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EQUIPPING MEMBERS AT CALVARY CHAPEL EVANGELICAL
FREE CHURCH IN VALLEY VIEW, PENNSYLVANIA, WITH
A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE COVENANTS

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Jesse Aaron Benack
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APPROVAL SHEET

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I dedicate this project to my longsuffering and encouraging wife, Laura.

Without her support and uplifting, this would not be possible.

Apart from my Savior, she is God's greatest gift to me.

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PREFACE

I am grateful to the kindness of my church in encouraging and enabling me to pursue this course of study. They have been a constant blessing in the life of my family. They truly exemplify the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

I am also thankful for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the blessing that the institution has been to me during the course of my doctoral studies. The faculty and classes have been a tremendous encouragement. My experience in the D.Min. program has been the best educational experience of my life. In particular, I am grateful for my supervisor, Dr. Robert L. Plummer. He has been a great encouragement and guide throughout this process. I could not have asked for a better supervisor to shepherd me through this program.

This work would not have been possible without my wife, Laura. Her support and love have been invaluable to me throughout this project. I do not deserve her, but I thank God for her. I am also thankful for our children: Noah, Daniel, Evangeline, Micah, and Penelope. They all are proof of God's kindness toward me, and they inspire me to work harder and follow Christ more closely.

Most of all, I am grateful to my Lord Jesus. He has been faithful to me, despite my unfaithfulness to him. He has given me the best news to drink deeply from and proclaim. May he be glorified in and through this project.

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Valley View, Pennsylvania

December 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Does the Old Testament matter for Christians? Should followers of Jesus be concerned only about the portion of Scripture which mentions Jesus explicitly? This project helped the members of Calvary Chapel Evangelical Free Church (CCEFC) gain an understanding of the Bible's unity. This objective was accomplished through a series of expositional sermons that explored the divine covenants. The purpose of this project was to equip the members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants.

Context

Calvary Chapel Evangelical Free Church is a small church in rural Pennsylvania. The people of the church have a strong love for God and for his Word. Yet for some, there was a need for increased theological depth in their comprehension of the Word. There was a hunger for God's truth, but also a necessity to grow in their understanding of how the whole of Scripture tells a unified story.

This lack of understanding led some to devalue the Old Testament, even voicing the opinion that the Old Testament is not important for the Christian to study or understand. One man even called on me to stop teaching from the Old Testament, suggesting that I stay exclusively in the New Testament. This idea contradicts what Jesus and the New Testament authors testified about the Scriptures (Luke 24:27; John 5:46-47; 2 Tim 3:16-17). Thankfully, very few hold so strong an adversarial view toward the Old Testament.

The majority of members of CCEFC affirm the value and importance of the Old Testament, but some struggled to understand why and how these Scriptures apply to Christians today. This lack of understanding may have been attributed to past teaching in

the church, which taught sharp distinctions between the Old and New Testaments and between Israel and the church. This issue manifested itself in several ways. For example, one woman told me she wished she were born Jewish so she could be one of God's chosen. I promptly told her that she was one of God's chosen, but sadly her line of thinking is not unique among the congregation. Others have shared their personal struggles in reading through the Old Testament.

This need led me to seek to equip the congregation to grasp the cohesiveness of the Bible. The focus of this project was to equip members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants of Scripture. Biblical theology seeks to view the entire Bible as one book that tells one story.¹ It emphasizes the essential unity of Scripture and seeks to understand how many human authors over thousands of years all contribute to the metanarrative of God's story.

The covenants found in Scripture form an important aspect of biblical theology. Understanding the biblical covenants is crucial because throughout the course of the entire Bible, God deals with his people on the basis of covenants. O. Palmer Robertson notes, "No period in the history of redemption from Noah to Christ stands outside the realm of God's covenantal dealings with his people."² God has established covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the church. Therefore, it was beneficial for the church to see the relationship that these covenants have with one another. The covenants also helped the church to understand the security and value of their salvation and relationship with God. This project was designed to help the people of CCEFC better comprehend the grand narrative of Scripture and to better relate to their God.

¹Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "Biblical theology is nothing more nor less than allowing the Bible to speak as a whole: as the one word of the one God about the one way of salvation." Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 7.

²O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 17.

Rationale

This project was necessary because God's people must understand God's Word. God has most clearly revealed himself in the Bible. This revelation is not restricted to the New Testament only— where Jesus is named explicitly. Both testaments reveal essential truths about the triune God, man, sin, salvation, and judgment. The better God's people know the Bible, the better they know God. Understanding divine truth gives confidence to individuals in their relationship with God. The Scriptures build up and support the faith of the people of God. To avoid the Old Testament, or to read it ineffectually, is to miss out on the immense blessing of a more intimate knowledge of God. By ignoring or neglecting any part of Scripture is to miss out on a vast treasure that will lead the Christian into much joy.

The apostle Paul writes, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).³ One cannot miss the clear teaching of these verses. God does not provide his people with any unnecessary information in his revealed Word. Every scrap of Scripture has divine intention behind it, aimed at equipping and training God's children to do good.

Significantly, the Bible from which Jesus and the apostles taught and quoted was the Old Testament. The New Testament was not yet complete during the early ministries of Jesus and his apostles. The implication is that the Old Testament was used as Christian Scripture and therefore speaks to followers of Jesus. Paul claimed the Old Testament Scriptures, which he refers to as “the sacred writings” (2 Tim 3:15), were able to make one “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” He does not see a sharp distinction between what the Old Testament taught about salvation and the core teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, Paul understood that the Old Testament revealed Jesus and is essential for the Christian life. Graeme Goldsworthy, an influential voice in

³Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

biblical theology and hermeneutics, observes, “Paul here expresses the important hermeneutical principle that the Old Testament instructs us for salvation, but only in relation to Jesus Christ.”⁴ This teaching reinforces the relevance and value that the Old Testament holds for the Christian believer.

This principle was not unique to Paul. Significantly, Jesus also held this to be true. He announced to his enemies that while they studied the writings of Moses, they did not understand what he wrote, because Moses wrote about him (John 5:46-47). He also schooled his disciples about the Christocentric nature of the entirety of the Old Testament on the day of his resurrection (Luke 24:13-27, 44).

These biblical examples prove the worth and value for the Christian to both study and understand the whole of Scripture. The entire Bible has relevance for believers concerning their faith in Christ. If the people of God will truly know their God, they must seek him in all his Word. To divorce oneself from any portion of Scripture is to forfeit the blessing that God has provided for his people. Thus, it was necessary to equip members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants. God’s people must strive to grasp the overarching message of the whole Bible.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Calvary Chapel Evangelical Free Church with a biblical theology of the covenants.

Goals

The project to equip members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants was guided by five goals:

1. The first goal was to assess the knowledge of the biblical covenants among the adult membership of the church.

⁴Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 85.

2. The second goal was to develop an eight-week sermon series on the biblical covenants.
3. The third goal was to increase the knowledge of the adult membership regarding biblical covenants by preaching an eight-week sermon series.
4. The fourth goal was to develop an eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants.
5. The fifth goal was for ten family units of the church to utilize the eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants.

The successful attainment of these goals would equip the members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project included a pre-series survey, post-series survey, and evaluation rubric.⁵ Five goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the knowledge of the biblical covenants among the adult membership of the church. This goal was measured by administering a pre-survey⁶ about the biblical covenants to the adult members of CCEFC.⁷ This goal was considered successfully met when 80 percent or more of the adult members of CCEFC completed the survey and the survey was analyzed to yield a clearer picture of the members' initial knowledge base of the biblical covenants. The results of the survey were utilized to inform sermon preparation. Greater attention was given to areas of weakness revealed through the survey on the covenants.

The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-week sermon series on the biblical covenants. These sermons covered God's creation covenant with Adam, his covenant of redemption, his covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the new

⁵All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁶See appendix 1 for Survey on the Biblical Covenants.

⁷CCEFC had roughly 55 regular-attendees, of whom 40 were adults.

covenant. This goal was measured by the elders of CCEFC who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.⁸ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. The sermons were revised if a minimum of 90 percent of all rubric evaluation indicators failed to meet or exceed the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of the biblical covenants among the adult membership by preaching an eight-week sermon series. This goal was measured by administering a post-series survey⁹ to the adult members of CCEFC following the sermon series, which was used to measure the change in their knowledge of the biblical covenants. Those who took the post-series survey had to have listened to all eight sermons either live or via recording. This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test¹⁰ for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

The fourth goal for this project was to develop an eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants. This study was designed to reinforce the sermon series by having families review the teaching series at home. This goal was measured by a qualified panel¹¹ who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the companion study.¹² This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

⁸See appendix 2 for Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric.

⁹The post-series survey was the same as the pre-series survey. See appendix 1.

¹⁰The *t*-test for dependent samples was used to compare pre-survey and post-survey scores in order to measure any significant difference accomplished through the teaching series.

¹¹The qualified panel consisted of pastors, teachers, and children's workers who were able to give an informed assessment on the quality of the curriculum.

¹²See appendix 3 for Family Study Evaluation Rubric.

The family study was revised if a minimum of 90 percent of all rubric evaluation indicators failed to meet or exceed the sufficiency level.

The fifth goal was for ten family units of the church utilize the eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants. This goal was measured by having ten family units keep a journal of what they were learning throughout the series.¹³ The journals were utilized to track the progress of the families throughout the eight weeks. The journals served to confirm the families' participation in the study and foster reflection. The journals were evaluated after the sermon series. Periodic and informal meetings were held to determine how the families were interacting with the studies. This goal was considered successfully met when ten family units of the church completed six out of the eight weeks of devotions from the companion study of the biblical covenants.

Definitions and Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Biblical theology. There are many varied and helpful definitions of biblical theology.¹⁴ For the purpose of this project, Brian S. Rosner's definition of *biblical theology* is used, and defined as

principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole and, to achieve this, it must work with the mutual interaction of the literary, historical, and theological

¹³See appendix 4 for Family Journal Form.

¹⁴For example, Geerhardus Vos defines biblical theology as "that branch of exegetical theology which deals with process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible." Geerhardus Vos, quoted in Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 22. James Hamilton emphasizes the understanding of the biblical authors in biblical theology. He describes biblical theology as "the interpretive perspective reflected in the way the biblical authors have presented their understanding of earlier Scripture, redemptive history, and the events they are describing, recounting, celebrating, or addressing in narratives, poems, proverbs, letters and apocalypses." James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 16. Still further, Klink and Lockett list five types of biblical theology: historical description, history of redemption, worldview story, canonical approach, and theological construction. Edward W. Klink and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 20-25.

dimensions of the various corpora, and with the interrelationships of these within the whole canon of Scripture.¹⁵

Biblical theology then is viewing the whole canon of Scripture as one book, inspired by one God, telling one story. It seeks to understand individual parts of Scripture by discovering their significance in the whole of it. The culmination of the biblical storyline is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ gathering a people for himself.

Covenant. Like biblical theology, the term *covenant* is difficult to define because it is used to describe a wide range of agreements. For the purpose of this project covenants are defined, per Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, as “an enduring agreement which defines a relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation(s) specified on the part of at least one of the parties toward the other, made by oath under threat of divine curse, and ratified by a visual ritual.”¹⁶ In the Bible, God deals with his people on the basis of covenants. The covenants are an important aspect of biblical theology.

Metanarrative. A metanarrative, according to R. Albert Mohler, Jr., is “a grand story that explains all other stories, and to which all other stories must answer.”¹⁷ The metanarrative of the Bible is the story of God’s redemption through his son Jesus. God uses covenants to bring about this redemption.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the pre- and post-surveys were administered only to the adult membership of CCEFC. Second, those who took the post-surveys had to have listened to all eight sermons either live or via recording. Finally, the project was limited to a twelve-week timeframe. This limit provided adequate time to

¹⁵T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000), s.v. “biblical theology.”

¹⁶Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 49.

¹⁷R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 92.

prepare the eight sermons and the companion study and permitted time to conduct the post-survey assessment following the eight-week study.

CHAPTER 2

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF COVENANTS IN THE HISTORY OF GOD'S REDEMPTION

The word “covenant” has fallen on hard times. It is not a word that one normally hears at the grocery store or bank. Not many people sit around at the coffee shop discussing covenants. Yet, God’s Word places a priority on this word. The word “covenant” is found over 300 times in the Bible.¹ Not only is the word used frequently in Scripture, it is used in significant moments. God introduces the idea of covenant at important moments with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, but the word is also employed in one of the most crucial moments in all of biblical history. On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples. During the supper, Jesus took the cup of wine and after giving thanks, said, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28). Christ uses the word “covenant” in connection with his impending death for the forgiveness of sins. This moment Jesus shared with his disciples the eve before his death was dripping with gravity. Why would he bring up the idea of covenant on the final night with his disciples at this critical moment? Jonty Rhodes answers, “The death of Christ stands at the heart of the Christian gospel. And Jesus, for one, thought ‘covenant’ best unlocked the meaning of that death.”² Jesus’ use of “covenant” at such a pivotal moment in salvation history reveals how central the idea of covenant is in the Bible.

¹Jonty Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God's Unfolding Promises to His People* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014), 17.

²Ibid., 16.

Covenants are the framework in which the Bible is structured. Biblical scholars Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum write, “The covenants form the backbone of the Bible’s narrative.”³ They speak to the relationship God has established with his people. So central is understanding the covenantal framework of the Bible that leading evangelical J. I. Packer writes that neither the gospel of God, the Word of God, nor the reality of God can be “properly understood till [they are] viewed within a covenantal frame.”⁴ This observation is true because God has related to his people on the basis of covenants throughout history, and each of the biblical covenants find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ.⁵ A discussion on man’s relationship with God cannot be divorced from a discussion of God’s redemption of mankind from their sins. Apart from redemption, man remains separated from God (Isa 59:2); hence, covenants play an essential role in man’s salvation. Throughout history, God’s work of redemption occurs through covenants.

The Need for Biblical Theology

Covenants are seen throughout the pages of the Bible. They are the vehicles God uses to establish relationships with his people. The common covenantal refrain, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (for example, Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10) exemplifies this reality. In order to mine out the significance of the role of covenants throughout the entire Bible, biblical theology must be utilized. As already mentioned, there are various definitions of biblical theology. For the purposes of examining how the covenants fit into the metanarrative of Scripture, Gentry and Wellum provide a helpful explanation of the role of biblical theology:

³Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 17.

⁴J. I. Packer, *An Introduction to Covenant Theology* (Middletown, DE: Fig, 2012), loc. 71. Kindle.

⁵Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 19.

Biblical theology as a hermeneutical discipline attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the entire Canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God's plan and carefully think through the relationship between *before* and *after* in that plan, which culminates in Christ.⁶

Biblical theology assumes the Scriptures are a unified whole, inspired by one God. As human authors use literary devices to unify the chapters in the stories they are telling, so the divine author uses people, patterns, and institutions to show how individual parts of Scripture are connected to the whole. They all serve to further the metanarrative of the Bible.

God's Covenant with Creation

If covenants are the backbone of the Bible, then one would expect to find mention of them early in the canon of Scripture. The word "covenant" is not found anywhere in Genesis 1-3. The first occurrence of the word does not appear until the story of Noah in Genesis 6:18. This delayed appearance of the word has led some⁷ to deny that God had established any type of covenantal relationship with Adam at creation. However, the absence of the word does not indicate the absence of its reality. One could describe a tall leafy object made of wood and has roots and branches, and the average person would understand I am speaking of a tree. The word *tree* does not need to be evoked to convey its reality. In like manner, sometimes the Bible evokes a reality without ascribing a word to the reality. Wellum and Gentry illustrate this truth with Isaiah 66:1, which God declares, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?" They conclude, "Although the word 'king' does not occur in this verse, the text is loudly proclaiming the kingship of Yahweh. Just as one can speak of kingship without the word 'king,' so one can speak of covenant

⁶Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 23.

⁷For example, Paul Williamson argues against citing that "explicit covenant terminology is conspicuously absent in the creation narrative." Paul Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 72.

without using the word.”⁸ It also should be noted that the word “covenant” is absent in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17, both of which describe the Davidic covenant. Yet, notwithstanding its absence, other biblical authors refer to these passages as the establishment of a covenant between God and David (Pss 89:3, 28, 34, 39; Jer 33:21). The presence of the word “covenant” is not necessary to establish the reality of a covenant.

Despite the absence of the word “covenant,” there is enough evidence in Genesis 1-3 to see its presence. In order for a covenant to be observed in the text, some basic understanding of what a covenant looks like is necessary. Covenants have been defined in countless ways—some very simply and others with more nuance. Michael Williams provides a helpful definition: “A covenant is a relationship between persons, begun by the sovereign determination of the greater party, in which the greater commits himself to the lesser in the context of mutual loyalty, and in which mutual obligations serve as illustrations of that loyalty.”⁹ Covenants can be strictly human, but the covenants described in Scripture are weighty because they are initiated and established by God and reflect his desire to be in relationship with man. Rhodes reflects this divine/human reality by stating that a covenant is “an agreement between God and human beings, where God promises blessings if the conditions are kept and threatens curses if they are broken.”¹⁰

In looking at the first three chapters of Genesis, the evidence of a covenant is unmistakable. Ancient extra-biblical covenants reveal a fairly common pattern.¹¹ They

⁸Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 69.

⁹Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 45-46.

¹⁰Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 22.

¹¹O. Palmer Robertson writes about Hittite suzerainty treaties, which have been discovered among the archives of the Hittite empire. An international treaty form was developed and shared among the nations. Of the treaties discovered, of particular importance are documents dating into the late Bronze age (c. 1400-1200 BC). He lists the most fundamental features the treaties included: “1. A perambulatory declaration of the lordship of the conquering suzerain. 2. An historical prologue emphasizing past acts of benevolence. 3. An extensive delimiting of stipulations involving both demands for heart-loyalty and requirements for specific action. 4. Provisions for the official depositing of duplicate copies of the treaty

begin with a preamble, which identifies the sovereign, or great king who is authoring the covenant and the other parties, often vassal kings, whom they are entering into the covenant relationship. This covenant pattern can be seen in the opening of Genesis. God is revealed as the Omnipotent Creator and Sovereign Lord. He is the great King who speaks the world into existence and beckons its obedience.¹² God's self-disclosure in the early chapters of Genesis points to the establishment of a covenant. God is referred to as "the LORD God" at least twenty times in the space of two chapters (Gen 2-3). Gordon J. Wenham explains the significance of the divine appellation "the LORD God" in these chapters: "Usually one or the other name is used, but here the two are combined, suggesting no doubt that this story reveals both God's character as sovereign creator of the universe (God) and his intimate covenant-like relationship with mankind (the LORD)."¹³ God's self-identification as Yahweh (Gen 2:4, 5, 7, etc.) gives credence to the covenant nature of the creation account.

Following the preamble often is a historical prologue, which establishes what the great king has done for the vassal. The accounting of God's creation of mankind would fit this category well. Man owes his entire existence to the creative power of God. Stipulations, or covenant obligations customarily follow next. These are an inventory of what is expected of the vassal. These expectations are accompanied by a list of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience to the covenant.¹⁴

documents in the presence of the respective gods of vassal and suzerain. 5. An invocation of witnesses, often involving the summoning of inanimate objects. 6. A statement of potential curses and blessings related to covenant fidelity." O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 168-69.

¹²Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found*, 48.

¹³Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 87.

¹⁴Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 56.

Genesis 2:15-17 describes both the covenant stipulations and the curse of the covenant God established with man. Thus, God's covenant with Adam is often referred to as a "covenant of works" because Adam is expected to perfectly obey God's command.

