

VI. COVENANT

THE OLD COVENANT, THE LAW, THE NEW COVENANT TO COME

✠ SINNERS IN NEED OF GRACE ✠

Often times we minimize the effects and reality of sin, as if Heaven is some cosmic night club in the sky and we don't quite meet the dress code, so we either make a few adjustments or make sure we know someone who can get us in. But sin is so much deeper than this. It's not a matter of "if I sin less and try to be good, I know I will still need forgiveness for my other sins, but maybe God will see that I'm trying and then He will give me salvation." Nor is it "since God is a merciful God, He'll just let me in anyways because He is good." It is not just sin that this holy God will destroy, but it is the sinner that God must punish.

This is why the popular but not-actually-in-the-Bible phrase "God hates sin but loves the sinner" falls short.³⁷⁸ A better way to say it *could* be "God hates sin and hates (yet desires to *have mercy* on) the sinner." See the *major* difference? Outside of Christ, we are God's enemies, objects of wrath, and law breakers deserving His punishment.³⁷⁹

Psalm 5.5

The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. ⁶ You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

This is no cute gospel of God just looking the other way and sneaking you in the club because He loves you so dearly. No, God plays by His very own righteous rules and He doesn't break His rules so He can just "sneak people in." He would be a terrible God if He didn't destroy sin and evil as well as punish sinners. If He did just sneak people in, He would then cease from being a *good* God.

This must become reality for us, for without it, we don't understand salvation. Without this reality, do we really have a need for the cross? Think about it. If God hates sin and loves the sinner, why would God punish the sinner? Why not just punish sin and then let us go? Furthermore, if God did just hate sin and not the sinner, then the sacrifices of animals in the Old Testament would have been sufficient, since God allowed man's sins to be put on the animals. If the animal, bearing man's sins, was then killed, problem solved! But not so, for as we see in **Hebrews 10.4** that it is "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Why? Because sin is not an autonomous agent roaming around creation; the sinner, as well, must be punished.

**When we believe that it is sin *alone* that God hates,
this makes us believe that we are some kind of victim.**

But let's be abundantly clear that we are not the victims in this. We are the perpetrators, the law breakers, and the enemies of God. Yes, sin has ravaged us, but we should not merely see ourselves as poor victims of sin and because of that God should feel sorry for us. Rather, we should see ourselves at very least as *partners* with sin as we have invited it and welcomed it into our lives, despite the fact that we have a Creator who loves us and wants to bring ultimate satisfaction to us.

We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners.

Again, if it were just sin that was the problem, then God could just destroy sin, or we would just have to work harder and stop sinning. But this is not the case. The problem is not just sin, the problem is *us*, which is why God's anger is not just on sin, else we could just do away with sin. But His anger is on His rebellious, broken image bearers. This is a tough thing to understand, that God could have hatred for something that He also desires to show mercy upon. But this is one of those unique attributes of God, the fact that He can be both loving and wrathful; that His perfect love and perfect holy anger co-exist equally.

³⁷⁸ This commonly quoted term comes from Mahatma Ghandi, but was originated by Augustine, who said "With love for mankind and hatred of sins." However, this was more a reflection on how we should view others, since we are not the divine Judge. God, however, is able to justly and righteously hate sinners as well as simultaneously desire mercy for them as image bearers.

³⁷⁹ Proverbs 20.9 // Ecclesiastes 9.3 // Isaiah 53.6, 65.2 // John 3.19, 8.34, 43, 44 // Romans 2.4-6, 3.10-18, 6.20 // Ephesians 2.1-3, 4.17-19

As a matter of fact, we should realize that the very fact that God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden was indeed an act of divine mercy, for if they would have stayed and eaten once again from the Tree of Life after eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would have *eternally* been stuck under the curse and death would have been on them *forever!* And so, God, in His mercy, cursed them out of the garden.³⁸⁰

His love for goodness is fueled by His hatred of sin, and His hatred of sin is fueled by His love of goodness.

The good news in all of this, as we will see, however, is that “while we were still sinners [enemies of God, objects of wrath, hated by God], Christ died for the ungodly.” The good news is that despite the fact that we are born as sinners, God chose a plan of redemption, rather than what we deserved: judgment. We see that God, in His glory and perfection and wholeness, is somehow able to give love and forgiveness to these created image bearers, while simultaneously having righteous and holy hatred for what they have become. This is what we call *unmerited favor*. ♣

What unmerited favor essentially means is that we have done *nothing whatsoever* to receive mercy from God. Additionally, we have done *everything necessary* to deserve God’s complete wrath, anger, and punishment. Regardless of these harrowing facts, God has chosen to offer us grace and mercy, for no reason other than because of His love and for His glory.

Sometimes, it seems to me that though we recognize that we have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory,³⁸¹ we still think that God at least recognizes those that are *trying* to honor Him by living right, so He has some special favor, sympathy, respect, or acknowledgement that we are trying. When we see good moral people around us who don’t know the Lord, we’ll say things like, “well God knows his heart, he’s a good person, I’m sure God will save Him. He’s trying to do the right thing.”

But what unmerited favor tells us is that, unfortunately, God *does indeed* know our hearts, and that they are wicked above all things! We are totally depraved, undeserving of grace and favor, no matter *how hard we try!* We have been completely separated from God, which has made us enemies. This is why Scripture says that God is “no respecter of any man” and shows “no partiality.”³⁸² He sees us all equally as sinners and enemies deserving of punishment.

God’s grace does not discriminate. He will quite possibly give grace to the “worst” of sinners, and yet quite possibly *not* give grace to the more “moral” of sinners.

This is a truth we don’t often understand. We tend to say things like, “oh my Uncle Rufus, he’s so messed up. That guy will never get saved, he’s so selfish and prideful. It’d take a miracle.” And then, as I wrote before, we’ll say things like “oh Aunt Beatrice, she is such a sweetheart. I wish she knew Jesus, she’d be such an awesome Christian. Well, I’m sure God knows her heart, she’s such a selfless person, I’m sure God will have mercy.”³⁸³

In these statements, we tend to think that there are “worse sinners” than others; that it’d be a miracle for Rufus to get saved, but we can probably expect Beatrice to get saved, *based on their merit!* Based on their works! Based on their own righteousness, or attempt at righteousness! But God’s grace is *unmerited* and *indiscriminate*. The Word says that there is “no one who does good; no, not one.”³⁸⁴ Beatrice’s salvation is just as much a miracle, just as much an act of grace as Rufus’ salvation. Neither is any further or closer to holiness, for “all have fallen short of the glory of God.”³⁸⁵

The reason why understanding this is so important is because we sometimes think, even if subconsciously, that we’re pretty good people before we got saved, so there was something in us that gave God reason to have mercy on us. We won’t really acknowledge that out loud, but we pretty much think it. We still do, in fact, compare ourselves to the “bad people” in the world.

We are not simply *undeserving*, but we are *ill-deserving*.

³⁸⁰ Genesis 3.22

³⁸¹ Romans 3.23

³⁸² Acts 10.34 // Galatians 2.6 // Deuteronomy 10.17 // 1 Peter 1.17

³⁸³ If you have an Uncle Rufus and Aunt Beatrice I promise you I didn’t use them as an example.

³⁸⁴ Romans 3.10-12

³⁸⁵ Romans 3.23

This reminds us of Calvin's word-picture that we are not just simply empty, neutral cups waiting and hoping and needing to be filled. No! We are broken and shattered, not only *not* deserving to be put back together, but actually *deserving* to be cast away due to our brokenness and rebellion!

Do we really and truly understand this? Do we really believe this, that spiritually there is "nothing good in you"³⁸⁶ because you are born spiritually dead? Do you truly believe that apart from Christ, you have become worthless and as an enemy?³⁸⁷ This is precisely why it is so important for us to understand that yes, God does hate sinners. He must, because sinners are law breakers who oppose what is holy and pure. We have opposed His love. Yet as we're about to see, He does also simultaneously have a desire to show unmerited mercy on these law breakers. However, this should *not* negate the fact that in His righteous anger He has absolute hatred for anything impure and unholy. That, indeed, includes us. And this, in fact, is why unmerited favor is of *utmost* importance for us to understand and embrace.

What's maybe even more beautiful is that while unmerited favor teaches us that we are all equally beyond the reach of redemption on our own, what it also teaches us is that there is *no one* who is beyond the reach of God's grace, because we are all equally enemies in need of mercy. When you see someone, anyone, on the street or at work or school, think to yourself, "this person was made in the image of God, and he is a perfect candidate for God's unmerited favor."

⌘ LAW BREAKERS IN PRISON ⌘

WE ARE BORN SPIRITUALLY DEAD AND UNABLE TO CHOOSE RIGHTEOUSNESS

Because we are born in sin and we live as lawbreakers that have missed the mark and separated ourselves from God, we have an inability, then, to please Him. We don't even pursue God, even though we do have some sort of "moral compass" that causes us to hopefully choose right over wrong, but our desire is not for God, at least not truly.

Romans 3.10-12

...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Ephesians 4.18-19

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (NIV)

As a kid growing up in the Catholic Church, I remember many times praying, often times even praying very sincere prayers. Sometimes it was in the outfield hoping the ball wouldn't be hit to me during an important moment, sometimes it was because I did something wrong and I felt bad, and sometimes I remember saying a sincere prayer that I would be able to go to Heaven. I don't negate these prayers as being real and sincere; at the time it absolutely was to me. Some of them were pretty passionate. But none of these prayers were prayers of faith. They were for sure prayers of *my* desire and prayers from *my* heart, but not prayers of faith.

As a young boy, God was more of a genie when I wanted something, and He seemed to me as an angry tyrant when I sinned. There was zero relationship, zero son-ship, zero understanding of who He was. I was spiritually dead, unable to comprehend who He was, and at the end of the day, uncaring of who He really was, as He was only there when I either wanted Him to be or when I was afraid that He was there. Worship was never a part of any of those prayers.

It's often been likened to a physical corpse. A dead physical body is unable to do anything physical, unless, of course, someone brings it to life. It cannot come to life by its own power. It is dead. Spiritually, we are born, in Adam, dead in our sins and transgressions.³⁸⁸ We cannot "will" ourselves to be alive, and we can't "do" anything spiritually, unless, of course, Someone brings us to spiritual life first. This is why the Word shows us that we can do physically good deeds because we are physically alive, we can do emotionally good things, like love your children, because you are emotionally alive (even though sin has corrupted our emotions as well and our emotions so that even love often gets distorted),³⁸⁹ and we can even do *morally* right deeds. But spiritually we are dead, and we can do nothing spiritually good to please God. We must be brought to life, and we can't do it on our own, as we are incapable.

