

text teaches that this will concerning salvation is particular, not universal. The text teaches that the will for the salvation of some only includes, as an essential aspect of this will, the will for the hardening and damnation of others. And this twofold will of God regarding salvation is part of biblical revelation. It is the *revealed* will of God. Whether they receive it by bowing to the revelation, this will of God is made known to Sam Waldron and his free-offer allies, as well as to the PRC, unless they do not have John 10 and Romans 8 and 9, and many similar passages, in their Bibles.

To Waldron and his theological allies, who forever oppose and argue against this revealed will of God, that He is merciful in the gospel to whom He wills to be merciful, withholding His mercy from others, as though this truth would render God somehow unfair, if not hard-hearted, making Him the original “hyper-Calvinist,” comes the apostolic warning, “Nay but, O man, who art

thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay...?” (Rom. 9:20).

Let Waldron and his allies consider, whether their theology of the offer would occasion such an objection and necessitate such a warning. Who would object to the teaching that God loves all with a saving love and comes to all alike with the message, “I love you all alike, that is, with a saving love, and sincerely desire to save you all; now I offer all of you alike Christ and salvation; and (as this message implies) it is now up to you”? It is inconceivable that anyone would object, “Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?” (vv. 19–20).

So important for Waldron’s defense of his theology of the well-meant offer is his mistaken understanding of the preceptive will of God that, with the exposure of this inexcusable error, his well-meant offer collapses.

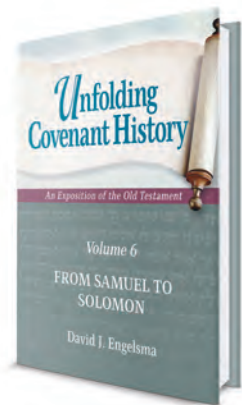
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## ***UNFOLDING COVENANT HISTORY: FROM SAMUEL TO SOLOMON***

Reviewed by Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

*Unfolding Covenant History: From Samuel to Solomon*, volume 6. David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020. 224 pages, hardcover, \$28.95.



Professor David Engelsma has written volume six of the series on Old Testament history entitled *Unfolding Covenant History*. This series is being published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). This is his second contribution to the series. He also wrote volume 5, which covers the history of Judges and Ruth. The RFPA is to be commended for its long-term commitment to publish this series. The series is a valuable part of the publisher’s lineup of orthodox, Reformed books and an invaluable alternative to a host of weak or erroneous commentaries on the Old Testament that flood the book market and vie for the attention of Reformed readers.

Remarkable is the unity of theology throughout the volumes. The first four volumes were written by Homer Hoeksema—and the substance of them goes back to George Ophoff and the very beginnings of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 1920s—and the series is being continued by Professor Engelsma. Yet all the volumes speak with one voice the truth of God’s sovereign and particular grace in an unconditional covenant to the glory of God.

All the books of the series make for fascinating and

edifying reading. The sixth volume is no exception. This is true because the books treat the Old Testament history as history. Before one can be engrossed in or learn from the biblical history, one first needs to be impressed by the truth that the Old Testament is factual, infallible history inspired by the Holy Spirit. Nothing saps the reader’s fascination with the history or is so fatal to the believer’s edification from the history as an unbelieving discussion that calls into question or explicitly denies the veracity of the biblical record. Common today in Old Testament commentaries is naked unbelief in the biblical record that parades itself in the robes of scholarship and erudition. It is unbelief. It is unbelief that stems from unbelief in the infallible inspiration of scripture and the authorship of sacred scripture by God the Holy Spirit. It is easy to criticize scripture—and the activity is *de rigueur* in theological high society today—if the author were merely a man. Furthering the offense, these commentators present the supposed human authors of biblical history as incompetent and bumbling editors who created a discordant and contradictory Old Testament record drawn from

multiple sources like a badly bungled patchwork quilt. Then the authoritative teaching of the Holy Ghost in the history is easily dismissed.

The sole author of scripture is the Holy Ghost. Criticism of his book is criticism of him. Such criticism is dangerous to the souls of the writers and readers of these commentaries. The warning of Revelation 22 is rightly sounded against much that passes for Old Testament commentary today. Such unbelieving books serve to weaken and undermine the faith of the church in scripture, to take away any possibility for application of the history to the church. Further, oppressing the believing reader with the authors' unbelief, these books take away the thrill of Old Testament history. Professing to explain the history, they in fact dismantle it. No book of ancient history written by a worldly historian—Thucydides, Plutarch, or Tacitus—is treated so disgracefully by those who profess to study them, as Old Testament history is treated by professing but unbelieving biblical commentators.