The obligations are detailed in Genesis 2:15-17:

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

God expected the man and the woman to work in the garden. Unlike the popular portrayal, Adam and Eve were not called to a life of lounging and laziness. They were to be diligent in the upkeep of the garden. They must "work it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). Kenneth Mathews notes the words "keep it" are often associated with obeying "covenant stipulations," such as in Genesis 17:9-10; 18:19:26:5; Deuteronomy 4:6; 7:12; 29:9.¹⁵ Most covenants express blessings from the sovereign if the obligations were kept, and cursings to the vassal if the obligations were unmet. The curse of the covenant is unambiguously declared to be death in 2:17. However, there is no stated blessing of the covenant. While, there is no explicit mention of a blessing, some have understood "the tree of life" (2:9) as connected with the blessing. Williams writes, "The tree of life . . . symbolizes the blessing that will come upon man and all creation so long as human kind obeys the Word and will of God."¹⁶ Rhodes echoes this thought, connecting the tree of life with the promise of eternal life. God removed mankind's access to the tree after the fall (Gen 3:22).¹⁷

With these covenantal elements in mind, there are other clues to God's covenant with Adam. God creates the world in six days and rests on the seventh. On the sixth day, God created man and woman in his own "image and likeness" (Gen 1:26-27). Being

¹⁵Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 210.

¹⁶Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found*, 51.

¹⁷Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 23.

created in the image and likeness of God has led some to see the outworking of a covenant. Gentry and Wellum argue the terms “image” and “likeness” refer to man’s relationship to both God and the world:

These would be understood to be relationships characterized by faithfulness and loyal love, obedience and trust—exactly the character of relationships specified by covenants after the Fall. In this sense the divine image entails a *covenant relationship* between God and humans on one hand, and between humans and the world on the other.¹⁸

Man was created to be God’s vice-regent carrying out his rule and will upon the earth. More evidence of God’s creational covenant is found in Hosea 6:7, where God compares the sins of Israel with the sins of Adam: “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.” Some question whether Hosea is referencing the first man, but instead claim “Adam” is a geographical location.¹⁹ Yet, there is no biblical record of specific covenant breaking taking place at a location named Adam.²⁰ Therefore, it seems best to understand “Adam” to refer to the first man. God then declares there was a covenant relationship established between Adam and himself at creation, and this covenant relationship was transgressed by sin. Still further, the apostle Paul seems to make an allusion to a covenant with Adam at creation in the New Testament. In Romans 5, Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Christ. In fact, he labels Adam as a “type” of the coming Christ (Rom 5:14). Elsewhere, Paul refers to Jesus as “the last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45). Adam was the covenant representative of the entire human race. He fell into sin and brought the curses of the covenant upon the whole race. Jesus, the last Adam, is the fulfillment of the woman’s “seed” (Gen 3:15), which fulfilled the covenant obligations and provides the covenant blessings to the human race as the covenant representative.²¹

¹⁸Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 79.

¹⁹One example is Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 24 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 439.

²⁰Josh 3:16 references a geographical location named “Adam.”

²¹Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 23.

God's covenant with Adam at creation plays an important role in the larger story of redemption. In fact, it plays a central role in connecting all the biblical covenants together. Adam serves a forerunner of other covenant representatives listed in Scripture. As Gentry and Wellum clarify, "Whether we think of Noah, Abraham, Israel, or David, *all* of these later covenant mediators function as a subset of Adam, ultimately leading us to Christ, the last Adam."²² The covenant at creation also establishes several patterns that will be repeated in subsequent biblical covenants. The creation covenant ushers forth the establishment of Sabbath rest, true worship, and the basis of a relationship between God and man at creation. These patterns all find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. The rest God enjoyed on the seventh day is a type of the perfect Sabbath rest Jesus provides in salvation (Heb 3:7-4:13). Marriage is introduced and established in the garden by God. This institution will find its ultimate purpose and aim in the marriage between Jesus and the church (Eph 5:32). Eden is pictured as God's temple as he dwells with Adam and Eve "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen 3:8). Eden finds its perfect fulfillment in Jesus establishing the new heavens and new earth.

God's Covenant of Redemption

Key to God's creation covenant is a promise he makes after mankind fell into sin. Genesis 3:15 is often labeled the *protoevangelium*, or first gospel message. In it, God promises perpetual strife between Satan and his offspring, and the offspring of the woman. One offspring in particular will come and will have his heel bruised by Satan, while simultaneously dealing the fatal head blow to Satan. This promise of a future confrontation finds its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus and his redemptive death on the cross. Interestingly, some view Genesis 3:15 as implying a covenant of redemption. Wayne Grudem writes about the reality of the covenant of redemption in Scripture, despite not

²²Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 258.

being mentioned by name. Grudem defines the covenant of redemption as “an agreement among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in which the Son agreed²³ to become a man, be our representative, obey the demands of the covenant of works on our behalf, and pay the penalty for sin, which we deserved.”²⁴ This covenant can be seen in passages such as Psalm 2, Psalm 110, Isaiah 49, John 5, and Revelation 5. It is the triune God’s commitment to redeem men and women who are made in his image, by becoming one of them. God promises to take on the curse of the covenant for his people. Michael Lawrence notes the significance of God’s words in the midst of his curse on the serpent: “What’s interesting about Genesis 3:15 and what suggests that there is a covenant behind these words is that in the midst of the curse on the serpent, God himself undertakes obligations and makes promises.”²⁵ Each of the biblical covenants that God establishes with his people is rooted in this covenant of redemption. Each future covenant will extend God’s covenant of redemption and serve to bring it to fruition in Christ. With the advent of sin in the human race, God is ready with a response. His response is a promise of a future offspring who will fatally wound the enemy.

God’s Covenant with Noah

The first time the word “covenant” appears in Scripture is in connection with Noah (Gen 6:18). It is often referred to as a covenant of “common grace” because God establishes it with all creatures on the earth.²⁶ God declares to Noah, “But I will establish my covenant with you.” This language is different than the ordinary way the Bible

²³One must be careful not to assert there are divergent wills among the members of the Godhead. There is unity in the will of the trinity.

²⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 518.

²⁵Lawrence, *Biblical Theology*, 59.

²⁶*Ibid.*

describes the initiation of a covenant. Covenants are customarily “cut” (Gen 15:18; 26:28). The cutting of a covenant reflects the sacrifices that are often offered in the ratification of the agreement. But Genesis 6:18 describes God as “establishing a covenant” with Noah. In the Bible, this phrasing commonly means “to confirm a preexisting commitment.”²⁷ Wenham explains that these words show that “Noah is viewed as already in a covenant relationship with God.”²⁸ Gentry and Wellum agree and suggest that throughout the Scriptures, the phrase “to cut a covenant” expresses covenant initiation, while the words, “establish a covenant” speak of affirming the “continued validity of a prior covenant.”²⁹ This phrasing reveals that God is not beginning a new covenant with Noah, but is recalling the prior covenant already established at creation with mankind. This language also suggests that God is taking all of the covenant obligations upon himself. Unlike the other biblical covenants, there are no obligations for mankind to keep. God unconditionally swears to never flood the earth again.

While God introduces his covenant with Noah before the flood in Genesis 6, he does not expound upon the details of the covenant until chapter 9. After the flood, God lists those who will benefit from this covenant and he establishes the sign of the covenant (9:8-17). After Noah and his family abandoned the ark and offered sacrifices to God, God reaffirmed his covenant with Noah. He uses the same phraseology as 6:18. While chapter 6 warned of an imminent flood due to the wickedness of mankind, chapter 9 promises perpetual confidence post-flood. Mathews notes the emphatic nature of the Hebrew construction of verse 9:9: “Now I— behold—I am establishing my covenant.” This wording stresses God’s commitment to keep His word with Noah, his family, and every living creature. Mathews writes, “The covenant obligation rests with the Lord alone, who

²⁷Mathews, *Genesis*, 367.

²⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 175.

²⁹Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 60.

has determined not to devastate repeatedly the earth's inhabitants . . . with floodwaters, despite man's continued sinfulness (cf. 8:21)."³⁰ God's covenant with Noah is comprehensive and all-encompassing. All created life stands to benefit from it. To help grant assurance of this promise, God introduces the sign of the covenant—a rainbow (9:12). Covenant signs serve to offer reassurance. Signs are how God certifies his covenants.³¹ They remind man of God's presence and his promised obligations. The use of a rainbow has led some to envision God hanging up his warrior's bow— never to fire a worldwide arrow at the earth again. Waltke writes, “The relaxed bow stretches from earth to heaven and extends from horizon to horizon, reminding God of his universal commitment.”³²

God's covenant with Noah should not be divorced with God's covenant with Adam at creation. Instead, it should be viewed as God's continued commitment to mankind despite their wickedness. This covenant shows God's determination to redeem mankind. God promised to bring about a “seed” who would deal a crushing blow to the head of the enemy (Gen 3:15). God preserved one man and his family in order to uphold his redemptive promise. Despite their sin, mankind will live on as God's image-bearers. Gentry and Wellum write,

The “seed of the woman” will now come through Noah the covenant mediator and his family, and it is this seed who will reverse the effects of sin and usher in a “new creation.” In this way, Noah functions as “another Adam” (Gen 9:1-7; cf. 1:26-30)—as the new head of the human race—and is called to be an obedient son.³³

Like Adam, Noah was told “to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1).

However, after the flood, Noah did not wait long to reveal he is exactly like Adam. Noah's

³⁰Mathews, *Genesis*, 367.

³¹Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 146.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 263.

drunken stupor (Gen 9:21) reveals that despite a freshly washed world, sin was still harboring inside of him. He served as a new Adam, the head of the human race, but suffered from the same sin ailment as the first Adam. Mankind needs more than an external washing from a deluge of water, but an internal cleansing by God's Spirit (Titus 3:5-6) made possible by the sacrifice of God's Son.

God's Covenant with Abraham

As time passed after the flood, God showed his intention to redeem mankind from their sin. To accomplish this, God chose Abraham³⁴ to be the vehicle of redemption by making a covenant with him. In it, he promises to bless Abraham, make him into a great people, and give his people a land of their own. This covenant is introduced to Abraham in stages. In Genesis 12:1-3, God tests Abraham's faith, calling him to go to an unknown land on the basis of his word alone. He also makes great promises to Abraham of land, seed, and God's presence and blessing. The covenant is formally ratified in chapter 15, when God powerfully shows Abraham that he will take the curse of the covenant upon himself if he fails to uphold his word. God initiates the sign of the covenant in chapter 17, showing that while God's covenant with Abraham is fundamentally a covenant of grace, faith must embrace the covenant promises by adopting the sign of the covenant—circumcision.

The author of Genesis introduces Abraham as a new kind of Adam. The Bible lists three sons descending from Adam and Eve (Cain, Abel, and Seth). They certainly had more than three sons, but the author is using a literary device to tell a larger story. The author finishes the genealogy of chapter 5 by listing the three sons of Noah—Ham, Shem, and Japheth (Gen 5:32). Abraham is introduced in a similar manner. Chapter 11 concludes by listing a man who had three sons. Those sons were Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Gen

³⁴Abraham was known first as "Abram," but God changed his name to "Abraham" to further emphasize the certainty of his covenant promises (Gen 17:5-8).

11:26). Gentry and Wellum conclude, “This parallel is a literary technique inviting the reader to compare Abram with Noah and Adam.”³⁵ The apostle Paul seems to see the same connection of Abraham serving as a new Adam. He writes,

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Rom 4:16-17)

Paul’s observation that God, in respect to making Abraham the father of many nations, “calls into existence the things that do not exist” is a clear reference to God’s creation *ex nihilo* in Genesis 1-3. William Hendriksen agrees, stating, “The most reasonable explanation may well be that which refers this expression to the activity of the Almighty during the week of creation.”³⁶ As a new Adam, the promises God makes to Abraham connect him and his future descendants to God’s creation purposes. God will have a people who will bear image and serve as vice-regents on the earth.

God calls on Abraham to venture out in faith in Genesis 12:1-3. The patriarch is asked to leave his country and family and go to a land yet to be announced. God ties a promise to Abraham’s obedience. Upon exercising faith in God’s word, Abraham would be made into a great nation, with a great name, and become a blessing to all the families of the earth. These verses give an intimation of the covenant God will establish with Abraham, but the covenant is not ratified until Genesis 15.

Genesis 15 finds Abraham on the heels of an impressive military victory, rescuing his nephew Lot. God’s word came to Abraham to reassure then Abram, of his protection and reward. The amount of time from when God first made the promise of Abraham about becoming a great nation (12:1-3), to the present day concerned Abraham.

³⁵Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 94.

³⁶William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 158.

How could God's promises of many offspring coalesce with his current childlessness? God reassured Abraham by having him fruitlessly count the stars in the sky. The patriarch is promised to have as many descendants as there were stars (15:5). Abraham believed God's promises and is counted as righteous because of his faith (15:6). Then, to reassure Abraham of his intention to give him the land of Canaan, God requests Abraham to retrieve a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtle dove, and a pigeon (15:9). For modern readers this is an odd request, but Abraham seems to understand its significance. Abraham obtained the animals and then cut them in half, setting them across from each other. God was sealing his promise with an oath.³⁷ Claus Westermann and David Green explain that this oath "takes the form of a conditional self-execration: the one who passes between the divided halves of the animals asks to be struck dead if he breaks the oath."³⁸ To walk through the cut-up animals was to take the curses of the covenant upon oneself if the promises were broken. While this ceremony may seem peculiar, verse 18 explicitly says, "The Lord made a covenant with Abram."³⁹ The most surprising element of this ceremony is that Abraham is not asked to walk through the pieces of animals. Instead, it is God alone, pictured as a smoking fire pot and flaming torch (15:7), that passes through the pieces of the animals. By passing through the pieces alone, God is taking the curses of the covenant upon himself. Therefore, the Abrahamic covenant is a covenant of grace. Abraham's responsibility is minimized when the covenant was inaugurated. He was struck by a deep sleep (15:12). Abraham is "a passive spectator of God at work."⁴⁰ He must simply continue in faith.

³⁷Waltke notes, "God's covenant with Abraham has parallels with ancient Near Eastern royal land grants bestowed by kings to loyal servants and their descendants in perpetuity." Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 245.

³⁸Claus Westermann and David Green, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 121.

³⁹The traditional terminology "to cut a covenant" is employed.

⁴⁰Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 57.

God's active role and Abraham's passive role in the establishment of the covenant does not excuse Abraham from any responsibilities toward God. While this covenant is freely established apart from good works or merit, there are conditions given. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant that Abraham and his descendants must take upon themselves, as revealed in Genesis 17. Circumcision is a "mark, indelibly cut into the flesh, now becomes a witness to identity with Yahweh and Yahweh's people."⁴¹ Victor Hamilton suggests that the reason why the sign of the covenant is given (Gen 17) sometime after the formal ratification of the covenant (Gen 15) is to emphasize that human obligation in the covenant is subordinated to the divine promise.⁴² Yet, there are severe consequences for refusing to take the sign of the covenant. God warns Abraham, "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Gen 17:14). This strong warning does not indicate the Abrahamic covenant was a covenant of works. Circumcision is not the conveyor of covenantal grace. Paul understood that circumcision is "a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith" (Rom 4:11). Thomas Schreiner writes that Paul's purpose is to "say that circumcision is not intrinsic or essential to faith. Instead, it confirms, documents, ratifies, and authenticates the right standing by faith that Abraham already had."⁴³ Circumcision is then a picture of faith. Faith is the condition of the covenant.

God's covenant with Abraham hearkens back to his covenant with Adam at creation. In many ways, God is promising to restore to his people what Adam lost when he sinned. Adam lost intimate fellowship with God, a paradise world, and the chance to be a people who would bear his image throughout the world. God affirms these promises

⁴¹Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 96.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 225.

to Abraham through faith. Specifically, the promise of God to Abraham recalls the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. The seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent will be a descendant of Abraham who will bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3). This promised descendant of Abraham is Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16).

God's Covenant with Moses

God's covenant with Moses, or the old covenant as it is often called, has gotten a bad reputation.⁴⁴ This covenant is often associated with soul-crushing rule keeping. After all, this covenant, which is primarily established in Exodus 20-25, is centered on God giving his law to Moses. The people of Israel are called to embrace God's law and live in obedience to it. The customary covenant language is used in its establishment. There is a historical prologue, covenant obligations, a document clause,⁴⁵ blessings, and cursings. The covenant is ratified with a dramatic ceremony described in Exodus 24:1-18. The proceedings began with Moses reading God's words and laws to the people of Israel, and all the people affirmed their commitment to obey God's commands (24:3). Moses then built an altar at the foot of the mountain and called for young men of the people to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings to the Lord (24:5). Much like with Abraham, God gives no specific directions to Moses about handling the sacrifices to ratify the covenant. He seems to understand what needs to be done. J. A. Motyer points out, "Moses would, of course, have known from Abram's experience that the Lord's covenant is inaugurated by sacrifice (Gen 15)."⁴⁶ Moses collected the blood of the

⁴⁴To illustrate some Christian's antipathy toward the Old Testament, Alexander Blair characterizes modern New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann as an example of someone who "avoids the Old Testament and that when he feels he must refer to it he does so with reluctance and aversion." Alexander Blair, *Christian Ambivalence Toward Its Old Testament : Interactive Creativity Versus Static Obedience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 110.

⁴⁵Lawrence notes that the document clause "is a paragraph requiring that copies of the covenant be placed in the temples of each of the kings and that the vassal king periodically read the covenant publically and pass it on to his sons." Lawrence, *Biblical Theology*, 56.

⁴⁶J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, The Bible Speaks Today

sacrificed oxen. He put half into basins and half he threw against the altar (Exod 24:6). He then read the book of the covenant to the people and they again affirmed, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (24:7). In response to this second confirmation from the people of their intended obedience, Moses took the blood of the oxen and threw it on the people. These actions represent mutual obligation. Blood is thrown on both the altar and the people. The altar serves as a representation of Yahweh. With this action, God is again binding himself to his people. He will be faithful to his word.⁴⁷ Both parties are committing themselves to keep their word. If they do not, then they are symbolically taking the curse of the covenant upon themselves.⁴⁸

There is debate about whether God’s covenant with Moses should be considered a covenant of works or a covenant of grace. Some believe God is establishing a covenant of works with Israel as he had with Adam at creation. After all, just take note of all those rules to keep. Obedience will yield blessing, while disobedience will produce cursing. Yet, it should be remembered that Adam was called to obey God’s obligations perfectly. Obedience produced blessing, but for Adam, any instance of disobedience brought on the permanent consequence of death. The Mosaic covenant, however, provides ways forgiveness should be sought when sin was committed under the covenant, which is powerfully illustrated in God’s commands about sacrifices and the priesthood (i.e., Lev 4-7), and most notably in His prescription for the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Those who argue for the Mosaic covenant as being a covenant of works often emphasize its purpose

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 248.

⁴⁷Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 208.

⁴⁸The full symbolism of the blood is not explained in the text. Some hold that the blood pictures cleansing and atonement as it commonly does in Scripture. Motyer writes, “The first function of the blood is Godward. . . . The primary need is that God should be satisfied, for it is his justly due wrath that constitutes our danger and, in mercy he has appointed that by substitutionary death—encapsulated in and symbolized by the shed blood—those endangered by his wrath are accepted into his presence and fellowship.” Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, 249

in showing the impossibility of garnering salvation by obeying the law.⁴⁹ After all, one purpose for which the law was given was to reveal and intensify man's sinfulness (Rom 3:20). Still others view God's covenant with Moses as a covenant of grace, similar to Abraham's. Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck writes, "The covenant with Israel was essentially no other than that with Abraham. . . . The covenant on Mount Sinai is and remains a covenant of grace."⁵⁰ This is evidenced in the fact that the giving of God's law was predicated on his redemptive work in the exodus. Goldsworthy writes,

The covenant of God made with a chosen people is before all else a covenant of grace. God elects his people, makes significant promises to them, and acts to bring about the fulfillment of these promises. Only after the great redemptive act in the exodus from Egypt is Israel given the code of conduct in the law of Sinai: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod 20:2). They are already his people through what he has done in the past. They could not save themselves from Egypt and from their bondage to foreign gods; they could only stand still and see the salvation that God would achieve for them (Exod 14:13-14).⁵¹

The Mosaic covenant is also connected with the Abrahamic because they share the same promised blessings. Like Abraham, the children of Israel were promised a paradise land, a multitudinous people, and God's distinct presence with them. Like Abraham, they were chosen by God's sovereign grace apart from any good they have done. Moreover, just as the chosen seed of Genesis 3:15 was to proceed from Abraham and bless the world, it is evident that the forthcoming seed is revealed to emanate from Israel in order to bless the nations (Exod 19:6). As Abraham and Noah before them, Israel is considered "another Adam." God, in fact, refers to the nation as his "firstborn son" (Exod 4:22-23). About this matter, Gregory Beale concludes, "The likely reason that Israel was referred to as God's 'son' or 'firstborn' is that the mantle of Adam had been

⁴⁹Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 72.