³⁸⁶ Romans 7.18

³⁸⁷ Romans 3.12

³⁸⁸ Romans 5.15-21 // 1 Corinthians 15.21, 22

³⁸⁹ Luke 11.13

Ephesians 2.1-3

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

These are sobering words. But these words show us the depth of our sin and corruption; they are words that should cause us to understand even more *how far off the mark* we were from holiness. We weren't even close. We are by nature spiritually dead, unable to please God. Even as we look back to the very beginning of this study when we discussed God's self-disclosure, that He is the One who initiates everything, notice that nothing here has changed! Inasmuch as you can't "find" God if you went on a scavenger hunt unless He revealed Himself, you also cannot truly seek God as a spiritually dead being unless He awakens you, calls you, and draws you.

But once again, this isn't to say that you can't search for answers. You can physically open a Bible, read it, and study it. You can go to school for it, and even volunteer teaching it. For that matter, you can, sadly, become a pastor at a church and yet not be a Christian, as there are so many churches who have forsaken the basic foundations of truth. Knowledge of something and being enlivened and awakened by something are two different things.

It would be like saying that I can choose to know about the President, but I can't just choose to *know* him personally. That takes an invitation, something I can't just choose to do, something which I can't do by my own power. It must be initiated by him. With God it is no different. You can absolutely choose to seek our information on Him and learn about Him, but to actually *know* Him takes divine revelation, an act of inviting grace, something that is not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God.³⁹⁰

Look at this portion of Scripture from the book of **Romans**:

Romans 6.16-23

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What Paul is teaching, in a nutshell, is that we, as humans born "sinful at birth" as David says, are enslaved to sin. Because of this, we have an *inability*♣³⁹¹ to truly choose God and make ourselves spiritually alive. Now, keep in mind, as physically and emotionally alive (yet corrupted) people, as we have seen we can still choose to do physically and emotionally "good" deeds. We are, indeed, moral agents, or what many call *free agents*.♣ We still do as we choose, making daily choices and decisions as we please. However, due to our spiritual deadness, we cannot choose to be spiritually free and found in Christ. We cannot truly see the need for a Savior and repent, because we are slaves blinded by sin and dead in sin.³⁹²

Romans 8.7-9

The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed, it cannot;⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.⁹ But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit if the Spirit of God really dwells in you.

³⁹⁰ Ephesians 2.8

³⁹¹ Many theologians interchange the phrase *total depravity* with *total inability*; though they have most things in common, I make some distinction between the two doctrines, namely that *depravity* not only makes us unable, but also makes us untrustworthy in our heart, mind, emotions, and thoughts. *Inability*, as I see it, also makes us unable to freely choose spiritual things, and is mostly limited to that characteristic.

³⁹² Ephesians 4.18

We are doomed to death and destruction because we are law breakers, and the penalty is death. Without the grace of God, our eyes are spiritually dead, unable to see the Truth, therefore unable to even to see the need and put real faith in a Savior.

**A sinner has no more ability to repent and believe without the Holy Spirit's aid
than he has the ability to create a world.**

-C.H. Spurgeon

Let's take a moment to consider what the terms *inability*, *free agent* and *free will* entail. When most people hear the phrase "God's sovereignty" or "predestination," there always seems to be the follow up question: "well what about free will?" This is a valid question, and in light of our inability, I would pose the thought this way:

**We indeed have absolute free will to choose whatever we want
according to what we are capable of.**

Let me use an example. Can you fly? No, of course you can't...at least I doubt you can. You cannot just "choose" to fly. Why? Because you are bound to a human body.

Can you start a war in Australia? Unless you are the president of a powerful country reading this, the answer, again, is no. You don't have the authority to start a war in Australia.

If you are in prison, can you just "choose" to be free? No, you can't. A judge must order the cell to be opened.

You may think I'm being a little absurd, but Scripture uses an example that is even more ridiculous:

Jeremiah 13.23

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. (NIV)

So if you think the question of "can you fly" is absurd, then you must also believe that the question God's Word poses is also absurd. And in a sense, it *is* absurd, because the point being made is that the idea that a spiritually dead person having the ability to "choose" to become spiritually alive is also just as absurd. That's the point!

Can you, as a spiritually dead sinner blinded from your need for God, simply "choose" all of a sudden to have eternal life and live in heaven forever? No, you cannot. You are spiritually imprisoned because of sin, your sentence has been handed down by the great Judge, and you are awaiting your penalty, which is death. As we read above in **John 8.34-36**, the Son is the only one who can set you free.

So here's the picture: you are free to do whatever you want, other than walk out of your spiritual prison cell. You can play checkers, whittle, do jumping jacks or read books. You have all the free will in the world, according to what you are allowed. In real life it looks like this: you can choose your job, your wife, and your favorite baseball team. You can choose to commit adultery, or as a morally free agent, you can choose to repent of committing adultery.

This reflects Spurgeon's statement above. You are free to do whatever you want, so long as you are able. Are you able to create a world? No, because you are just human. Are you able to overturn your conviction for murder and just walk out of prison whenever you want? No, because only the judge and the court of law has that authority. Are you able to open up your own spiritual prison cell and have the Judge grant to you clemency so you can receive freedom? No, because you are dead in your sins, enslaved by them and imprisoned by them. You have earned your place.

Romans 6.23a

For the wages of sin is death, but...

**By God's grace the prison cell is opened; through faith we walk out.
By God's grace our eyes are opened; through faith we express our need for mercy.**

Romans 6.23b

...the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And yet, there is something in our pride, our perceived autonomy, that makes us want to believe that “no way, I could have chosen to repent at any point in my life. I was free to do so.” The reason this strikes us is because we always *perceive* complete freedom.



For instance, can a dead person be convinced they are dead? No. Why? Because they are dead. Remember the movie *Sixth Sense*? Bruce Willis' character [SPOILER ALERT!] wasn't even aware that he was dead, so he *perceived* that he had all the freedoms of a fully alive person. It is only *after* we are made aware of our place of despair (by God's given grace as He opens our eyes to reality), that we can *then* operate freely by repenting and putting our faith in Him.

Now to be clear, spiritual imprisonment and death with “limited” free agency doesn't mean we're all a bunch of sinning robots going around doing completely immoral and wicked things all the time. No, again this is the difference between *total depravity* and *utter depravity*. You are only *spiritually* dead, not emotionally or physically. In this spiritual

"I see people that don't know they are dead people."

prison cell, you are free to love your wife, be an honest person, pay your taxes, and help old ladies across the street.

But just remember, all these self-righteous emotional and physical good deeds are like filthy rags.³⁹³ The only way to gain this spiritual freedom is if it is given to us as a gift. To walk out of the prison cell, it must be opened by someone other than us. Once it is open, we are *then completely free* to choose freedom, to choose life, to choose salvation!

Thankfully, then, there is good news. Rather, *the* Good News, that as the aforementioned **Romans 6.23** says, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Look at the words of Christ here in John's Gospel:

John 6.43-44

Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

John 8.34-36

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

So because of this free gift *by grace* that opens our prison door (completely unmerited favor because we were totally unable), we can *now* gain freedom *through faith* exercised by walking out the door. This is precisely why the Word says:

We are saved by grace, and *through* faith.

These two important elements, “by grace” and “through faith,” are of utmost important to understanding our salvation and our need for a covenant. The Reformers of the 16th century coined these two phrases as two of what we call the “Five Solas” (“sola” is Latin for “alone”). “Grace alone” is known as *sola gratia*,♣ and “faith alone” is known as *sola fide*.♣³⁹⁴

Ephesians 2.8, 9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We recognize that to have faith, faith is only because God the Father has initiated and drawn us by His grace, not of our own “free will” of doing works. It is then that Jesus sets us free by that grace so that we can put our faith in Him, walking freely out of our prison cell.³⁹⁵

³⁹³ Isaiah 64.6

³⁹⁴ We saw the first of the Five Solas in Chapter III when we learned of “Scripture alone,” which is *sola Scriptura*. The others, as we'll get to, are “Christ alone” (*solus Christus*) and “glory to God alone” (*solus Deo gloria*).

³⁹⁵ Acts 18.27

God doesn't give us grace *because* we choose Him; He gives us grace *so that* we can choose Him.

Once again, this is why Spurgeon said that without the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, we can't even repent and believe! Repentance and belief are gifts themselves that can only come from faith, and faith only comes as a gift resulting from the gift of unmerited grace! So, without God initiating and drawing us to Himself and opening our eyes, we would not be able to even see the need for repentance.

Therefore, salvation truly is an absolute undeserved gift. And as we see, our sin has sealed our fate and rendered us unable to choose the things of God. We need to be drawn by the Father, set free, and raised up. Without that, we live under punishment.

☪ The Need for a Covenant ☪

So here we are, fallen race, infiltrated by sin, imperfect, and incapable of pleasing God's set standard of perfection and holiness. In our sin, we may make attempts to appease God and "buy Him off," with acts of righteousness, but as we already have seen, our righteousness are like filthy rags to the Lord. They simply just don't stack up.³⁹⁶

Sin must be destroyed.

So what is the road to redemption? How do we even begin to put the pieces together back again?

I remember one day, as a matter of fact it was the day before the very first small group meeting in my wife's and my living room that eventually became a church plant only three months later. We were out sharing the Gospel at Cal State San Marcos in the free speech area, and I began talking with a young college student who was probably about the same age as me. I could tell he was into music, so I asked him what his favorite band was. He answered with Metallica. I asked him, "so tell me, let's say Metallica was playing here on campus, and backstage passes were \$10,000, could you get in?"

"No," he replied, "I couldn't afford it."

I asked, "but what if you went up to the security guard and recited every Metallica lyric from every song, and even told him the birthday, wives' and kids' names, and Social Security number of every member in the band, would the security let you in?"

"No," he said again, knowing it was all about payment.

I asked him how he could possibly get in backstage if even the biggest fan wouldn't be allowed back. His answer was that he would have to purchase it, which he admitted he could not, so he would have to receive it as a gift, maybe by a radio show contest as I suggested.

I then asked him, "let's say there was a kid that was offered a backstage pass who had just recently heard of Metallica, but didn't know any songs, any lyrics, and definitely knew no personal details of the band. Most wouldn't even call him a real fan. If he walked up the security guard and showed him the pass, would he be given entrance, even if he wasn't all that "worthy" of a fan?"