Basic to biblical commentary—and especially Old Testament historical commentary—is faith in the inspiration and infallibility of scripture. The words of sacred scripture are holy and divine. They are beyond the possibility of error and above all criticisms and judgments of men. The words of scripture—including especially Old Testament history—judge all men and are judged of no man. Many a commentator falls under the judgment of James that being a judge of the law, he is no doer of the law. That lawless spirit—a refusal to be judged by the words of scripture and a refusal to have the words of scripture govern one's theology, life, and commentaries—is rife in the world of Old Testament biblical commentary. Faith in scripture, above all else, recommends this series of commentaries on Old Testament history. Every volume breathes a child-like faith in the inspiration and infallibility of sacred scripture and thus a love for the history and doctrine of that history.

In volume six the commentator and his commentary are governed by scripture's words, and he brings out the sense, meaning, and application of those words. Because of that, the commentary makes not only for fascinating reading but also edifying reading.

If Old Testament commentaries today are not irredeemably fouled by unbelief in the inspiration and infallibility of scripture, they are fatally marred by the imposition of conditional covenant theology onto the history. Conditional covenant theology presents the covenant of God—whether the theologians define that covenant as a contract or relationship—as dependent on the faith and faithfulness of the covenant people. The covenant of God is viewed as including all the circumcised—baptized in the New Testament—people of God. God's promise of salvation in the covenant is taught as given to all the

circumcised—baptized—children of the covenant. That promise of God is taught as depending for its fulfillment on the faith and faithfulness of the covenant people. Theologians only compound their error when they describe that conditional covenant as a contract or agreement.

Conditional covenant theology is an imposition on the biblical history that takes away the main lesson of that history: God's covenant as the relationship of friendship with his elect people in Jesus Christ. Beginning with the first announcement of the promise in Genesis 3:15, the history of the Old Testament is consumed by the truth of God's gracious work to bring the seed of the woman, who will crush the head of the serpent, which seed the Holy Spirit teaches in Galatians 3 is Christ. Christ is the head and mediator of the covenant, a covenant made with the elect and them only. The covenant promise to save his people from their sins and to bring them to heavenly glory in Jesus Christ is for the elect alone and is absolutely unconditional. The promise of God in the covenant depends solely and exclusively on God's work in Christ. The covenant God is faithful to maintain and perfect his covenant by the wonder of grace alone. Throughout his commentary Professor Engelsma teaches the unconditional character of God's covenant promise. Included in this—indeed essential for this—is his orthodox treatment of the truth of election and reprobation as that controls membership in God's covenant and God's covenant promise.

This comes out throughout the commentary, but perhaps most pointedly in connection with reprobate Saul. Saul was not a member of God's covenant who successfully resisted the grace and promise of God that was offered to him, and against whom God turned because Saul was unfaithful. Rather, Saul was a reprobate in the sphere of God's covenant, to whom there was no promise of God. Saul was revealed as an unbeliever in the course of God's dealings with him, and Saul came to such terrible grief on account of his unbelief and other sins. His rise and fall were not unfortunate setbacks in the unfolding of God's covenant, but a divinely decreed antithesis through which God's kingdom came in David.

That emphasis—the unconditional covenant promise of God controlled by election—does not mean that the author ignores the calling of God's covenant people to righteousness and holiness. The commentary provides clear, powerful, and moving explanations of the relationship between God's sovereignty and the proper calling of God's people in the covenant to live out of the principle of regeneration and to stand as God's friends and servants antithetically in every area of life.