⁵⁰Herman Bavinck, quoted in Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 73.

⁵¹Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 5.

passed on to Noah and then to the patriarchs and their ‘seed,’ Israel.”⁵² The Israelites are called to serve the world as God’s son who will eventually bring the final deathblow to sin, death, and Satan. God’s covenant with Moses also points forward to the future establishment of the new covenant. An important function of the old covenant is to reveal man’s sin and great need for a Savior (Rom 5:20-21; 7:13; Gal 4:4).

God’s Covenant with David

The next step of covenantal history focuses on establishing a king and a dynasty. After Moses’ death, Joshua led the children of Israel into the land of Canaan. For the most part, they enjoyed God’s presence and blessing. After the death of Joshua, during the period of the judges, the children of Israel were repeatedly guilty of violating God’s covenant. Israel consistently forsook God to commit spiritual adultery with false gods. The book of Judges reports a vicious cycle of apostasy, judgment, repentance, and the divine appointment of a judge, or deliverer to save the people. This cycle repeats itself after the death of each judge. The miserable condition of God’s covenant people is aptly described in the final verse of the book: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25). It is in this atmosphere of spiritual decay that God would raise up a king in Israel and make a covenant with him. Saul was chosen to be the first king of Israel. While outwardly kingly looking, Saul showed a consistent inability to heed God’s Word, which led to his downfall and the appointment of David as king over Israel.

The Davidic covenant is formally established in 2 Samuel 7:8-17. The conventional covenant language is found in these verses. God identifies himself and what he has done for David. He took David from the pasture caring for sheep, and placed him on the throne to care for his people, Israel. God promises David a great name, a place for

⁵²G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 402.

Israel to be planted, and rest from their enemies. God also promises to eternally establish David's throne and establish "a house" (7:11) or dynasty, where David's son will be God's son. As with the covenant at creation, the word "covenant" is not used in the text. Yet, other Scriptures confirm the covenantal nature of God's promises (Ps 89:3-4).

God's covenant with David is connected with the other biblical covenants. As God promised Abraham to make him a great nation and give him the land of Canaan, these promises find fulfillment under the reign of David. The Davidic covenant also continues the theme of "sonship." God promises a father/son relationship between the Davidic king and himself, which has implications that look both backward and forward along the arc of the story of redemption. God had previously referred to Israel as his "first born son" under the mosaic covenant (Exod 4:22-23). This designation would place the Davidic king in the role of the divine representative of Israel. Gentry and Wellum write, "He becomes the administrator/mediator of the covenant, thus representing God's rule to the people and representing the people as a whole."⁵³ In this way, the Davidic king serves as another "Adam" who effects God's rule as his vice-regent in the world and is called upon to submit his life to the Mosaic covenant (Deut 17:18-20). Furthermore, the covenant with David looks forward to the coming new covenant. The New Testament speaks plainly of how the eternal establishment of David's throne is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, the son of David (Matt 1:1; 22:42-46; Luke 1:32; etc.). Jesus proves to be the perfect Son of David who always does what pleases the Father (John 8:29).

God's New Covenant

The idea of a new covenant is often closely associated with the New Testament, and with good reason. However, the new covenant is introduced in the Old Testament books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. God describes his new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 as a covenant of grace. Robertson notes the unique elements of the new covenant that God

⁵³Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 268.

promises in Jeremiah as including “the internal renewal by the work of God’s Holy Spirit, the full forgiveness of sins, the union of Israel and Judah, possessing an everlasting character.”⁵⁴ Looking ahead to the New Testament, Jesus referred to the cup at Passover as symbolic of “the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28). Both Luke and Paul add the adjective “new” before covenant when describing Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25), thus making clear allusions to Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer 31:31-34). Biblical scholar D. A. Carson expounds the significance of Jesus’ reference to “covenant” in the supper: “This [choice of words] means that Jesus understands the violent and sacrificial death he is about to undergo as the ratification of the covenant he is inaugurating with his people, even as Moses in Exodus 24:8 ratified the covenant of Sinai by the shedding of blood.”⁵⁵ The vehicle God will use to forgive his people’s sins (Jer 31:34) is the sacrificial death of Jesus, and the way God will relate to those forgiven through the death of Jesus is a covenant.

The author of Hebrews describes why the new covenant is superior to the old in Hebrews 8:6-13. The biblical author describes Jesus as the better mediator of a better covenant with better promises. Peter O’Brien explains, “The superiority of the new covenant is forcibly underscored by the repetition of the adjective *better*, which occurs in an emphatic position in each of its phrases.”⁵⁶ This superiority of the new covenant is not the result of a deficiency in the old. The apostle Paul wrote that the law was “weakened by the flesh” (Rom 8:3), which is to say the defect is in man’s ability to carry out God’s law, not in the law itself. The superiority of the new is also discovered in the typological

⁵⁴Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 274-75.

⁵⁵D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 537.

⁵⁶Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 293.

nature of the old. The priesthood, tabernacle, and sacrificial systems of the Mosaic covenants were shadows pointing forward to the coming reality of Christ who is the antitype.⁵⁷ F. F. Bruce writes that God's promises built into the new covenant are "a personal knowledge of God to be possessed by each individual member of the covenant community, because of the new heart received by each"⁵⁸ that also includes the assurance of forgiven sins "written into the very terms of the covenant in the most unqualified fashion."⁵⁹ The new covenant is a covenant of grace, where mankind can enter a relationship with God by faith in the sacrificial death of Christ.

In Jesus each of the biblical covenants discover its ultimate fulfillment. Robertson states, "He therefore may be seen as the Christ who consummates the covenant."⁶⁰ Each of the previous covenants were established with Christ as the focal point. Jesus is the last Adam, who perfectly obeyed God the Father and overcame every temptation. He is the perfect son of Abraham, who has blessed all the families of the earth by extending salvation to those who would be justified by faith in him (Rom 4; Gal 3:16). Christ is the true Israel obeying all of the covenant obligations and laws of Moses on behalf of his people. He is the Davidic king, whose throne has been established for all eternity. He reigns over his people with justice and equity. All of God's promises find their "Yes" in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). It is Christ who sets apart a people for God, who are promised an Edenic paradise where they will dwell in the very presence of God for all eternity. Jesus is the seed of the woman who came to crush the head of the serpent in order to redeem his people from their fiercest enemies (Gen 3:15).

⁵⁷See Heb 10:1.

⁵⁸F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 191.

⁵⁹Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 192.

⁶⁰Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 273.

CHAPTER 3

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF THE COVENANTS IN THE CHRISTIAN'S SPIRITUAL FORMATION

In baking, if someone uses only half of the needed ingredients, the end result will likely be an inedible mess. In the same way, it is dangerous for Christians to ignore or minimize the fullness of God's revelation in the Bible. Paul prioritized proclaiming "the full counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). God does not include any filler material in the Scriptures. He is not seeking to meet a word count or page quota. Everything that has been given and preserved in the Bible has a purpose for believers in Christ. The apostle Paul told his fellow worker in the faith, Timothy, that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Several implications flow from the apostle's words. It is noteworthy that the "Scripture" Paul references would refer to the whole Old Testament and at least some of the New Testament. Paul affirms the divinely inspired nature of Scripture. It is "breathed out by God"—a unique word that may have been coined by the apostle. The word credits God as the source of the sacred writings. Paul unambiguously pronounces the whole Bible as proceeding from God. At the same time, he also describes how the whole of Scripture serves to bring a believer to maturity in the faith. The Word of God accomplishes this by "teaching," "training," "correcting," and "reproving" those who submit their lives to its truths. This truth led John Stott to declare, "Indeed, Scripture is the chief means which God employs to bring 'the man of God' to maturity. . . . It is only by diligent study of

Scripture that the man of God may become ‘complete, equipped for every good work.’”¹ Consequently, comprehending the Bible is essential for spiritual formation. Spiritual formation can be defined in a variety of ways, but at its core, it describes a Christian’s growth into maturity in the Christian faith. Therefore, if understanding the Bible is imperative for a believer’s spiritual formation, grasping the central unifying themes of the Bible is fundamental. The covenants, which connect Genesis to Revelation, reveal the unity of the biblical metanarrative. They unveil the steadfast love of God for his wayward people and give eternal hope for God’s people. Just as baking a delicious cake requires the addition of all the proper ingredients, reaching maturity in the Christian faith requires a robust understanding of the covenants, which play a principal role in the Christian’s spiritual formation.

The Covenants Help Christians Read the Bible

Having noted the key role the Scriptures play in spiritual formation (2 Tim 3:16-17), it is vital that God’s Word is properly handled in order for true maturity to take root. It also must be acknowledged that it is possible to misunderstand the Bible’s message, or fail to see its cohesive structure. The examples are legion. One common erroneous thought is the idea that the Old Testament is for Israel, while the New Testament is for the church. At face value, this idea seems to have credence. Much of the Old Testament speaks to Israel and their history. Some parts seem downright un-Christian. Yet, that is not what Jesus and the apostles believed about the Old Testament. There are hundreds upon hundreds of Old Testament quotes, allusions, and prophecies recorded by the New Testament authors. Significantly, Jesus understood himself to be the subject of the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27, 44; John 5:39, 46). If this is true, then the church cannot afford to write off the Old Testament text as pertaining only to Israel. Instead, the whole of

¹John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 103.

Scripture is unified and points to Christ. The covenants play a key role in fusing the testaments together, showing the relevance of the entire Bible for all believers in Christ.

The Covenants Reveal the Unity of Scripture

If the entire Bible speaks to Christ and redemption in some sense, then readers should look for clues that unite the biblical metanarrative under this redemption. The Old Testament authors seem to sense that unity. The writers focus on the history of a specific line of people—the children of Israel. Each stage of Israel’s history is built upon what has gone before it.² It becomes clear through the span of biblical history that God utilizes covenants to ensure his commitment and relationship with his people. The author of Genesis focuses on Seth’s line, then Noah’s, Abraham’s, Isaac’s, and Jacob’s respectively. This attention is obvious as the narrative unfolds. Of all the world’s inhabitants, one family received most of the attention. The opening books of the Pentateuch are not interested in giving a history of mankind, but rather a history of Israel. The importance of this one people is bound up by the commitment God makes to them. This commitment is clearly defined in God’s covenantal promises to Abraham, but finds its roots even earlier. The first humans, made in God’s image, dwelt in paradise with God in perpetual Sabbath.³ Sin fractured that perfect fellowship. There was a covenant of works in place between Adam and God. Adam must obey God’s command in order to remain in fellowship. Adam disobeyed, and the curse of the covenant fell upon mankind.

Adam’s failure, however, would not be the end of God’s covenantal dealings with mankind. Despite the advent of mankind’s sin and shame, God committed himself to redeem mankind. Specifically, He promises that a future descendant of the woman will

²Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1991), 56.

³Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2002), 33.

come and defeat Satan (Gen 3:15). The rest of the Old Testament can be seen as trying to follow this family line and God's relationship to that line. This relationship is testified about through covenants. Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen write, "The covenant speaks of a deeply personal relationship between God and his people, a relationship so close that God may be thought of as binding or tying himself to them, and them to him."⁴ Thus, the Bible reiterates the common covenantal refrain, "I will be their God and they will be my people (Gen 17:8; Exod 29:45; Ezek 14:11; Jer 31:33; Rev 21:3, etc.)." Covenants are relationships. Grasping the covenants help believers read the Bible because they witness the unity of the biblical metanarrative. Michael Lawrence reasons,

To study the covenants is to study God's revelation of how he relates to people in history. When we recognize that, we realize right away that how these various covenants relate to each other is a matter of real importance for understanding the story of the Bible.⁵

The Bible, after all, is one story. It can be easy for well-meaning Christians to get lost in individual books of the Bible. Leviticus has sidetracked more than a few well-intentioned believers. This diversion happens for several reasons, but one possible remedy for getting lost in individual sections of the Bible is to keep the metanarrative in mind. The Bible was written over the course of thousands of years by many human authors, yet it has a central unity. God inspired numerous human authors to tell his story. That story involves a progressive covenantal harmony that aids believers in grasping the grand arc of God's plan. Michael Horton refers to the covenants as

an architectonic structure . . . that hold together the structure of biblical faith and practice. . . . It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God's covenantal dealings in our history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable variety.⁶

⁴Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 50.

⁵Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 61.

⁶Michael S. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 13.

By comprehending the overall covenantal unity of the Bible, Christian readers can realize the Bible's consistent message from start to finish, which culminates in Christ's redemption.

The Covenants Divulge God's Unfolding Plan

The unity of the Bible reminds readers that despite its varied nature, the Scriptures are telling one story. God is telling his story throughout history. The Bible is his record. Like a skilled writer, God builds his plotline throughout the pages of Scripture. He does not give the ending of the story away in the beginning. He makes allusions to it, but the ultimate unveiling of his future plan remains veiled until the appearance of his Son (Heb 1:1-2). Thus, readers can discern a progression throughout the Old Testament. The biblical authors focus on one nation of people, Israel. Significantly, God chooses Israel and binds himself to this people through a series of covenants. Each covenant that God establishes with his people builds upon those previously established, which is exemplified in looking at the Abrahamic covenant. God promised the great patriarch land, progeny, and blessing. These promises are partially fulfilled during and after Abraham's life. Abraham eventually became a proud father to a son, Isaac (Gen 21:2), and would eventually own real estate in Canaan, albeit it was a gravesite (Gen 23:17-18). Yet, it becomes manifest in the rest of Scripture, that God's promises to Abraham will be fulfilled on a far greater scale and most fully revealed in the new covenant of Jesus. John Stott elaborates, "It may truly be said without exaggeration that not only the rest of the Old Testament but the whole of the New Testament are an outworking of these promises of God."⁷ The truth of the gospel of Jesus is fulfilled in the promises God made to Abraham. Certainly, the nation of Israel partially fulfilled these divine promises, but God promised to bless all the families of the world through Abraham. The apostles understood this

⁷John Stott, *Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 58.

blessing as being fulfilled in Christ for his people (Acts 3:25). Paul told the gentile Galatians, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29). From the beginning, God intended on redeeming the world from its sin, and his redemption is revealed in covenantal steps. God’s covenant with Abraham is foundational, but each subsequent covenant is progressive in nature. Each covenant builds upon the promises of the last, progressing to their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. The gospel was preached to Abraham through the promises of the covenant (Gal 3:8). There was a partial fulfillment in Abraham’s natural descendants, but the ultimate fulfillment came through Jesus and Abraham’s spiritual descendants. Thus, it can be understood that God’s redemptive purposes have unfolded progressively in stages. Jonty Rhodes compares this progressive unfolding of the covenants to a software update on a smartphone. While there are advancements and changes, it is still the same essential package.⁸

The progressive unfolding of Scripture carries important consequences for how Christians read and appropriate the Bible. An underlying story is being told through the various genres and literary forms of the Bible. By recognizing the progressive and unfolding nature of biblical revelation, readers can track the story of redemption throughout its pages. Gentry and Wellum helpfully conclude, “And it is crucial that we read Scripture in such a way that we do justice to the Bible’s own presentation and within its own categories, which is precisely why the biblical covenants are so important.”⁹ Each covenant then should be examined in its own immediate context, yet not in isolation. Those who would seek to grasp the metanarrative of Scripture would benefit to contemplate each covenant’s relationship to the covenants that precede and follow them. Most importantly,

⁸Jonty Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God’s Unfolding Promises to His People* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014), 64.

⁹Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 31.

each covenant ought to be examined to determine how it finds its greatest fulfillment in Jesus and his new covenant.¹⁰

The Covenants Unlock the Old Testament

Many Christians struggle to read the Old Testament. To some, it just seems distant. Some of its teachings and practices appear to be archaic and not relatable. It focuses on an ancient nation on the other side of the world. What does the Old Testament have to say to modern-day American Christians? People inevitably lose interest in a topic or course of study if they cannot understand its relevance to them personally. Many have discarded searching out the Old Testament because of a failure to recognize its bearing on the modern Christian. This thinking must be disabused in the church. The Old Testament is Christian Scripture and the apostle Paul encouraged believers to put themselves in the story of the Old Testament (1 Cor 10:11). J. Alec Motyer demonstrates how the Old Testament resonates with every follower of Christ:

How wonderfully important this is! The Old Testament is not something that we try to accommodate ourselves to as though it were an alien book, belonging to somebody else and only ours at second hand. It is our book. In the persons of our ancestors we were at the Passover. The lamb was slain for us. We sheltered under the blood. We came out of Egypt. We are the inheritors of the promises of God. The Old Testament is not an alien country. It is not somebody else's property. It is our property. We, because we belong to Jesus, are the Israel of God.¹¹

The Old Testament is not foreign soil for the believer in Christ. Instead it was written for the benefit of Christians today (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11).

Embracing a biblical theology of the covenants is one tactic that unlocks the Old Testament for believers. Seeing the interconnectedness of the covenants and their ultimate goal—redemption in Christ—enables Christians to place themselves in the Old Testament story. The Old Testament does not simply tell the story of Israel's history, it

¹⁰Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 32.

¹¹J. Alec Motyer, *Loving the Old Testament* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2015), 46.

tells the story of redemptive history, of which every Christian is heir. The covenants then serve as a map for navigating the Old Testament and locating oneself in God's story. As Paul Williamson notes, "Each covenant provides further divine assurance that God will realize his purpose for creation in general and humanity in particular by fully establishing his kingdom on earth."¹² Having this framework in mind assists believers in understanding each part of God's story, how it fits within the whole, and how it impacts them.

The Covenants Help Christians Understand Their Relationship with God

One of history's most revered preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, began his sermon on January 7, 1855, by saying,

It has been said by someone that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.¹³

The prince of preachers is right. There is no higher knowledge than the knowledge of God. There is no subject more worthy of study than the subject of God and his nature and attributes. While having abstract knowledge of God is good, it is incomplete without relational knowledge of him. The demons know many things about God and are, sadly, much better theologians than many Christians are (Jas 2:19), yet they lack a personal relationship of intimacy with the Almighty. Mankind's greatest need is to be rightly related to their Creator. In fact, it can be said that the final goal of the mission of Christ in the gospel is to enable mankind to truly know God. Pastor theologian John Piper argues, "The highest, best, final, decisive good of the gospel, without which no other gifts would be

¹²Paul Williamson, quoted in D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2646.

¹³Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 17.

good, is the glory of God in the face of Christ revealed for our everlasting enjoyment.”¹⁴ Jesus died for mankind’s sins in order to reconcile God with man. No one can know God apart from having been reconciled to him through the work of God’s Son.

The gospel of Christ enables mankind to know God, yet, that knowledge is not perfect. Conversion unites people to God perfectly, but the believer still needs to grow in their knowledge of who God is. Thus, the study of theology is necessary. God is incomprehensible. While believers can never know him completely on earth, he has revealed his nature and character in the Scriptures for their benefit. The covenants play a beneficial role in the Christian’s knowledge of God. In fact, some have argued that God’s reality cannot be comprehended outside of a covenantal framework.¹⁵ Covenant is all about relationship. It is in the covenants that God binds himself in relationship with his chosen people. God reiterates this in the common covenantal refrain, “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” It is in relationship where relational knowledge flourishes. A person cannot be well known by another outside of relationship. This is also true with humans who enjoy a covenant relationship with God. The covenants reveal the fidelity and grace God for his covenant people and thus serve to further bolster man’s confidence in his relationship with God.