"Yes," he said.

"Why so?," I asked back.

"Because he had the pass."

Unlike the night club analogy I opened with, we see that entrance is *completely impossible* unless it is a gift, 100%. We are unable to set ourselves free, no matter how hard we try. We can't even try to win mercy by trying hard! I shared with him that it didn't matter how 'good' you were, how much of the Bible you knew, or how big of a 'fan' you were of God's, it all comes down to a payment we can't make and a God who makes the payment for us.

³⁹⁶ Isaiah 64.6

What is a Covenant?

And so we find ourselves now in this era of humanity at a major loss. Like the kid wanting to go to the concert, there is absolutely no way we can attain that. We are cut off from our Creator, who has promised death for the law breaker. The only way is through the benevolence and mercy of God, who must offer it freely, as none of us has merit or the ability to set ourselves free.

Up to this point, God had been at rest amid His creation, enjoying the beauty and “very goodness” of all He had made. His work was complete. But now, creation has become marred. What would God’s response be to these new enemies, these law breakers? He hates sin, hates the law breaker, and hates all that is impure and unholy.

And so we see, God *could have* remained in His Sabbath rest and allowed us to continue down our road of destruction, the very end that God had forewarned and promised to us would happen if we broke His holy Law. But instead, God did something dramatically different than what you might expect from a holy God.

He got up from His rest.

And yet He did not get up in order to cast us off or condemn us, carrying out our sentence, even though He had every right. Instead, however, He went back to work; but this time, the work was different. It wasn’t the work of creation, that work was finished. This time, however, He went to work on the *new creation*.³⁹⁷

God’s heart, even for His enemies, was to restore them.³⁹⁸ He immediately, upon speaking with them after their first sin, went to work on this new creation by making the first sacrifice, the first shedding of blood, for the sins of mankind. He made clothes out of animal skins to show man that sin is punishable by death, and only by death can the sins of man be atoned for.³⁹⁹

And so, this was God’s response to sinners: a promise that He will devise a plan, a promise of redemption for His undeserving, broken image bearers. This is what we call a *covenant*,⁴⁰⁰ a promise that a plan of salvation will be put in place despite our shortcomings; a plan that will satisfy God’s just and holy wrath, while allowing Him to show mercy.

A covenant, in its simplest definition, is a relational promise, particularly a promise or agreement between two acting parties. It occurs around 300 times in the Bible.⁴⁰⁰ In a covenant, there is an overriding tone of a “whatever it takes” attitude in the making of the covenant, and the agreeing parties are “covenanting” to keep their end of the bargain at all cost, even if the other party fails. In a covenant between man and God, however, it is less like a traditional covenant because in a typical covenant there are two negotiating parties. With this kind of covenant, the covenant is issued by God alone, and there are no negotiations. Nonetheless, it is a serious act of commitment to the terms.

COVENANTS BETWEEN PEOPLE

Because of this biblical picture of a covenant of relational promises as a covenant, this is why we see and call some human relationships as covenants. Some are explicit (such as covenants between humans, whether friends and enemies⁴⁰¹), and some are implicit, evidenced in the Bible in certain terms.

Marriage Covenant

First and foremost, we have, of course, the marriage covenant. This again is not just simply a contract, but is a relational promise of commitment that engages an overriding tone of a “whatever it takes” attitude. This is why we say “in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, till death do us part.” Marriage is not 50/50, but 100/100. And even when the other side only gives 20, or 10, or -20, our part of the covenant is to still give 100. As Paul said specifically to husbands, they are to “lay your life down for your wife.”⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ John 5.36, 14.10 // Luke 2.49, 50 // Matthew 11.28-30

³⁹⁸ Romans 5.6-11 // Colossians 1.21

³⁹⁹ Genesis 3.21, cf. Hebrews 9.22

⁴⁰⁰ Genesis 6.18, 9.9-17, 15.18, 17.2-21 // Exodus 2.24, 6.4, 5, 19.5, 31.16 // Leviticus 26.42 // Deuteronomy 4.13-31, 29.1-25 // Psalm 89.3-34, 105.8-10, 111.5-9 // Jeremiah 31.31 // Matthew 26.28 // Mark 14.24 // Luke 1.72 // Acts 7.8 // 1 Corinthians 11.25 // 2 Corinthians 3.6-14 // Galatians 3.15-17, 4.24 // Hebrews 7.22, 8.6-13, 9.1-20 // Revelation 11.19 among countless others.

⁴⁰¹ 1 Samuel 18.3 // Genesis 31.44 // Exodus 23.32

⁴⁰² Ephesians 5.25

Part of the marriage covenant is that the two become one and each person is to leave their family and cleave to their spouse, trusting each other as the only two people in the covenant.⁴⁰³ The marriage bed is not to be defiled.⁴⁰⁴ Each person's body is now not their own, but shared with the other, *and is to be exclusive* to the other.⁴⁰⁵ A commitment to loyalty is expected, which includes physical, emotional, and spiritual fidelity. Sexual sin, emotional adultery, pornography, and going outside the marriage for anything expressly intended for marriage breaks this covenant.

Church Covenant

Additionally, we also see that we are a covenant people under God and to each other as the body of Christ. Both the Old and New Testament describe a diverse people who, in love, are to be committed to growth, spiritual health, accountability, service, care, submission one to another, vulnerability, honesty, prayer for one another, and sharpening each other, *regardless* of whether or not those actions are reciprocated.⁴⁰⁶

For this reason, many churches have a formal church covenant (and those that don't have an *explicit* discernable covenant, nearly all church have an *implicit*, unspoken and *assumed* church covenant⁴⁰⁷). A church covenant might be a declaration of beliefs, statement of faith or values, or even a formal partnership for those who call that church "home," whether by relational commitment, membership, or general agreement. While not all churches have formally defined covenants (of any sort), they are practical helps in order to clearly define the values of a local church and the expectations it has for the people who represent Christ and His body in order to truly depict what a covenant people should live like.

Family Covenant

Also, one can also see within the Scriptures an implicit familial covenant between parents and children. Parents are expected to raise, love, discipline, and teach their children by God's grace, and children are to obey their parents and submit to their authority.⁴⁰⁸ The blessings and curses of keeping and breaking this covenant are evident as we see throughout the Word and of course throughout our own lives.⁴⁰⁹

Like with church covenants (and even the marriage covenant), there is often, even if most likely, not a physical and clarified written type of a covenant in place for families, but based on God's Word and the guidance it gives, each family nearly always has implicit (or even spoken) expectations of a covenant type relationship amongst each other.

FACILITATING A COVENANT

In the Old Testament, a very graphic ritual was common when making a covenant with another person. In this covenant, the two parties would agree to the terms, then take an animal, slice it down the middle, and place the two pieces on the ground a couple feet apart. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew definition of "covenant" includes the phrase "a cutting." Then, the two parties would then walk through the center of the pieces as part of their oath. By doing this, they were essentially saying "I promise to keep my end of the deal, and if not, I should be as cursed as this dead animal." In other words, if you broke the covenant, you were dead meat.⁴¹⁰

So as we see, a covenant is a big deal, it is a serious interaction, and it is not taken lightly. So, what does this mean for us? Let's look at the four major Old Testament covenants made between man and God as we see God's plan for the redemption of His creation unfold.

⁴⁰³ Genesis 2.24 // Matthew 19.5 // 1 Corinthians 6.16 // Ephesians 5.31

⁴⁰⁴ 1 Chronicles 5.1 // Hebrews 13.4

⁴⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 6.19, 7.4, 5

⁴⁰⁶ 1 Thessalonians 3.11-4.2

⁴⁰⁷ What I mean by this is that many churches don't have a formal church covenant, though they still have just as many or more (spoken or unspoken) expectations for their congregants and leaders. Whether the expectation is to hold to certain beliefs, act a certain way in public, to serve, be involved in a small group, or even just show up on Sunday, these are all "covenantal" expectations (which should all and only be derived from God's Word), even if they aren't written down. For the most part, written covenants set clear expectations and values for both parties, giving way to a successful, healthy church family life.

⁴⁰⁸ Ephesians 6.1-4 // Exodus 20.12

⁴⁰⁹ Exodus 20.12 // Proverbs 20.7, 22.6, 29.15

⁴¹⁰ Genesis 15.7-21

The COVENANTS of the BIBLE

COVENANTS BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE

This is a huge topic that deserves much more treatment than what is here, but it is important, at very least, to give a general understanding. First of all, there is much conversation on how this is ordered, arranged, and divided, but know that the way you view these covenants is what gives you an overall framework of how God's redemptive plan will be carried out. It gives you a great and deep understanding of the overall heart and desire of God's redemptive desire for mankind.

First of all, the biblical covenants give us a new picture of who God is and who He intends to be seen as amidst His creation. We saw that the first way He revealed Himself as in **Genesis** was that of a Creator. Here, however, with the enacting of a covenant, God is establishing Himself in a different role.

He is revealing Himself as a King.

God now, is letting us know that He is not just the Creator of this creation that we have marred, but He is the King over it. And His intent, as King, is to restore His marred earthly Kingdom.

In John Frame's book, *the Doctrine of the Word*,⁴¹¹ he extensively speaks of the covenants of God being written in the form of the ancient Hittite's treaties called *suzerain treaties* that were between a great king and a lesser king, the lesser king being the *mediator*♣ on behalf of his represented people. The mediator was necessary as the one who spoke on behalf of his represented people so that the people could enjoy the terms set by the great King. It was through the mediator that the represented people could have access to the great King. This was always a part of these suzerain treaties of the ancient Hittites, who would have been contemporaries during these biblical times.

Frame often quotes a colleague and expert on the matter, Meredith Kline, who points out in his book *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, the various "parts" in which you find in both the covenants of the Bible, as well as these ancient Hittite suzerain treaties.⁴¹² Though both Frame and Kline go into much deeper detail on the nature of these covenants, we can take the main points and break it down for our understanding of each covenant.

