



ALL SAINTS
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Covenant Theology Week One

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Introduction to Covenants

- The story of how God has dealt with humanity and creation is all about covenants.
- The study of the various covenants between God and man is covenant theology.
- In the reformed tradition, we use covenants as a framework to understand the Bible.

The Plan

- Week One--Part One: Introduction to Divine Covenants, pp. 1-53
- Week Two--The Covenant of Creation, pp. 67-92
- Week Three--Adam: The Covenant of Commencement & Noah: The Covenant of Preservation, pp. 93-126
- Week Four--Abraham: The Covenant of Promise & The Seal of the Abrahamic Covenant, pp. 127-166
- Week Five--Moses: The Covenant of Law & Excursus: What structures scripture—covenants of dispensations, pp. 167-228
- Week Six--David: The Covenant of Kingdom & Christ: The Covenant of Consummation, pp. 229-300

Today

- The Nature of the Divine Covenants
- The Extent of the Divine Covenants
- The Unity of the Divine Covenants
- Diversity in the Divine Covenants

Sources

- For this class, I am largely drawing material from Christ of the Covenants, by TE O. Palmer Robertson.
- This is a now classic text originally published in 1980. It is commonly used as a text in our reformed seminaries.
- I am also supplementing with other material, and all errors are mine.

The Nature of the Divine Covenants

Covenant Defined: “A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered.” CoTC 4.

The Nature of the Divine Covenants

- A covenant is first a **Bond**.
- This means a relationship between or among parties.
- “The formalizing element essential for the establishing of all divine covenants in Scripture is a verbalized declaration of the covenant. He speaks graciously to commit himself to his creatures, and to declare the basis on which he shall relate to his creation.” CoTC 6.

The Nature of the Divine Covenants

- Next covenant is first a bond in **Blood**.
- It is a relationship with life and death consequences.
- There are curses associated with breaking a covenant.
- Consider Genesis 15

Genesis 15

⁹ He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give^[c] this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

The Nature of the Divine Covenants

- The Hebrew word used in the OT for making a covenant literally translates as to “cut” a covenant.
- *kaw-rath'*; a primitive root; to cut (off, down or asunder); by implication, to destroy or consume; specifically, to covenant (i.e. make an alliance or bargain, originally by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces):—be chewed, be con-(feder-) ate, covenant, cut (down, off), destroy, fail, feller, be freed, hew (down), make a league (covenant)

Jeremiah 34

¹⁷ “Therefore, thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, declares the LORD. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ¹⁸ And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, **I will make them like^[a] the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts**— ¹⁹ the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. ²⁰ And I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

The Nature of the Divine Covenants

- Next covenant is first a bond in blood
Sovereignly Administered.
- The covenant is dictated by God.
- It is enforced by God.
- It is not negotiable.

The Nature of the Divine Covenants

“Both Biblical and extra-biblical evidence point to the unilateral form of covenant establishment. No such thing as bargaining, bartering, or contracting characterizes the divine covenants of Scripture. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth dictates the terms of his covenant.” CoTC 15.

Exodus 20

And God spoke all these words, saying,

² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³ “You shall have no other gods before me.

Extent of Divine Covenants

- God's relationship with humanity has always been defined by covenants.
- The covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David are explicitly termed such.
- The New Covenant, fulfilled in Christ extends to the consummation of all things.
- But what about prior to Noah?

Extent of Divine Covenants

- The answer of course is that while the term covenant (Hebrew *ber-eeth*, Strongs H1285) does explicitly appear in Scripture prior to Genesis 6:18, there are clearly covenants that occur prior to this.
- The clearest and most obvious example is the covenant of works.

WSC 12

- **Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise towards man in the estate wherein he was created?**
- **A. When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.**

Genesis 2

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Genesis 3

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

Extent of Divine Covenants

- We also of course see that inauguration of the one covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15.
- This one covenant of grace subsumes the later subsidiary covenants by which it is administered (e.g. Noah, Abraham, David, New Covenant).