The Covenants Reveal God’s Fidelity

Humans are insecure creatures. Almost every person has experienced being betrayed and deceived by people they have loved and trusted. Sin is the culprit. Sin makes well-meaning individuals capable of breaking their word and betraying trust. Men and women struggle to trust others completely because of past wounds and scars that have accumulated over a life of fractured relationships. God is not like that. God is

¹⁴John Piper, *God Is the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 13.

¹⁵J. I. Packer, *An Introduction to Covenant Theology* (Middletown, DE: Fig, 2012), loc. 128, Kindle.

always faithful to his people. The presence of the covenants in the Bible serves to confirm God's faithfulness to his covenant people. The Hebrew word for used for covenant is *berith*, which describes an agreement marked by permanence and certitude. "The outstanding characteristic of a *berith*," writes Reformed theologian Geerhardus Vos, "is its unalterableness, its certainty, its eternal validity, and not (what would in certain cases by the very opposite) its voluntary, changeable nature."¹⁶ This word, which is introduced by God to Noah (Gen 9:9) and subsequently repeated throughout the pages of Scripture, communicates immutability and eternity. Vos concludes, "The *berith* as such is a 'faithful *berith*,' something not subject to abrogation."¹⁷

The word used for covenant is important in what it conveys, but a covenant is only as strong as the person's fidelity entering into it. Man can, and did, break covenants. To do so, however, was an egregious offense. The gravity of covenant breaking was heightened by the ancient inauguration ceremony often employed. Covenants were "cut." The cutting reflects the common practice in the ancient Near East of shedding blood to sign and seal the agreement. Michael Lawrence writes about the practice: "In the ancient Near East, not only would animals be sacrificed, they would also be mutilated, torn in two, or have a leg shoved down their throat, all as a sign of what would happen to the vassal and his people should they break the covenant."¹⁸ This imagery was reinforced by having the lesser of the two parties entering the covenant walk through the pieces of the torn animals. The message communicated was unmistakable—if they fail to remain faithful to the covenant, they deserve the curse of the covenant and to be torn apart.

¹⁶Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 23.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁸Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 57.

As previously discussed, God alone symbolically took on the curse of the covenant. Shockingly, God passed through the pieces of animals alone. Meanwhile, Abraham was down on the ground in a stupor (Gen 15:12, 17). Jonty Rhodes verbalizes God's actions. He declares by His deeds, "I will take on myself the conditions for fulfilling my covenant with you. And if they are broken, I will take the punishment for them. I, God almighty, Lord of hosts, will be torn in two, undergo death, if this covenant is not kept."¹⁹ God's actions confirm that his covenant with Abraham was based on his grace, but it also speaks to God's faithfulness to his people. Robertson states, "By this divine commitment, Abraham's doubts are to be expelled."²⁰ The covenants train God's people to see how reliable his Word is. It should not be missed that the dramatic inauguration ceremony was prompted by Abraham's desire for further assurance of God's promises (Gen 15:2, 8). Abraham believed God, but still looked for reassurance. God graciously provided a vivid confirmation that he would keep his word for his covenant partners. He offers up his own life as collateral, proving his ultimate commitment to his covenant people.

This account should provide comfort for anyone who has entered into a covenant relationship with God. The Bible is filled with promises that God has made and kept. "Every word of God proves true" (Prov 30:5). The promises of God are given more weight, if possible, through the establishment of covenants. Through covenants, God solemnly binds himself through blood to his people. He demonstrates how reliable and trustworthy he is.

¹⁹Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 58.

²⁰O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 131.

The Covenants Display God's Love

For God to enter into a covenant with any human is a staggering thought. Nothing in mankind deserves God's eternal commitment and relationship. The question becomes, why? Why would an omniscient, omnipotent God desire covenantal relationships with mere mortals who are bent on rejecting him? There is not an explicit answer to that question; however, J. I. Packer offers a convincing response. He believes the answer is rooted in God's triune nature. Just as harmonious fellowship, mutual honor, and love is shared among the members of the godhead, so God purposed to enlarge "this circle of eternal love and joy."²¹ He enlarges that circle of eternal love and joy by inviting humans into covenant relationship with himself. The triune nature of God is immensely important in helping mankind understand not just why he would initiate a covenantal relationship with man, but also why he would create man at all. God did not create humanity out of loneliness or some kind of deficiency in himself that believers could fill. The Father, Son, the Spirit enjoyed mutual love, honor, and glory for all eternity (John 17:5, 24). Michael Reeves argues that God's triune nature proves him to be eternally loving, rather than essentially lonely. A solitary God cannot be an eternally loving being. After all, there would be no one for him to love. But, as Reeves observes, "since God the Father has eternally loved his Son, it is entirely characteristic of him to turn and create others that he might also love them."²² Therefore man's creation can be credited to God's desire to share his love with him, not because of a deficiency in the divine. Moreover, eternal election of individuals to enter into an eternal covenant, demonstrates God's intention to share his love. Hendriksen explains, "The essence of the covenant of grace . . . is the experience of

²¹Packer, *An Introduction to Covenant Theology*, loc. 128.

²²Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 42.

‘the friendship of Jehovah.’”²³ God’s chosen people were created to know God and love God, having received his love. The same could be said of God’s people entering into covenant with God. God initiates his covenants with people to know them and share his love with them (Deut 7:7-8).

To enter into a covenant with God is to experience his loyal love and faithfulness. This loyal covenant love is denoted by a pair of Hebrew words: *hesed* and *emet*. Gentry and Wellum state that these words distinguish covenant relationships as marked “by faithfulness and loyalty in love.”²⁴ Commentator Dale Ralph Davis notes that *hesed* “is not merely love, but loyal love; not merely kindness, but dependable kindness, not merely affection, but affection that has committed itself.”²⁵ *Hesed* accentuates God’s devotion and steadfast love for his covenant people. To be in covenant with God is to enjoy his loyal love. God’s *hesed* is not a love predicated on mankind’s obedience, but instead, is undeserved and freely given on the basis of God’s commitment in the covenant. This loyal love is not simply one aspect of the covenant. Harris, Archer, and Waltke explain that “rather the covenant is the sign and expression of his love.”²⁶ According to Gentry and Wellum, God’s *hesed* is not just part of the structure of “the formalities of covenant-making,”²⁷ but instead, the biblical covenant is constructed on the foundation of God’s loyal love. If a covenant were compared to a tree, God’s loyal love would not simply be a branch of the tree, but instead would be the root system that

²³William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 129.

²⁴Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 54.

²⁵Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 207.

²⁶Laird R. Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 306.

²⁷Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 142.

anchors the tree to the ground and supplies nutrients for its health. The covenant is instigated by love and sustained by love (Ps 40:11; Hos 2:18-20).

The association of God's loyal love with his covenant partners should provide immense contentment. God commits himself in loyal love to his chosen people. One implication of this reality is that it is impossible to experience the fullness of God's love while being outside of a covenant relationship with him. Only his covenant partners know the extensiveness of God's *hesed*. Therefore, understanding the reality of the covenant provides security and stability in a person's relationship with God. There is no need for the childhood game of plucking flower pedals, saying, "he loves me," "he loves me not," with God. The covenants reveal that God always loves his covenant partners. Davis details this blessing by writing, "The order is: love gives itself in covenant and gladly promises devoted love in the covenant; the covenant partner then rests in the security of that promise and may appeal to it."²⁸ As God's covenant partners, Christians can rest in the refuge of God's love and petition him for it.

The Covenants Exhibit God's Grace

One cannot really know God apart from understanding him to be a God of grace. God gives undeserved favor to people who have rejected him and actively oppose him. It would be difficult to find anyone who has experienced more of God's grace than God's chosen covenant partners. The connection between grace and covenant is well known. This connection is evidenced in that biblical covenants are often classified as being either covenants of works or covenants of grace. A covenant of works provides blessings for obedience and cursing for disobedience.²⁹ Covenants of grace, however, are

²⁸Davis, *1 Samuel*, 207

²⁹There are divergent opinions among scholars regarding which biblical covenants are covenants of works and covenants of grace. This disagreement is especially true of God's covenant with

so named because they are established upon God's unmerited favor toward man. Jonty Rhodes summates that these covenants do not depend upon humanity doing good works, "but on God's offer of forgiveness and grace."³⁰ On a superficial level, covenants of works and covenants of grace seem to be similar; however, there is a key distinction. While both mention blessings for obedience and cursing for disobedience, as Lawrence explains, "The crucial difference lies in who takes the oath and so undertakes to suffer the cursings should the covenant be broken."³¹ When God establishes a covenant of grace with his people, he is the one who takes on the conditions for fulfilling the covenant in man's place (Gen 3:15; 15:17; Lev 26:40-45).

The gracious basis of these covenants is powerfully illustrated in the covenant ceremony God established with Abraham in Genesis 15. There, God passed through the pieces of torn up animals while Abraham was just plain passed out. Abraham's lack of action contrasts with God's activity in pledging himself to the patriarch. There is no earning in a covenant of grace. God does not give a "to-do" list to earn his approval and win the blessing of a covenant. Instead, God elects people by grace and enters into covenant with them. They have done nothing to earn this privileged blessing. To be aware of God's covenants is to be made a student of his incredible grace toward undeserving sinners. The cross of Jesus is the ultimate example of God's covenant grace. As Lawrence helpfully states, "All of us deserve to suffer the consequences of a broken covenant with God. But Jesus suffered those consequences for us—if, like Abraham, we repent and believe in the promise of God."³²

Israel. This issue was partially discussed in chap. 2. I hold that only the creation covenant with Adam was a covenant of works.

³⁰Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 54.

³¹Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 58.

³²*Ibid.*

The Covenants Stimulate the Christian's Eternal Hope

What people believe about the future impacts how they live in the present. If a person had reason to believe they could possibly lose their job in the near future, they would take extra care in saving money, preparing a résumé, and searching for job openings in the present. Christians are a people who have been assured a glorious future. Believers in Christ have been promised the gift of eternal life in the new earth, dwelling in the very presence of God. The Christian's future inheritance sounds a lot like Eden, only better. It is then not surprising that many biblical authors use the future imminent return of Jesus as a source of motivation for holy living (e.g., 2 Pet 3:11-13). However, on what ground should the follower of Jesus be confident in this future? Certainly confidence is anchored in the Scriptures. The Bible proclaims God's gospel for sinners. It describes in vibrant detail how faith in Christ is the only path to eternal glory. Yet further study into the Scriptures reveals that God pledges these promises in covenants, which guarantee their surety. Accordingly, the covenants are gifts given to God's people that embolden them to look forward to their future, certain fulfillment. The biblical covenants serve to restore the blessings to mankind that were lost at the fall in Genesis 3. Sin caused separation from God, loss of paradise, and the introduction of death. In the covenants, God swears to reconcile with his people, create for them a new earth that is unstained by sin's sludge, and to live with them forever in perfect intimacy. These are promises sworn by God the Father and accomplished by the God the Son.

The Covenants Are Confirmed by God's Character

People fail one another often. Promises are broken. Commitments are forgotten. These failures can be chalked up to man's sin nature. God is not like man—a dramatic understatement. God never fails his people. God never breaks a promise or forsakes a commitment. This divine dependability gives God's covenant people confidence about the future glory he promises them. In describing the certainty of God's Word, the author

of Hebrews writes that his promises are ensured by his upright and faithful character: “For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you’” (6:13-14). The author specifically refers to the Abrahamic covenant, but the truth would apply to all of God’s covenants. The believer’s eternal hope rests in the unbreakable character of God. It should be enough for man to simply be told something by God for humanity to believe its veracity. After all, God does not lie and cannot lie (Heb 6:18). His word is faithful and true (Ps 33:4). Yet God went further than merely telling mankind what he would provide for them, he assured it with an oath. The author of Hebrews explains, “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath” (6:17). It was God’s desire to show his fixed resolution toward his people. His commitment to his promises is undisputable.

Commentator William Lane concludes, “What is recorded in Scripture is intended to strengthen Christians in their conviction that God’s purpose for them is also unalterable. The sworn assurance of God is extended to them.”³³ God’s Word does not need a crutch. It is sufficient by itself. However, God desired to overwhelm his people with assurance by confirming his Word in the strongest of possible ways—swearing an oath in a covenant. The covenants typify God’s desire to give his chosen people assurance. Puritan author John Owen sums up the overwhelming evidence of the Christian’s security in their relationship with God:

Having given us his Word, promises, covenant, oath, the revelation of his faithfulness and his immutability as guarantees, all of which exist outside us, he also graciously gives us his Spirit to dwell within us, so that we may have all the security and guarantee of which we are capable.³⁴

³³William Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 152.

³⁴John Owen, *Communion with God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 186.

The Covenants Are Confirmed by God's Actions

The covenants communicate many messages to God's people. One of the most eternally soothing messages the covenants teach is that God binds himself to save believers. This truth is seen vividly in the redemption covenant, Abrahamic covenant, and the new covenant. These covenants are grounded in God's grace. God is responsible for salvation. Those who are sensitive to their own depravity realize that if it were possible to mess up and lose their salvation, they most certainly would. There would be no comfort or assurance in salvation if people were responsible for the fate of their soul. This reality is highlighted in the doctrine of election. God's covenant relationships are initiated by his unconditional election of those individuals. Election figures prominently in God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and the church. Goldsworthy states, "God's covenant is shown to have its outworking in a plan of redemption. This [design] involves the election of representative individuals through whom the plan of God will be effected. Election is based on nothing in those who are elect."³⁵ This truth is very good news. By his grace, God chose his people from before the world's foundation (Eph 1:4). Humans were not conscious before the world's establishment and therefore contributed nothing to persuade God to choose them. The doctrine of election provides eternal security, because, as Rhodes articulates, "If we did nothing to earn it, we are therefore in no danger of 'un-earning' it."³⁶ Therefore, God's grace in choosing covenant partners awards assurance and security for their eternal future.

It is also prudent to note that there is a common biblical tension on this point. God sovereignly initiates the covenant with his people, yet it is essential for his people to reply with a fitting response. The fitting response is seen in examples like Noah and

³⁵Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 119.

³⁶Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 132.

Abraham. They answered God's initiative with obedience-inducing faith.³⁷ Noah found grace with God (Gen 6:8). He was not perfect. He was a sinner like the rest of his generation, but he had received grace from God. Yet, that grace was not given in vain. When God promised a flood and told Noah to build an ark, Noah responded with faith-filled obedience and started construction. Before God called Abram into covenant, Abram was living in Ur of the Chaldeans and was likely worshipping idols (Josh 24:2). However, when God initiated a covenant relationship, calling Abram away from his homeland to go to an unknown land, Abram responded in obedience through faith—and so it is for believers in Christ. God initiates a covenant relationship while humans are lost in sin. It is necessary to respond in faith and obedience to the discipleship call of Jesus.

The Covenants Confirm God's Plan

The Bible is God's story, revealing how God created the world and everything in it. The Scriptures show how everything God made was very good (1:31). The crowning achievement of creation was man and woman, who were formed in the image of God. Before the taint of sin, man and woman enjoyed God's personal presence in paradise. Creation was not cursed. Fellowship was not broken. There was perfect peace between God and his image bearers. Vaughan Roberts paints the idyllic scene, describing Eden as the pattern for God's kingdom: "God's people, Adam and Eve, live in God's place, the Garden of Eden, under God's rule; as a result, they enjoy God's blessing."³⁸ Life was perfect. This picturesque vision of life was lost in a moment when the divine image bearers rebelled against their Maker. When sin entered humanity, life, as they knew it, had changed. They were now separated from God. In fact, they ran and hid from him as he sought them out (Gen 3:8). The voice of God would previously have been sweet to the

³⁷Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 36.

³⁸Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 33.

humans, now it caused them to flee in terror. They were estranged from God. They also lost paradise. They were removed from the garden, which God had richly supplied for them. They had rejected God's rule over them, and have perpetually strived to rule for themselves. Sin ruined everything, yet all was not lost.

God had a plan to restore everything that was broken. One sees God's restoration plan early in the canon. The plan of redemption (Gen 3:15) shows God's commitment to overthrow evil. It sets the standard for the covenants that will follow it. Each subsequent covenant found in Scripture leads to redemption. Each covenant is connected together with redemptive ligaments. Roberts explains that the "covenants are distinct but they are also bound together. They are all part of God's eternal plan to save the world through Jesus."³⁹ Each covenant shows God's commitment to restore what was lost with mankind's fall into sin. With Noah, God shows his commitment to the human race. God promises to give Abraham a people, living in a paradise land (i.e., Canaan), with God's blessing. The nation of Israel was given God's rule in God's land along with his presence in the tabernacle. God promised to eternally establish David's throne through David's future descendant. And yet, with each of the fulfillments of these covenant promises, a greater future fulfillment still awaited. They all pointed to the eternal redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ and the everlasting future secured for believers in Christ in a world that will be better than Eden.

To grasp God's plan of redemption and see how it has been progressively revealed brings practical spiritual encouragement for the believer. To fail to see how Scripture is united and connected together can lead to discouragement and confusion. It is akin to giving a person lumber, screws, and tools, but never telling that person what he or she should build and what it should look like. The covenants serve to instruct believers in

³⁹Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 52.

God's redemptive plan. They provide a glimpse of the end result of history. They deliver hope and assurance that God will finish what he started.

Conclusion: The Covenants and Christians Maturity

The role the Bible plays in growing Christians into maturity cannot be overstated. The Bible testifies of itself that it is a chief source of a believer's spiritual formation (John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17). This internal claim alone should convince the Christian how necessary solid biblical theology and faithful biblical understanding is. The biblical covenants are given a core place in God's unfolding story told in the Bible. They are too prominent for believers to ignore or minimize. If they are the Bible's backbone as Gentry and Wellum contend,⁴⁰ then examining them closely is required. As the human backbone provides protection for the spinal cord and structure for the whole body, so the biblical covenants provide protection for each covenant member and structure for the Bible's composition. This certainty illustrates why understanding the covenants is essential to the Christian's spiritual formation. The covenants help followers of Christ understand the Bible. They manifest the Scripture's unity, unearth God's unfolding plan for history, and unlock the Old Testament for modern day readers. God uses his Word to grow believers into maturity, and the covenants give structure to the metanarrative of Scripture.

The covenants also help Christians grow in their knowledge of God. These biblical agreements shine illuminating light upon God's fidelity, loyal love, and grace to his people. They serve to protect the doubting and wounded believer who may be tempted to question God's commitment to them after their repeated failures. The covenants not only reveal God's commitment to his people, but also how undeserved that commitment is. They also eliminate questions and doubts of God's love. Still further, the covenants fan

⁴⁰Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 17.

the flame of the believer's eternal hope. They reveal how God's character determines the saint's future. The holy and righteous Creator God has bound himself by oath to sinful mortals. Through the covenants of Scripture, he repeatedly shows his absolute determination to redeem his people. The believer's future hope is also bolstered by God's actions. Redemption is not accomplished through man's ineffectual efforts, but through God's might and faithful power. The doctrine of election, confirmed in the covenants, typifies God's actions of redemption on behalf of his people. He has chosen a people for himself from before the foundation of the world. His choice was not based on mankind's merit, but upon his will (Eph 1:5). The covenants verify God's ultimate plan. They supply hope for the downtrodden sinner. God has committed himself to remake the world and live with his covenant people eternally in paradise, which is truth each Christian needs to grasp in order to grow in faith.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND SCHEDULE OF THE COVENANTS PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants. The first goal was to assess the knowledge of the biblical covenants among the adult membership of CCEFC.¹ The second goal was to develop an eight-week sermon series on the biblical covenants. The sermons covered God's creation covenant, his covenant of redemption, his covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and his new covenant. The third goal was to increase the knowledge of the adult membership regarding biblical covenants by preaching an eight-week sermon series. One week was devoted to study each biblical covenant, with the exception of the new covenant, which was given two weeks of study.

The fourth goal was to develop an eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants.² The family studies consisted of three devotionals per week. The content was devotional in nature and sought to reemphasize the major points of each week's sermon using practical illustrations. The family studies were distributed in the bulletin each Sunday according to its corresponding sermon. The fifth goal was for ten family units of the church to utilize the eight-week family companion study of the

¹This assessment was accomplished through a survey on the biblical covenants found in appendix 1.

