (1 Cor. 11:25, 29). The book of Hebrews speaks of a covenant mediator in reference to the high priestly work of Christ (Heb. 8:6). Covenant is so central to the outworking of God's plan of salvation that the gospel needs the framework of covenant theology.⁹ Covenant explains the work of Christ on the cross, the administration of salvation in the Old Testament, the administration of salvation in the New Testament in the covenant signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the relationship established between God and His people. Covenants give assurance to God's people that a relationship with God is secure through covenant promises (see God's response to Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17).¹⁰

The Definition of Covenant

The word 'covenant' (*bēr'it*) refers to a legal agreement between two parties that is ratified by certain rituals that emphasize the binding nature of the agreement. The phrase in the Old Testament that is used to establish a covenant is 'to cut a covenant'. This phrase highlights the rituals of sacrifices and oaths that are at the heart of establishing a covenant (Gen. 15:7-18).¹¹ Covenants are made in a variety of situations. There are covenants between human parties who are equal (Gen. 21:27, 26:26-31, 31:44-50; 1 Sam. 18:3), between human parties who are not equal (Josh. 9:3-21; 1 Sam. 11:1; 1 Kings 20:34), and between God and humans (Gen. 6:18; 15:18; 17:2; Exod. 19:5; 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89:3).¹²

Common elements in covenants include promises made and oaths taken to ensure the promises will be carried out. They include stipulations or laws that must be kept. There are blessings for keeping the covenant, and curses for breaking the covenant. Covenants also include descendants. Covenants are ratified by blood. Not every mention of a covenant includes the rituals that establish the covenant, but the importance of sacrifices

9. Packer, 'Introduction,' n.p.

10. Duncan, 'Recent Objections to Covenant Theology,' pp. 498-500.

11. Elmer B. Smick, בְּרִית, [בְּרִית], *TWOT*, p. 1:128.

12. Gordon J. McConville, בְּרִית, *NIDOTTE*, p. 1:748.