Closely connected are the sharp warnings of God's just chastisements of his unfaithful servants and covenant people. I found particularly compelling in this regard the insight that in these chastisements—such as the capture

of the ark by the Philistines during the days of Eli and his wicked sons—God allows his own holy name to be besmirched, culminating in the cross. It reminds one of the sobering words of Romans 8 that God *spared* not his own Son. It is a testimony to amazing grace what it costs the living God to take his elect—but sinful—people into his covenant and to maintain that covenant with them. It is testimony regarding how far God goes in seeking their repentance and salvation from their frequent backslidings, even to the fouling of his holy name by the heathen, whom God uses to chastise and ultimately to bring his people back. His covenant he will not break, and his mercy he will never take away from them. Always what comes out in the book is that the apparent setbacks, severe chastisements, and deep troubles of God’s people—justly received by them for their sins—are according to God’s eternal decree for the purpose of the revelation of God’s grace in Christ Jesus. The covenant continues to unfold infallibly, and the kingdom always advances unswervingly.

All this means that this volume clearly and sharply teaches the truth of God’s unconditional covenant. In doing so it sets itself apart from every other commentary of which I am aware. In doing so it also gives all the glory to the faithful, covenant God, which is the purpose of the whole Bible and all of history and must be the purpose of every commentary on scripture.

There is also a needful polemic in the commentary against the ever-present danger of dispensationalism. Dispensationalism views the Old Testament nation of Israel as God’s kingdom people and the church of the New Testament as a different people gathered during a kind of interlude, or parenthesis, after the kingdom people rejected Christ. Prior to the end of the world, God will rapture the church off the earth and turn again to his kingdom people, the Jews, and form a new earthly kingdom of David in the earthly city of Jerusalem, from which Christ will rule over all the nations of the world. Besides all the absurd and bizarre aspects of this false doctrine—rebuilt temple, animal sacrifices renewed, rapture of the church, earthly opponents of Christ fighting him with guns—it denies the essential oneness of the Old Testament church and the New Testament church. It is also seriously wrong in its insistence that there will be a reinstatement of the Old Testament sacrificial economy, which is a patent denial of the one sacrifice of Christ as the only way of salvation.

Volume six treats the history of God’s covenant from Samuel to Solomon. This history includes the coming of the kingdom. Professor Engelsma makes a compelling case that the unfolding of the covenant of God involves the revelation of the kingdom of God in its typical form in David and Solomon. These two concepts—covenant and kingdom—are not to be viewed as rivals for the place of main theme of the Bible. Rather, the eternal kingdom of God

in Jesus Christ is the form that the covenant is destined to take. In connection with the truth of the kingdom, and explaining that when things went badly for the king they went badly for the people and when things were well with the king they were well for the people, is the solidarity of the king, kingdom, and kingdom people. Christ and his elect people are one. He is the head. They are the body. The welfare of the covenant and kingdom people of God is wholly wrapped up with the king of God’s kingdom. All the repeated failures of Israel’s kings, including her best king, David, demonstrate clearly that the king of that kingdom must be perfect, a king who comes only in Christ.

Professor Engelsma’s treatment of the vast amount of scripture involved in this epoch of the unfolding of God’s covenant is efficient. The book neatly divides into four sections: the rise of the omnipresent office of prophet in the nation of Israel in the person and work of Samuel, the antithesis of God’s king and kingdom in Saul, the coming of the righteous king in David, and the kingdom of peace in Solomon. The many details are organized and treated under main themes. With swift, bold strokes he tells the story and teaches the doctrine. Always the reader is brought by the details to consider the main doctrines that are being taught in the history. Throughout the commentary appropriate applications for the church today are briefly sketched. Such efficient organization of the history no doubt proceeds from the author’s complete mastery of the subject. The biblical history is full of characters, befitting the fact that it is real history full of real people. Sprinkled throughout the book are enlivening little descriptions of the various characters that populate the biblical account and still populate the history of the church today.

Summarizing the thrust of the whole book are the last words of the commentary:

To the one who cast the shadows that were Israel’s greatest kings, David and Solomon, the true Israelite looked forward in hope. His hope was not shattered by the weakness and failure of the earthly types, namely David and Solomon—David’s adultery and murder and Solomon’s idolatry. Rather, the failure of the types served to concentrate the hope upon the coming reality and to enliven the hope. The merely earthly, no matter how gifted and glorious, could not sustain and fulfill the grand hope. The Israel of God must look further and higher. To David’s greater Son and to the greater than Solomon! They did. And by this hope, they were saved.

The commentary constantly draws the reader’s attention through its treatment of the history—as history—to Christ and in him to Jehovah and his grace. No higher praise can be given. The book is highly recommended.

—NJL