²See appendix 5.

biblical covenants. The family units measured their completion of the studies by completing a family study journal.³

Administering the Covenant Study Pre-Survey

The first step in implementing this project was to assess CCEFC members' knowledge of the biblical covenants through the use of a survey. The survey questions were designed to gauge the acumen of church members in the nature and implications of the biblical covenants. Special attention was given to test their insight into the prominent role covenants play in the metanarrative of Scripture. The survey consisted of three sections. In the first section, members were asked to define "covenant" in their own words. The second section asked them to respond "true" or "false" to twenty-three statements. The third section provided members a Likert scale which ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Church members were asked to rate their views on seven practical statements regarding the biblical covenants.

In order to gain maximum participation in the survey, announcements were made in advance of its distribution. When the time came to distribute the surveys, church members were given three weeks to complete them. The results of the surveys were utilized to inform sermon preparation. The surveys revealed which specific areas of weakness needed additional emphasis in sermon preparation.

Covenant Study Sermon Preparation, Development, and Approval

After the surveys were distributed, collected, and reviewed, sermon preparation began. Each sermon took one week to prepare. After each sermon was completed, a copy of the sermon, its outline, and a rubric was distributed to the elders of CCEFC.⁴ They

³See appendix 4.

⁴See appendix 2 for Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric.

reviewed the sermons and utilized the rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of each sermon in the series. The elders who took part in sermon evaluation were Jim Kimmel, Dallas Miller, Ronald Dietz, Joe Shies, Raymond Burian, and Dave Wolfgang. The sermon rubrics were expected to be returned within one week, either by email or in person. The sermons were preached when the rubrics were returned with at least a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators meeting or exceeding the sufficiency level.

Summary of Covenant Sermons

The sermon series on the biblical covenants spanned the course of eight weeks. It was birthed out of a desire to help the members of CCEFC grasp the overarching storyline of the Bible, and the crucial role the covenants play in redemptive history. Seven biblical covenants were studied in detail utilizing biblical theology to demonstrate the central focus of covenants in the storyline of Scripture.

Sermon 1

The title of the first sermon was “God’s Creation Covenant,” and was based on Genesis 1-3. This introductory sermon was used to establish the need and benefit for studying the biblical covenants. Attention was given to the question, “Did God establish a covenant at creation?” Evidence was provided that argued for the establishment of a covenant between God and Adam. It was also taught that this is the only covenant of works found in the Bible. Time and consideration were also given to the perspective blessing associated with the creation covenant (i.e., the tree of life and incorruptible life), and the crucial role Adam played as covenant mediator. Stress was given to how Jesus serves as the final Adam, who earns a better paradise for his followers through his perfect obedience to the Father.

Sermon 2

The second sermon was titled “God’s Covenant of Redemption,” based on Genesis 3:15. The sermon sought to demonstrate from the *protoevangelium* how God planned mankind’s redemption from eternity past. The framework of the sermon emphasized God’s initiative in accomplishing man’s redemption, God’s assurance of victory through this covenant, and the gracious nature of this covenant. It was taught that Jesus was the promised offspring of the woman who defeated the serpent. Special consideration was given to how faithful God is as a covenant partner, which was compared to the Bible’s unflinching honesty about the infidelity of God’s human covenant partners. Despite man’s constant failure, God ensures salvation for his covenant people based on his own word and works. The hope found in the midst of the curse was also underscored. This hope is seen in both Adam naming the woman “Eve” and in God’s provision of clothing for the first humans. The church members were exhorted to find joy and confidence in God’s faithfulness and promises.

Sermon 3

The third sermon was grounded in Genesis 6-9, with most attention given to Genesis 9:8-17. The title was “God’s Covenant with Noah.” The sermon’s framework was based on four characteristics of God’s covenant with Noah. These characteristics included (1) Noah’s covenant is a continuation of the creation covenant; (2) Noah serves as a type of Adam; (3) Noah’s covenant is a covenant of common grace; and (4) Noah’s covenant is given the rainbow as its covenant sign. This sermon highlighted God’s commitment to the earth and mankind. While he must punish sin, he will not make a complete end of creation or his image bearers.

Sermon 4

The fourth sermon of the series was titled “God’s Covenant with Abraham,” based out of Genesis 12, 15, and 17. The focus of the sermon was one the three stages of

the Abrahamic covenant: (1) the covenant promised (Gen 12:1-3); (2) the covenant initiated (Gen 15); and (3) the covenant sign (Gen 17). Special consideration was given to the fact this was a covenant of grace, as highlighted by God's passing through the pieces of the animals alone during the covenant ceremony (Gen 15:17). Focus was also given to the condition of the covenant—faith. Abraham and his descendants must take on the sign of the covenant, or be cut off from the people as covenant breakers (Gen 17:14). Taking on the sign of the covenant (i.e., circumcision) was not an act of works that merited favor with God, but instead was an act of faith that demonstrated trust in God's covenant promises.

Sermon 5

“God's Covenant with Moses” was the title for the fifth sermon in the series. This sermon was derived from Exodus 19-24. This sermon sought to show how God's covenant with Moses, or the old covenant, was birthed out of the Abrahamic covenant, founded upon God's redemptive act of the exodus, and largely promised the same blessings as the Abrahamic covenant. Therefore, it should be viewed as a covenant of grace. That God included both the priestly and sacrificial systems from within the covenant demonstrates his expectation that his people will transgress the covenant. The covenant's confirmation ceremony (Exod 24:1-8) was also studied, as well as the role Israel was to occupy as a new kind of Adam, as God's firstborn son (Exod 4:22-23).

Sermon 6

The title of sermon 6 in the series was “God's Covenant with David,” based out of 2 Samuel 7:1-17. In this sermon, it was observed that a new promise was added to the promises already given to Abraham and Moses. This new promise is of a covenant king who will descend from David. Time was first given to examine God's fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant promises during the time of King David and his son Solomon. Israel occupied the land God promised to Abraham and were “as many as the sand on the

sea shore” (1 Kgs 4:20-21). Yet, God also makes future promises to David. God would establish David’s throne eternally through David’s son, who would also be God’s son (2 Sam 7:13-14). As with each of the sermons in the series, it was demonstrated how this covenant finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

Sermon 7

The seventh sermon in the series was titled “God’s New Covenant, Part 1,” and was based in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The sermon was structured around five promises God made concerning his new covenant. It will be new in nature, global in scale, internal in quality, regenerate in membership, and provide final and complete forgiveness. Consideration was given to the need for a new covenant and the qualitative differences between the old and new covenants. Time was devoted to discussing the relationship between Israel and the church. The church has not replaced Israel, but has been grafted into Israel. Jesus has destroyed the wall of hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles and has created one new man in the place of two (Eph 2:12-16). All who trust in Jesus by faith are God’s covenant people. The New covenant was also celebrated because of the internal change it promises. This covenant addresses the root issue of man—his sinful heart.

Sermon 8

The eighth and final sermon in the series was titled “God’s New Covenant, Part 2,” and was based out of Luke 22:19-20; Hebrews 8; Revelation 21-22. While the previous new covenant sermon focused on the future promises the covenant would bring, this sermon focused on the covenant’s fulfillment. Time was given to examining the covenant’s initiation, its reality, and its ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and new earth. Church members were exhorted to see how the new covenant promises were sealed by the sacrificial blood of Jesus. They were encouraged to realize the superiority of the new covenant over the old. It is a better covenant, enacted on better promises, offers a

better sacrifice, with a better High Priest. The congregation was also encouraged to understand how every blessing Adam lost with his sin is restored and renewed in new heavens and new earth because of Christ's work. The covenant promises obtain their fulfillment in Jesus. Thus, "he therefore may be seen as the Christ who consummates the covenant."⁵

Covenant Family Study Development and Approval

After each sermon was prepared, the corresponding companion family studies were written. These studies were designed to reinforce the sermon series by having families review the teaching series at home. The family studies consisted of three devotional writings that highlighted major points of the previous week's sermons. Each family study included several discussion questions, where families were encouraged to read various Scriptures and discuss their importance regarding the topic at hand. Once the family studies were written for each week, they were distributed to a qualified panel who would utilize a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the companion study.

The qualified panel consisted of Brian Wilson, Patty Early, and Jonathan Hikes. Brian Wilson is a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church of Coventry and a licensed preacher in the Southern New England Presbytery. He is well-versed in covenant theology and has much experience in preaching and teaching.

Patty Early works for the Pennsylvania state government. She also serves as a Sunday school teacher at CCEFC, teaching children from kindergarten to fourth grade. Patty is an astute Christian who has an eye for detail, and experience communicating God's truth to all ages.

Jonathan Hikes is Director of Children's and Student Ministries at Kimmel's Evangelical Free Church in Orwigsburg, Pennsylvania. Jonathan has had ample experience

⁵O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 272.

in teaching the Bible to both youth and adults, and has shown the ability to faithfully evaluate biblical curriculum for all ages.

Each family study met a minimum of 90 percent of the sufficient score of the rubric evaluation. The panel offered valuable feedback toward the success of the project. They helped in identifying a variety of issues that enabled the family studies to be improved. These issues spanned from minor typos and mistakes to important theological reflection. The rubrics were distributed via email and were requested to be returned within one week.

Summary of Covenant Family Studies

After each covenant sermon was preached, church members were given the family studies which corresponded to that week's sermon. Each week's study consisted of three devotionals, which were designed to foster reflection and discussion within family units.

Week 1

The first family study in week 1 was titled "Why Covenants?" The goal of this day's study was to highlight the church culture's failure to appreciate covenants and adequately define what they are. Members were encouraged to understand the central place of covenants in God's dealings with his people.

The title of day 2's family study was "A Creation Covenant?" This study's aim was to present evidence for the establishment of a covenant between God and Adam at creation despite the lack of the word "covenant." Descriptions of extra-biblical ancient covenants were given in order to identify similar features in the creation account. This day's study also highlighted that the creation covenant is the only biblical covenant that is a covenant of works.

The third study in week 1 was titled "The Second Adam." This day's discussion was to show how Eden was not perfect because of its ability to be corrupted.

Adam's sin ushered forth death for all of his descendants. He acted as mankind's representative. Conversely, Jesus came to be the last Adam. Through his obedience, mankind is offered eternal life (1 Cor 15:45). Jesus' victory offers a better Eden to his followers. The New Jerusalem is a paradise world that will be incorruptible and eternal.

Week 2

The first study of week 2 was titled "God's Faithful Word." The goal of this study was to show how God's promise in Genesis 3:15 expresses how God was ready with an eternal plan to redeem mankind from their sin. Attention was given to God's determination to defeat the serpent and the inspired nature of all Scripture that tells a unified story from beginning to end.

The second study in week 2 was titled "The Offspring of the Woman." This study's objective was to reveal how Jesus was the fruition of God's promise about the woman's future offspring. Details about his victory were discussed, such as how the decisive blow to the serpent (i.e., the bruising of his head) was dealt at the cost of the offspring being wounded (i.e., the bruising of his heel).

"A Covenant of Grace" was the title for the third study in week 2. This study highlighted how God's covenant of redemption formed the foundation for all subsequent biblical covenants. This study also underscored the hope found in Adam naming his wife "Eve" after the promise of the *protoevangelium*.

Week 3

The third week's first study was titled "A New Adam." This study examined the many parallels between Noah and Adam, and the connection the author of Genesis makes between the two men. Unfortunately, the two men were too similar. Like Adam, Noah proves to be a sinner (Gen 9:21), revealing that mankind needed more than an external washing of water to address their sin problem. Man's only hope would be the internal washing by God's Spirit made possible by the sacrifice of God's Son (Titus 3:5-6).

The title of week 3's second study was "A Covenant of Common Grace." The goal of this study was to show the universal and unconditional benefits that God's covenant with Noah extended to all inhabitants of the earth. A distinction was made between saving grace and common grace.

The third study for week 3 was titled "The Rainbow." This study discussed how God gave covenant signs to his people. The signs are often a physical symbol that reminded God's people of an unseen spiritual reality. In particular, God's sign to Noah of a rainbow is fitting. God is symbolically laying down his warrior's bow, promising to never flood the earth again. The bow faces up toward heaven, assuring God's people of his willingness to be cursed if he fails to keep his word.

Week 4

"The Covenant Promised" was the title of week 4's first study. This study demonstrated how Abraham serves as another type of Adam, who will be used to reclaim the blessings Adam lost. The grace of the covenant was stressed by pointing out how Abraham did not deserve to be chosen by God for this covenant. As with all of God's covenant people, the Lord's gracious election allows them to reap the benefits of a relationship with him.

The second study of this week was titled "The Covenant Ceremony," based on Genesis 15. This study examined Abraham's desire for reassurance about his promises (vv. 2, 8). God graciously grants Abraham reassurance in the form of a covenant ratifying ceremony. The ceremony described in Genesis 15 highlights God's commitment to keep both sides of the covenant. Abraham was a passive spectator.

The third study of week 4 was titled "Abraham's Sign." The goal of this study was to examine the condition of the Abrahamic covenant. To enjoy the benefits of this covenant, Abraham and his descendants must take on the sign of the covenant. Circumcision was not an act of works that merited God's acceptance. For a child of

Abraham to take on circumcision was to exercise faith in God's promises. Therefore, faith is the condition of the covenant.

Week 5

The initial study of the fifth week was titled "The Old Covenant." This study endeavored for people to realize how closely linked the Old Testament has become with the old covenant. The word *testament* comes from the Latin word *testamentum*, meaning "covenant." The study observed how the traditional marks of a covenant are found in Exodus 20-24. It was also noted that the same promises extended to Abraham are repeated and expanded upon in this covenant to the people of Israel.

The second study of week 5 was titled "A Covenant of Grace?" It asked whether God's covenant with Moses was a covenant of works or grace. This study argued for this covenant being classified as a covenant of grace. The reasons for this classification include (1) the clear link between God's covenant with Moses and God's covenant with Abraham, (2) the presence of the priesthood and sacrificial system within the covenant, (3) the redemptive act of the exodus preceding the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, and (4) the promise of God to uphold his covenant despite Israel's covenant infidelity (Lev 26:44-45).

"More Adams?" was the title of the third study of the fifth week. This study discussed how Israel, as God's firstborn son, serves as another type of Adam (Exod 4:22-23). This study also examined the value of God's law, and the revelation of God's covenant name (Exod 3:14-15).

Week 6

The title of the first study in week 6 was "The Need for a King." This study's goal was to show how grave Israel's condition became during the period of the judges and their need for a godly king to lead them. Attention was also given to the preparatory words God gave to Israel about their future kings (Deut 17:14-20).

The second study in week 6 was titled “Covenant Fulfillment.” This study examined God’s faithfulness to keep his promises to Abraham. God made Abraham’s descendants as many as the sand on the sea shore and blessed them with the full boundaries that he promised during the reign of David’s son Solomon (1 Kgs 4:20-21). Attention was also given to the unalterable nature of the word *covenant* (i.e., the Hebrew word *berith*). The church members were encouraged to be comforted in the security of God’s promises.

Week 6’s third study was titled “The Son of David.” The goal of this study was to detail how the promises about David’s son would find fulfillment in his immediate offspring, but ultimate fulfillment in the coming of Jesus Christ. Special attention was given to the Hebrew word *hesed*, which describes God’s loyal covenant love for his covenant people.

Week 7

The first study in week 7 was titled “The New Covenant.” This study called on its readers to contemplate why a new covenant was necessary. It also discussed the connection between this new covenant and the old covenant which preceded it.

The second study from week 7 was titled “What’s So New?” and detailed the internal nature of the new covenant. God would change people from the inside out. Attention was also given to the means God used to renovate man’s heart—the gift of his Spirit (Ezek 36:27; 37:14).

The third study was titled “New Covenant Perks.” The goal of this study was to emphasize how each member of the new covenant is regenerate. Hence, there will be no need to tell one’s brother to “know the Lord,” for all will know him (Jer 31:34). This final study of week 7 also stressed the gracious promise of complete and final forgiveness for God’s covenant people and the price that must be paid to accomplish it.

Week 8

The first study of the final week was titled “New Covenant Initiation.” This study focused on the initiation of the new covenant that Jesus established in the upper room with his disciples. This study facilitated discussion about “the cup” of Jesus’ blood that is poured out for the establishment of the new covenant. The new covenant ceremony emphasized God’s work on behalf of his people.

The title of the second study in week 8 was “A Better Covenant.” It focused on the superiority of the new covenant over the old. It examined the words of the author of Hebrews, who details why the new covenant is superior. It has better promises, a better sacrifice, and a better High Priest (Heb 7:23-28; 8:6-7; 10:1-4, 14).

The title of the final study in the series was “Covenant Fulfillment.” The goal of this study was to examine how Jesus brought ultimate fulfillment of God’s covenant promises. The promises are fulfilled in the future new heavens and new earth. There, God’s people will be fully assembled in a paradise world in his immediate presence. Jesus is the son of David, who will rule as covenant King. This study utilized several passages from the book of Revelation to find the ultimate fulfillment of the covenants in Christ.

Covenant Family Study Journal Distribution and Collection

To ensure church families would utilize the family studies, ten family units were asked to participate in family study journals.⁶ The ten chosen families represented a cross section of the church membership. They included families with young children, families with older children, and families of retired age. The journals were utilized to track the progress of the families throughout the eight weeks. The journals served to confirm the families’ participation in the study and foster reflection upon the material.

⁶See appendix 4.

Frequent and informal discussions were held with the families to monitor progress through the journals. These regular discussions and reminders helped to verify both their participation and the effectiveness of the material. After the completion of the sermon series, the family journals were collected and evaluated. This goal was considered successfully met if ten family units completed six out of the eight weeks of family journals.

Administering the Covenant Study Post-Survey

Following the completion of the covenant sermon series, the covenant post-survey was administered. Church members received the same survey they took at the beginning of the study to see if there was demonstrable growth in their understanding of the biblical covenants. The surveys were collected and the data was documented to quantify differences from the results of the pre-survey.

Conclusion

Each step of this project was designed to equip the membership of CCEFC in a biblical theology of the covenants. To grasp the unity of the story of Scripture and to be comforted in the security of a covenant relationship with God provides immense benefit for every follower of Christ. The ultimate success of this project relied upon the work of the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God to the hearts of His people.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

For a large part of my Christian life I struggled to read the entirety of the Bible. I was taught that the Old Testament was good and necessary, but not relevant for Christians. This understanding of Scripture is contrary to what Scripture teaches about itself. Sadly, I have observed this same thinking in the people of CCEFC. One of the great aids in understanding all of the Bible is to grasp the structure and unity of the scriptures. The covenants serve as the divinely constructed infrastructure of the Bible. This project was designed to equip the members of Calvary Chapel Evangelical Free Church of Valley View, Pennsylvania, with a biblical theology of the covenants. This final chapter evaluates the project purpose and its prescribed goals. Moreover, the project's strengths and weaknesses are assessed, along with potential alterations I would have made. Finally, the chapter details theological and personal reflections about the project.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip members of Calvary Chapel Evangelical Free Church with a biblical theology of the covenants. The first chapter detailed the context and rationale for this project, which addressed the necessity for such a study. The pre-series survey proved to confirm the need for this project on the covenants. Using a Likert scale, each participant was asked to “strongly agree,” “agree,” “agree somewhat,” “disagree somewhat,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree” to a series of statements. The overwhelming majority of the church members who took the pre-series survey responded positively that comprehending the biblical covenants is important for Christians. In fact, 93 percent of the church members who completed the pre-series

survey responded “agree” or “strongly agree” that understanding the biblical covenants was important for Christians. Yet, only 19 percent marked “agree” or “strongly agree” that they felt confident to tell others why the covenants are important. These results revealed a troubling disconnect between understanding the importance of the covenants and being able to articulate that importance to others. Many sincere Christians affirm the importance of biblical words and concepts, but if those words and concepts cannot be verbalized and communicated, there is a lack of comprehension.

