“A wonderful, thoughtful, and important set of essays on the relation of the covenant at Sinai to the gospel, a topic that has been at the center of controversy in the guild and in the pews. Estelle, Fesko, and VanDrunen have laid out a coherent argument in this collection that the original covenant with Adam in the garden has been ‘republished’ in the covenant with Moses at Sinai. Future discussions of ‘faith and obedience’ controversies will be indebted to the argument here laid out. This is a highly competent and pastorally rich collection by some of the finest minds in the Reformed community today.”

—Richard Lints, Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Theology, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“The Law Is Not of Faith is not an easy book to read for the busy pastor. Every page evidences careful, methodical exploration into one of the thorniest brambles of biblical-theological discussion—the relationship between the old and new covenants. Yet, like a great detective story, the authors of these essays, through diligent spadework—biblical, theological, and historical—uncover and expose to the light of day a great lost truth of the Reformed faith: the doctrine of the republication of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant. The effort expended will yield rich reward in the end. You will learn not only how to preach Christ from Scripture, but to preach Christ better.”

—Alfred Poirier, Pastor, Rocky Mountain Community Church (PCA), Billings, Montana

“This anthology argues that the Mosaic covenant in some sense replicates the original covenant with Adam in the garden, and that this notion is neither novel to nor optional for Reformed theology. The authors locate it within the fabric of federal theology in its Reformation and post-Reformation development, and more importantly, they demonstrate how it is firmly embedded in the flow of redemptive history. Finally, they explain why a thin and merely soteric Calvinism, without the support of federal theology, cannot withstand the challenges to Reformed orthodoxy today. While varying among themselves in their expression of this ‘republication thesis,’ these authors together make a compelling and coherent argument with rich historical, exegetical, and theological insights.”

—John Muether, Library Director and Associate Professor of Theological Bibliography and Research, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“I am delighted with this book. I plan to require it in my hermeneutics class.”

—Robert J. Cara, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte
THE LAW
IS NOT OF
FAITH

Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant

EDITED BY

Bryan D. Estelle,
J. V. Fesko,
and David VanDrunen

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Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

(Gal. 3:11–12)
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On a sultry September afternoon, the Presbytery of Springfield reconvened after a short break over donuts and overripe bananas. As the presbyters shuffled back to their seats, a candidate for the gospel ministry came forward to be examined for ordination. The candidate, wearing a slightly ill-fitted suit, took his place behind a microphone and wiped his sweaty hands down the front of his pants. The examination began.

For nearly an hour the examiner asked the usual range of questions, which the candidate answered with methodical orthodoxy while the occasional presbyter’s head nodded under the temptation of daytime sleep. After asking a couple of questions about eschatology and receiving assurance that the thousand years of Revelation 20 are by no means literal, the examiner relinquished the floor to the moderator in order to solicit questions from the body. A few brief questions probed the candidate’s commitment to presuppositional apologetics and his attitude toward remarriage after divorce, and then a minister rose from the back and asked: “Could you tell us more about your views on the Mosaic covenant?”

The candidate’s brows furrowed for a moment, and then he began: “Well . . . that’s a big question, but I’ll do my best. It was a covenant that God made with Moses—with all of Israel—after he brought them out of Egypt, on Mount Sinai. It had lots of stipulations, and rewards and curses depending upon the people’s obedience. So the works principle was operative in it—a republication of the covenant of works. It was filled with typology. The land, the priests, the sacrifices, the temple—lots of things—pointed ahead to
the coming of Christ and redemption and attaining the heavenly kingdom. All of this was to lead them to Christ. The people were usually disobedient and were often punished by God because of this, but God kept his promises and sent Christ. Now that Christ has come and fulfilled all of the types and shadows, the church is no longer under the Mosaic covenant.”

The candidate paused, uncertain whether this general question required a longer response, and immediately the minister stood again and asked to follow up. “A republication of the covenant of works, did you say? Claiming that Israel had to be right with God by their works sounds like dispensationalism to me. How could there be any way of salvation for sinners except through Christ? But maybe I missed something.”

“No, sir, I did say ‘republication of the covenant of works,’” the candidate answered, “but I definitely didn’t mean to say anything supporting dispensationalism. I’m very sorry if I gave that impression. I think a minute ago I was just trying to elaborate on what I said earlier in my exam. The Old Testament saints were clearly saved only by faith and by looking to the Messiah who was to come. I believe I mentioned earlier that Paul pointed to David and Abraham in Romans and Galatians as models of faith in Christ. And of course Hebrews 11. There was never any other way of salvation. When I said something about a republication of the covenant of works, I wasn’t suggesting a different way of getting to heaven, just the historic Reformed view that the Mosaic law had this typological function. It demanded strict obedience, and God said that he would give them blessings or curses in the land depending on whether they obeyed. So their receiving blessings and curses on the basis of their own obedience—or usually disobedience, actually—was not about gaining salvation or heaven, but was typological. You know, it reminded them of God’s demand for perfect obedience and of Adam’s disobedience to the original covenant of works . . . and it showed them the impossibility of keeping the law perfectly. And so it pointed them to Christ. Galatians 3 speaks about the law being a pedagogue unto Christ. And Galatians 4 speaks of Christ being born ‘under the law.’ So Christ came under the Mosaic law and fulfilled its demands perfectly for our salvation. That’s all I was getting at.”

Immediately another minister down the aisle jumped to his feet and demanded the moderator’s attention. “Mr. Moderator, I’d like to pursue this last issue a little more.” He turned to the candidate. “You’ve told us that you’re not a dispensationalist. I’m sure you meant that sincerely. But I want to make this more concrete. I heard you refer to historic Reformed views, but our confessional standards speak in a very different way from the way in which you’re speaking. You talk of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of
works, yet the Westminster Confession of Faith calls it an administration of the covenant of grace. But I didn’t hear you take an exception to the Confession at this point. Do you wish to state one now?”

The candidate adjusted his glasses, wiped his forehead with his palms, and cleared his throat. “No, I don’t wish to take an exception, not at all. I’m happy with what the Confession says about the Mosaic covenant. It’s Chapter 7, I believe, that says that there are not two covenants of grace, but one—they are the same in substance. But Chapter 7 also speaks about this covenant being administered differently under the law and under the gospel. The things that seem to make the Mosaic era distinct is that it was administered through promises and types and ordinances that signified the Christ who was to come. So that’s exactly what I was trying to express before. The works principle under Moses—the connection of their obedience and disobedience with blessing and curse in the land—was typological, showing the people their sinfulness while pointing them to Christ who would fulfil the law. I hope that you didn’t understand me to say that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works; I believe that it is an administration of the covenant of grace, but that there is this principle of works operative at a typological level as part of this administration. I believe that even the republication of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant is meant ultimately to lead to Christ.”

The candidate cleared his throat again and reached for the Styrofoam cup of water that had been sitting untouched on the communion table next to him. The same minister’s hand and body shot up again as he sought the floor a second time. “Mr. Moderator, I’d like to follow up. This strikes me as a very novel interpretation of the Confession. Perhaps the candidate could enlighten us as to why he thinks this body should take this new view of our confessional standards.”

The candidate looked over to the moderator, who prompted him to answer. He said: “Well, I didn’t think—with all due respect, sir—I didn’t think that I was saying anything novel. And I wasn’t implying that everyone here has to agree with my particular view. I admit, I’m certainly not an expert on the historical interpretation of the Confession on this issue, but as far as I can tell there have been some differences among Reformed people on this point and no single view was required of everyone. But I think my view was pretty common historically. I know that Charles Hodge, for example, held a position basically like mine, so it’s been an accepted reading of the Confession in American Presbyterianism. I’ve also noticed some of the proof-texts that Presbyterian churches have commonly used to support the Confession’s statements about the covenant of works at creation. Romans 10:5 and
Galatians 3:12 are cited—more than once, I think. Both of these verses cite Leviticus 18:5: the one who does these things will live by them. If the church has thought that Leviticus 18:5 teaches the covenant of works, then it must be reading the Old Testament law in a way similar to my understanding. So those are some reasons why I feel very comfortable about affirming what the Confession says about the covenant theology.”

“Just one more question, Mr. Moderator,” said the minister. “You mention Romans 10 and Galatians 3. Isn’t Paul addressing a Jewish misunderstanding of the law? The Judaizer problem? Do you agree with the Judaizer view of the law—and are you saying that the Confession and the church support this view?”

The candidate shifted his feet and folded his hands in front of his chest while he paused for a moment’s thought. “I’m sorry that I’m taking a moment here. Of course I don’t agree with the Judaizers; I’m just thinking about how to answer this as best I can. I understand the Judaizer problem to be teaching that obedience to the law contributes in some way to our justification, failing to see that the law was never designed to overturn the promise to Abraham and failing to see that the law was meant to point to Christ. I don’t have a Bible open in front of me, but isn’t it in Romans 10:5 that Paul makes a point of saying that Moses describes the righteousness of the law in this way—and then quotes Leviticus 18:5? And then in Galatians 3 doesn’t he say that the law is not of faith, and then quotes Leviticus 18:5 to prove it? So Paul seems to make a special point of saying that the law, that Moses himself, taught a works principle—the one who does these things shall live—that in and of itself is very different from the principle of faith—the righteous will live by faith. So I think the issue for Paul was not whether the law teaches that blessing and curse are tied to obedience and disobedience—he clearly seems to affirm this—but whether the Mosaic law’s ultimate purpose was to lead people to trust in Christ rather than in their own works. And I guess I don’t see how the church could cite these verses as proof-texts for the covenant of works if it didn’t see a strong works principle taught here. But clearly our churches haven’t held Judaizing views. In fact, it’s interesting how Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 in discussions of justification. It seems from Paul that understanding the works principle in the Mosaic law enables one to understand the doctrine of justification better. The law requires perfect obedience; no one can meet that requirement. But Christ has met this requirement for us, and by faith in him his obedience to the law is imputed to his people. So seeing a works principle in the Mosaic law, which Christ took upon himself and perfectly fulfilled, helps us to have a strong view of Christ’s active obedience.”
A momentary lull settled upon the presbytery. The moderator opened his mouth, about to ask if there were any more questions, when an aged presbyter, an elder in one of the local congregations for many years, slowly rose to his feet and motioned for the floor. The moderator called his name.