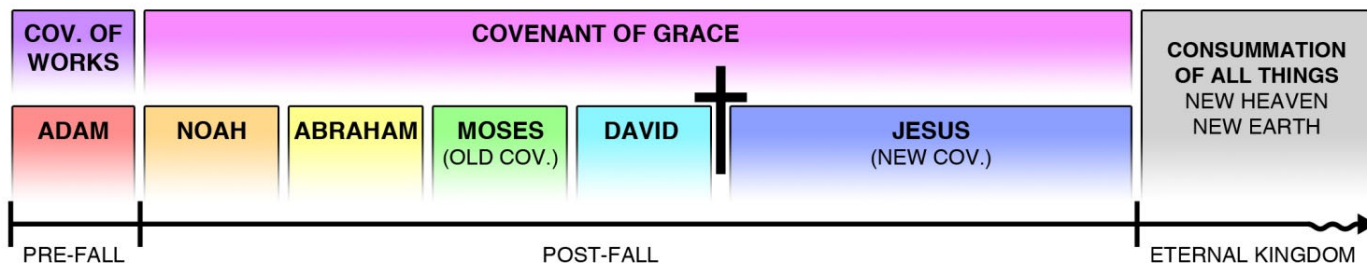
Each biblical covenant consists of the following traits of the suzerain treaties:

- A. **Name of the great king initiating the covenant**
- B. **History of relationship between great king and lesser king, sometimes seen as the mediator**
- C. **Conditions of the covenant, such as laws and terms**
 - 1. **Expectation of loyalty**
 - 2. **Specific requirements**
- D. **Consequences:**
 - 1. **Blessings for keeping**
 - 2. **Curses for breaking**
- E. **The sign (administration) of how the covenant is made known**

Before looking at the specifics of each covenant, let's look at the chart on the following page to get an idea of how they work in continuity with each other.

⁴¹¹ Mostly in chapter 24

⁴¹² Kline even sees this most evidently in the structure of the entire book of Deuteronomy. He sees that the whole book was written in the same form as these suzerain treaties.



1. The 2 Overarching Covenants.

Most (but not all) theologians distinguish between two overarching covenants between God and man that umbrella all other covenants and periods of time. They would say that there was an original Covenant of Works (sometimes synonymously called the Adamic or Edenic Covenant) created upon the creation of mankind and that it was up to mankind to maintain this covenant by being perfect through their works.

This, of course, failed because Adam and Eve, the first of mankind, failed in sin. God then instituted what we know as the Covenant of Grace, which started at the fall and will continue until Christ returns and brings the consummation of all the covenants, ushering in the eternal Kingdom. This is the basic biblical belief that salvation has always been “by grace, through faith.”⁴¹³ As we will see, even when the Law was in place, salvation was never gained through upholding the Law; it couldn’t be, because as born sinners, we all fall short.⁴¹⁴ Therefore, from the fall until the end, the Covenant of Grace is in effect.

2. The 2 “Main” Sub-Covenants under the Covenant of Grace.

Underneath the Covenant of Grace we have two main covenants. The first, now known by believers in Christ as the Old Covenant, was the pre-Jesus Mosaic Covenant of the Law. This covenant was kept solid between man and God by men, acting in faith, making temporary atonement for their sins by the sacrifice of animals. Again, this is by faith, as it was an imperfect covenant because animal sacrifice couldn’t completely redeem man, since animals weren’t the law breakers.

Therefore, we needed a New Covenant, one that was mediated by a perfect man, the Lamb of God, who does in fact take away the sins of the world and brings exoneration to sinners. When the Lamb came on the scene and took on the cross, He instituted the New Covenant, where a perfect Man came to redeem mankind once and for all time.

3. Major “Sub-Covenants.”

Throughout man’s history, God made some broad spanning covenants, in part to declare His faithfulness and prove His glory, love, and patience, and yet also to foreshadow the New Covenant to come. Most divide these covenants into six in the Old Testament, which we will detail below: the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants. The sixth one is the New Covenant, which was ushered in with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God (which is also, as stated above, the second of the two “main” covenants).

✠ The COVENANTS of the OLD TESTAMENT ✠

As we look now at the specific covenants in the Old Testament, it should be noted that there are two distinct types of covenants: *unconditional* and *conditional*. ♣

Now, as you will see, when these covenants are unconditional, it means that the “great King” who enacts the covenant requires no particular stipulations for the mediator and his represented people to enjoy the blessings of the covenant. There is a bit of a misnomer by saying this, however, because in reality, the *true condition* to enjoy *all* of these biblical covenants, even the unconditional ones, is faith, which is then accompanied by an outward sign of that faith. Therefore, when there are no particular or specific conditions, always know that the true and eternal condition for all of these is an internal faith that is shown by an outward sign.

⁴¹³ Ephesians 2.5-8 // Acts 18.27

⁴¹⁴ Romans 3.23

The Adamic (Adam) Covenant

Without explicitly naming it, we've already explored the first biblical covenant that some call the Adamic Covenant when we looked at creation in **Chapter III**. It was there that we saw that God had made all things and, in essence, made a deal (a covenant) with Adam. Again, some theologians don't agree that the Adamic Covenant was an "official" covenant, though they would agree that there was a basic understanding and the general "form" of a covenant was in place, since it was made clear that the first couple could stay in the garden if they obeyed, but if they broke the law they would die. That, in a nutshell, is a relational promise with built in conditions. But on top of that, the Word seems to make it more abundantly clear in this passage:

Hosea 6.7

But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

So the deal between God and Adam was basically this: don't eat the fruit from the one tree and you can stay here, rent free, forever. You will enjoy all of creation, subdue the earth, enjoy marriage and baby-making. If you break this covenant, you will surely die, your land will be taken from you, and you will live under a curse as covenant breakers.⁴¹⁵

During the time of this covenant, God gave Adam a sign, somewhat of a token, to remind him of this covenant. The sign for this covenant was the Tree of Life, which was a symbol of the Sabbath rest, showing Adam that God was at rest because all was well and that eternal and free fellowship with God was in effect.

Of course, as we saw in the last chapter, Adam broke this covenant and turned everything upside down. Now, the Sabbath acts as a sign for us, as we now see God at work on the new creation as the Messiah will become our Sabbath rest and will make all things "very good" again, but *newly* "very good;"⁴¹⁶ all this so we can enjoy true Edenic freedom on the New Earth. Additionally, the earth will be given back to us when it is freed from the curse.⁴¹⁷

- A. **Name of the great King:** God.
- B. **Mediator:** Adam, on behalf of the whole human race.
- C. **Conditions:**
 - 1. **Expectation of loyalty:** Walk with God and live in obedience.
 - 2. **Specific requirements:** Don't eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
- D. **Consequences:**
 - 1. **Blessings:** If you obey, you will walk with God eternally, eat freely, subdue the earth, and be fruitful and multiply.
 - 2. **Curses:** If you break the covenant, you will surely die; the curse(s) will be enacted.
- E. **The Sign:** Internal sign was works; external sign was the Tree of Life, which symbolized a life of Sabbath rest.

The Noahic (Noah) Covenant

As time progressed, these broken image bearers were acting more and more treacherously; mankind was getting worse and worse by the day.⁴¹⁸ God was understandably grieved by this, and yet also angered by such relentless law breaking. As He decided to enact His justice upon sin and pour out wrath, He decided to give one man grace.

Chances are you already know the story of Noah in a nutshell, but there are a few details that are important to recognize so we get a proper understanding that goes "beyond Sunday School" for this great event in world history.

Noah, first of all, was a man who "found grace in the eyes of the Lord."⁴¹⁹ This, coupled with **Hebrews 11.7** which says that "*by faith* Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith," shows that Noah was given grace, and then *through faith* he acted on what was asked of him.

So often we read the story in a way that makes it sound like Noah was the only righteous, God-fearing man on the planet. But this isn't the case. He may have been a decent guy, especially compared to the world around him, but compared to

⁴¹⁵ Genesis 3.16-19

⁴¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5.17 // Galatians 6.15 // Revelation 21.5

⁴¹⁷ Isaiah 65.17-22 // 2 Peter 3.13 // Romans 8.18-22 // Revelation 21.1

⁴¹⁸ Genesis 6.5, 8.21

⁴¹⁹ Genesis 6.8

God, he was still just another hopeless sinner, an enemy of God, in need of unmerited favor. Despite the fact that Noah, too, was an enemy of God, dead in his sins and trespasses, God, in His mercy, decided to bestow grace upon Him.

It is by this grace that he received the faith that enabled him to step out and risk everything, spending 120 years working, along with his family and other hired hands, on building a ridiculous structure for a ridiculous purpose.⁴²⁰

And what of some of the beautiful foreshadowing of the New Covenant do we see in this great event that ends with a covenant? As Noah was putting the final touches on this wooden structure, it says that the Lord commanded him to “cover it [pitch it] inside and outside with pitch.”⁴²¹ Pitch was a tar-like covering, a seal so that no leaks could come into the vessel. So why is this significant? The Hebrew word for “pitch” is *kaphar*, and its definition says to “appease, make an atonement, cleanse, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, purge, reconcile.”

So what is it that God could be showing us through this historic narrative? That in order to preserve us from the cause of death (in Noah’s case, water; in our case, sin), we must be hidden in the vessel which is covered with atonement, pardon, and reconciliation! And not only that, but once Noah, by faith, is in the vessel (Christ, covered in His atoning blood), the Lord shuts and seals the door behind him, proving, again, that it is by grace, through faith, that God will save, sanctify, and keep.

After the flood and the family exited, immediately Noah had the first worship service on the newly formed (rather deformed) earth. The earth, drastically altered, was now in an accelerated state of decay, and yet Noah gave thanks, and God then made a promise to Noah, stating that He would never destroy the earth by flood again.⁴²² The sign He gave us as a reminder was the rainbow (rainbows were presumably not known before this time, as this was the first rainfall in history, and rainbows, as we know, are effects of rain. Particularly, rainbows are caused when sunlight is passing through the water in the atmosphere, causing this prism. So, for a rainbow, you need both rain and sunlight, with the sunlight acting as the beautiful promise (covenant) that an end of rain has or will come).

The flood, however, didn’t solve the problem (nor was it intended to). In **Genesis 8.21**, God says “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Man was just as wicked as before (and as a matter of fact, right after we see Noah at his worship service, we see him drunk and naked in his tent).

Rather, the flood was to be a major “wake-up call” to humanity that there is a God who hates sin and hates the law breaker, and without His grace, judgment will be upon us. In other words, we need a great mediator to come between us and the great King, the great Judge.

- A. **Name of the great King:** God.
- B. **Mediator:** Noah, on behalf of his family and the rest of humanity.
- C. **Conditions:**
 - 1. **Expectation of loyalty:** Unconditional.
 - 2. **Specific requirements:** Unconditional.
- D. **Consequences:**
 - 1. **Blessings:** You and your family will be spared, and you as well as the animals will repopulate the earth. You are also now free to eat animals as part of your diet, and I will never again destroy the earth by flood.⁴²³
 - 2. **Curses:** If you live outside of faith, you will not be a part of this restored humanity and creation.
- E. **The Sign:** Internal and eternal was faith; external and temporal was the rainbow.