The benefit of this project has been confirmed since its completion. Multiple, mature members have personally communicated to me the usefulness of the study. Specifically, they have indicated that they have never before understood the interconnectedness of the covenants in the big story of the Bible. There also has been almost universal improvement in post-series surveys when compared to the pre-series surveys. The average mean score from the pre-series survey was a 71 percent, while the average mean score of the post-series survey was 84 percent.

Evaluation of the Goals

This project was guided by five goals that served to facilitate the project’s success. The first goal was to assess the knowledge of the biblical covenants among the adult membership of the church. The second goal was to develop an eight-week sermon series on the biblical covenants. The third goal was to increase the knowledge of the adult membership regarding biblical covenants by preaching an eight-week sermon series. The fourth goal for this project was to develop an eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants.¹ The fifth goal was for ten family units of the church to utilize the eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants.

¹See appendix 5.

Goal 1

The project's first goal was to assess the knowledge of the biblical covenants among the adult membership of the church. The initial goal was measured by a pre-series survey on the biblical covenants. Each participant was given a unique number at random to ensure anonymity. The survey consisted of twenty-six questions and statements designed to measure the existing understanding of the biblical covenants church members possessed.

In order for this goal to be successfully met, 80 percent or more of the adult membership needed to complete the survey. Unfortunately, only 70 percent of the adult membership completed the pre-series survey. There was a total of twenty-eight participants in the pre-series survey. Although only 70 percent of adult membership filled out a pre-survey, it was still helpful in gauging the church's overall comprehension of the biblical covenants. The surveys revealed prevalent patterns of strengths and weaknesses in the congregation's understanding of the covenants. The results of the pre-series survey served to help shape the preparation of the subsequent sermon series and family studies.

Goal 2

The second goal of the project was to develop an eight-week sermon series on the biblical covenants. An individual sermon was prepared for each of the covenants, with exception to the new covenant, which was given two. Special attention was given to the use of biblical theology throughout the sermon series. Church members were encouraged to see how God used each of the covenants to bring about redemption through Christ. This goal was measured by the elders of CCEFC who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.

The elders were willing to help by evaluating each sermon against the rubric. This provided helpful conversations and questions about each sermon before it was preached. More than the minimum of 90 percent sufficiency level was met on the given

criterion for each sermon. Upon receiving the sermon evaluation rubrics, the goal of developing an eight-week sermon series on the biblical covenants was successful.

Goal 3

The third goal of the project was to increase the knowledge of the adult membership by preaching an eight-week sermon series. This goal was measured by administering a post-series survey to the adult membership following the eight-week preaching series. The post-survey was the same survey that members took at the beginning of the study and revealed if knowledge of the biblical covenants had increased after the project.

This goal was met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically difference in the pre-survey and post- survey scores. The *t*-test for dependent samples was valuable because it measured that a statistical difference was made through the teaching series. When the *t*-test was completed, it revealed the goal was met successfully and CCEFC adult members' knowledge increased.

Goal 4

The project's fourth goal was to develop an eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants. The companion study was intended to reinforce the sermon series by having families review the teaching together at home after listening to the sermon. This goal was measured by a qualified panel who used a rubric to evaluate the companion study's biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance. The qualified panel consisted of a licensed preacher, Sunday school teacher, and a youth director.

The panel received each week's study and were helpful in improving the quality of the study. They aided in spotting typographical errors, reconsidering wording, and highlighting further theological reflection. The panel also gave helpful suggestions, such as defining more obscure terms and refining scripture references. The goal was

successfully met when the panel returned the family study rubrics with a minimum of 90 percent or better sufficiency level.

Goal 5

The fifth goal of the project was for ten family units of the church to utilize the eight-week family companion study of the biblical covenants. The goal was measured by having ten family units keep a journal that chronicled what the families learned throughout the eight weeks. The journals were designed to ensure the families' participation and promote further reflection. Ten families committed to participate in the studies and keep the journals.

After the sermon series, the journals were collected and evaluated. Unfortunately, the goal of having ten family units complete the studies was not fully met. Only eight of the ten families completed the family journals. However, each of the eight families who returned the family journals completed at least six of the eight weeks of devotions. Those who did complete the journals demonstrated growth in comprehension of the subject material.

Strengths of the Project

This project proved to have a number of strengths. First, this project addressed a legitimate need within the church. Before the series began, the majority of members who took the pre-survey indicated an understanding of the covenants was important, but did not feel confident explaining to others why they were important. The post-survey revealed a significant increase in confidence among membership to be able to explain why the covenants are important to their peers. In the pre-series survey, only 19 percent marked "agree" or "strongly agree" that they felt confident to tell others why the covenants are important. In contrast, 81 percent marked "agree" or "strongly agree" that they felt confident to tell others why the covenants are important in the post-series survey, which revealed a 62 percent increase. The post-series survey also revealed greater

comprehension as a whole. The average mean score of the pre-series survey was 71 percent, while the average mean score of the post-series survey was 84 percent among adult church members. Having served in the church for over twelve years, I have learned that it takes time and faithfulness for the people of God to grow in the faith. It has truly been an encouragement to see such positive results from the teaching series in the collective understanding of the church membership.

A second strength of the project was that it facilitated time of family worship and devotions. By providing family studies for the entire congregation each week, families were given a ready source of biblical discussion and contemplation. Many families know they should be spending time together in the Word, yet struggle to make it a regular habit. Receiving studies based on the sermon they just heard together motivated and assisted families in their devotional time together. Those who completed the family journals indicated that the companion studies were valuable and elicited edifying discussions in their household.

A third strength of the project was found in its focus on biblical theology. Brian Rosner writes that biblical theology is “principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible.”² Throughout the course of my ministry at CCEFC, I have utilized verse-by-verse consecutive expository preaching. I have sought, especially in the last few years, to point out the overall theological message found throughout the story of Scripture while preaching consecutively through books of the Bible. However, it was particularly beneficial to conduct a sermon series that was not in my normal practice of preaching in a specific book of the Bible, but instead intentionally sought to follow the metanarrative of the entire canon of Scripture. My inclination is to

²T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 3.

focus on the smaller minutia of each biblical text, so it was profitable to take a bird's eye approach of the Bible, if only for a series.

A fourth strength was unexpected. The process of writing family studies forced me to think about crafting illustrations that would help families better understand the given material. I customarily utilize illustrations in my preaching, but I recognized I often fail to give enough attention and priority to illustrations. The process of writing family studies helped me cultivate this important aspect of my preaching. Spending more time thinking on illustrations was further aided by the series schedule. In order to write the family studies, the sermons needed to be completed earlier than normal. This extra time afforded me further deliberation in illustrating biblical truths.

Weaknesses of the Project

Even though the project was largely successful, some weaknesses became evident. The first weakness was timing. I did a poor job fitting the covenant preaching series within the preaching schedule. I began preaching through the letter of Ephesians in July of 2016, before the project was ready to be implemented. I decided to finish the systematic study of Ephesians, with normal breaks for advent and Easter, without interruption. Thus, the covenants preaching series did not begin until June 25, 2017. The scheduling of the series was not ideal, because of the lull in attendance most churches experience during the summer months due to vacations and trips.

The timing of the series also led to a second weakness of the project— participation. As mentioned previously, only 70 percent of adult membership took part in the pre-series survey, failing to meet the goal of 80 percent participation, despite numerous promptings and requests.³ This struggle with participation was also evident in collecting family journals. Not all who committed to fill out family journals followed

³One person took the post-series survey without any record of taking the pre-series survey.

through and completed and returned them, despite several conversations and email reminders.⁴ The timing of the studies during the summer may have contributed to this difficulty.

A third weakness of the project was lack of feedback. While I appreciated receiving feedback from the elders reviewing sermon rubrics, the qualified panel evaluating family study rubrics, and the families who filled out family journals, it would have been beneficial to have a method of receiving feedback from the rest of the congregation. A couple church members provided verbal feedback, but there was no easily accessible avenue for the membership at large to voice comment regarding the merits of the teaching series.

What I Would Do Differently

If I had to do the project over again, I would do a few things differently. Overall, I was pleased with the teaching series and family studies, however improvements could be made. The improvements I would implement correspond to the weaknesses already stated. The first change I would make would be to alter the timing of the teaching series. Instead of implementing the teaching series in summer, I would conduct the series in the early fall or the beginning of the year. Experience has taught me that those times of year are generally advantageous because more people are present and are receptive to a new teaching series.

A second change I would make would be to increase the church members' participation in the series. Instead of getting ten commitments from families to work through the family journals to match my goal, I would seek fifteen families or more to commit to completing the journals. This would account for some failing to complete the journals, but still meet the stated goal of ten family units completing the journals. I also

⁴Seven of the ten families who committed to fill out journals returned their journals completed.

would consider making the pre-and post-surveys available to take online, in order to encourage greater ease of participation in the study.

A third change I would make would be to provide an opportunity to receive feedback from church membership following the teaching series. I would give members an opportunity to share their thoughts about the sermons and family studies. This feedback would afford people an opportunity to voice their thoughts and provide useful consideration about the effectiveness and value of the study.

Theological Reflections

In order to equip the members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants, much meditation and study on the impact of covenants was involved. To study the biblical covenants is to learn about relationships. Particularly, the covenants teach God's people about his gracious commitment to them. The covenants are legal commitments undergirded by God's love for his people. The common formula that describes God's covenant relationship with his people is, "I will be their God and they will be my people" (Gen 17:8; Exod 29:45; Ezek 14:11; Jer 31:33; Rev 21:3). This refrain assures God's people of a secure and intimate relationship with their God. There is a mutual belonging involved. God and his people belong to one another in an enduring relationship. The covenant assures this relationship because it speaks to its permanence. *Hesed* is the Hebrew word used often in Scripture to describe God's loyal covenant love for his chosen people. God promises to never remove his steadfast love from those with which he has entered into covenant (Isa 54:10).

God's covenants with his people also underscore how he relates to them through grace. Man's confidence before God is not based on his own merit or works. Instead, the covenants remind man that his relationship with God is entirely a product of God's unmerited favor. In establishing a covenant of grace with his people, God is the one who

both initiates the relationship and assumes the consequences of his people's failures under the covenant.

The covenants also reveal the divinely designed infrastructure of the canon of Scripture. While much time and effort has been exerted in finding unifying themes in the metanarrative of Scripture, the covenants stand out as the divinely inspired common thread that is woven from the beginning of the Bible to the end. The covenantal structure of Scripture demonstrates the unity of God's Word. The common message being told through the covenants is the story of redemption in Jesus Christ. Every blessing the first Adam lost in failing to keep the covenant of works at creation, has been gained by the last Adam in his obedience to keep every covenant obligation on behalf of his people (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22, 45).

Personal Reflections

The desire to focus this project on equipping the members of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants was birthed out of a need that I saw in my church. I was sensitive to this need, because it was a need that I experienced personally. I spent most of my Christian life feeling like only half of the Bible pertained to me as a believer in Christ. In the beginning of my ministry at CCEFC, I began to become awakened to the centrality of Christ through all the Scriptures, and the relevance of the Old Testament for the church today. This realization led me to the practice of biblical theology. I benefited from grasping the unified story God is telling his people through the Scriptures. I became excited to make the connections, see all the shadows, and examine the various types the Old Testament provided about Jesus. It has since been an earnest desire that I help my church see this glorious truth and comprehend God's eternal plan revealed in Scripture. I am grateful that the members of CCEFC have only encouraged my pursuit of this degree. They genuinely love God and his Word and have been excited to see cohesiveness of the story of Scripture as revealed in the covenants.

I am also grateful for this project because it has strengthened my sermon preparation. Specifically, I found writing the family studies to be a valuable process. Writing the studies forced me to submit my work to others and be sharpened by honest feedback. The writing process led me to wrestle with finding helpful and appropriate illustrations that would cause the teaching material to resonate with the members of the church. Writing the studies also required that I wrote the sermons earlier than I customarily do, which enabled greater time of prayerful reflection.

This project also served to bring genuine encouragement in teaching and preaching. It can be easy for a preacher of God's Word to become discouraged if growth and receptiveness to his teaching seems slow, or non-existent. I was grateful to see positive improvement between the pre-survey and post-surveys among the church members who took part in it. It has been gratifying to hear some testify that this project was a blessing to them. This was a cause to praise God for his kindness.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to equip the membership of CCEFC with a biblical theology of the covenants. While not meeting all five goals, I do believe the overall purpose of the project was successfully accomplished. After concluding the project's implementation, there was notable improvement in covenant surveys taken by the congregation. I have personally grown in my understanding of the central place the covenants occupy in the structure of Scripture's big story. It is my prayer that the results of this project will continue to bear fruit in the lives of the members of CCEFC and grant each one greater security and joy in their relationship with God.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY OF THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of the biblical covenants of the participant. Jesse A. Benack is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

ID# _____

Section I

Directions: Please complete the answer.

1. In one or two sentences define the word “covenant”.

Section II

Directions: Respond to the following statements by circling True or False.

2. The Bible is structured around covenants.
True
False
3. Covenants found in the Old Testament have no bearing on Christians.
True
False
4. Christians enjoy a covenant relationship with God.
True
False

5. Each covenant in the Bible has rewards and curses attached to them.
True
False
6. God did not make a covenant with Adam at creation.
True
False
7. You have traditionally viewed the following words of God as the establishment of a covenant, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen 3:15)."
True
False
8. God placed conditions on his covenant with Noah.
True
False
9. God established the Abrahamic covenant with all humanity.
True
False
10. The Abrahamic covenant is a covenant of works.
True
False
11. The benefits of God's covenant with Abraham are only reserved for Abraham's physical descendants.
True
False
12. The Mosaic covenant is unrelated to the covenant God made with Abraham.
True
False
13. The curse of the Mosaic covenant is exile from the land of promise.
True
False
14. The Mosaic covenant has no bearing on Christians today.
True
False
15. The covenant God established with David focuses on the coming kingdom.
True
False

16. The Davidic covenant relates only to David and his son Solomon.
True
False
17. The Davidic covenant is unconditional in nature.
True
False
18. The new covenant is first mentioned in the New Testament.
True
False
19. The sign of the new covenant is the Lord's Supper.
True
False

Section III

Directions: Please give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

20. Understanding the biblical covenants is important for Christians.
SD D DS AS A SA
21. I know that the covenants in the Bible are important, but I don't understand why.
SD D DS AS A SA
22. I have greater security in my relationship with God because of my understanding of the covenants.
SD D DS AS A SA
23. I understand the difference between a covenant of works and a covenant of grace.
SD D DS AS A SA
24. I believe the various covenants in the Bible are interrelated.
SD D DS AS A SA
25. I can confidently tell others why the covenants are important.
SD D DS AS A SA
26. The covenants help me to understand the overarching message of the Bible.
SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

SERMON SERIES EVALUATION RUBRIC

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of the biblical covenants of the participant. Jesse A. Benack is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Sermon ____ Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The sermon was faithful to the biblical text.					
The sermon was faithful to the context of Scripture.					
Clarity					
The sermon presented the biblical teaching in a way that is clear and easy to understand.					
The sermon facilitated a more complete understanding of the biblical text.					
Relevance					
The sermon helped the listener apply the biblical text to their life.					
The listener will be equipped to better explain the biblical covenants to someone else					

APPENDIX 3

FAMILY STUDY EVALUATION RUBRIC

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of the biblical covenants of the participant. Jesse A. Benack is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Family Study Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The curriculum is faithful to the biblical text.					
The curriculum is theologically sound.					
Teaching Methodology					
The curriculum utilizes language appropriate for the audience.					
The curriculum defines necessary terms.					
Scope					
The curriculum adequately addresses each biblical covenant.					
The curriculum adequately addresses the fundamentals of the biblical covenants.					
Applicability					
The curriculum demonstrates the importance of the biblical covenants in the life of Christians.					
The curriculum properly applies the teaching to the life of the reader.					
The curriculum enables the reader to reproduce what they have learned.					

APPENDIX 4 FAMILY STUDY JOURNAL

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of the biblical covenants of the participant. Jesse A. Benack is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

<p>Lesson 1 We completed Lesson One in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>	<p>Lesson 2 We completed Lesson Two in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>
<p>Lesson 3 We completed Lesson Three in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>	<p>Lesson 4 We completed Lesson Four in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>

<p>Lesson 5</p> <p>We completed Lesson Five in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>	<p>Lesson 6</p> <p>We completed Lesson Six in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>
<p>Lesson 7</p> <p>We completed Lesson Seven in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>	<p>Lesson 8</p> <p>We completed Lesson Eight in the family study of the covenants.</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Name one thing you learned about God's nature:</p>

APPENDIX 5
FAMILY STUDIES

WHY COVENANTS?

WEEK 1 -DAY 1

What's in a Word?

Words enter and leave our vocabulary on a regular basis. At one time words like goluptious, maffick, and marconigram were in common use.¹ To understand these words today would require an old dictionary. The word “covenant” is not as common as it once was. Yet it is a word that occupies a central place in the Bible. Not only is the word used frequently in Scripture, it is used in significant moments. God introduces the idea of covenant at important moments with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, but the word is also employed in one of the most crucial moments in all of biblical history.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples. During the supper, Jesus took the cup of wine and after giving thanks, said, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28)”. Christ uses the word “covenant” in connection with his impending death for the forgiveness of sins. This moment Jesus shared with his disciples the eve before his death was dripping with gravity. Why would he bring up the idea of “covenant” on the final night with his disciples at this critical moment? Jonty Rhodes answers, “The death of Christ stands at the heart of the Christian gospel. And Jesus, for one, thought ‘covenant’ best unlocked the meaning of that death.”² Jesus’ use of “covenant” at such a pivotal moment in salvation history reveals how central the idea of covenant is in the Bible.

What is a Covenant?

Covenants are a central theme running from Genesis to Revelation. They bear witness to the bond God has established with His people. Covenants are all about relationships. They set the terms, boundaries, and nature of a relationship. Covenants have been defined in many different ways; Tim Keller provides a helpful definition. He states, a covenant is “a stunning blend of both law and love. It’s a relationship much more intimate and loving than a mere legal contract could create, yet one more enduring and binding than personal

¹Goluptious- delightful, luscious; Maffick– to exult riotously; Marconigram- A message sent by Marconi’s system of wireless telegraphy

²Jonty Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God’s unfolding Promises to His People* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014), 16.

affection alone could make.”³This definition illustrates how covenants ensure God’s people that they enjoy a secure and loving relationship with their God.

Discuss:

- Why should covenants give people confidence in their relationships?
- Does the Bible ever show God dealing with His people outside of a covenant?
- The common covenantal refrain in the Bible is “I will be their God and they will be my people”. What does this statement tell us about covenants?

A CREATION COVENANT?

Week 1 -Day 2

The Missing Word

If I would describe to you a tall leafy object that is made of wood and has roots and branches, you would know I’m talking about a tree. I don’t need to use the word “tree” to make clear what I’m talking about. Similarly, the word “covenant” is found nowhere in the first three chapters of the Bible, but that does not mean the evidence of a covenant is lacking.

Evidence of a Covenant

Ancient covenants follow a general pattern. They begin with a preamble, which identifies the sovereign, or great king who is authoring the covenant and the other parties entering the covenant with them.

- Can you identify the preamble in Genesis 1-2?

The preamble is often followed by a historical prologue. A historical prologue describes what the great king has done for the vassal.

- Can you identify the historical prologue in Genesis 1-2?

Stipulations, or covenant obligations customarily follow next. These designate what is expected of the vassal. If the vassal obeys, they are promised blessings, but if they disobey, they will face curses.

- Read Genesis 2:15-17; are there stipulations, blessings, and curses?

The curse for breaking the creation covenant is death, yet there is no stated blessing. While not explicit, it seems clear the blessing of the covenant is connected with the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). Obedience would have produced eternal life, in which mankind would not be capable of sinning.

³Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 104.