“Young man,” the elder began, “I’m not a trained theologian, and I’m not sure that I follow all of these theological debates. But that’s my problem with what you’re saying. It’s so complicated. The ordinary people in the pews, like me, can’t understand this sort of thing. What’s important to me is whether you can preach what you believe. Do you really think that you can preach this? Will the children in your congregation be able to understand this? I have serious doubts, but perhaps you’d care to comment on that.”

The candidate responded: “I’m glad that you ask me that; that’s very important. I haven’t meant to get into a technical theological debate. And I agree, these debates aren’t to take place from the pulpit. But I’m convinced that it is possible to preach this view of the Mosaic covenant, and that it’s actually very helpful for explaining many parts of Scripture—and I think that it can be presented in simple ways for all people in the church to understand, though I probably have a lot to learn about how to do this effectively.

“Just take the passages in Galatians and Romans that we were discussing earlier. Every Reformed minister loves preaching from Romans and Galatians. Presenting the Mosaic law as teaching a works principle really helps in explaining Paul’s doctrine of justification: what sin is all about, why people can’t rely on their own law-keeping, how faith is radically different from works, how Christ fulfilled the terms of the law so that we may be justified. That’s just the gospel as I see it, but you can’t explain the gospel without understanding the law. Or take all of those Old Testament passages that call for Israel’s obedience and promise blessing and threaten curse in the land depending on their response. For example, the beginning of Deuteronomy 4, which tells Israel to follow the law so that they may live and take possession of the land. Or Deuteronomy 28, which recounts all sorts of earthly blessings in the land if the Israelites are careful to obey and all sorts of earthly curses if they aren’t. I don’t want a congregation to think that God was holding out a works-based way of salvation here, and I also can’t tell the congregation that this is the same way that God deals with the New Testament church when he calls her to obedience, for there’s nothing equivalent in the New Testament, no promise of earthly blessing for the church today if we meet a standard of obedience. Saying either of those things might be simple, but of course they’d be misleading, and damaging for the church to hear.

“So how do we preach these kinds of texts? We can begin by showing how Israel illustrates the basic problem of the whole human race: obligated
to obey God’s law yet unable to do so. If we then explain how Israel’s dis-
obedience brought curse, we can show humanity’s sinful condition. If we 
explain that obedience really does bring blessing from a just God, then we 
can show them their need for a Savior and proclaim how Christ has provided 
this obedience. If we explain how the Promised Land of the Old Testament 
was a type of the heavenly kingdom, as the New Testament teaches, then we 
can teach them to see how the earthly blessings given to Israel are a shadow 
of the much greater things that we will experience on the last day. This is 
not simplistic, but I think it’s actually fairly simple. At least as simple as the 
gospel message itself. We have to teach our children the Old Testament one 
way or another, and I believe that this is a theologically accurate way to do 
so, and one that shows them the gospel even from parts of Scripture that 
may not seem very much related to it.”

The candidate again reached for his water, took a sip, and took a step back 
from the microphone. After a few moments of silence, a presbyter moved that 
the exam be arrested. The motion passed. Then the presbyter moved that the 
exam be sustained and so the moderator opened the floor for debate.

What Is the Doctrine of Republication?

The preceding fictional narrative introduces the real issue with which this 
book deals, namely, the doctrine of republication, which holds that the 
covenant of works is in some sense republished in the Mosaic covenant at 
Sinai. When people first hear of the doctrine of republication, one reaction 
is that it is a theological novelty, yet it might surprise some to discover that 
far from a novelty, it is part of the warp and woof of Scripture and sound 
document. We can briefly survey Scripture from the biblical-theological and 
 systematic-theological perspectives to substantiate this claim. It will also 
prove helpful to note a few historical expressions of the doctrine and to 
dismiss common misconceptions of it.

In Biblical Theology

Adam’s Probation in the Garden-Temple

There are many narrative threads that begin in the Old Testament and run 
throughout the whole of the Scriptures, such as redemption as new creation, 
exodus/second exodus, and the flood judgment.1 Another prominent theme

spect & Prospect, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 159–73; Rikki E. 
Watts, Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Meredith G. Kline, Kingdom
Introduction

is that of the probation of God’s sons. Genesis 1 begins with the creation of the heavens and earth and culminates with the creation of man (Gen. 1:28). The Genesis account tells us that man was created in the image and likeness of God. Shortly thereafter, we see hints that image- and likeness-bearing are bound together with the idea of sonship when we read that Adam had a son who bore his image and likeness (Gen. 5:3). Because of what is said of Adam and his image-bearer Seth, we can in some sense say that Adam was God’s son, as he bore God’s image. This is the import of Luke’s statement in his Gospel that Adam was God’s son (Luke 3:38). We see, then, that not only did God create his son Adam, but he placed him in a garden environment and gave him a twofold command with appended blessings and curses. Adam was told not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge upon the penalty of death. He was also told to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth with offspring who also would bear the image of God. Were Adam to be obedient to these commands, he would secure his place eternally and indefectibly in God’s presence. Adam, however, disobeyed.

Often people look at the Genesis account too literally and scratch their heads wondering why Adam did not immediately die, when God explicitly told him that in the day that he ate from the tree he would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The Genesis narrative clearly tells us that Adam lived for another 930 years (Gen. 5:5). Theologians at times have explained this by saying that while Adam could have legitimately been immediately stricken dead, God relented and gave him a stay of execution of sorts. Yet what many often miss is the significance of being cast out of the garden-temple of Eden. To be exiled from the presence of God was akin to death itself. In this sense, Adam surely did die on the day that he was exiled from the benevolent presence of the Lord. This story of the probation and exile of God’s son is one that is repeated beyond the pages of the Genesis narrative. It is repeated in the rest of the Old Testament, especially in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, and in the prophets, especially Ezekiel.

3. E.g., Gleason L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 72.
Israel’s Probation in the Garden-like Land

When we look at later portions of the Pentateuch, we find that the story of the probation and exile of God’s son resurfaces once again. We see hints of this in the opening chapters of Exodus when God tells Moses to inform Pharaoh to release Israel, his firstborn son (Ex. 4:22). We see further clues on a grand scale that just as Adam bore the image and likeness of his heavenly Father, so too Israel was supposed to bear the characteristics of his Father. Israel was to be holy as God was holy (Lev. 19:2). God’s son was redeemed from Egypt so that he could dwell in the presence of his heavenly Father (cf. Hos. 11:1). Yet there was still the matter of the probation of God’s son.

On the eve of entering the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a description evocative of the garden-temple of Eden (Gen. 13:10; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35; 47:12; Joel 2:3), Moses told God’s firstborn son that he was to receive the land as his inheritance, but that his ability to dwell in the land and before the presence of God was conditioned upon his obedience: “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth” (Deut. 28:1; cf. Lev. 26:3–6). If Israel was obedient to the stipulations of the covenant, then God’s son would receive blessings, the land would yield its fruit, Israel would multiply, and he would live long in the land (Deut. 7:12–13). If Israel was disobedient, on the other hand, he would be, like his predecessor Adam, exiled from the presence of God (Deut. 8:19). Israel the disobedient son would be taken outside the camp, outside the dwelling place of the Lord, and put to death—Israel would suffer exile-death (Deut. 21:18–21; cf. Jer. 5:23; Isa. 1:2–4). While Israel’s probation ended in exile, Ezekiel prophesied of a time when God would resurrect his son from the exilic graveyard in which he was buried and return him to dwell once again in his presence (Ezek. 37:1–14). At this point, neither Adam nor the people of Israel as God’s sons were able successfully to pass their probation and offer unto their heavenly Father the obedience he required. This did not mean, however, that no one would ever pass the test.

The Successful Probation of God’s Only Son

When we come to the pages of the New Testament, Jesus does not emerge on stage divorced from antecedent redemptive history. In fact, it is against

7. Dempster, Dominion, 126, 172–73.
the backdrop of the theme of the probation and exile of God’s son that so many of the seemingly disparate statements about Jesus cohere and make sense. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry at his baptism, in actions evocative of the creation, flood, and Red Sea crossing, God’s only begotten Son emerged from the waters of baptism as the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove and God the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Then, Jesus, like God’s son of old, Israel, was led into the wilderness for forty days, echoing Israel’s wilderness wanderings for forty years.

Unlike God’s disobedient son, Jesus was perfectly obedient to the will of his Father. In fact, one of the exegetical flags that alerts the reader that Jesus is retracing Israel’s steps, especially as it relates to the Mosaic covenant, is that, in his temptation, Jesus responds with three quotations from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3). Jesus’ obedience, however, was not merely in his wilderness temptation, but was throughout his life and culminated in his crucifixion. It was because of this obedience unto death that Jesus’ heavenly Father gave him the name that is above every name (Phil. 2:5–11). In terms of the antecedent preredemptive and redemptive history, or Adam’s and Israel’s failure, Jesus the faithful Son successfully passed the probation, yet though he was faithful and obedient, he nevertheless suffered exile on behalf of his bride, the covenant people of God (Heb. 13:11–12).

From the biblical-theological perspective, we can see that the doctrine of republication is not in any way imposed upon the Scriptures but rather grows organically from it. Recognizing that Adam’s probation in and exile from the garden-temple was repeated on the grand scale in terms of Israel’s probation in and exile from God’s presence in the land in no way undermines the grand narrative of redemptive history. Instead, both Adam and Israel point forward to the person and work of Christ. Paul makes this very point in the fifth chapter of Romans. Paul explains that death entered the world through one man, Adam (Rom. 5:12). We should not miss the implied comparison between Adam and Israel, in that both transgressed expressly revealed commands, whether Adam’s transgression of the prohibition to eat from the tree of knowledge or Israel’s transgression of the Torah, the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. Succinctly stated, both of God’s sons, Adam and Israel, lived under nomos-governed circumstances. Adam’s circumstances in the

garden-temple were repeated in Israel’s circumstances in the land of promise, though we should note that Israel was not a federal head as Adam was and as Jesus would be. And Jesus also lived under nomos-governed circumstances, as he was born under the law, yet he completely fulfilled its requirements unlike Adam and Israel (Gal. 4:4; Matt. 5:17).