⁴²⁰ Genesis 6.11-22

⁴²¹ Genesis 6.14

⁴²² Genesis 9.8-17

⁴²³ Isaiah 54.9, 10

The ABRAHAMIC (ABRAHAM) COVENANT

The next major covenant we see in the Word is the covenant made between God and Abraham. This covenant is described in **Genesis 12.1-3**, and it is an unconditional covenant. This is a promise that God is making to Abram (soon to be Abraham), and it entailed three main points:

1. **A Promise of Land:** God promises Abram that He will give Him a specific plot of land for his people. It is reiterated in **Genesis 13.14-18**, and its physical dimensions are even given in **Genesis 15.18-22**. **Deuteronomy 30.1-10** also speaks of this covenant.
2. **A Promise of a People:** God also promised Abram that He would make a great nation out of his own offspring, despite his old age and being childless. He reiterates this in **Genesis 17.6** and renews it through the Davidic Covenant in **2 Samuel 7.12-16**. The fulfillment of this has been apparent, as we see the Jewish race still thriving today, and, most importantly, we did see the Messiah come through the line of Abraham. However, this part of the blessing, as we will see, goes beyond a national or ethnic people.⁴²⁴
3. **A Promise of Blessing:** God also promises that Abraham's offspring will be a blessing to all the people of the earth. This was fulfilled in totality as Abraham's offspring gave way to the birth of the Messiah, who would become the final Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Aside from the actual covenant itself, like in the story of Noah, we see some amazing foreshadows of the New Covenant to come within the story of Abraham. One particular story was the near-sacrifice of his son, Isaac, found in **Genesis 22**.

Abraham and Sarah did eventually give birth in their old age, which was a miracle for sure! Then, out of the blue, God asks Abraham to sacrifice this son, Isaac, as an offering to the Lord. I don't know about you, but I would need major confirmation on something like this, not just a fleeting thought! I would want it spelled out in my Alphabet Soup or by the sound of James Earl Jones' voice coming from the sky.

Nonetheless, Abraham was a man of faith who trusted God. Abraham told his son Isaac that they were going to sacrifice to the Lord on Mt. Moriah, but Isaac was suspicious because they didn't have a goat. Abraham, being partly truthful, yet partly withholding, says "the Lord will provide."

At the top, it must have become apparent to Isaac that there was no goat, and that he, in fact, was the sacrifice. His first clue may have been when his dad started tying him up, but that's just me making assumptions. Keep in mind, however, that Isaac is 14 years old and his dad is 114 years old and near death! No doubt, Isaac could have easily taken him out at the knees, but there *must have been* some element of faith and obedience on Isaac's part as well!

Then, as Abraham raised his knife, the Lord stopped called out to him, saying, "Abraham! Abraham!" No doubt relieved, God assured Abraham that he wouldn't have to go through with this task. He looked up, and across the way was a ram, stuck in a thicket. The Lord did indeed provide.

A few things we can note from this:

- Isaac was Abraham's only son. Jesus was God's only Son.
- Isaac presumably went to his own death as a sacrifice willingly, as did Jesus.
- Isaac carried his very device of execution up a hill, which was the wood for burning. Jesus carried His device of execution up a hill, the wooden cross.
- Many theologians point out that Mt. Moriah is on the same mountain range as Golgotha, where Christ was executed years later.

Of course, Isaac couldn't be the human sacrifice we needed, he was not the perfect, unblemished Lamb of God. But this gave us a taste for two things: a deeper reality of the cost of sin (it wasn't just a couple pairs of leather jackets and pants anymore), as well as the need for this covenant to be fulfilled by a perfect Human.

Notably, it is interesting to look at Abraham's (and presumably Isaac's) faith. Why would Abraham do this if he knew that God promised that He would establish Himself through Abraham's seed? According to **Hebrews 11.17-19**, Abraham

⁴²⁴ Isaiah 27.6 // Mark 16.15 // Revelation 5.9

knew in faith that God would bodily resurrect Isaac! He absolutely believed, because God had made a covenant promise, that even if he killed his own son, God would make a way to fulfill His promise. Therefore, Abraham knew by faith that God *must* raise Isaac from the dead.

This, yet again, is *another* beautiful picture of having faith in the coming of a Messiah, the Lamb of God, that would resurrect from the dead.

- A. **Name of the great King:** God.
- B. **Mediator:** Abraham, on behalf of God's chosen people Israel, which is promised to comprise of people from all the nations of the earth.
- C. **Conditions:**
 - 1. **Expectation of loyalty:** Unconditional.
 - 2. **Specific requirements:** Unconditional.
- D. **Consequences:**
 - 1. **Blessings:** I will make from your seed a great nation, and all the nations of the earth will benefit because of you. I will give you the Promised Land.
 - 2. **Curses:** If you live outside of faith you will not be a part of this great nation.
- E. **The Sign:** Internal was faith (a circumcised heart)⁴²⁵; external and temporal was circumcision.

The Mosaic (Moses) Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant is what is more commonly known as "the Law" or the "Old Covenant." To be clear, when speaking of the "Old Covenant," we are not talking about the entire Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant, not every part of the Old Testament. For instance, the Noahic Covenant is still in effect, God's promise remains that He will not destroy the earth by flood, and we still have rainbows as the sign. The Abrahamic Covenant was not abolished, but was renewed even in the Davidic Covenant, and will be fulfilled, as we will see, by the New Covenant.

Before the Mosaic Law was given in given in **Exodus 19-24**, (starting with the Ten Commandments), God gave them a specific foreshadow of not just this covenant, but of the New Covenant. When He was about to deliver the Hebrews out of Egypt, He told them to find an unblemished lamb, slaughter it, and put its blood on their doorpost on the night of that He led them in their exodus.

That night, the Hebrews who believed *in faith* that God would do as He said, God went around Egypt and killed the firstborn of everyone, even animals, who didn't have the blood of the lamb on their doorpost. The Hebrews, then, were "passed over" by God's wrath. Instead of His anger towards sinners killing the Hebrews' first born children, His wrath was temporarily appeased by the blood of the Passover lamb.

This would become a sign for the Hebrews for this Mosaic Law about to be introduced. But it was more importantly a sign of the coming New Covenant, as we will see later.

After the exodus, the Mosaic Covenant was given to the Hebrews as an administrative covenant to point people toward their *need* for atonement through not just a Passover lamb, but a perfect Messiah who would be *the* Passover Lamb who could mediate between them and God. The Law showed the intensity of perfection and God's holiness. This system of commands, sacrifices, offerings, and festivals could not atone for sin, but simply "put off" or "postponed" His wrath until it could be fulfilled, provided they were faithful to it. The Old Covenant simply foreshadowed and made more plainly the need for a final and worthy sacrifice to truly take away their sins in order to procure the promises given in the other covenants.

The thing with the Mosaic Covenant is that it was *never intended* to bring the promise of the Adamic, Abrahamic, Noahic, and Davidic Covenants. Somehow, Christians have wrongly spent too much time focused on the Old Mosaic Covenant and trying to keep it, rather than focusing on the blessings and fulfillments of the other covenants that were procured by the *fulfilling* of the Old Covenant.



⁴²⁵Deuteronomy 30.6

When I say “too much time,” I don’t mean *at all* that we should spend *less or no time on it*. There is *so much to learn* by knowing and studying the Old Covenant. But rather, what I mean is that we neglect the fact that the Mosaic Covenant was intended to *point to the fact* that we needed a Messiah to fulfill the Mosaic Covenant *so that* we could have the blessings and promises of the fulfilled Adamic, Abrahamic, Noahic, and Davidic Covenants.

The Mosaic Covenant was meant to be a “tutor,” as the Word calls it.⁴²⁶ This means that it was here to help us and teach us, pointing us to the Solution, by making clear that we are sinners in need of a Savior! It was always intended to be a *temporary* tool to show us that for the previous promises of the other covenants to be received, we need God’s grace, that none of these promises can be attained by the works of the flesh!⁴²⁷

Therefore, God’s holy Law was given to the people, not as a means for salvation, that would be impossible; but rather as a means to *show them the only way to salvation: by grace through faith!*

Faith in what? Faith in a coming Lamb of God who will be *the sacrifice to end all sacrifices*, once and for all! God’s wrath against sinners would indeed finally be appeased forever, and His full and complete love will be extravagantly poured out!

- A. **Name of the great King:** God.
- B. **Mediator:** Moses, on behalf of Israel.
- C. **Conditions:**
 - 1. **Expectation of loyalty:** Do not have other gods.
 - 2. **Specific requirements:** The Law, which includes the Ten Commandments and the sacrificial system.
- D. **Consequences:**
 - 1. **Blessings:** If you keep the Law, you will be able to have fellowship with God, as His wrath would pass over you.
 - 2. **Curses:** If you don’t fulfill the Law, you will be separated from God.
- E. **The Sign:** Internal was faith that *the* Lamb of God will eventually come and fulfill all the righteous requirements of the Law; external was the giving of the Ten Commandments, as well as the sacrifice of animals as a temporary “appeasement” of God’s wrath, including the Passover.

THE DAVIDIC (DAVID) COVENANT

In **2 Samuel 7.8-17** we see another covenant made between God and King David.⁴²⁸ In this covenant, God renews the Abrahamic Covenant by promising to give His people the land that He promised and that He would establish His people in that land. But the covenant becomes more specific when it mentions particulars about the actual rulership of this land:

2 Samuel 7.11-16

“Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son...¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”



Michelangelo's Statue of David Getting Spiffed Up

Here, God is promising to David that even after he dies, one of his descendants will build a house for the Name of God, and God will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever. He is promising that David’s throne will rule and reign over the entire earth forever, and that God will be a Father to this Ruler, and that the Ruler will be His Son!

⁴²⁶ Galatians 3.23 (NKJV)

⁴²⁷ John 6.63 // Galatians 2.20, 21

⁴²⁸ This covenant is largely reiterated in Psalm 89.19-27

Hebrews 1.5 also specifically quotes this covenant when the author asks “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’? Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son’?” Additionally, **Psalm 89.3, 4** gives further clarity when it says of God that:

“You [God] have said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ⁴ “I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.”’”