Genesis 3

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring^[e] and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

2. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

3. Man, by his fall, having made himself uncapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make **a second, commonly called the covenant of grace**; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

4. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

“The term ‘testament invokes biblical themes and biblical language. It reminds us that great gifts have been bequeathed to us. It evokes the idea of a ‘testator’, in Jesus Christ, and of an ‘everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it’. On one level, in making this point, the members of the Westminster assembly are avoiding contention over words, for we all know that arguments about words have been more than a cottage industry in the Christian church. The gospel can be described in the dialect of covenantal theology, or in the language of a last will and testament.” Chad Van Dixhoorn, Confessing the Faith 101.

Hebrews 9

¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called **may receive the promised eternal inheritance**, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ¹⁶ **For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.** ¹⁷ For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. ¹⁸ Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.”

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

diathékē, dee-ath-ay'-kay; from G1303; properly, a disposition, i.e. (specially) a contract (especially a devisory will):— covenant, testament.

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

5. This covenant 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, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament.

WCF 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

6. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. **There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.**

Unity of the Divine Covenants

- While aspects of the various covenants differ as redemptive history develops, there is a unity in how God deals with this people.

Unity of the Divine Covenants

“The cumulative evidence of the Scriptures points definitively toward the unified character of the biblical covenants. God’s multiple bonds with his people ultimately unite into a single relationship. Particular details of the covenants may vary. A definite line of progress may be noted. Yet the covenants of God are one.” CoTC 28.

Structural Unity

- Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants are not-self contained.
- Rather they build.
- God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled in the latter two. There is continuity to the relationship with Abraham's descendants.

Exodus 6

² God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty,^[a] but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. ⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.’”

Structural Unity

- Note that this promise in Exodus 6 comes prior to the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant later in Exodus.
- This follows a pattern: God makes his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, but the covenant is inaugurated later in Genesis 15.
- God anoints David king as a boy in 1 Sam 16:12, but the covenant was not established until later in 2 Sam 7:1-17.

Historical Unity

- The way the covenant were lived out also demonstrates that the later covenants did not supplant the former.
- When Moses please for mercy after the golden calf, he invokes the Abrahamic covenant.

Exodus 32

¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. ¹³ **Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”** ¹⁴ And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

Historical Unity

- The possession of the land that occurs in the book of Joshua is clearly a (partial and typological) fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham.
- This occurs after the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant, demonstrating that the Mosaic covenant fulfilled rather than supplanting the Abrahamic covenant.

Historical Unity

“Thus the history of Israel supports the unity of these two covenants. The Mosaic covenant did not annul or interrupt the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant continued to function actively after the institution of the Mosaic covenant. In the context of the history of the Mosaic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant found a basic fulfillment.” CoTC 33.

Historical Unity

- David also invokes the Mosaic covenant in his deathbed charge to Solomon. 1 Kings 2:3.
- David also invokes the promise to Abraham in his song when the Arc is brought to Jerusalem. 1 Chron. 16:15-18.

Genealogical Unity

- God's promise to Abraham and subsequent promise to David were to bless their offspring.
- We see a line of family succession from Abraham down through Christ.
- There is a sense in which the descendants are participants in the earlier covenants because their parents were there when it was inaugurated.

Deuteronomy 5

² The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. ³ Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

Genealogical Unity

- God's covenants run down through the generations of his people.

Deut 7

⁶ “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you **and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers**, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, **the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,** ¹⁰ and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them.

Psalm 105

- ⁷ He is the LORD our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
- ⁸ He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand
generations,
- ⁹ the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
- ¹⁰ which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
- ¹¹ saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance.”

Genealogical Unity

- God's covenants run down through the generations of his people.
- But remember there is ingrafting and pruning.
- Not all Israel is Israel.

Romans 9

⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Unity with the New Covenant

“Jeremiah’s classic prophecy clearly relates the new covenant to its Mosaic predecessor (cf. Jer. 31:31ff.). This ‘new covenant’ with the ‘house of Israel and with the house of Judah’ will not be like Mosaic covenant in its externalistic features. But the law of God as revealed to Moses shall be written on the heart. While the substance of the law will be the same, the mode of its administration will be different. The form may change, but the essence of the new covenant of Jeremiah’s prophecy relates directly to the law-covenant made at Sinai.” CoTC 41.