A Covenant of Works

The creation covenant is the only biblical covenant that is classified a covenant of works (yes, this includes the Mosaic covenant) and not a covenant of grace. This means that mankind needed to obey the stipulations of the covenant perfectly or receive the curse of the covenant.

Discuss:

- Look up Isaiah 24:5-6 and Hosea 6:7; do they provide evidence of a covenant at creation?

THE SECOND ADAM

WEEK 1 -DAY 3

Perfect Paradise?

How can you improve on perfection? Wasn't the Garden of Eden perfect? How could covenant obedience bring a blessing to a perfect world? Perfection is an interesting idea. It must be absolute. If Eden and Adam were perfect, how did we end up in our sorry state? The truth is, Adam was sinless and the earth had no corruption. However, the man was capable of sin, and the earth was capable of decay.

If Adam had obeyed God, he would have blessed the entire human race with incorruptible eternal life, living in the presence of God on a truly perfect earth. However, Adam sinned. He transgressed God's covenant. He acted as our representative, bringing death to all of his future descendants.

The True and Better Adam

As death came into the world through one man's disobedience, so one man would offer life to all through His obedience.

The Apostle Paul writes, "thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (1 Cor 15:45)"

Adam's failure brought death, but Jesus' victory brings life. Jesus died and became a curse for us by bearing our sins. He then rose from the dead, conquering the curse of the creation covenant.

The True and Better Eden

Jesus' victory and obedience means those who trust in Him by faith, are assured a future paradise.

- Read Revelation 22:1-4; Compare John's description of the new heavens and new earth with Genesis' description of the Garden of Eden

John describes the New Jerusalem as a paradise world that is free from the corruption of sin and the curse. The presence of the tree of life in the new Jerusalem shows that because of Jesus' work as the last Adam, Christians are promised eternal life that is incorruptible and eternal.

Discuss:

- What patterns established in the creation covenant will be repeated in later covenants? (Hint: see Hebrews 3:7-4:13; Ephesians 5:32)
- Read Romans 5:12-19; How is Adam a “type” of Jesus (v.14)

GOD’S FAITHFUL WORD

WEEK 2 -DAY 1

God’s Eternal Plan of Redemption

Can you surprise God? Is it possible to pull a fast one on someone who is all-knowing, all-wise, and all-powerful? God was not surprised by Adam’s failure to keep the covenant of creation. Genesis 3:15 is proof that He had a plan to rescue His image-bearers ready in response. Theologian Wayne Grudem says the covenant of redemption is “an agreement among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in which the Son agreed to become a man, be our representative, obey the demands of the covenant of works on our behalf, and pay the penalty for sin, which we deserved.”⁴

Discuss:

- When did God make this agreement to redeem sinful mankind (See 1 Corinthians 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:9)?

The Major Actor

Think of a time someone made a promise to you that they did not keep. Were you quick to trust them again? You probably had some strong concerns about believing them again. The Bible is God’s Word, which He never breaks. In Genesis 3:15, God promises perpetual conflict between the woman and the serpent and between both their offspring. He assures us that this continual hostility will lead to the serpent’s eventual downfall.

Discuss:

- Who is the serpent (Hint: See Revelation 12:9; 20:2)?
- Look up John 8:44 and 1 John 3:10-12; who are Satan’s offspring?
- What does it tell us about God that He can make such a promise?

The First Gospel

This verse is often referred to as the first gospel proclamation in the Bible. God declared from the very beginning of His Word, that He would reverse the effects of sin and death.

⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 518.

This reminds us how the Bible is a book written by many authors over many years, but is fully inspired by God. It is telling one story —the story of redemption in Jesus.

Discuss:

- Does this early message about Jesus and His salvation make it easier for you to trust the Bible?

THE OFFSPRING OF THE WOMAN

Week 2 -Day 2

The Conquering Offspring

Some words in English are not as clear as others. If I told you, “Watch out for the deer”, would you understand what I was saying? You probably know what a deer is and what it looks like, but was I warning you about one deer, or a group of deer? It could be either. The Hebrew word for “offspring” (Genesis 3:15) works similarly.

Traditionally, both Christian and Jewish scholars understood the woman’s offspring of Genesis 3:15 to be a reference to an individual offspring coming to defeat the force of evil. Some critical scholars have said that this verse has nothing to do with Jesus. They claim this verse simply is talking about the fact that men and snakes will be perpetual enemies. Regardless of your feelings about snakes, to dismiss the spiritual nature of this warning is to ignore Satan’s involvement in tempting Eve in the garden. The serpent is clearly indwelt by Satan and the offspring who will come and battle with him is a reference to the coming of Jesus.

Discuss:

- What does the promise of the future coming of the woman’s offspring reveal about Jesus’ nature (Hint: See Hebrews 2:17)?

The Battle

Satan’s fate was sealed by God. Yet, God acknowledges that the devil would inflict damage in this battle against the woman’s offspring. He would bruise the ankle of the offspring, while simultaneously having his head crushed. In many ways, the entire Bible is a story of Satan’s attempted assassination of the woman’s offspring.

Discuss:

- How did Satan “bruise the heel” of Jesus?
- Can you think of any attempts by the devil in the Old Testament to prohibit the birth of the woman’s offspring?

Victory

Jesus was attacked by the enemy and was killed. Yet His death on the cross proved to be the moment of His decisive victory over the ancient serpent. Jesus’ death on the cross provided the fatal blow that crushed Satan’s head.

Discuss:

- Read Colossians 2:15; Is the Devil defeated right now?

- Despite his defeat, Satan is still active. Read Romans 16:20; What will God soon do for us?

A COVENANT OF GRACE

WEEK 2 -DAY 3

The Basis of all Future Covenants

God's covenant of Redemption, alluded to first in Genesis 3:15, forms the foundation for all of the subsequent biblical covenants. It is similar to car models. Each year car makers produce updates to their most popular models. Yet each year's new model (usually) shares the foundation of the models that have come before it, but with added details and improvements.

All of the biblical covenants are birthed out of God's gracious covenant of redemption. Man did nothing to deserve this relationship with God. God is ensuring salvation for His people based on His word and His works.

Discuss:

- Can you define grace?

Shadows vs. Reality

Each future covenant highlights the failures of God's human covenant partners. Whether it is Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, or David, at one point or another, they all show themselves to be covenant breakers.

God acts alone to keep His promise through the provision of a faithful covenant Partner so that a new and better covenant can be established. It is only through giving us Jesus, and because of His obedience and death, that our redemption is secured. This makes the covenant unbreakable, because it doesn't depend on us to keep it. It is a covenant of grace.

Discuss:

- Can you think of some failures of God's human covenant partners (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, or David)?

Post-Curse Hope

Have you ever noticed that Eve is not given the name "Eve" until after the humans sinned and God pronounced the curse (Gen 3:20)? Before this, she was called "woman" (Gen 2:23). The name "Eve" means "life" or "life giver." This is important. This alludes to the faith Adam and Eve placed in God's promise about her future offspring's victory.

Discuss:

- Can you see reason for hope in God's provision of clothes for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21)?
- How does this covenant of redemption give Christians joy and confidence?

Another Adam?

If I asked you to name a person in the Bible who was told by God to have lots of kids to fill the earth, rule over creation, and who would eventually become ashamed because of their nakedness, who am I describing? There are not many people that fit this description, but there are at least two: Adam and Noah. Moses, the author of Genesis, wants us to see Noah as another kind of Adam.

Discuss:

- Compare and contrast Adam and Noah, creation and new creation after the flood (1:2 = 8:1; 1:28-30 = 9:1-3; 3:7 = 9:20-21).

To Be Continued...

Have you ever watched your favorite television show only to be disappointed that the episode was not resolved in the end? The show ended with the words “to be continued.” Before Netflix and binge watching, people needed to wait an entire week, or sometimes a couple of months to see how their favorite characters would get out of the difficult situation in which they found themselves.

The language that is used surrounding God’s covenant with Noah reveals this is not a new covenant, but a continuation of God’s covenant with Adam and creation. When the Bible talks about God initiating a covenant, it typically uses the words “cut a covenant.” With Noah, God uses the words “establish my covenant”, which always speak of how a person is still committed to a previously made covenant.

Discuss:

- Why does it matter that God is affirming His previous covenant with Adam?
- What does this tell you about God’s commitment to humans and to the earth?

Too Much Like Adam

Noah’s drunken stupor (Gen 9:21) shows us that despite a freshly washed world, sin was still harboring inside of him. He served as a new Adam, the head of the human race, but suffered from the same sin sickness as the first Adam. Mankind needs more than an external washing from a flood of water, but an internal cleansing by God’s Spirit made possible by the sacrifice of God’s Son.

Discuss:

- Look up Titus 3:4-7; what is the only washing that can make us clean before God? How can we experience this washing?

Grace for Everybody

In a classroom, a teacher may offer rewards for certain students. Those who behave well in class may be offered extra credit or longer recess. Those who do well on exams may be exempt from homework. Still there are other times when a teacher may give the entire class a reward, despite the behavior of individual students.

Similarly, God extends saving grace to some, but common grace to all. Saving grace is the undeserved favor God bestows upon individuals for salvation through faith in Jesus. Common grace describes all the good gifts God extends to all of humanity.

Discuss:

- Name some examples of God's common grace (Hint: See Matthew 5:45).

An Unconditional Covenant

God's covenant with Noah is different from His covenants with Abraham, Israel, or David. He gives this covenant to everybody (even animals), without condition. Unlike the other covenants, faith is not even necessary. The most hardened atheist reaps the benefit of this divine covenant.

Discuss:

- Read Genesis 9:8-11; What does God promise in the covenant?

A Scrubbed Clean Earth

The flood did not change man's heart. It also did not change God's mind about man's sin. Genesis 8:21 reveals that God knew the flood would not change the depravity of man's heart. Our sin condition is passed down from Adam, and as long as God spared humanity, the sin problem would not be fixed. Instead, this covenant shows God's resolve to redeem mankind and the earth. He will not give up on His image bearers. He has future plans for humanity and this earth.

Peter compares Noah's ark with our salvation in Christ and baptism (1 Peter 3:20-21). Baptism does not save us, but is the outward sign of our faith in Jesus. In each case, believers are saved through the waters of judgment. This theme is revisited often in Scripture (e.g., infant Moses in the basket—literally the word "ark", the Red Sea crossing, etc.)

Discuss:

- Read Romans 8:18-23; To what future hope does the earth look forward?
- How does this covenant show you God's determination to redeem sinners?

Road signs are often under appreciated. They play an important role in promoting our safety and guiding us to our destination. On a long trip, road signs give us reassurance that we are heading in the right direction.

In a similar way, God provides signs for His covenants. Covenant signs bring mankind reassurance of God's promises. They are how God certifies His covenants. They are a continual reminder of God's presence with us and His promises. Covenant signs are often a physical symbol that is meant to remind us of an unseen spiritual reality.

Discuss:

- Read Genesis 9:11-17; What is the sign of God's covenant with Noah? Name all the beneficiaries of this covenant.
- The Bible describes marriage as a covenant relationship (Malachi 2:14). What is used often today as the traditional sign of the marriage covenant?

A Bow Without Arrows

The Hebrew language does not actually have a word for "rainbow". Instead, the word for a "warrior's bow" is used. Hence a rainbow is a fitting choice for the sign of Noah's covenant. It's as if God is symbolically laying down His warrior's bow. He will never again flood the entire earth again.

Michael Williams describes the fitting nature of this sign writing, "One could say that in the flood, God's bow was aimed toward the earth in judgment. But once God placed his bow in the sky, the plane of the earth becomes the bowstring and the weapon is now pointed upward toward God, and thus God himself becomes the recipient of the threatened covenant curse." In this light, God promises to take on the curse of the covenant if He fails to keep His word.

Discuss:

- Have you ever viewed a rainbow as a warrior's bow at rest that is aimed at heaven before?
- Why should this covenant give encouragement to your faith?

THE COVENANT PROMISED

WEEK 4 -DAY 1

Another Adam?

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, Abraham is presented as another kind of Adam. We see in the list of three sons associated with Adam, Noah, and now Abraham. This is a literary technique that encourages readers to compare Adam, Noah, and Abraham.

Paul makes this same connection in the New Testament (Romans 4:16-17). Abraham is shown to be another kind of Adam that God will use to restore all the blessings that Adam lost when he sinned. God is going to fulfill his promise to defeat the devil and reverse the effects of the curse through the covenant He makes with Abraham.

Discuss:

- Look up Romans 4:16-17; in what ways does Paul connect Abraham with Adam?

Hanging Out in Ur

We often elevate the great heroes of the faith. We esteem people like Abraham, but often neglect to see what makes them so special—God’s grace. Abraham was the son of an idol worshipper (Joshua 24:2), who is living in Ur of the Chaldeans. There is nothing that makes him stand out from his brothers. He is not actively seeking God, yet God sought him out.

This reminds us that this is fundamentally a covenant of grace. Grace never requires people to first clean themselves up and get their act together before God lets them join the covenant. No, instead God chooses people who do nothing to deserve His kindness and enters into covenant with them.

Discuss:

- Does God relate to His people in the Old Testament primarily on the basis of works or grace?

Redemptive Promises

A person only cares about a promise if they are excited for what is being guaranteed to them. I can promise to give you a penny, but that promise won’t likely thrill you if you don’t need a penny, or if you have too many pennies already. God promises to give Abraham something he desperately needs. He guarantees to make Abraham a great people, give him a great name, and make him a blessing to all the families of the earth. God promises to restore the blessings to mankind that Adam lost in the fall.

Discuss:

- By sinning, Adam lost a paradise world, an intimate relationship with God, and living in happy community with God’s image-bearers. In what ways is God promising to restore these things through His covenant with Abraham?
- Look up Acts 3:25; how are all the families of the world blessed through Abraham?

THE COVENANT CEREMONY

WEEK 4 -DAY 2

Are You Sure God?

Have you ever questioned God’s promises? Have you ever doubted His Word? If so, you can rest assured that you are in good company. This is something we share with the father of faith. Years after receiving promises from God, Abraham asked God for reassurance about the promises’ fulfillment (15:2, 8). God is not angry with Abraham, but responds by giving him greater reassurance than he could imagine.

Discuss:

- What should we do when we have doubts about God's promises? What did Abraham do (Genesis 15:2,8)?

'Till Death Do Us Part

Do you like going to weddings? There is a lot of time, energy, and money spent on wedding preparations. How much have you thought about the ceremony itself? A crucial part of the wedding ceremony is the exchanging of marriage vows. In the traditional vows, future husbands and wives commit themselves to their would- be spouses until death.

Ancient kings also committed themselves in covenants with other kings. They utilized a graphic ceremony that God uses with Abraham. In these ceremonies, animals were cut in half and lined up opposite of each other. Then, either both, or the lesser of the parties would walk between the pieces of the animals. They were symbolically taking the curse of the covenant upon themselves. They were declaring, "If I fail to uphold the covenant, may I be torn apart."

Discuss:

- Would walking between pieces of torn-up animals encourage you to keep your word?

God Walks Alone

The great shock of the covenant ceremony that God initiates with Abraham is that Abraham was a passive spectator in the ritual (15:12). God was committing to keep both sides of the covenant Himself. This illustrates how this covenant is based on grace. Abraham wasn't physically able to walk through the animals. God would keep His word, while simultaneously promising that He wouldn't allow Abraham to falter.

Discuss:

- How does God's willingness to take the curse on behalf of man's covenant failure set a pattern that culminates at the cross (Hint: See Galatians 3:13)
- Does this covenant ceremony help any doubts you may have about God's promises?

ABRAHAM'S SIGN

WEEK 4 -DAY 3

The Condition to Grace

With all this grace talk, one might think everybody would automatically receive salvation. Do God's promises apply to every descendant of Abraham? The answer is no.

God warns Abraham that any male who would not take on the sign of the covenant (i.e., circumcision) would be cut off from the people and has broken the covenant.

Discuss:

- Read Genesis 17:9-14; What is the sign and condition of God's covenant with Abraham?

Grace or Works?

If this is a covenant of grace, why does God demand Abraham's offspring to be circumcised? This covenant is not received by works. In writing on this subject in the New Testament, Paul reveals that circumcision is actually a sign of Abraham's faith (Romans 4:11).

The condition of the covenant is ultimately faith. By taking on the sign of the covenant, Abraham's descendants are showing their faith in God's promises.

Discuss:

- Baptism is the sign of the new covenant. What role does faith play in baptism?
- Read Genesis 15:6; Discuss how important faith is in Abraham's relationship with God. Extra credit: list the other places in Scripture Genesis 15:6 is quoted.

Faith is the Ticket

To go to the Super Bowl, a person needs a ticket. Imagine that your father gave you a ticket to the big game. The person sitting next you might ask how you were able to afford such an expensive ticket. Your answer would be, "I couldn't afford it, but my father gave me it as a gift." The ticket is an absolute condition needed to enter the stadium. However, you yourself did not pay one cent to purchase the ticket. You did not earn or buy the ticket. You received it as a gift.

This is how faith works. Faith is the necessary condition of our salvation. But the Bible tells us that even our faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29), earned for us by Jesus given out of His grace. Abraham was given the sign of the covenant and he received it by faith. Circumcision, like baptism, is a picture of faith. And faith is the ultimate condition of the covenant.

Discuss:

- Read and meditate on the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11.

THE OLD COVENANT

WEEK 5 -DAY 1

You Nimrod

We often use words without understanding their original meaning. For example, have you ever called someone a "nimrod?" Today, that is not a flattering title. It refers a person who is inept and not bright. However, that name did not always carry that meaning. It

originally comes from the Bible. Nimrod was Noah's grandson and is said to be "a mighty man" and "a mighty hunter before the Lord (Gen 10:8-9)." A mighty hunter of a man is a far cry from how we think of "nimrods" today. What accounts for the change in meaning? In the mid 20th century, Bugs Bunny (kids can google him if they need to) sarcastically called his blundering hunting nemesis Elmer Fudd a "nimrod." The cartoon rabbit's sarcasm has endured. And now we view nimrods as people who aren't very bright.

The word "testament" has followed a similar, yet less dramatic shift in meaning. For most people, a "testament" simply refers to the two separate halves of the Bible. Yet the word comes from the Latin "testamentum" meaning "covenant". Thus, our Bibles are divided in two parts—the old covenant and new covenant. This division reveals how closely associated the Old Testament has become with God's covenant with Moses.

Discuss:

- Who is the biggest nimrod in your life? Just kidding— Don't answer!
- Because the two halves of the Bible were named for the old and new covenants, what does that tell you about how the church historically viewed the importance of covenants in the story of Scripture?

If it Walks like a Duck...

God's covenant with Moses, which is primarily described in Exodus 19-24, has all the marks of an ancient covenant. There is a historical prologue, covenant obligations, blessings, and curses. A historical prologue describes what the great king has done for his covenant partners.

Discuss:

- Read Exodus 20:2; what has God done for the Israelites?
- What is the well-known name for the covenant obligations?

Same Blessings, Different Details

The blessings of the covenant are an expansion and clarification of the same promises given to Abraham. They can be summarized as the three "P's": People, Paradise, and Presence (Exodus 23:20-30). The curses are found in detail in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The curses are essentially a reversal of the blessings.

Discuss:

- Can you think of any ways the Bible describes the promised land of Canaan as a new Eden? (Hint: Exodus 3:17; 33:3; Micah 4:4)

A COVENANT OF GRACE?

WEEK 5 -DAY 2

Works or Grace?

There is some dispute about God's covenant with Moses. Is it a covenant of works or a covenant of grace? God's covenant with Adam is considered a covenant of works because Adam was expected to obey the covenant flawlessly, or face the consequences of covenant breaking. God built means within His covenant with Moses to deal with the inevitable failure of His people to perfectly obey the covenant obligations.

Discuss:

- What two systems does God institute within the framework of the Mosaic covenant to atone for His people's sins? (Hint: Exodus 28:1; Leviticus 16).
- How is Jesus the fulfilment of both these systems?
- Does God expect or believe the Israelites will be able to perfectly obey this covenant?