In addition to these verses, there are many places that specifically state that the Ruler of this Kingdom will come from the seed of David and that it will reign eternally from the land that was promised.⁴²⁹

So what does this mean, exactly? Well, first of all, it means that whoever this Messiah, this Lamb of God is, He must be a descendant coming straight from the hereditary line of David, and that this Messiah would be called the Son of God. This Messiah will in fact come from the line of David, and He will indeed be called the Son of God! Our hope is coming, and the people in David’s kingdom look forward in faith that this Messiah will indeed sit on the throne of David eternally.

- A. Name of the great King:** God.
- B. Mediator:** David, as a king on behalf of the kingdom of Israel.
- C. Conditions:**
 - 1. Expectation of loyalty:** Unconditional.
 - 2. Specific requirements:** Unconditional.
- D. Consequences:**
 - 1. Blessings:** That the Messiah will come through David’s line and establish the rule of God forever upon His chosen people. God’s Kingdom would be restored once and for all time. This chosen people under the Messiah’s reign on David’s throne will extend to the Gentiles.⁴³⁰
 - 2. Curses:** If you live outside of faith you will not be a part of this great Kingdom.
- E. The Sign:** Internal sign was faith that the Messiah will reign forever; external was the throne of David.

The Need for a New Covenant

But when will it end? Surely, we know that the blood of animals and the sacrifice of incense does not get close to redeeming what was lost at the fall. It really just magnifies the fact that the only true payment that can be made would be the blood of true human innocence. Thanks to Adam, however, this could never be known from mankind. Our blood is poisoned with sin, and our righteousness, on its best day, is like filthy rags compared to godly and holy righteousness, as revealed to us in the Law.⁴³¹ At best, we are sinners, hated by God, but by His grace we are temporarily delaying His wrath through annual animal sacrifices as enacted through the Mosaic Covenant.

But of course, this can’t go on forever. We are in dire need of a New Covenant that makes His mercy and grace permanent.

And yet here, is where we see the great and glorious wisdom of God encompassing the whole thing, as we look at two final covenants. First, we see implicitly in the Scriptures what is indeed the most incredible of all the covenants: the Covenant of Redemption.

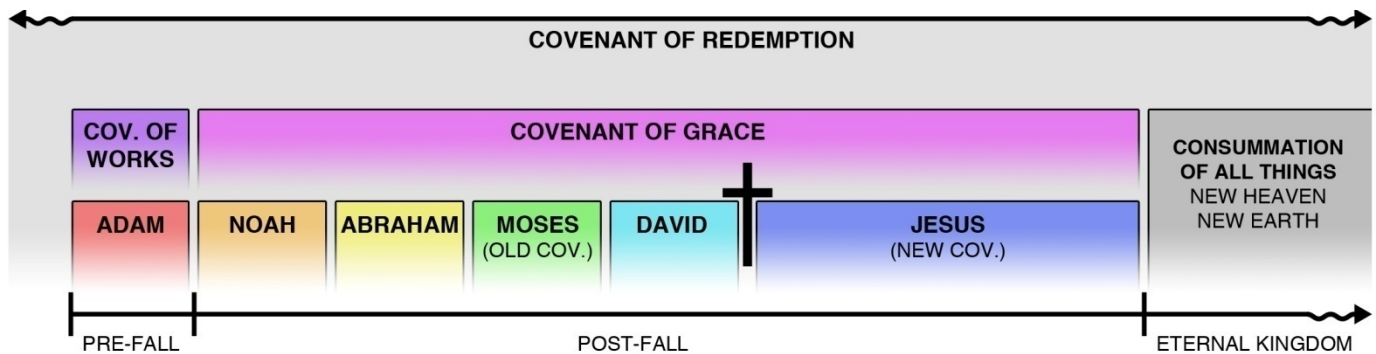
⁴²⁹ Psalm 132.11

⁴³⁰ Amos 9.11, cf. Acts 15.14-18 // Revelation 7.9

⁴³¹ Ezekiel 37.23-28 // Jeremiah 23.5, 6 // Isaiah 9.6, 7 // Romans 1.2-6 // 1 Corinthians 15.25 // Acts 15.8 // Amos 9.11

The COVENANT of REDEMPTION

The Covenant of Redemption is an eternal covenant made in eternity past. It is a covenant between none other than the Trinitarian God Himself. Yes, that's right, this is a covenant, a relational promise made between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.



Though the phrase “Covenant of Redemption” doesn’t appear in Scripture, we see that there was, in fact, an eternal covenant among the Trinity. Charles Hodge says “The Father did give the Son a work to do, and He did promise to Him a reward upon its accomplishment. The transaction was, therefore, of the nature of a covenant. An obligation was assumed by the Son to accomplish the work assigned Him; and an obligation was assumed by the Father to grant Him the stipulated reward.”⁴³²

Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones points specifically to **Ephesians 1.1-14** in showing the working of the Trinity in this covenant. He says, “The three blessed Persons in the Trinity divided up the work – the Father planned [v. 4-6], the Son put it into operation [v. 7-12], and the Holy Spirit applies it [v. 12-14].”⁴³³

God the Father, before time began, had chosen to redeem a people that He foreknew would turn from their Creator. Yet because of His mercy and love, He created, again before time began, a plan. A plan of what? A plan of a covenant between Him and His fallen image bearers. But as we have seen, in light of the Mosaic Covenant being our “tutor,” this covenant can’t be fulfilled, unless there is a perfect, unblemished Lamb of God, who is not a mere lamb, but is *the* Lamb of God. But who could this be?

The Father then turns to the Son and enacts this Covenant of Redemption. He promises His Son a people, a bride, as a gift to Him; however, as it were, the bride needs to be purchased, because her sins are many, and she is standing in line to receive the wrath of God’s anger. For the Son to receive His bride, He must become the Lamb. In return for fulfilling this covenant, He would give His Son a people to redeem, a bride to be wed, and all authority to pour out the Holy Spirit to His people of redemption.⁴³⁴

Yes, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, God Himself, must become a Man, a perfect Man, and fulfill every part of the Law in order to permanently appease the wrath of His Father. If He does so, His reward is great: a perfect and spotless bride for all eternity. The Son, always wanting to glorify His Father, and very much desiring to have a bride, agrees wholeheartedly to the plan, as painful as He knows it will be. This will be the one act to secure for eternity the people that God the Father desired to be His people, the people chosen for His glory.⁴³⁵

And as we have seen, all good covenants deserve a sign. And what would the sign of this covenant be? None other than the Holy Spirit Himself.⁴³⁶ He will be the sign of this Covenant of Redemption. He has agreed to His critical role in this covenant by being sent by the Father and the Son to testify of the Son, glorify the Son, indwell in the people and testify that the Father gave them to the Son; ultimately, as the sign of the covenant He will apply the fulfillment of this covenant, namely the atonement for our sins, to our lives for salvation. He would become the seal of our redemption, sanctifying us by His empowerment, securing our salvation to enable us to be His covenant people. He will resurrect us in our

⁴³² www.graceonlinelibrary.org

⁴³³ *God’s Ultimate Purpose: an Exposition of Ephesians One*; Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones, published by Baker Book House, 1978.

⁴³⁴ John 17.1-26

⁴³⁵ Philippians 2.5 // Psalm 110 // Revelation 5.1-10

⁴³⁶ Acts 15.8

glorified bodies as we live and reign with the Triune God as the Son's pure, spotless bride for all eternity.⁴³⁷ It is *only* by the creation and fulfillment of the Covenant of Redemption that makes redemption even possible.

And so, when this Lamb arrives – this Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of Israel – He will fulfill every part of the Mosaic Law, paying back the debt of humanity to the great Judge, the great King. The King/Judge's anger and fury will be finally and in totality appeased. He will forgive the debt of mankind because of the work of the perfect Lamb. The covenant people will have been perfectly and permanently purchased.

- A. **Name of the great King:** God the Father.
- B. **Mediator:** The Messiah, on behalf of all of God's covenant people who were chosen by grace through faith.
- C. **Conditions:**
 - 1. **Expectation of loyalty:** Seek to glorify the Father, speaking and doing only His Word and works.
 - 2. **Specific requirements:** Fulfill all the righteous requirements of the Law.
- D. **Consequences:**
 - 1. **Blessings:** A pure, spotless bride.
 - 2. **Curses:** Impossible.⁴³⁸
- E. **The Sign:** The Holy Spirit.

The New Covenant

So what specifically comes of this? The Lamb, by fulfilling the Mosaic Law, will permanently procure the promises of the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, and Davidic Covenant. Look as the Old Testament itself prophecies of this New Covenant to come:

Jeremiah 31.31-34

"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 But 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."

Notice what it says in here, that it is *not* like the covenant they broke when He took them out of Egypt! No, it's *not* the Old Covenant written on stone, but the New Covenant written on our hearts! How so? By the Holy Spirit, who is the sign of the New Covenant!

Ezekiel 36.27, 28

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. (NIV)

Yes! The New Covenant, which came in effect by the Covenant of Redemption when God the Father chose a people to be a bride for His Son (see **Jeremiah 31.32** above which mentions God's husbandry), will be procured by the Son and known by the sign of the Holy Spirit who applies the work of the covenant! And what does **Ezekiel 36.28** say will happen? We will "live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God"! This is the final and ultimate fulfillment of the covenant! We receive all the promises that God made to our ancestors, Adam, Abraham, Noah, and David! The land will be ours and our fellowship with God, our marriage with His Son, will be made complete! This picture of the unfolding covenants culminating and coming to completion with the New Covenant is generally referred to as *covenant theology*, ♣ which is a basic framework that we see God's plan of salvation within and how He plans to complete the plan.

⁴³⁷ Revelation 19.7, 21.2, 9

⁴³⁸ This is a theological question considering what is called the "peccability" or "impeccability" of Christ. "Peccability" is the idea that Jesus, being 100% Man, could have sinned, though He did not; impeccability is the idea that Jesus, being 100% God, could not have sinned. Proponents of both sides absolutely agree that He did *not* sin, and it is merely a hypothetical question. Though there are some great theologians on both side of the coin on this one, Scripture seems to be clear that Jesus, being God, could *not* have sinned. Some assert that this takes away the impact of His temptation and ability to "sympathize with our weaknesses," however the very fact that Jesus truly and really experienced very deep temptation is absolutely enough for Him to sympathize, understand, and relate to the hardships we face as humans. There is no need for the ability to sin, just the experience of having temptation to make Him a greater High Priest. For this reason, I have entered "Impossible" as the consequences for the failure to fulfill this covenant.