In Systematic Theology

When we turn to the discipline of systematic theology, we can see that these biblical-theological patterns have been recognized under the theological rubrics of the covenants of works and grace, which cover the works of the first and last Adams respectively (Westminster Confession of Faith 7.2–3). Though fallen man is unable to fulfil the broken covenant of works, nevertheless God sends Jesus to take up and complete that broken covenant. Since the fall, then, man has been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone—this is how God’s people become partakers of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace began immediately upon the heels of the fall. However, this does not mean that the covenant of grace has always been administered in the same manner. The Westminster divines explain that the covenant of grace “was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, and paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foresignifying Christ to come” (7.5). Because the covenant of grace was administered in terms of “sacrifices . . . and ordinances delivered” to Israel, which were given through the Mosaic covenant, we can see that the Mosaic covenant looked forward to the work of Christ.

The Westminster divines also believed that the Mosaic covenant looked back to Adam’s state in the garden. The divines explain, “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience” (19.1). They go on to say in the next paragraph, “This law,” referring to the law given to Adam, “after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and writ-

ten in two tables” (19.2). In this regard, the divines saw that the law given to Adam was of a piece with that given to Israel at Sinai. In other words, in some sense, the covenant of works was republished at Sinai. It was not republished, however, as the covenant of works per se, but as part of the covenant of grace, which pointed to the person and work of Christ. In terms of the classic threefold distinction on the uses of the law, the republication of the covenant of works falls under the pedagogical use of the law, that which drives the sinner to Christ by bringing the requirement for perfect obedience before the fallen creature, forcing him to turn to the only one who has been obedient. These biblical-theological and systematic-theological observations have long been part and parcel of Reformed theology.

Various Expressions of the Doctrine of Republication

Historic Reformed theology has acknowledged the doctrine of republication, but this is not to say that it has always been expressed in the same way. As chapter 3 in this present volume shows, there are a number of different formulations, some unorthodox, that have been offered over the years. In the period of early orthodoxy (1565–1630), Amandus Polanus (1561–1610), professor of Old Testament at the University of Basel in 1596 and dean of the theological faculty from 1598 to 1609, expresses the doctrine of republication by writing: “The repetition of the covenant of works is made by God” (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 5:2; 1 Kings 8:21; Heb. 8:9). He then cites four reasons for this repetition of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant:

1. That God by all means might stir up men to perform obedience.
2. That every mouth might be stopped, and all the world might be made subject to the condemnation of God for not performing perfect obedience (Rom. 3:19).
3. That he might manifest man’s sin, and naughtiness (Rom. 3:19–20; 7:7–11).
4. That he might thrust us forward to seek to be restored in the covenant of grace (Gal. 3:22; 5:23).

Another Reformed continental theologian, Francis Turretin (1623–87), John Calvin’s (1509–64) successor at the Academy of Geneva after the tenure of Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and his father Benedict Turretin (1588–1631), expressed his understanding of republication in a slightly different manner. Turretin writes, “It pleased God to administer the covenant of grace in this period under a rigid legal economy.” He goes on to state that the covenant of grace had a twofold relation (duplex, σχέσις), one legal and the other evangelical. Under the legal aspect, he argues that the Mosaic covenant was “a new promulgation of the law and of the covenant of works” (nova legis et foederis operum promulgatione). The evangelical aspect of the Mosaic economy was that the law was a schoolmaster unto Christ and contained a shadow of things to come (Gal. 3:24; Heb. 10:1). While Turretin does not explicitly state it in these terms, when he discusses the “external economy” (externam oeconomiam) of the Mosaic covenant being legal in nature, he relies upon an old medieval distinction between substance and accidents, or substance and form. Succinctly stated, the form of the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of works, but its substance was the covenant of grace.

One can find other variations of the doctrine of republication in the theology of Charles Hodge (1797–1878). In Hodge’s commentary on 1–2 Corinthians the Princetonian theologian explains: “Every reader of the New Testament must be struck with the fact that the apostle often speaks of the Mosaic law as he does of the moral law considered as a covenant of works; that is, presenting the promise of life on the condition of perfect obedience.” He goes on to write that this apparently contradicts the gospel, in that men are saved by faith in Christ, not their works. He explains, however, that Paul’s characterization of the moral law as the covenant of works does not contradict the gospel. Hodge writes:

1. The law of Moses was, in the first place, a re-enactment of the covenant of works. A covenant is simply a promise suspended upon a condition. The covenant of works, therefore, is nothing more than the promise of life suspended on the condition of perfect obedience.


2. The Mosaic economy was also a national covenant; that is, it presented national promises on the condition of national obedience. Under this aspect also it was purely legal.

3. As the gospel contains a renewed revelation of the law, so the law of Moses contained a revelation of the gospel. It presented in its priesthood and sacrifices, as types of the office and work of Christ, the gratuitous method of salvation through a Redeemer. This necessarily supposes that faith and not works was the condition of salvation.16

In distinction to Turretin, Hodge raises the idea of a national covenant of works, which substantively raises the issue of the grand narrative of redemptive history, namely, the idea of Israel as God’s son who prefigures God’s only begotten Son. Moreover, Hodge’s view is somewhat different from Polanus’s expression, as Polanus seems to be interested in exploring the doctrine of republication only vis-à-vis the *ordo salutis*.

In these three examples, we can easily see that the doctrine of republication was not a novelty but was a regular staple in Reformed dogmatics. In this regard, though disagreeing with the doctrine of republication, Professor John Murray (1898–1975) recognized the commonplace nature of the doctrine when he once wrote: “The view that in the Mosaic covenant there was a repetition of the so-called covenant of works, current among covenant theologians, is a grave misconception.”17 Murray also admitted that the doctrine of republication “has exercised a profound influence upon the history of interpretation and it has cast its shadow over the exegesis of particular passages.”18 Murray certainly did not agree with the doctrine, but the point still stands that he recognized that the doctrine was common and widespread in Reformed theology. We will explore more on Murray’s views vis-à-vis the Mosaic covenant below. In classic historic Reformed theology, despite the variegated expression, the same thread runs throughout, namely, the idea that in some sense the covenant of works was repeated or republished in the Mosaic covenant.

**Common Misconceptions**

Several things should be clear for a proper comprehension of the doctrine of republication, since the contemporary reception of the doctrine is often

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met with criticism rather than careful attention to both Scripture and historic Reformed theology. First, to affirm that in some sense the covenant of works is republished at Sinai is not to say that there is a different way of salvation in the Old Testament from the New. The doctrine of republication is not in any way dispensationalism. Advocates of republication universally affirm that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and that the gospel was in operation from the instant of man’s fall.

Second, to affirm the doctrine of republication does not entail the view that the Mosaic covenant is not part of the covenant of grace. While there are perhaps those in the past who separated the Mosaic covenant and argued that there are two separate covenants of grace, the vast majority of those who hold to the doctrine of republication affirm that the Mosaic covenant is a part of or connected to the covenant of grace (Westminster Confession of Faith 7.6).

Third, and finally, to affirm the doctrine of republication is in no way to deny the third use of the law; it is not antinomianism. To hold that the Mosaic covenant republishes the covenant of works does not therefore mean that because Christ fulfilled the obligations of the moral law the believer therefore has no use for the law post-conversion. Rather, in concert with historic Reformed theology, the doctrine of republication merely points the redeemed sinner to Christ as the one who has fulfilled the broken covenant of works and has redeemed him from the curse of the law. Moreover, because the believer is no longer under the curse of the law, and because Christ has written the law of God upon his heart, the believer is thereby enabled to walk in the statutes of the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit (Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1–2, 5–7). So, then, while these criticisms are perhaps common objections, one should note that they are unfounded when one carefully examines the Scriptures and historic Reformed theology.

What Happened to the Doctrine of Republication?

During the early years of the development of Reformed orthodoxy there was significant discussion about the nature of the Mosaic covenant and its


20. See chapter 2 in this present volume. Also, for information surrounding the views extant during the Westminster Assembly see Samuel Bolton, The True Bounds of Christian Freedom (1645; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 99; Anthony Burgess, Vindiciae Legis (London, 1647), 229.
relationship to the covenant of works in Eden, or as it is sometimes called, the covenant of creation. With the dawn of clarity on the doctrine of justification that the Protestant Reformation brought, there also seems to have been some weighty deliberations within the church regarding the principle of continuity and discontinuity of the Sinaitic covenant and its teaching on the law and freedom from the curse of that law in the new covenant.

As previously mentioned, chapter 3, concerned with historical description, takes pains to develop a taxonomy of various views held on these subjects by Reformed ministers and theologians after the Reformation. After reading that chapter, one has to ask some of the following questions. What happened? How is it that such a dominant concern with so many Reformed luminaries in the past slipped off the table of discussion and was no longer, generally speaking, a matter that exercised the best minds among theologians, ministers, ruling elders, and educated laypersons? Extended questions immediately arise as well. What were the consequences following on the heels of this silence? Moreover, were they negative or positive in nature? In other words, did such silence issue in some kind of injury to the theological acuity of deliberations inside and outside the church, especially within church courts, and most importantly, among the understanding of all those filling the pew? Did such silence, dare we say historical ignorance, lead to a kind of unwitting torpor in the thinking of ministers, exegetes, and theologians in areas of theological inquiry such as the nature of the law, grace, typology, and merit?

There is no doubt that Professor John Murray, who held a position as instructor at Princeton Theological Seminary before following J. Gresham Machen and others to Westminster Theological Seminary, exercised a profound influence on generations of pastors and teachers through the numerous students that sat under him. One can be thankful for many areas in Professor Murray’s life and teaching that exercised a strong influence on future ministers. Nevertheless, with sadness it must be said that the extant evidence is irrefutable concerning his views of the doctrines of the covenant of works and the Mosaic covenant. Not only did he see the need for “recasting” covenant theology and especially the confessional and classical doctrine of the covenant of works, but he also eschewed the notion that the Sinaitic covenant was in some sense a “repetition of the so-called cov-

enant of works,” and he employed unfortunate diction in describing such views as a “grave misconception” involving “an erroneous construction of the Mosaic covenant, as well as fail[ure] to assess the uniqueness of the Adamic administration.”