Jeremiah 31

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

Unity with the New Covenant

- Remember there is one covenant of grace.
- The Mosaic covenant is part of the one covenant of grace.
- So is the Abrahamic covenant.
- These are about the Gospel.
- God chooses who to have mercy on. He keeps faith with this covenant people.
- In the new covenant, God's people are those united to him through faith in Christ.

Ezekiel 37

24 “My servant **David shall be king** over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. **They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes.** **25** They shall **dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob**, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and **David my servant shall be their prince forever.** **26** I will make a **covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them.** And I will set them in their land^[g] and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. **27** My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **28** Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

Unity with the New Covenant

- Note how this prophecy combines elements of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants with the New Covenant.
- David's greater Son will be king over ever over God's people dwelling in God's land.

Thematic Unity

“Throughout the biblical record of God’s administration of the covenant, a single phrase recurs as the summation of the covenant relationship: **‘I shall be your God, and you shall be my people.’** The constant repetition of this phrase or its equivalent indicates the unity of God’s covenant. This phrase may be designated as the ‘Immanuel principle’ of the covenant. The heart of the covenant is the declaration that ‘God is with us.’” CoTC 46.

Thematic Unity

This thematic phrase appears explicitly with respect to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants.

Genesis 17

⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

Exodus 6

⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Exodus 19

⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Deuteronomy 29

¹⁰ “You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, ^[d] your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, ¹² so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, ¹³ **that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God**, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Ezekiel 34

²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

Thematic Unity

The New Covenant is also expressly tied to the thematic formula of God and his people in covenant.

Zechariah 2

¹⁰ Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. ¹¹ And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, **and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst,** and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

Zechariah 8

⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, ⁸ and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

2 Cor 6

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,

¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

Thematic Unity

- The theme of the Immanuel principle works itself out in redemptive history in the tabernacle, the arc, the temple(s), and finally in Christ.
- In the New Covenant the theme of God dwelling among his people find expression in the person of Christ.
- And we look for its final fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth.

Diversity in the Covenants

“Both structurally and thematically the covenants of God are one. A covenantal unity characterizes God’s dealings with men from creation to consummation.

But the various covenants administered throughout history do not appear as monotonous duplications of one another. A luxuriant diversity of covenantal administration emerges as history progresses.” CoTC 53

Pre/Post Creation

- It is clear from Scripture that from creation on, God has dealt with his people via covenants.
- It has been suggested that there was/is a pre-creation covenant between the persons of the Trinity to redeem a people.
- Scripture does not give us much on this, and Robertson thinks it seems artificial.
- I offer no opinion and choose not to speculate.

Covenant or Works/Grace

“The division of God’s covenant dealings with men in terms of a ‘covenant of works’ and a ‘covenant of grace’ has much to commend it. It emphasizes properly the absolute necessity of recognizing a pre-fall relationship between God and man which required perfect obedience as the meritorious ground of blessing. In this structure, Adam cannot be regarded as a purely mythical figure. . . . Because of its inherent emphasis on the unity of God’s redemptive program, this structure delivers the church from the temptation to draw too strongly on a dichotomy between old and new testaments.” CoTC 55.

Old Covenant/New Covenant

“The incarnation of Christ represents the most basic differentiation-point in this history. The bond of God with man before Christ may be called ‘old covenant’ and the bond of God with man after Christ may be called ‘new covenant.’ The ‘old covenant’ may be characterized as ‘promise,’ as ‘shadow,’ as ‘prophecy’; the ‘new covenant’ may be characterized as ‘fulfillment,’ as ‘reality,’ as ‘realization.’” CoTC 57.

Old Covenant/New Covenant

- Much of the NT deals with how the new covenant fulfills the old.
- E.g. the entire book of Hebrews.
- Also much of Galatians.

Covenants Categorized

- Adam: the covenant of commencement
- Noah: the covenant of preservation
- Abraham: the covenant of promise
- Moses: the covenant of law
- David: the covenant of the kingdom
- Christ: the covenant of consummation

We will explore these over the next five weeks.