Without getting into all the different nuances of various “strands” of covenant theology, the basic premise is exactly what we have been seeing: that God’s promise of salvation will be brought forth through the fulfilling of the Old Covenant, which will procure all the blessings and promises made by God to His covenant people, which entails every believer from all time, His true people of faith.⁴³⁹

He will be our God, and we *will be His people!*

Now that I’m jumping out of my own skin just writing this, let’s look in a nutshell at what some of these great and incredible covenant promises are!

Adamic Covenant:

- The curse(s) will be lifted (even Satan’s, but he will be given a newer, worse, and eternal one⁴⁴⁰).
- Man will once again be at Sabbath rest with God, in perfect fellowship with Him.⁴⁴¹
- Man will once again be living in a perfect Edenic paradise.⁴⁴²
- The earth will be restored to its original (and presumably more glorious) state.⁴⁴³
- Eternal life has returned to mankind.⁴⁴⁴
- The Tree of Life will return to be in our midst.⁴⁴⁵

Noahic Covenant:

- Man will be permanently spared from God’s wrath upon the world.⁴⁴⁶
- When the earth is restored in accordance with the Adamic Covenant, not only will it never be destroyed again by water, but it will never be destroyed again period.⁴⁴⁷

Abrahamic Covenant:

- God will permanently and eternally give us the Promised Land as our inheritance.⁴⁴⁸
- The nations will be blessed. Salvation, through the Lamb, will originate from Israel, but extend to the ends of the earth, reaching every tongue, tribe, and nation.⁴⁴⁹
- God’s covenant people will be one, preserved forever according to His promise.⁴⁵⁰

Davidic Covenant:

- The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Seed of David, will rule and reign forever on David’s throne from the New Jerusalem.⁴⁵¹
- His covenant people will be a people under the great covenant King, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords.⁴⁵²
- His rule will be eternal.⁴⁵³

The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

–Augustine

⁴³⁹ This is a very detailed study that is worthy of your time. How you view the overall framework and structure of God’s redemptive plan has a bearing on many other theological views, which include, but are not limited to: the difference between the church and Israel; the existence of the rapture; are there two ways to salvation, Old Covenant for pre-Jesus Jews and New Covenant for post-Jesus Christians?; did the church “replace” Israel as God’s chosen people?; is the church a ‘parenthetical break’ while God reprimands Israel and brings her to repentance?; did Christ fulfill the whole Law, or just part of it?; do we only need the New Testament?; are we bound to the Ten Commandments?; the list goes on and on, and I confess can quickly turn into a headache as you try to understand each view and what the ramifications are. See “What Difference Does it Make?” at the end of this chapter for a little more insight.

⁴⁴⁰ Ezekiel 28.19

⁴⁴¹ Matthew 11.28-30 // Isaiah 40.28-31 // Hebrews 4.9-13 // Revelation 7.17, chapters 21 and 22

⁴⁴² Revelation chapters 21 and 22

⁴⁴³ Revelation chapters 5, 21, and 22

⁴⁴⁴ Revelation 2.7, 22.2, 14-21

⁴⁴⁵ Revelation 2.7, 22.2, 14-21

⁴⁴⁶ 1 Thessalonians 1.10, 5.9

⁴⁴⁷ Revelation 21 and 22

⁴⁴⁸ Romans 8 // Revelation chapters 5, 21 and 22

⁴⁴⁹ Galatians 3.8-14, 28, 29

⁴⁵⁰ Ephesians 2.14-22

⁴⁵¹ Revelation 4.9, 10, 5.1-13, 7.10-15, 19.4, chapters 21 and 22

⁴⁵² Revelation 17.14, 19.16

⁴⁵³ 1 Timothy 6.15

Therefore, as we look again at the model of the suzerain covenant, we see these as the varying elements of the New Covenant.

- A. **Name of the great King:** God the Father.
- B. **Mediator:** The Messiah, on behalf of all of God's covenant people who were chosen by grace through faith.
- C. **Conditions:**
 - 1. **Expectation of loyalty:** Unconditional.
 - 2. **Specific requirements:** Unconditional.
- D. **Consequences:**
 - 1. **Blessings:** The Messiah will fulfill all of the Mosaic Covenant, which enables Him to procure and enact the blessings of the Adamic, Abrahamic, Noahic, and Davidic Covenant for Himself on behalf of His covenant people. He will sit on the throne of David and rule as King of kings, and will be the Lord of lords. The list of other specific blessings are a long list.⁴⁵⁴
 - 2. **Curses:** If you live outside of faith you will not be a part of the pure, spotless bride of Christ.
- E. **The Sign:** Internal sign was faith that the Messiah fulfills all the righteous requirements of the Law and sufficiently pays our debt to God; external sign is baptism, and the ongoing sign is communion.⁴⁵⁵

As we revel in these great and many promises, does this just get you fired up? Do you realize, now, the depth of which you have been saved? Once enemies, and now chosen by God, to be His people! If that doesn't bring tears to your eyes and give you Holy Ghost Goosebumps, you need to reread the last chapter again.

So as it stands, in this place in our story, we are sinners who have been given promises, but promises that can only be procured by the fulfilling of the Law. Sadly, we are unable to fulfill this Law, and so we are stuck in our sin until the Lamb of God comes to be the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Until then, we are on borrowed time, as we realize our sin is still upon us.

It is for this reason, that as we see the darkness of our total depravity, inability, and as limited free agents in need of unmerited favor, salvation truly becomes more and more plainly received by only one way:

By grace...through faith.

Ephesians 2.8, 9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We can now yearn for this grace and echo the words of the Apostle Paul in **Romans 7.24, 25** by exclaiming, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" The answer, as you probably know, is in the next sentence of that verse, and we will welcome His arrival as look at the next chapter.

⁴⁵⁴ See Chapters VIII and IX specifically.

⁴⁵⁵ Matthew 26.26 // 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

HOW UNDERSTANDING GOD'S COVENANTS SHAPE OUR VIEW OF GOD

We see the continuity of Scripture as one single prophetic Word.

One of the greatest things we can do as believers to see and understand that the Word of God is not just a collection of random stories or events, nor is it “God’s Greatest Hits.” But it is a single, purposeful prophetic promise coming straight from the very mind and heart of God.

Seeing the Word in the context of His plan of redemption, enacted under the Covenant of Redemption, helps us identify the solidarity and unity of Scripture. When we get a grasp on what covenant is, the Old Testament makes sense in light of the New Testament, and the New Testament helps you understand the Old Testament, and *both* Testaments help you understand who God is, what His plan is, and what our great promises are as covenant people under our covenant God!

It is our highest goal as the covenant people of God to try to see His Word the way He hoped we would see His Word. When we understand the more or less “flow” of the Bible, we begin to understand *so much more* about His heart and His mind!

We see the equal need for salvation for every person.

When we realize the brevity of the situation, that we are completely hopeless and unable to get ourselves out of this mess, it should have a dramatic effect on how you view every single person that you will ever meet. It doesn’t matter if they are the nicest people, or the most monstrous people that you see on the news, as a people we are all in the same exact boat.

Not only that, but when we realize that God doesn’t disqualify people because they are “so bad” or give them special consideration because they are “trying to be good,” it causes us to be in awe of God’s impartiality, that He sees everyone as equally in the *same exact* desperate situation.

Just as you will never meet a single person who was not made in the image of God, you will also never meet a single person who doesn’t need the grace of God.

When we understand the doctrines of total depravity, inability, unmerited favor, *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, and our need for a covenant, what it *should* do is break our heart for the world around us. Every single day, you will meet people who living with the wrath and anger of God pointed at them.

But this shouldn’t give *us* a hatred for them, because we know that *we too were once enemies*, but God gave us grace! And we *know* that God desires to have mercy, and that He enacted His Covenant of Redemption in order to make redemption possible.

One thing it does with our evangelism is that it teaches us a bit more how to pray for others. Often times, we will pray that someone “hit rock bottom” or that they would “see their need for You” or “realize the beauty of life once they have a baby.” But the prayer that *needs* to be prayed for them to even experience those things is to say “God, please give them grace. In Your mercy, extend Your love, Your covenant to them. Open the eyes of their heart to see their need for You so that they can repent in faith.”

We see that the Law has been fulfilled and understand “by grace, through faith.”

Understanding the New Covenant and how it relates to the Old Covenant (the Law) and the other covenants helps us understand freedom in Christ. It should liberate us from the bondage of performance and trying to “please” God by doing good things in order to keep Him happy with us. When we see what the true purpose of the Law is and how Christ fulfilled it, it causes the Spirit in us to leap and become overwhelmed with gratitude, amazement, awe, humility, wonder, and worship.

It is this “connecting of the dots” that ends up showing us the real picture of what God’s intent was from the beginning: to be our God and for us to be His people. And we see that it has always been “by grace, through faith.”

It causes us to have a greater anticipation for the future glory.

When we see that the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, and Davidic Covenants were filled with promises for our future that are relevant to us today (and for our future), it give you a couple different things:

- An increased excitement for our future (both in this life and in the coming Kingdom).
- It helps us understand more of what heaven is going to entail.
- A sense of awe and wonder that God has fulfilled all that He planned for us *well over* 5,000 years ago (going back to Noah and before).
- You see the Scriptures through a lens closer to God's perspective. When you see His story as He planned it, the pieces begin to come together in a way like never before. This aids you in your Bible study and understanding of theology, and makes studying the Word and knowing God become more alive and fulfilling.
- Because you see this hope of the future and awe of the past, it give you confidence to be actively seeking to be on mission for God to share this great heritage and future with those that are currently outside the covenant.

We see the importance of covenants between people.

We also recognize the solemnity of what a covenant is and why it is important. As we take part in the covenant of marriage or a church covenant, we see the deep beauty of what it means to be selflessly committed to another, and with their best interest in mind.

We take very seriously the commitments we make, the promises we make, and the partnerships we enter into, be it familial, business, or friendship. Our goal should never be for our glory, but for God's.

It helps us understand our place "in Israel."

Seeing God's plan linked together by these covenants and culminating with the New Covenant helps us understand what exactly our role as a Gentile church is in relation to Israel. We begin to see that the true Israel that God spoke of all throughout the Old Testament was Abraham's offspring *by faith*, not just by bloodline. As we see the New Covenant fulfill the Old and procure the promises of the others, we that their fulfillments are not just for the (national) Jew, but for the Gentile believer as well! We realize that we Gentile (non-Jews) Christians were not only part of the promise, but given the benefits of the promise!