It has been argued that Murray was not only willing to stand against many of his Reformed predecessors from a perspective beginning with the Mosaic covenant looking backward to Eden, but was also willing, from a perspective starting with Moses and looking forward to the new covenant, to break with many in the Reformed tradition in his arguments for a radical continuity between the testaments in regard to the nature of obedience. It is true that that tradition had maintained that individual election to eschatological life was only by grace through faith throughout both testaments in the postlapsarian period; however, with respect to the national election of Israel, a great many in that same Reformed tradition had taught that a principle of works did exist and was operative in the covenant of Sinai. Israel was like another Adam in some sense. Canaan was another Eden, and sincere, real obedience to the stipulations set out by God was the condition of either tenure in or extirpation from the land of promise.

Contrary to this, Murray’s view, which has been called “monocovenental,” teaches that the demand for obedience in the Sinaitic covenant was principally the same in the new covenant of the gospel age. Additionally, Murray was at least monocovenantal in the sense that he affirmed no other kind of covenant than a covenant of redemptive grace and, in doing so, he ironically blurred distinctions between the covenant of works and grace. In fairness to Murray, however, monocovenentalism is a slippery term that is used in many different ways. Nevertheless, what can be said is the following.

Murray saw continuity between the Sinaitic and new covenants with respect to the demands of each. Some of Murray’s construals may have been consistent outworkings of terminological distinctions and methodological commitments he had from the beginning. However, it has been argued, and is argued below in the following pages, that the most important impetus for “recasting” was motivated in response to the errors of classical dispensa-

22. Murray, Collected Writings, 2:50.
23. Some, for example, describe it as a view that blurs the distinctions between law and gospel because many monocovenentalists suggest that the law-gospel distinction is a Lutheran notion not shared by Calvin. Others use the label to describe those who emphasize the gracious nature of the covenants to the exclusion of any meritorious conditions placed upon human parties of the covenant and with no sensitivities to the changing nature of God’s work in each succeeding covenant context. Still others have described as monocovenantal those who reject or deemphasize classical construals of the order of salvation (ordo salutis) and emphasize union with Christ (unio cum Christo). Whether Professor Murray was a monocovenantal in some or all these respects is beyond the purview of this brief introduction.
tionalist hermeneutics of the Mosaic covenant. In the classical expression of this theology, law was identified as the means of salvation in the Mosaic covenant. Classic dispensationalism, that of C. I. Scofield (1843–1921) and J. N. Darby (1800–1882) for example, viewed the means of obtaining righteousness in the Sinaitic covenant as law and the means of obtaining righteousness in the new covenant as grace. Professor Murray thought this construal was fundamentally contrary to the teaching of the continuity of the covenant of grace: there are not “two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations” (Westminster Confession of Faith 7.6). Centuries of discussion about republication in the Mosaic covenant, even as recent as Charles Hodge (only one generation removed), could be dismissed if they were perceived to be a look-alike to the dispensational scheme.

With such rhetoric, Murray released the clutch, and those who had studied under him or were influenced by his writings without appropriate reflection and criticism in these areas set in motion a chain of events that would produce deleterious injuries for confessional Reformed theology and beyond. Norman Shepherd, professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1963 to 1982, is a case in point. In his recent book, he too showed great antipathy to any construal of republication in the Mosaic covenant and a works principle represented in such an important passage as Leviticus 18:5, for example.²⁴

Recent evidence of this agitation in the church and elsewhere can be seen in the fact that the notion that Sinai republished a works principle has received much hostility in books, peer-reviewed journals, and trials in the courts of the church. Some are even calling for formal judicial discipline of ministers who hold to any view of the Sinaitic covenant that smacks of works being in place for pedagogical and typological purposes. Therefore, the essays in this book have profound contemporary relevance for the church and her theology.

There are other reasons why this book should receive a wide reading: it is impossible to write about Paul and his theology as presented in the New Testament without commenting on the Mosaic covenant. Paul was a Yeshiva boy, raised in the womb of the Hebrews and therefore profoundly familiar with the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism. He was probably on a trajectory to become one of the leading rabbis in Jerusalem prior to his conversion. Therefore, to plumb the depths of Paul’s thought necessarily means understanding the Mosaic covenant.

Beyond Reformed confessional circles, the subject of these essays also has significant relevance. The so-called New Perspective(s) on Paul, a primarily academic movement which began with E. P. Sanders’s important writings on Second Temple Judaism and has been carried forward especially by the teachings of James D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright, shows great interest in Israel and her covenants. Likewise, the so-called Federal Vision movement, which has been associated with the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Louisiana, and Steve Schlissel, Douglas Wilson, James Jordan, and some ministers of the Presbyterian Church of America (e.g., Peter Leithart, Steve Wilkins, Joel Garver), has demonstrated significant interest in both the theology of the covenants and sacraments, which are integrally related to the subject of republication. Beyond the provincial conservative Reformed world, the seismic influence of Karl Barth’s (1886–1968) teaching has been felt through his writing that suggests a basic unity between gospel and law.\(^{25}\) The Dutch theologian G. C. Berkouwer (1904–96), formerly professor of systematic theology at the Free University of Amsterdam, was affected by this shift. Additionally, the Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng (1928–) and others who have had a great concern for ecumenism have tried to bring together Protestant and Roman Catholic perspectives on the doctrine of justification which have consequently affected people’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant.\(^{26}\) Other examples could be mentioned as well.

Additionally, Reformed theology has taught the planned obsolescence of the Sinaitic covenant and its promised rest in the land: the old covenant was doomed to failure. Indeed, the Abrahamic covenant with its associated promises to usher in a new age with Gentiles as well as Jews entailed the eventual collapse of the Sinaitic arrangement. In the old covenant, what was passing, prototypical, symbolic, and provisional had to give way to what was perfective, permanent, and antitypical: the new covenant. Many of the essays in this book address this point.

But what does the doctrine of republication do for us today? Is this not an arcane preoccupation with precision and theological minutiae on the part of Reformed scholastics and others with too much time on their hands? Are not these finer nuances of the Mosaic covenant too, too difficult for the ordinary person in the pew, let alone his children? The answer to these questions is an unequivocal no! We offer at least two reasons why. First, if ministers let the doctrine of republication die out and do not teach it faithfully, then they


destroy a part of Old Testament typology that God gave for the edification of the church. Secondly, if there really is some principle of works operative in the Mosaic economy, and it is not just hypothetical but it is put there by God’s design, then we dare not do injury to our own selves by ignoring what God has placed in his holy Word for our instruction.

In short, the doctrine of republication is integrally connected to the doctrine of justification. The Mosaic law was necessary to make manifest a works principle that Christ the Messiah would have to fulfil. Jesus Christ stands in the stead of his people to take the curses of the law. But this is only half of the equation. There must be positive righteousness to merit the Father’s approbation and meet the just demands of the law. Christ fulfilled that as well. Since the doctrine of republication highlights the need for a true son of Israel to accomplish this righteousness, and ultimately does make manifest the obedience of Christ as the fulfilment of that demand, a misunderstanding of the Mosaic economy and silence on the works principle embedded there will only leave us necessarily impoverished in our faith. We will see in only a thin manner the work of our Savior. God desires that we have the whole richness of his Word displayed before our eyes and ears so that we might respond to his immeasurable grace with grateful hearts filled with joy.

The Plan of This Book

Before offering an overview of the chapters of this volume, we present a few considerations for readers to keep in mind. First, readers should remember that the doctrine of republication, though in basic respects simple enough for a child to understand, is in other respects a difficult and complex matter. The idea that a typological principle of works is operative in the Mosaic covenant is not obscure—many Old Testament passages, after all, clearly connect Israel’s obligation of obedience with their tenure in the land. Yet some of the most theologically rich texts in which this doctrine is at least arguably taught—such as Leviticus 18:5, Hosea 6:7, Galatians 3:10–12, and Romans 9:30–10:8—are exegetically challenging passages that have been subject to long debates. One goal of this volume is to encourage the church and academy to avoid simplistic solutions to harmonizing the array of biblical teaching on the Mosaic covenant and its significance for the church today. But this is hard work, and we ask our readers to engage with us in this hard work by reading these chapters with care.

Second, we also wish readers to recognize that this volume does not intend to thrust a single, monolithic view of the Mosaic covenant upon Reformed
churches. The Reformed tradition has always acknowledged and tolerated a variety of positions on the Mosaic covenant. This volume, therefore, does not wish to squelch debate but instead to encourage and catalyze discussion about what we believe are important issues for the doctrine and life of the church. Careful readers will even perceive subtle differences among the contributors to this book. No particular view expressed by one contributor should be automatically imputed to any other contributor. Though all of the contributors share a general sympathy with the republication idea and a general desire to recover serious theological reflection on issues related to it, not all share exactly the same sentiments on how best to express the relation of works and grace under Moses or the relation of the Mosaic covenant to the Adamic and new covenants. We hope that the various essays in this volume will serve to renew significant conversations that have not been taking place in recent years, toward the goal of seeing Reformed churches come mutually to a richer understanding of the Old Testament in God’s larger redemptive plan.

Third, we encourage readers to take up these essays in the order in which they are presented. Though there may be temptation to skip to one’s favorite author or topic, we believe that readers will profit most by studying these chapters consecutively. The historical essays in Part One lay important groundwork for the constructive essays that follow in Parts Two and Three by illuminating some of the relevant discussions that have gone on through much of the Reformed tradition. In Part Two itself, the Old Testament essays discuss important themes that are picked up in the New Testament essays. In fact, some of the New Testament essays contain discussion of Paul’s exegesis of some of the Old Testament verses which the Old Testament essays consider. Likewise, the systematic and moral themes addressed in the theological essays in Part Three will themselves be better appreciated against the exegetical foundations laid in Part Two.

Part One presents three historical studies. In chapter 1, J. V. Fesko examines two undoubtedly significant figures of the early Reformed tradition, the sixteenth-century Genevan Reformer John Calvin and the seventeenth-century writer Herman Witsius, one of the preeminent covenant theologians in the history of Reformed thought. Fesko brings to light these theologians’ nuanced and balanced understandings of the Mosaic covenant as well as some of the developments in Reformed covenant theology in its first couple of centuries. In chapter 2, D. G. Hart takes up various issues pertaining to the view of the Mosaic law among some significant theologians of old Princeton Seminary. Hart connects the Princeton appreciation for the republication idea with their engagement with the intellectual climate of their day and with
their broader Reformed convictions about sin, natural law, and the atonement. Brenton C. Ferry presents a taxonomy of Reformed views of Moses in chapter 3. This essay, which considers theologians primarily of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also several of more recent times, displays the variety of ways in which Reformed theologians have spoken about the Mosaic covenant, yet also reveals a widespread appreciation among these theologians for a distinctive works principle under Moses.

Part Two consists of six exegetical essays. The first of three Old Testament studies is Bryan D. Estelle’s examination of Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:1–14. Estelle first considers these crucial passages in their original Mosaic context and then examines the interpretation of these verses in later biblical revelation, culminating in Paul. He finds that these passages, which Paul places in antithesis, point ultimately to the fact that obedience to the law results in the right to eschatological life, an obedience that Christ alone satisfied. Richard P. Belcher’s study of the kingship and Torah Psalms in chapter 5 is the second Old Testament essay. Belcher concludes that these psalms, juxtaposed in significant ways in the Psalter, display the close relationship between the law and the Davidic king, thereby pointing to the fulfillment of the original kingly role of mankind in the garden through the active obedience of Christ. In chapter 6, Byron G. Curtis considers the republication idea in the Old Testament prophetical books through a thorough study of Hosea 6:7. Curtis presents a new interpretation of the reference to “Adam” in this verse that seeks to account for the strengths and weaknesses of past proposals, and he argues that Hosea not only makes reference to a prelapsarian covenant of works with Adam, whose violation is analogized to Israel’s violation of the Mosaic covenant, but also to the place-name, a double entendre.

Three New Testament essays follow in the remainder of Part Two. In chapter 7, Guy P. Waters considers Romans 10:5 in context and argues that Paul indeed sets two statements by Moses (from Leviticus 5 and Deuteronomy 30) in contrast to each other. Waters concludes from this passage that though the Mosaic law was promulgated within the context of a gracious covenant, the moral demands of this law set forth the standard of righteousness that the covenant of works required. T. David Gordon follows with a study of Galatians 3:6–14 in chapter 8. Though Paul did not build a comprehensive covenant theology in these verses, Gordon argues that he did make an important contribution to our overall understanding of the biblical covenants by contrasting the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants in regard to faith and works and by explaining the new covenant in terms of its similarity to the Abrahamic and dissimilarity to the Sinaitic. The final
New Testament essay is S. M. Baugh’s study of Galatians 5:1–6 in chapter 9. Baugh argues that while the Mosaic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace, these verses teach that the Mosaic law more narrowly considered embodies a works principle, namely, an obligation to personal and perfect obedience. Attaining eschatological righteousness through this works principle and attaining it through faith in Christ the covenant mediator are, he claims, mutually exclusive options in Paul’s mind.

Part Three presents two essays on theological topics. In chapter 10, David VanDrunen claims that the natural law proclaims the works principle revealed in Scripture, with both its requirements and sanctions. He argues from this idea that the revelation of the works principle in the Mosaic covenant serves to make Israel a microcosm of the whole human race, displaying in clear terms both the predicament of every human being under the curse of sin and the need for a Savior to satisfy the works principle. Finally, Michael S. Horton reflects upon the republication idea in the light of the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. Through examination of the common Old Testament declaration that God considers obedience better than sacrifice and of New Testament interpretation of this declaration, Horton sets forth Christ as the Last Adam and True Israel who fulfils God’s desire, personal as well as legal, for an image-bearer who responds to his Creator with perfect love and who establishes a people who themselves are being conformed unto true obedience.
PART ONE

HISTORICAL STUDIES
When it comes to the Mosaic covenant, an ocean of ink has been spilled by theologians in their efforts to relate it both to Israel’s immediate historical context and to the church’s existence in the wake of the advent of Christ. Anthony Burgess (d. 1664), one of the Westminster divines, writes: “I do not find in any point of divinity, learned men so confused and perplexed (being like Abraham’s ram, hung in a bush of briars and brambles by the head) as here.”¹ Among the Westminster divines there were a number of views represented in the assembly: the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works, a mixed covenant of works and grace, a subservient covenant to the covenant of grace, or simply the covenant of grace.² One can find a similar range of views represented in more recent literature in our own day.³ In the limited amount of space

here, it is not possible to set forth a complete case for the proper place of the Mosaic covenant. Nevertheless, it is certainly worthwhile to take a comparative historical-theological snapshot of two continental Reformed theologians on this challenging issue.

John Calvin (1509–64) is certainly a theologian who needs no introduction, as he is one who is familiar to most if not all serious students of the sixteenth-century Reformation. While Calvin’s views were certainly not prescriptive for the Reformed tradition in his day, they were nevertheless influential both in continental and British Reformed theology. One particular continental Reformed theologian in whom Calvin’s influence is found, especially on the nature and role of the Mosaic covenant, is Herman Witsius (1636–1708). Witsius is perhaps best known for his *Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* (1677), as well as his exposition of the Apostles’ Creed (1681), though perhaps little else is known about the man. Witsius studied at the universities of Utrecht and Groningen. He served as a pastor for nearly twenty years before he was appointed as a professor of theology at the University of Franecker. He subsequently served as a professor at the University of Utrecht before finishing out his career at the University of Leiden, being forced out of teaching because of poor health before his death in 1708.

What makes a comparison of Calvin and Witsius worthwhile is not only that the former influenced the latter on his explanation of the Mosaic covenant, but also for other factors, particularly the later developments in early (ca. 1565–1640) and late orthodoxy (ca. 1640–1700) in the Reformed tradition.

Since the decades of dominance of Barthian theology in the twentieth century not only in international systematic theology but also in historical theology, a new wave of scholarship has reversed the common portrait of the relationship between Calvin and the subsequent Reformed tradition. The typical line of argumentation was that Calvin was a biblical humanist pastor-theologian whose scriptural insights were hijacked by a horde of scholastic academics interested in Aristotle more than the Bible and in presenting the teachings of Scripture in a rationalistic and logical rather than in a biblical manner. Recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated that the historical analysis coming out of the Barthian-influenced school was more interested in vindicating their monocov-
Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant

enantal understanding of Scripture rather than doing accurate contextualized historical theology.\(^5\)

In a comparative exploration of Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic covenant, then, one will be able to see the continuity that exists between these two Reformed theologians despite coming from different periods. One will be able to see the influence Calvin yielded upon Witsius’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant. At the same time, one will be able to see some differences between the two theologians. The differences do not amount to a distortion of Calvin’s theology, never mind the fact that such a notion seems inherently fraught with unchecked assumptions. That is, at no time did any early or late orthodox Reformed theologian understand himself to be a Calvin clone restricted to reproducing Calvin’s theology in his own. Rather, the differences lay in the emphasis that Witsius places upon the use and role of typology in his explanation of the Mosaic covenant.

There is a case to be made that, due to the greater attention to biblical theology in the late orthodox period, explanations of the Mosaic covenant were expressed less in the Aristotelian heuristic use of the terms “accidents” and “substance” and more in terms of the *historia salutis*, or redemptive history.\(^6\) The bottom line, at least in terms of the previous Barthian character-

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6. First, one should note that by the use of the term “biblical theology” the specific discipline as defined by the historical-critical school is not intended (see Johann P. Gabler, “An Oration of the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Origins of Each,” in *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992], 489–502; Gerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Gerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980], 3–24, esp. 15). Rather, as Gerhardus Vos (1862–1949) has defined it, the term is here intended in its broader usage denoting the unfolding of special revelation (*Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* [1948; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996], v). The biblical-theological hermeneutic versus the distinct discipline as it was defined by Gabler has a long pedigree in the history of interpretation and is not bound to the idea of severing biblical from dogmatic, or systematic, theology, but largely to one’s commitment to understanding the Scriptures and its teachings in terms of the revelatory whole, both Old and New Testaments. Such a hermeneutic can be found in the church fathers and in the Reformers (see Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, “Story and Biblical Theology,” in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004], 153; cf. James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 351). Second, the use of the term *historia salutis* is not intended to imply that Reformed theologians of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries employed it, as it is of recent origins (see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 14; cf. Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* [1978; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987], 14). Rather, it is being used to describe the unfolding of redemptive history, something the Reformers materially acknowledge, though they formally do not use the term.
ization of the relationship between Calvin and the Calvinists, is that Witsius’s theology is “more biblical” than Calvin’s. It is preferable to say, however, that Calvin and Witsius have similar formulations but with different emphases in the ways in which they express their formulations. Therefore, one should first explore Calvin’s understanding of the nature and place of the Mosaic covenant, and then move to the views of Witsius, so that one may compare and contrast the two continental Reformed theologians’ views.

Calvin on the Mosaic Covenant

This section will survey Calvin’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant by first exploring his understanding of Old Testament (OT) soteriology and then the place and function of the Mosaic covenant.

Soteriology in the OT

In any survey of Calvin’s understanding of the law, it is important that one delineate his different uses of the term. In Calvin’s *Institutes*, the term “law” can mean the “form of religion handed down by God through Moses” (2.7.1), which means the Mosaic covenant in its entirety as one finds it in the Pentateuch. For Calvin the term “law” can also refer to the moral law, that is, the Decalogue and Christ’s summary of it (2.8). Lastly, the term can also refer to various civil, judicial, and ceremonial statutes (4.20.14–16). When one explores Calvin’s understanding of the function of the law, he must therefore carefully distinguish whether he has the moral law or the law as the Mosaic covenant in view.