Therefore, as we see the blessings and promises given to Abraham's people, we can know that we have been "grafted in" with them and have been made part of the "commonwealth of Israel." We are co-heirs of the great and rich inheritance of Christ! This *definitely* makes us read the Old Testament differently, and dramatically changes the way we see our faith.

A Note on Covenant Theology:

Warning! The Following is Not for the Faint-Hearted, this Last Section is for Geeks Only!

As noted in the study, this above view is called *covenant theology*. Covenant theology is a basic framework for viewing the overall redemptive picture set forth in the Scriptures. This isn't the *only* view, by any means, but it is the most common view of most Protestant and Reformed churches, such as most Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, and Anglican churches.

Under the umbrella of covenant theology is, as you would expect, a number of variances. Most of these don't have major points of contention, but some do affect greater parts of theology. One of these variances is called *new covenant theology*.

New covenant theology (NCT hereafter) and traditional covenant theology (CT hereafter) are incredibly closely related. Once main difference, however, is important. CT sees the Old Covenant as a set of laws broken up into three branches: national, ceremonial, and moral. They hold to the idea that when Christ came to fulfill the Law, He only filled the national and ceremonial laws, but ratified the moral laws, which would include the Ten Commandments, since these are more "universal" laws necessary for a life of real morality. Other national laws given to the people of national Israel, as well as ceremonial laws, such as washing of hands, commands for worship, would be unnecessary because He became the final sacrifice and we are under Him now as our King.

Where NCT differs is that it sees the Old Covenant as one unit, not three parts. Proponents would maintain that this is exactly how the Jews saw it, as they made no differentiation between national, ceremonial, or moral; to the Jew, the Law

was the Law. So when Jesus fulfilled the Law, He fulfilled the *whole* Law, not 2/3 of it. They would point to Scriptures that say we are now under the “Law of Christ,” which was most explicitly given under the commands to “love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself,” while giving specific instructions on how to do this throughout His ministry, in particular within the Sermon on the Mount.

NCT also makes reference to say that Christ in fact ratified nine of the Ten Commandments,⁴⁵⁶ which, because of this, *practically speaking* makes NCT and CT incredibly close. They just arrive at their position differently.

Dispensationalism

In addition to CT and NCT, another common framework is called *dispensationalism*.

Dispensationalism is much different than CT or NCT. It originated in its current form in the mid 1800’s by a theologian named John Nelson Darby who was a part of the Brethren Movement, and is what has now actually become known as *classic dispensationalism*, as more than one view has evolved from it. It is most popular in many non-denominational independent churches, such as Calvary Chapel (who are explicitly dispensational⁴⁵⁷) and other evangelical circles.

Where CT and NCT view God’s overarching covenants as the framework for salvation, dispensationalists see that God had various ways of dealing with man through various time-periods, or dispensations. Because of this view, one of the biggest distinctions between dispensationalists and CT and NCT is an absolute distinction between the church and Israel.

Dispensationalists view the New Covenant church as not being heir to the promises made in the Old Testament, because those are promises made to Israel, and they are yet to be fulfilled. They would purport that Old Testament prophecies are only for national Israel, the Jews, who come to faith in the Messiah, and that the Gentile Christians have different promises allotted to them. What this essentially breaks down to, in eternity, is two separate “peoples of God.”

For this reason, dispensationalists believe in a coming rapture where God will take the church out of the picture so He can return back to Israel since He has put them on hold. Now that His “other people” are raptured up into heaven, He can complete the work that He started with the Jews.

This is a broad-stroke view of the different camps, and there is *so much more* to be said, both for and against their favor. NCT, for instance, is a bit of a “bridge” between CT and the dispensationalists camp, as it aims to draw on the strengths of both, but curtail the weaknesses of both. Additionally, modern dispensationalist theologians have trail-blazed a viewpoint called *progressive dispensationalism* which gets so close to NCT that they can touch fingers through a chain link fence. They see that Israel and the church as under the same covenant, but that some of the Old Testament promises for Israel are not yet fulfilled.

For the record, I, in general, hold more closely to a NCT position, as I see Scripture *clearly* teaching that Christ fulfilled *all the Law*, and that we are now under the Law of Christ. I also, unlike classic dispensationalists, see that there is clearly “one body” of Christ, and that there is “neither Gentile nor Jew” when it comes to priesthood in the Kingdom. We Gentiles are grafted into the True Israel, which is *not even* ethnic Jews, since “all have fallen short,” but the True Israel is, in fact, Jesus Christ, the only faithful Son of God and descendant of Abraham that ever walked this planet.

That said, there are clearly *some* distinctions between spiritual Israel (i.e. the church and all Old Testament true believers saved by grace through faith and grafted into Christ) and ethnic Israel (not necessarily the country, but the people), however I don’t see it, as classic dispensationalists do, as the Jews having one place in the Kingdom and the Gentiles having another. I do see a particular heart of mercy, if you will, that God will act upon in the last days in order to woo back unbelieving Jews “for Abraham’s sake,” which most of both CT, NCT, and dispensationalists believe this to some degree. I also see that in the future Kingdom on the New Earth, heritage (whether Jew, Greek, Irish, or Mexican) will to some degree be maintained.

So at the end of the day, I *mostly* fall in line with NCT, but do, in fact, trade some NCT views with traditional CT views.

If you are interested in this for further study, send me an email. There are too many resources to list here.

⁴⁵⁶ All of them except “Keep the Sabbath,” which, as we have seen a bit and will see, indeed has become irrelevant for us since Christ will become our Sabbath.

⁴⁵⁷ They tend to be yet *another* strand of dispensationalists called *revised dispensationalism*.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

♣ Definition of Terms ♣

Unmerited Favor: This is the idea that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that we can do to earn God's grace. It means that there is nothing good in us, but that for some reason, we have been given God's grace, though we have no merit for it. What this tells us is that for one, we are beyond the hope of any kind of works for salvation, but that we are not beyond the reach of God's grace.

Inability: Inability is somewhat another way of saying *total depravity*. The fact that we are spiritually dead makes us unable to free ourselves from the bondage of sin. It is only by an act of grace that we can freely walk out of our prison. The Word constantly states that salvation is "by grace, through faith," not simply "by faith." Faith is a spiritual act of the will, but being spiritually dead, we cannot enact our will in that manner. We need grace (a gift from God) in order to enact true saving faith.

Free Agents: This is one of a few terms that people use to describe our (limited) free will. What this entails is that we, as humans, are absolutely free to make choices in life, such as what food to eat, where to go to school, whether or not we choose to steal, or whether or not we enter into an adulterous relationship or not. However, what we are not able to do, per the term "inability" above, is choose to free ourselves from the bondage and slavery of sin. Since we are dead in our sins, spiritually dead, we cannot just simply "step out of the grave." We're dead, and we need God alone to give us grace, the free gift of life, to enable us to rise from the spiritual grave.

So though we do see that we have every bit of freedom that we, as unbelievers, perceive to have, there is truly a spiritual free will that as unbelievers, we aren't even aware of, that is only made alive by grace.

Sola Gratia: This is one of the "Five Solas" coined from the Reformers of the 16th century. It means to represent the theological truth that we are saved by "grace alone." It works in tandem with the above phrase, *unmerited favor*. It states that there is absolutely *nothing* that we can do to impress, woo, please, sway, or gain His sympathy. Our salvation is an indiscriminate gift.

Sola Fide: This is another one of the "Five Solas" coined from the Reformers of the 16th century. It means to represent the theological truth that we are saved through "faith alone." This means that once we have been given grace by God to have our eyes opened, we now *still* don't do any works to gain salvation, but simply believe in faith that He is our Savior.

Mediator: A mediator, as far as biblical covenants go, is the person who stands representing a group of people before God. It is through this person that the blessings of the covenant are able to come to the people.

Covenant: A covenant, in its simplest definition, is a relational promise. It's not merely a contract, as a contract exudes a bit of a stale, lifeless, business transaction. But a covenant, particularly the biblical covenants, is based on commitment, love, mercy, and blessings. Yet at the same time, some are conditional and have attached stipulations that, when failed, result in punishment.

Conditional and Unconditional: As you probably assume, these terms relate the varying covenants expressed in the Word. Some of them have conditions attached that man must obey in order to procure the blessing. Others are unconditional, which is God saying that "there is nothing you can do to procure these blessings, you will simply have to trust that I can and will do it." That said, even in that statement we, in actuality, see one condition: faith. Though only God fulfills the actual conditions, our response is to "simply have to trust that He can and will do it." So though these covenants are "unconditional," they each do in fact have the condition of faith.

Covenant Theology: This is a basic framework for viewing the nature and structure of the plan of redemption as revealed through the Word. It is a way of viewing exactly how God interacts with His people and how He intends on carrying out His redemptive work. It gives us a more accurate "lens" to understand God and His plan.

Recommended Resources

Theology Books

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem. Chapters 16 and 25, cover God's sovereignty and the covenant respectively.

Sermons

www.christianessentialsbc.com/messages This is Wayne Grudem's sermons going through his book, *Systematic Theology*. Go to the sermons on Chapter 16 and 25.

www.desiringgod.org. This is John Piper's ministry. Along with audio or video sermons, he has the transcripts as well. The list under "Web Articles" for desiringgod.org has mostly audio sermons attached to the articles.

Web Articles

www.gty.org. This is John MacArthur's ministry. Type "covenant" in the search engine for various articles.

www.desiringgod.org. This is John Piper's ministry. Type in "covenant" for these articles:

- "Advancing and Sustaining the Covenant Community"
- "The New Covenant and the New Covenant People"
- "God's Covenant with Noah"
- "God's Covenant with David"
- "God's Covenant through Moses"
- "God's Covenant with Abraham"
- "The Covenant of Abraham" (different than above)
- "Why a Church Covenant?"
- "What God has Joined Together, Let not Man Separate, Part 1 and 2"
- "Why the Law was Given"
- "Why, Then, the Law?"

www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Covenant-Theology/ is a great site in general, but this particular link has a lot of information on covenant theology.

www.gotquestions.org. If you tend to have lots of questions in general, this is a great website to get to know. Go here and search "free will," "covenant theology," "covenants," "new covenant," "dispensationalism," you name it.

[www.theopedia.com/Covenant theology](http://www.theopedia.com/Covenant_theology). Another great starting place for general information is www.theopedia.com. It's open forum, like Wikipedia, but specifically for theology. So again, it's a good starting place, since you are dealing with any ol' somebody posting, but it's moderated well. Again, if anything else, it's a great place to start.