Keeping these definitions in mind, then, we find that, for Calvin, salvation has always been the same in every age, by grace through faith in Christ, even for OT saints. Calvin writes, “The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation” (2.10.2). Here is a programmatic, if not formulaic, construction for Calvin’s understanding of soteriology in both the OT and New Testament (NT). Notice that the Abrahamic *foedus* is so much like ours in *substantia et re*, yet he states that the covenant differs only in the *administratio*. Elsewhere Calvin applies the term *spirituale foedus* (2.10.7) to the one single covenant that unites both OT and

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NT saints in salvation. What changes, therefore, in the transition from the OT to the NT is not the covenant, but rather the form or administration of the covenant (2.11.13). Here then is what one may describe as Aristotelian language in the use of the distinction between substance and form, which was commonplace in the theology of Calvin's day. One should ask, then, Why does Calvin employ these distinctions of form and substance, and what role do they play in his understanding of the function of the law and more specifically the function of the Mosaic covenant?

Calvin explains that the form of the spirituale foedus in the OT was necessarily wrapped in shadows and ceremonies which pointed to Christ, who is the foundation of salvation in every age, because the OT saints were the underage church requiring simple instruction (2.6.2; 2.11.4–5). Calvin states,

The same church existed among them, but as yet in its childhood. Therefore, keeping them under this tutelage, the Lord gave, not spiritual promises undressed and opened, but ones foreshadowed, in a measure, by earthly promises. When, therefore, he adopted Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants into the hope of immortality, he promised them the Land of Canaan as an inheritance. It was not to be the final goal of their hopes, but was to exercise and confirm them, as they contemplated it, in hope of their true inheritance not yet manifested to them. And that they might not be deceived, a higher promise was given, attesting that the land was not God’s supreme benefit. Thus Abraham is not allowed to sit by idly when he receives the promise of the land, but his mind is elevated to the Lord by a greater promise. (2.11.2)

The spiritual promises, or the gospel of Christ, therefore were present in substance in the initial covenant made with the patriarchs, but the mode of administration was earthly and temporal. The earthly possession, however, was a mirror in which the patriarchs were able to see the future inheritance prepared for them in heaven (2.11.1). Seeing the nature of

9. “Quod externam formam et modum mutavit.”
God’s administration of the gospel in the OT, specifically to the patriarchs, one can begin to understand how the Mosaic covenant will function in the *historia salutis*.

**The Place and Function of the Mosaic Covenant**
Given Calvin’s explanation of soteriology in the OT, one has a framework in which to understand the place and function of the Mosaic covenant in his theology. Calvin explains that with the dispensation of the Mosaic covenant there are two separate covenants, the *foedus legale* and *foedus evangelicum*, the ministries of Moses and Christ (2.11.4). There is a sense in which Calvin sees these two covenants in an antithetical relationship to one another, as the law functions within the *foedus legale* only “to enjoin what is right, to forbid what is wicked; to promise a reward to the keepers of righteousness, and threaten transgressors with punishment” (2.11.7).12 In other words, Calvin is not afraid to say that the Mosaic administration of the law sets forth a covenant governed by a works principle, namely, eternal life through obedience: “We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised” (2.7.3).13 The problem, however, with this covenant of obedience is, because of man’s sinfulness, “righteousness is taught in vain by the commandments until Christ confers it by free imputation and by the Spirit of regeneration” (2.7.2).14 Calvin, therefore, sees the Mosaic covenant characterized by the promise of eternal life which can be obtained by Israel’s obedience, yet because of her sin, Israel is unable to fulfil the requirements of the covenant—only Christ was able to do this.

In this sense, then, the *foedus legale* and *foedus evangelicum* are antithetical, in that they both extend the promise of salvation, the former through obedience and the latter through faith in Christ. This is not to say, though, that the Mosaic covenant as a *foedus legale* is totally absent of grace, mercy, or any reference to the gospel. Recall that Calvin believed that the *spirituale foedus* had a changing form or *administratio* as one crosses over from the OT to the NT. This is especially true as it pertains to the Mosaic covenant for three reasons. First, Calvin clearly states that OT Israel participated in the *spirituale foedus* (2.10.15). Second, because Israel was still the underage church, God dealt with them as children:

12. “Ut praecipiat quae recta sunt, scelera prohibeat, praemium edicat cultoribus iustitiae, poenam transgressoribus minetur.”
13. “Nec refragari licet quin iustam Legis obedientiam maneat aeternae salutis remunerat, quemadmodum a domino promissa est.”
14. “Nam priore quidem significat frustra doceri iustitiam praeceptis, donec eam Christus et gratuita imputatione et spiritu regenerationis conerat.”
[Paul] also confesses that they were sons and heirs of God, but because of their youth they had to be under the charge of a tutor. It was fitting that, before the sun of righteousness had arisen, there should be no great and shining revelation, no clear understanding. The Lord, therefore, so metered out the light of his Word to them that they still saw it afar off and darkly. Hence Paul expresses this slenderness of understanding by the word “childhood.” It was the Lord’s will that this childhood be trained in the elements of this Word and in little external observances, as rules for children’s instruction, until Christ should shine forth, through whom the knowledge of believers was to mature. (2.11.5)

Third, given Israel’s underage status and the need to deal with them in simple terms, the ceremonies of the law were “accidental properties of the covenant, or additions and appendages, and in common parlance, accessories of it” (2.11.4). Once again we see Calvin explain the relationship between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants in terms of form and substance.

Calvin uses the distinction between form and substance to explain that the Mosaic covenant, as to its substance, is part of the  *spirituale foedus*, but as to its form, its  *administratio* is a  *foedus legale*. Calvin states, for example, that God “willed that, for the time during which he gave his covenant to the people of Israel in a veiled form, the grace of future and eternal happiness be signified and figured under earthly benefits, the gravity of spiritual death under physical punishment” (2.11.3). Where Calvin is quite pronounced in his usage of the form-substance distinction regarding the Mosaic covenant is in his commentary on Galatians. Calvin states concerning the nature of gospel in both testaments: “All this leads to the conclusion that the difference between us and the ancient fathers lies not in the substance but in accidents.” Calvin can speak of the OT saints partaking of the  *spirituale foedus* but also says that “their freedom was not yet revealed, but was hid-

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15. “Illos quoque filios et haeredes Dei fuisse fatetur: sed qui propter pueritiam sub paedagogi custodia habeni essent. Conveniebat enim, sole iustitiae nondum exerto, nec tantum esse revelationis fulgorem, nec tantam intelligendi perspicaciam. Sic ergo verbi sui lucem illis Dominus dispensavit, ut eam eminus adhuc et obscure cernerent. Ideo hanc intelligentiae tenuitatem pueritiae vocabulo Paulus notat, quam elementis huius mundi et externis observationibus, tanquam regulis puerilis disciplinae, voluit Dominus exerceri, donec effulgeret Christus: per quem fidelis populi cognitionem adolescere oportebat.”

16. “Hae vero tametsi foederis duntaxat accidentia erant, vel certe accessiones ac annexa, et (ut vulgus loquitur) accessoria.”

den under the coverings and the yoke of the law.” Where one finds some of Calvin’s most crystalized statements on the function and place of the Mosaic covenant is in his sermons on Galatians.

In Calvin’s sermons on Galatians one finds the same characteristics as were set forth in the Institutes and his commentary on Galatians concerning the nature and function of the Mosaic covenant. Calvin emphasizes that the OT saints were saved by grace, not by works. He also explains that what differentiates the OT from the NT saint is not the promise of the gospel, but “the diversity in the outward government,” or the outward administration of the gospel. Calvin explains, “The law reigned and had its full scope as in respect of outward order before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The outward order, of course, was marked by typology that found its telos in Christ: “It is said that the salvation is manifested unto us by the Gospel, yet was it also already before; and although there was a veil in the Temple, and other shadows, yet nevertheless the fathers had always an eye unto Jesus Christ, unto whom we be led at this day.” So, Calvin once again delineates between the substance of the OT administration, which was the gospel of Christ, and the form, which was legal in nature.

When Calvin explains to his congregants the nature of the Mosaic covenant, he does not withdraw or modify the conceptual framework that he has established in his theological writings. Calvin explains, for example, that the Mosaic covenant is characterized by a works principle, that is, redemption by obedience, but at the same time because of man’s sinfulness it only shows man’s inability to merit eternal life by his obedience and therefore drives the sinner to Christ:

“The law then is not transitory in respect of showing us what is good, for it must continue to the world’s end. But we must mark Saint Paul’s discourse: for he takes the law, as containing the promises and threatenings, and also the ceremonies. Then on the one side there is [this promise,] he that does these things shall live in them, as we have seen heretofore. And on the other side there is this threat, cursed is he that does not fulfil all that is contained

18. Calvin, Galatians, 76: “Quia scilicet libertas eorum nondum erat revelata, sed inclusa sub legis involucris et iugo” (CO 50:229).
21. Calvin, Sermons on Galatians, 448: “La response à cela est que la Loy a bien eu son regne et sa vogue devant la venue de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ quant à l’ordre extérieur” (CO 50:539).
22. Calvin, Sermons on Galatians, 516: “Mais quand il est dit que le salut qui nous est manifesté par l’Evangile estoit desia auparavant, combine qu’il y eust des ombrages, combine qu’il y eust le voile du temple: neantmoins que les Peres ont tousiours regardé à Jesus Christ, au quell nous sommes aujourd’hui conduits” (CO 50:580).
Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant

herein. Now the law (as we see) promises salvation to none but such as live purely and incorruptly: but all of us come short of that, and therefore the promise of the law is to no purpose.\(^\text{23}\)

Here Calvin emphasizes a works principle in the Mosaic covenant, but he is clear regarding the role of this principle—it drives the sinner to Christ by showing him his inability to render perfect obedience to the law.\(^\text{24}\)

**Summary**

Calvin’s understanding of the place and function of the Mosaic covenant can be summarized in the following manner: (1) salvation has always been by grace through faith in Christ; (2) all of God’s people, whether in the OT or NT, participate in the same *spirituale foedus* which was begun with the patriarchs; (3) in the OT the *spirituale foedus* had a different outward administration than in the NT, which Calvin uses the form-substance distinction to explain; (4) the outward OT administration of the *spirituale foedus* is marked by shadows and types of Christ; (5) the Mosaic administration of the law is specifically a *foedus legale* in contrast to the *foedus evangelicum*, the respective ministries of Moses and Christ; and (6) the *foedus legale* is based upon a works principle but no one is able to fulfil its obligations except Christ. One finds these characteristics in Calvin’s *Institutes* and in his commentary and sermons on Galatians. Keeping these summary points in mind, the investigation can now proceed to examine Witsius’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant and then compare and contrast the views of the two continental theologians.

**Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant**

In the theology of Witsius, there are many of the same themes and emphases that exist in Calvin’s theology. These parallels exist, of course, given that both Calvin and Witsius are continental Reformed theologians. While such a broad comparison is accurate, the more that one delves into the details, he finds nuances or emphases that exist in the formulations of Witsius but to a lesser degree in Calvin. These differences can be attributed to

\(^\text{23}\) Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*, p. 445: “La Loy donc entant qu’elle nous monstre ce qui est bon, n’a pas esté temporelle: car elle doit durer iusques à la fin du monde. Mais il nous faut noter la dispute de sainct Paul: car il prend la Loy d’autant qu’elle contient les promesses et les menaces, et puis les ceremonies. Il y a donc d’un costé, Qui fera as choses, il vivra en icelles: comme desia nous avons veu. Il y a la menace: Maudit sera celuy qui n’accomplira tout ce qui est ici contenu. Or la Loy (comme nous voyons) ne promet salut sinon à ceux qui aurons vescu purement et en toute integrité: mous defal lions tous, la promesse donc de la Loy est inutile” (*CO* 50:538).

the progression and development of Reformed theology—the move from early formulation of the Reformation (1509–65) to that of codification and defense of those formulations in the period of high orthodoxy (ca. 1640–1700). Witsius uses Calvin’s formulations in his own understanding of the Mosaic covenant, but at the same time employs developments that occurred well after Calvin’s death. The similarity that exists between the two theologians is the insistence that salvation is and always has been by grace through faith in Christ. Like Calvin, Witsius maintains that since the fall God’s redemptive intentions have always been by grace.\(^{25}\) Where the differences lie, however, are in Witsius’ employment of the theological construct of the covenant of works and the greater use of typology in explaining the nature of the Mosaic covenant.

**The Refinement of Covenant Theology**

In the days following Calvin, Reformed theologians continued to refine the categories under which they placed various scriptural data. Calvin, for example, placed God’s gracious postfall dealings with man reaching back to the garden and extending to the eschaton under the theological rubric of a *spirituale foedus*, or spiritual covenant. Yet around the same time theologians such as Zacharias Ursinus (1534–83) employed a twofold bifurcation to describe the pre- and postfall relationship between God and his people. In Ursinus’s Larger Catechism (1561–62) he writes:

> The law contains the natural covenant, established by God with humanity in creation, that is, it is known by humanity by nature, it requires our perfect obedience to God, and it promises eternal life to those who keep it and threatens eternal punishment to those who do not. The gospel, however, contains the covenant of grace, that is, although it exists, it is not known at all by nature; it shows us the fulfilment in Christ of the righteousness that the law requires and the restoration in us of that righteousness by Christ’s Spirit; and it promises eternal life freely because of Christ to those who believe him.\(^{26}\)

Here the prefall relationship between God and man is placed under the theological rubric of a *natural covenant* and the postfall under the *covenant of grace*. While the precise date and source of the term “covenant of works”


are debated, nevertheless by the late sixteenth century theologians were using the covenants of works and grace to describe the pre- and postfall relationship between God and man. It is the development of this covenantal framework, a development of nomenclature rather than theological substance, that one finds in Witsius’s explanation of the Mosaic covenant.

**Witsius on the Relationship between the Two Covenants**

Witsius’s understanding of the relationship between the covenant of works and grace is substantively similar to that of Ursinus. At the same time, however, Witsius also explains that the covenant of grace may be further subdivided into two distinct economies, which he defines as the old and new testaments. The two economies are similar in some respects, but in others they are quite different. In language quite similar to that of Calvin, Witsius explains that the substance of the covenant of grace in both the old and new economics is the same. What differs, however, is the circumstantialis of each economy:

It is a matter of the greatest moment, that we learn distinctly to consider the covenant of grace, either as it is in its substance or essence, as they call it, or as it is in divers ways proposed by God, with respect to circumstantialis, under different economies. If we view the substance of the covenant, it is but only one, nor is it possible it should be otherwise.

27. One of the earliest uses of the terms “covenants of works and grace” comes from Amandus Polanus (1561–1610): “The eternal covenant is a covenant in which God promises men eternal life. And that is two fold, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works is a bargain of God made with men concerning eternal life, to which is both a condition of perfect obedience adjoined, to be performed by man, and also a threatening of eternal death if he shall not perform perfect obedience (Gen. 2:17).” It is also of interest to note that Polanus believed that the covenant of works was repeated in the Mosaic covenant (The Substance of Christian Religion Soundly Set Forth in Two Books [London, 1595], 88). For the relevant literature regarding Ursinus and the development of the term “covenant of works” see Robert Letham, “The Foedus Operum: Some Factors Accounting for Its Development,” Sixteenth Century Journal 14 (1983): 457–67; Peter A. Lillback, “Ursinus’ Development of the Covenant of Creation: A Debt to Melanchthon or Calvin?” Westminster Theological Journal 43 (1981): 247; cf. Dirk Visser, “The Covenant in Zacharias Ursinus,” Sixteenth Century Journal 18 (1987): 531–44.


30. Witsius, Economy, 3.2.1; 1:291: “Maximi res momenti est, ut Foedus Gratiae, vel ut est in substantia & essential, quam vocant, sua vel ut quoad circumstantialia, sub diversis Oeconomis,
Keeping this distinction between the substance and circumstances in mind, one finds Witsius emphasizing the legal nature of the Mosaic covenant as he explains its role in redemptive history. While the covenant of grace is of the same substance throughout both the old and new economies, Witsius is nevertheless prepared to say that the Mosaic covenant is legal in nature because the Mosaic covenant was primarily an administration of the law with three aspects: the Decalogue was given to Israel, and as to its substance was one and the same with the law of nature; Israel received the law as the church, and as such, they received the ceremonial law, which pointed to the person and work of Christ; and Israel received the law as a peculiar people, as a theocracy, and therefore they received the political laws. In this threefold understanding of the law one finds the historic division of the law: the moral, ceremonial, and civil. It is important to note, however, that the telic goal of the threefold law finds its fulfilment in the person and work of Christ. In other words, the law, especially the ceremonial and civil, finds its significance in typology. It is typology that plays a major part in Witsius’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant and Typology
Recall that Witsius believes that the covenant of grace is the same in substance in both the old and new economies. At the same time, however, Witsius can also argue that the Mosaic covenant is a repetition of the covenant of works. This is not to say that Witsius believed that the covenant of works was republished so that Israel might attain their salvation by their obedience to the law. On the contrary, Witsius believed that the Mosaic covenant was connected to both the ordo and historia salutis in different ways. Witsius argued along the same lines as Calvin that the Mosaic covenant vis-à-vis the ordo salutis functioned in such a way as to reveal sin and drive Israel to Christ: “And so their being thus brought to a remembrance of the covenant of works tended to promote the covenant of grace.” In other words, the republication of the covenant of works served the pedagogical function of the law—that which drives the sinner to God.

diversimode a Deo proponitur. Si ipsam Foederis substantiam spectemus non nisi unum illud unicum est, neque vero, ut aliud sit, fieri ullo modo potest” (Herman Witsius, De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus. Libri Quatuor [Basel, 1739]).

32. Ibid., 4.4.48; 2:183.
33. Ibid., 4.4.49; 2:183.
34. Ibid., 4.4.49; 2:183–84: “Atque ita ea ipsa commemoratio foederis operum inservit promotioni foederis gratiae.”
to Christ. To support his understanding of this function of the Mosaic covenant as the republished covenant of works, Witsius sought the support and argumentation of Calvin from his commentary on Romans 10:4.\textsuperscript{35} Citing Calvin, Witsius argued that it was only “crass Israelites” who misunderstood the purpose of the Sinai covenant, thinking that they could secure their salvation by their obedience rather than through the work of Christ.\textsuperscript{36}

The Mosaic covenant vis-à-vis the \textit{historia salutis}, on the other hand, had a different aim. Witsius argued that the Mosaic covenant was a national covenant between God and Israel. The Mosaic covenant was an agreement whereby Israel promised to God a sincere obedience to all of the commands of the covenant, especially the Decalogue, and God in return would bless Israel with reward, both temporal and eternal.\textsuperscript{37} Given that Witsius argued that there were eternal rewards annexed to the Mosaic covenant, we see that, like Calvin before him, Witsius believed that God set forth a legal covenant before the nation of Israel, one by which they could earn their salvation through their obedience. Given man’s sinfulness, however, the Mosaic covenant as the republished covenant of works only revealed Israel’s sinfulness. At the same time the Mosaic covenant had temporal rewards annexed, namely, the hope of securing Israel’s presence in the Promised Land through their obedience.

In terms of Witsius’s understanding of typology, this means that he understood Israel’s existence in the Promised Land as harkening back to Adam’s probation in the garden, but also looking forward to the person and work of Christ, the Last Adam. OT people, places, and events such as the land of Canaan, the exodus from Egypt, the Red Sea crossing, the manna from heaven, water from the rock, the fall of Jericho, the conquest of Canaan, the exile and exodus from Babylon all pointed to greater NT people, events, and places, especially to the person and work of Christ:

But these very things certainly cease not, according to the sentiments of very learned men, to be all of them types of the greatest things to the Christian church. The city of Jerusalem itself, the very temple with its whole pomp of ceremonies, though no longer in being, any more than Adam and the deluge, yet ought also to be considered by us Christians as types of the heavenly city.


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 4.4.54; 2:186.
and temple not made with hands. In a word, the whole of the Mosaic law, though abrogated as to any obligation of observance, ceases not to exhibit to us, for our instruction, a type of spiritual things.\textsuperscript{38}

Given this typological thrust of the Mosaic covenant, Witsius is prepared to say that the Sinai covenant is therefore neither exclusively of the covenant of works nor of grace. Rather, it is a national covenant of “sincere piety” that presupposes both covenants.\textsuperscript{39} This covenant of sincere piety in terms of the land inheritance did not require perfect obedience, but sincere obedience, which for the godly Israelite was the fruit of his faith.\textsuperscript{40} The purpose of this national covenant was not so that Israel would earn the land through their obedience, but rather so that as a nation they would foreshadow the person and work of Christ.

**Summary**

The Mosaic covenant is unique in redemptive history, as it combines elements of the covenants of both works and grace. The republication of the covenant of works drives the sinner to Christ in its connection with the *ordo salutis*, and in terms of the *historia salutis* it is a typological sketch that has Israel foreshadowing the person and work of Christ. With this understanding, Witsius calls the Decalogue an “instrument of the covenant.” Witsius writes:

> As an instrument of the covenant they point out the way to eternal salvation; or contain the condition of enjoying that salvation: and that both under the covenant of grace and works. But with this difference; that under the covenant of works, this condition is required to be performed by man himself; under the covenant of grace it is proposed, as already performed, or to be performed by a mediator.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 3.3.4–5; 1:307–8: “At eadem omnia, certe ex Doctissimorum Virorum hypothesibus, non desinunt Ecclesiae Christianae rerum maximarum typi esse. Ipsa civitas Hierosolimitana, ipsum templum cum omni cerimoniarum choragio, licet in rerum natura amplius non existent, aeque ac Adamus ac Diluvium, a nobis tamen Christianis quoque uti typi civitatis coelestis, & templi sine manibus facti, considerari debent. Tota denique Lex Mosaica, quamvis quoad observationis obligationem abrogate sit, non desinit quoad doctrinam nobis exhibere typum rerum spiritualium.”

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 4.4.54; 2:186: “foedus sincerae pietatis.”

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 4.4.45–46; 2:182.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 4.4.57; 2:187: “Qua instrumentum foederis viam monstrant ad aeternam salutem; sive continent conditionem potiundae beatitudinis. Idque tam sub foedere gratiae, quam sub foedere operum. Verum hoc discrimine: quod sub foedere operum exigatur haec conditio praestanda ab ipso homine: sub foedere gratiae proponatur, ut praestanda vel praestita per Mediatorem.”
Given these data, we can move forward and summarize the similarities and differences that exist between Witsius’s and Calvin’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant.

Calvin and Witsius Compared

Thus far the investigation has explored Calvin’s and Witsius’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant and has revealed some parallels in their understandings, particularly in the areas of soteriology in the OT and NT, the employment of the substance-accident distinction, and the legal nature of the Mosaic covenant, that is, it embodies a works principle. The distinct differences between Calvin and Witsius are primarily in their nomenclature and the emphasis given to typology. The different emphases seem to emerge in terms of Calvin’s and Witsius’s respective understandings of the works principle.

For Calvin, the works principle is primarily aimed at the individual and the ordo salutis. The promise of eternal life for perfect obedience offered by the law is merely hypothetical. In other words, it seems a fair conclusion to say that Israel’s possession of the land was by grace through faith, the same manner by which they obtained eternal life. For Witsius, however, while the Mosaic covenant carries the same function that Calvin sees in terms of the pedagogical use of the law, at the same time there is also an added dimension brought about by typology. It is for this reason that Witsius calls the Mosaic covenant a national covenant, one that requires sincere, not perfect, obedience. In contrast to Calvin, Witsius therefore relates the Mosaic covenant to both the ordo and historia salutis. Calvin’s use of typology sees the Promised Land merely as a foreshadow of heaven, whereas Witsius sees the Promised Land both in terms of the Promised Land and also in terms of the foreshadow of Christ’s obedience, that which secures eternal life. It is particularly this difference in the use of typology between the two theologians that is of interest and deserves attention.

First, as observed above, with the march of time the Reformed tradition saw the refinement of its covenant theology, particularly in the development of the terms of the covenants of works and grace. Despite the attempts of those who see a substantive difference between Reformation and post-Reformation theology on this point, there is no difference. This is a difference in nomenclature, not theological substance.


43. See, e.g., Muller, After Calvin, 63–104, and relevant bibliography refuting the Calvin vs. the Calvinists thesis. Muller explains that Calvin virtually identified natural law with Mosaic law and
Second, concerning typology, there are some differences between Calvin and Witsius, though, again, this difference is not substantive but instead one of emphasis. It is without question that there is a greater use and employment of typology in the theology of Witsius. In fact, Witsius devotes an entire chapter to the subject of OT types, something that is unparalleled in Calvin. Moreover, one sees Witsius’s greater emphasis upon the historia salutis in the title of his work, “The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man.” This is not to say, however, that Calvin did not use and employ typology in his explanation of his understanding of the Mosaic covenant. In fact, Witsius saw his own understanding and explication of the nature and place of typology as grounded in the theology of Calvin. Witsius writes:

According to us and Paul, the Old Testament denotes the testament [or covenant] of grace, under that dispensation, which subsisted before the coming of Christ in the flesh, and was proposed formerly to the fathers under the veil of certain types, pointing out some imperfections of that state, and consequently that they were to be abolished in their appointed time; or as Calvin has very well expressed it (Institutes 2.11.4): “the Old Testament was a doctrine involved in a shadowy and ineffectual observation of ceremonies, and was therefore temporary, because a thing in suspense, till established on a firm and substantial bottom.”

Here in this statement we see that both Calvin and Witsius recognize the role and place of typology in explaining the function of the Mosaic covenant. It is fair to say, however, that Witsius places greater emphasis upon typology, at least in terms of the amount of space he gives the subject, than does Calvin.

It seems that both Calvin and Witsius are comfortable using the Aristotelian substance-accident distinction to explain the relationship of the
Mosaic covenant to the rest of God’s redemptive purposes, whether in the *spirituale foedus* for Calvin or the covenant of grace for Witsius. When it comes, however, to explaining the function of the Mosaic covenant, Witsius seems to place greater emphasis upon the role of the Mosaic covenant vis-à-vis the *historia salutis*, especially as it relates to the work of Christ. Calvin, on the other hand, has a greater interest in the function of the Mosaic covenant vis-à-vis the *ordo salutis*. What accounts for this greater emphasis?

There are no airtight solutions to the question of why Witsius places a greater emphasis upon typology in his explication of the Mosaic covenant, but there are some general indicators that surrender some clues. First, Richard Muller notes that there were different exegetical tendencies during the Reformation. He explains that Calvin had a tendency to deemphasize christological readings of the OT, whereas by contrast, other Reformers such as Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) employed a more typological approach to the OT, which was carried forward by post-Reformation exegetes such as Johannes Cocceius (1603–69). Muller notes that exegetes such as Cocceius employed a highly typological and prophetic reading of the OT.  

It is especially the theology of Cocceius that is of interest for this study. Cocceius was highly influential during the period of high orthodoxy, and at times his influence is noticeable upon Witsius’s thought. For example, in Witsius’s chapter dedicated to typology he explains the typological connection between the goats of expiation (Lev. 16) and the sacrifice of Christ. In the points of similarity between type and antitype, Witsius acknowledges that he learned of these connections from both Francis Turretin (1623–87) and Cocceius. Witsius quotes Cocceius’s commentary on Hebrews at length to explain how the protoevangelium says that Christ was to be delivered into the hands of the devil (Gen. 3:15), and that the slaying of the first sacrificial goat was a type of Christ’s death, whereas the sending of the second goat into the wilderness was a type of handing Christ over to the devil. Witsius cites Cocceius to prove that the two goats are types of “the twofold delivering up of Christ.”  

Given Cocceius’s influence, though Turretin also influenced Witsius on these points, one may say that Witsius had a greater interest in typology, which impacted his theological understanding of the

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nature, role, and place of the Mosaic covenant. In other words, it is fair to say that Witsius used a redemptive-historical hermeneutic, whereas Calvin used a hermeneutic that placed more emphasis upon grammatical-historical interpretation. Despite these differences, if one may borrow some of Calvin and Witsius’s terminology, there are no substantive differences between the two theologians’ understanding of the Mosaic covenant, rather only different accidental emphases.

Conclusion

In this comparative analysis of Calvin and Witsius there are great similarities between the two continental Reformed theologians, both of whom agreed that salvation has always been by grace through faith in Christ. They both acknowledge that God made a covenant with his people, and this covenant was marked by grace and not a works principle. The Mosaic covenant occupies a unique place for both theologians. Both agree that the Mosaic covenant brings forward legal demands and truly offers eternal life, but because of man’s sinfulness the legal demands drive the sinner to Christ. The manner in which Calvin and Witsius express the legal demands of the Mosaic covenant is the same; however, the latter gives greater attention and emphasis to typology than does the former. These conclusions, however, are in no way unique, even as they are variously expressed by Calvin and Witsius.

In Reformed confessions such as the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), one finds these same substantive points in the explication of the func-
tion and place of the Mosaic covenant. The divines, for example, employ the covenants of works and grace to define man’s pre- and postfall relationship to God (7.2). The covenant of grace, however, “was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel” (7.5). “Under the law,” the divines explain, the covenant “was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foresignifying Christ to come” (7.5). So here, as in Calvin and Witsius, there is an emphasis upon typology, as well as an implicit biblical-theological hermeneutic concerning the interpretation of and relationship between the OT and NT. At the same time, however, the divines employ the Aristotelian substance-accident distinction. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance of the OT, was exhibited, it was done with greater fullness, simplicity, and outward glory. The divines write: “There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations” (7.6).

One also finds the same legal characterization of the Mosaic covenant even in terms of the republication of the covenant of works, with the Westminster Confession bearing similarities to both Calvin and Witsius. The divines write that “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works” (19.1) and that “this law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai” (19.2). While space does not permit a full-blown exposition of these points, it is nevertheless useful to see that Calvin’s and even Witsius’s formulations were certainly in the mainstream of Reformation and post-Reformation thought. So, then, whether in Calvin’s more grammatical-historical or Witsius’s more redemptive-historical hermeneutic, one finds that both were making essentially the same point with different emphases: the Mosaic covenant is unique in that it is legal in nature, demonstrating vis-à-vis the ordo salutis man’s inability to fulfil the demands of the law, which drives man to Christ, and in terms of the historia salutis, painting a typological portrait of Christ’s person and work.