Abrahamic Covenant 2.0

Imagine a father who had two sons. He bought bicycles for both of them. One son received the bike as a gift with no strings attached. The other son, however, was given a list of rules and regulations he had to keep in order to earn the bike. Is this father just? Take note that the blessings of God's covenant with Moses are the same as the blessings of the covenant God made with Abraham. He would not give one on the basis of grace, and the other on the basis of works.

We should also consider that it was Abraham's covenant that sparked God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 2:24). This led to the major redemptive work of the Old Testament—the exodus. After God saves His covenant people from slavery, He then gives them the law.

Discuss:

- What is the significance of God saving the Israelites from slavery before giving them the law?
- How does the order of salvation and good works relate to our lives as Christians?

Kicked Out of the House

The major curse of the covenant is exile from the Promised Land (Leviticus 26:33). God warns Israel that, like Adam, their persistent disobedience will lead to their eviction from Canaan.

Discuss:

- Read Leviticus 26:44-45; Despite the warning of exile, God will not break His covenant with His people. What does this reveal about God?
- What comfort should this bring to God's covenant people?

The Pattern Continues

As the first person created, Adam is God's son (Luke 3:38). This is again a consistent pattern that God establishes with His people. In Exodus 4:22-23, God refers to the nation of Israel as His firstborn son. This leads Theologian/ Professor Greg Beale to write, "The reason they are called God's firstborn son is because the same mantle of Adam has been passed on to Noah and then to the patriarchs and their 'seed' Israel."

Through this covenant, God will bring about His truly unique son Jesus, who will conquer Satan and reverse the effects of the curse. The coming of God's perfect Son enables all who trust in Him to become God's children.

Discuss:

- Read 1 John 3:1-3; what hope do God's children have for the future?

Why We Need God's Law

Part of the reason God establishes His law in the old covenant is to reveal our inability to keep the law. The law and its standards demonstrate our need for a Savior. There are other good reasons for God giving His law. It reveals God's nature and character and helps to suppress evil in the world. However, the law was never meant to save us. It is not medicine that we can take and find healing for our sin sickness. Instead, it is like an X-ray that reveals our sin injuries. It is diagnostic, not medicinal. The law reveals our need for the true medicine of Jesus and His gospel.

Discuss:

- Read Romans 3:19-20 and Galatians 2:16; what do these verses reveal about the purpose of the law?

I Am Who I Am

Not to be missed in the establishment of God's covenant with Moses, is the revelation of God's name at the burning bush. As God was commissioning Moses to set the Israelites free from their slavery, the prophet was nervous. What if the people would not believe him? What if they ask for the name of the God of their fathers who was sending him? What should he answer? God's reply emphasizes His faithfulness to keep His promises to His people. He responds, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

(Exodus 3:14-15)." The name "I AM" represents forms of the Hebrew verb "to be", which is related to the divine name Yahweh. This name for God reveals much about who he is as Creator and independent, unchanging Ruler of the world. But the name also emphasizes God's covenant faithfulness to His people. He will not break His word to them; in fact, He can't.

Discuss:

- Read Malachi 3:6; what hope does this verse to give us about God?

Learning from History

The Bible's main purpose is not to be a history book. However, the history recorded in Scripture is true and faithful. Sadly, many fail to learn the lessons that their predecessors learned and are doomed to suffer with the same struggles. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel famously said, "The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history." This can certainly be said about the Israelites.

After Moses died, Joshua led the people to take hold of the promised land of Canaan. God's covenant promises were being fulfilled, but the people became sloppy in their faithfulness to God's covenant. The book of Judges reveals an ugly vicious cycle of apostasy, judgment, repentance, and the raising up of a judge who would deliver the people.

Discuss:

- What are some ways God's people can avoid this vicious cycle seen in Judges?

There was no King in Israel

The book of Judges ends with an important statement: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25)." The author reveals that a major reason for Israel's sorry state was their lack of a king. In one sense, they should not have needed a king. They had God and His Word to guide them. A king could help them, but not just any king would do. The people found themselves in trouble when they asked for a king like all of the nations (1 Samuel 8:5). The problem is not necessarily their desire for a king, but their longing to be like the other nations. Israel was not to be like the other nations—they were God's covenant people. They were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They were to lead other nations to the knowledge of the one true God.

Discuss:

- Who first had the idea that Israel should have a king? (Hint: Genesis 17:6; 49:10; Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

Kingly Behavior

The idea of having a king was not inherently wrong. The problem was the kind of king Israel wanted and their motivations for having him, that landed them in trouble. Israel's king was to copy God's law and meditate upon it. They also were to avoid accumulating too much of the 3 "w's": weapons, wealth, and wives (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Saul made a habit of ignoring God's Word, so he was rejected in favor of David. God establishes His covenant with David when David wanted to build a permanent house for God in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7:1-14).

Discuss:

- In what ways could a godly king benefit the people?

Building a House

Would you want to live in a house built by God? Every wall would be perfectly square. The paint would not be splotchy. The pipes would never leak and the foundation would always stand firm through any storm. David wanted to build a permanent house for God in Jerusalem, but instead, God offers to build a house for David (2 Samuel 7:11). Certainly, God is not promising to construct a brick and mortar structure for David. No, God is promising to build a dynasty for the son of Jesse. This is a promise that David would have many royal descendants. In fact, many of God's previous covenant promises are finding fulfilment in David's rule.

Discuss:

- Read 2 Samuel 7:9-11; do any of these promises God makes to David remind you of God's previous covenant promises? (Hint: Think of the 3 "p's": people, paradise, presence)

God Makes Good

We live in an age of immediate gratification. We want everything as soon as possible. We struggle with someone who doesn't pay off a promise in a year's time. It is very hard for us to process God making a promise and then fulfilling it over the span of a thousand years. Yet this is what takes place in the story of the covenants. 1 Kings 4:20-21 reveals that God's covenant with Abraham has been fulfilled, at least partially, in the Davidic covenant. At this time, God's covenant people were "as many as the sand by the sea". They also possessed the boundaries that God swore to their patriarch from the Euphrates to Egypt (Gen 15:8).

Discuss:

- If these covenant promises took centuries to fulfil, what does that tell us about God's timing versus our timing?
- What virtue should this reality instill in us?

God's Faithful *Berith*

The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*. Theologian Geerhardus Vos writes, "The outstanding characteristic of a *berith* is its unalterableness, its certainty, its eternal validity." The covenants are meant to train us to see how reliable God's Word is for believers. Abraham did not see the fulfilment of these promises, but God did not fail to keep His promise. "The Word of the Lord proves true (Psalm 18:30)."

Discuss:

- Does seeing a delayed fulfilment of God's promises encourage or discourage your faith?

Family Matters

Much of God's promise to David would not come to fruition until after his death. God was going to raise up David's future offspring and establish his kingdom. In this covenant, there is emphasis on sonship. Israel's future king would not only be David's son, but God's son. This is reminiscent of what is said about Israel (Exodus 4:22-23) and Adam (Luke 3:38).

Certainly, David's immediate son Solomon fulfills this promise and reaped the benefit of its blessings, but its true fulfillment is found in Jesus the Son of David and the Son of God. Jesus' fulfillment of the covenant enables us to be God's children.

Discuss:

- Read John 1:12; how can a person become a child of God?
- Name some blessings Christians reap from God's covenant with David.

Building God's House

One of the promises that God made to David about his son Solomon was that he would build a house for the name of the Lord (2 Samuel 7:13). This promise was fulfilled when he built the temple in Jerusalem. But the Scriptures reveal an even greater fulfillment of this promise in David's greatest Son. Jesus came and became the temple of God dwelling among His people (John 1:14). This work of temple building continues on today. After His death and resurrection, Jesus is constructing a house for the name of the Lord—the church.

Discuss:

- Where is God's temple today (Hint: Read Ephesians 2:19-22)?
- Who is currently building God's temple (Hint: Read Matthew 16:18)?

God's *Hesed*

As a child, have you ever played the game of plucking petals off of a flower, saying with each petal "they love me, they love me not?" God's promises that His "steadfast love" will not depart from David's son in 2 Samuel 7:15. "Steadfast love" is translated in various ways in English, none of which are able to get to the heart of its meaning. The Hebrew word is *hesed*, and it describes God's covenant love. Commentator Dale Ralph David explains *hesed* as "not merely love, but loyal love; not merely kindness, but dependable kindness, not merely affection, but affection that has committed itself." This word, which is so predominant in the Old Testament, illustrates God's merciful love for His people is loyal, dependable, and marked by His commitment to them. It assures us that, as His covenant people, God always loves us.

Discuss:

- Does learning about God's *hesed* for His covenant people give you security in your relationship with God? If so, Why?

The Need for New

When is it time to buy new shoes? Runners keep track of how many miles they put on their sneakers. They realize they usually need new sneakers after running 300 to 500 miles on a given pair. When is it time for God's people to need a new covenant?

The word "new" in English can mean a couple of things. It could refer to something that is brand new in origin or existence (e.g., a new house), or it could also refer to something that is renewed (e.g., a life-changing event can cause someone to be "a new person"). The new covenant takes on this latter sense, in that it is not disconnected from the previous covenants, but it is different and changed from the old.

Discuss:

- Think about times you have needed something new; what are some common reasons to replace something old with something new?

A New Name

The name for the new covenant comes from God Himself. When the Old Testament speaks of the new covenant, it is sometimes referred to as "the covenant of peace" (Isaiah 54:10; Ezekiel 34:25; 37:26) and "everlasting covenant" (Isaiah 55:3; 61:8; Jeremiah 32:40; 50:5; Ezekiel 16:60; 37:26). The only place the phrase "new covenant" is used in the Old Testament is in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Yet, this name is picked up by New Testament writers (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24).

God has been progressively telling His story of redemption. There is good reason for introducing the new covenant after the old covenant. Through much time and many examples, God has demonstrated the sinful nature of man which exposes why something new was so desperately needed. Adam's sin has been passed down to everybody. Now, everyone needs a heart transplant.

Discuss:

- Read Jeremiah 17:9; why is a new a covenant needed?

Out with the Old...

The fact that God provides a new covenant affirms to us that we are no longer bound under the old. God has determined to relate to His people in a new way. This in no way diminishes the value or worth of the old covenant. God did not change His standards or lower the bar for His people. The old covenant displayed the righteous character of God and a need for God's covenant people to walk in obedience to God's standards. The new has not abolished this righteous standard, however, it does provide a way for humans to be counted as righteous in God's eyes. This way is only through the work of Jesus.

Discuss:

- Read Matthew 5:17-30; are new covenant moral standards more relaxed than the old?

God Goes Global

God names the house of Israel and the house of Judah as the parties with which He is establishing the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Yet the New Testament makes clear this covenant is extended to all the nations of the world. If God says this covenant is for Israel and Judah, how do we reconcile the new covenant being given to the church in the New Testament? The New Testament emphasizes the spiritual reality of the covenant. The covenant is for the spiritual children of Abraham (both Jew and Gentile) who have trusted in Jesus by faith. They are referred to as “the Israel of God” (Galatians 3:7; 29; 4:25-27).

The church has not replaced Israel, but has been grafted into Israel (Romans 11:11-24). Jesus has made one new man, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.

Discuss:

- Read Ephesians 2:11-15; what do these verses reveal about the relationship of Jews and gentiles?

An Inside Job

One of the consistent complaints God has against His people under the old covenant is that their hearts were hardened, rebellious, and evil. While outwardly circumcised, their hearts were not. Their hearts were “deceitful above all things and desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9). This means mankind needs a heart transplant. God promises to write His law upon the hearts of His new covenant people (Jeremiah 31:33). External rules and laws will not address man’s core problem. Man’s great need is to solve his inward sinful condition. That is what God promises to address in this new covenant.

Discuss:

- Read Mark 7:14-23; where is the source of our evil actions?
- Read Jeremiah 24:7 and Ezekiel 36:26; what are the promises offered and what change will result?
- God promises to write His law upon our hearts. Have you experienced this reality? How do you know?

Extreme Heart Makeover

How does God go about renovating the hearts of men and women? Nothing short of God’s own Spirit is needed. One of the great promised blessings of the new covenant is the outpouring of God’s Spirit to indwell His covenant people. This promise is spoken of at length in the New Testament, but is prophesied in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 36:27; 37:14).

Discuss:

- Were all old covenant believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit, or is that a unique blessing to new covenant believers?
- Read Titus 3:5-6; what role does the Holy Spirit play in the Christian’s salvation?

“For they shall all know Me...”

In the homes of avid sports lovers, it is often expected that the children born into the family will adopt the same favorite teams as the parents. Yet, just being born into a family full of Phillies fans, does not ensure each child will grow to love the Phillies. Jeremiah wrote to a people who lived under the old covenant. Entrance into God’s previous covenants was by birth. Parents would have their baby boys circumcised on the eighth day of life to include them under the covenant God established. Yet, this action did not ensure each child would grow to trust in God by faith and live for Him. Many needed to be encouraged to still “know the Lord”, because despite their outward circumcision, their hearts were not circumcised.

God promises the new covenant will be different. Entrance into the new covenant community is not by physical birth, but spiritual birth (cf. John 3:3). When God promises that nobody will have to teach their neighbors and brothers to “know the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:34, He is not discounting solid Bible teaching or evangelism. Instead, He is describing the reality of the new covenant. Every member of the new covenant will already know God because they are born again by faith. All new covenant members are true believers in Jesus.

Discuss:

- The sign of the Abrahamic covenant (i.e., circumcision) was applied at birth, when should the new covenant sign of baptism be applied?

Forgiveness

The new covenant seeks to solve man’s greatest problem. Our greatest need is that we are sinners by birth and by action. God not only resolves to fix our hearts, He also promises to forgive our sins. In Jeremiah 31:34 God promises to forgive the iniquity of His people and “remember their sin no more.”

God simply can’t ignore our sins or sweep them under a rug. For sins to be forgiven, they must be atoned. God’s righteous punishment must be administered to all sin. Thankfully, God’s own son Jesus was willing to come and take on the punishment we deserve for our sins. The good news is that if you trust in Jesus by faith, you are a member of the new covenant and all of your sins are completely forgiven. The curse of the creation covenant is reversed by the death and resurrection of the woman’s offspring—Jesus!

Discuss:

- Do you know if your sins are forgiven by God?
- If so, what is your source of confidence?
- Read Romans 8:1; what hope do we have in Jesus?

Last Meal

If you knew that you only had a matter of hours to spend with your closest friends and family, how would you spend that time? Most likely, you would want to make the most of your final moments together and make them as meaningful as possible.

Jesus knew exactly how little time He had left before His arrest and crucifixion. He prioritized sharing the Passover meal with his disciples. Yet, Jesus was not looking to merely remember the Passover, He planned to transform the meal and give it greater significance. This meal now would become the covenant ceremony or initiation of the new covenant. During the supper, Jesus took a cup of wine and, after giving thanks, said, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:27-28).” Christ uses the word “covenant” in connection with His impending death for the forgiveness of sins.

Discuss:

- Why do you think Jesus would bring up the idea of “covenant” at this important moment with His disciples?
- Which specific promise from Jeremiah 31:31-34 is He alluding to?

This Cup’s for You

The word “cup” is important in the Bible. We are all thankful for a good drinking vessel that helps us enjoy our favorite beverages. However, the Bible adds great symbolism to the word. Biblical scholar and professor Thomas Shreiner writes, “The cup hearkens back to the Old Testament where the cup regularly stands for the wrath of God, which is poured out on those who have rebelled and sinned against Him (Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15, 17, 28; 49:12; Lam 4:21; Ezek 23:31-33; Hab 2:16).” In fact, later that same evening Jesus would pray in the garden of Gethsemane that the Father would let the cup pass from Him (Matt 26:39). Again, the cup refers to God’s wrath against our sins. When Jesus gave His friends the cup to drink in the upper room, He was illustrating how He would soon drink the cup of God’s judgment to propitiate, or satisfy the Father’s wrath against our sins. By saying the cup was “the new covenant in my blood”, (Luke 22:20) Jesus was showing His imminent death would be a sacrifice.

Discuss:

- Jesus made this pronouncement at a Passover meal. What does this reveal about how He viewed His approaching death (Hint: 1 Corinthians 5:7)?
- Connecting communion with the initiation of the new covenant is important. Do you regularly view taking the Lord’s supper as a way of being reminded of God’s new covenant promises? Should you?

New > Old

It is often assumed that if something is new it must be superior to the old version. The 2018 car model is better than the 2017. The iPhone 8 must be far greater than the iPhone 7. The new washing machine with all its fancy bells and whistles must be levels ahead of the no frills older version. We know this is not always true. Sometimes, the older versions are vastly greater than their newer counterparts. (This is especially true with washing machines! Don't ask me how I know.) When it comes to biblical covenants, the new is definitively greater than the old.

Discuss:

- Read Hebrews 8:6-7; what reasons does the author supply for claiming the new covenant is greater than the old?
- Can you think of any other reasons as to why the new covenant is greater than the old?

A Greater Sacrifice

One of the stated reasons for the superiority of the new covenant is that it supplies a greater sacrifice for sin. Under the old covenant, countless animals were slaughtered on behalf of the sins of the people. These sacrifices had to continue indefinitely because they could not effectively take away anyone's sin. Instead, they were a type of a future perfect sacrifice that would deal with sin once and for all.

Discuss:

- Read Hebrews 10:1-3; how is the law like a shadow?
- Read Hebrews 10:4; make five observations about the truth found in the verse.

A Greater Priest

There is a helpful saying that reminds us that "the best of men are men at best." This illustrates the universal effects of sin on mankind. Even the best priests under the old covenant were still sinful men who needed to offer sacrifices for their own sins. Jesus would be different. He lived a completely perfect life of righteousness. He did not need to offer any sacrifices for His own sin.

Jesus also rose from the dead and serves as our eternal High Priest. The old covenant priests were many because they all had a short shelf-life. Because they were mere sinful men, they all died. Jesus serves as a far greater High Priest who always lives to intercede for His people.

Discuss:

- Read Hebrews 7:23-25; what are the advantages of having an eternal priest in Jesus?
- Read Hebrews 7:26-28; Jesus' sacrifice was unlike the old covenant sacrifices, because it was once and for all. What does this reveal about our salvation?

A Story Well Told

We as humans love a good story. We read books, go to plays, watch television shows, and buy tickets to the movies, all to experience a good story. Children love to listen to fairy tales. They are entranced by the ups and downs, highs and lows of the heroes and villains. And almost everyone wants the stories to end with the happy and familiar refrain, “and they lived happily ever after.”

The Bible tells us many stories—all of them are true. We read about a great flood and a great fish. We learn about giants and judges; miracles and massacres; lions, donkeys, and even bears. Yet all of these stories are part of a much larger story. The story God is telling from beginning to end is the story of redemption. God’s redemption story culminates in the death, resurrection, and sovereign rule of Jesus Christ.

Discuss:

- What’s your favorite story in the Bible? Are you able to see how it fits within the big story of the Bible?

Promises, Promises, Promises

The covenants remind us that God’s word cannot be broken. They also show us that all of God’s promises are “yes” in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). God made covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel and David. We have summarized these promises as “the 3 p’s and a c”: people, paradise, presence, and covenant king. At the end of God’s story, He reveals the ultimate fulfillment of these promises in the new heavens and new earth.

People—Read Revelation 7:9-10; discuss how God’s promise of a great people will be fulfilled.

Paradise— Read Revelation 21:1-2 and 22:1-5; discuss how God’s promise of a paradise land will be fulfilled.

For extra credit list connections between the garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem.

Presence— Read Revelation 21:3-4, 22-23; 22:3-5; discuss how God’s promise of His presence will be fulfilled.

Covenant King— Read Revelation 22:16; discuss how God’s promise of a Covenant King will be fulfilled.

The ultimate fulfillment of the covenant assures that all those who have placed their faith in Jesus are God’s covenant people. They belong to Him for all eternity, and God belongs to them. They most assuredly will live happily ever after.

APPENDIX 6

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY COMPARISON

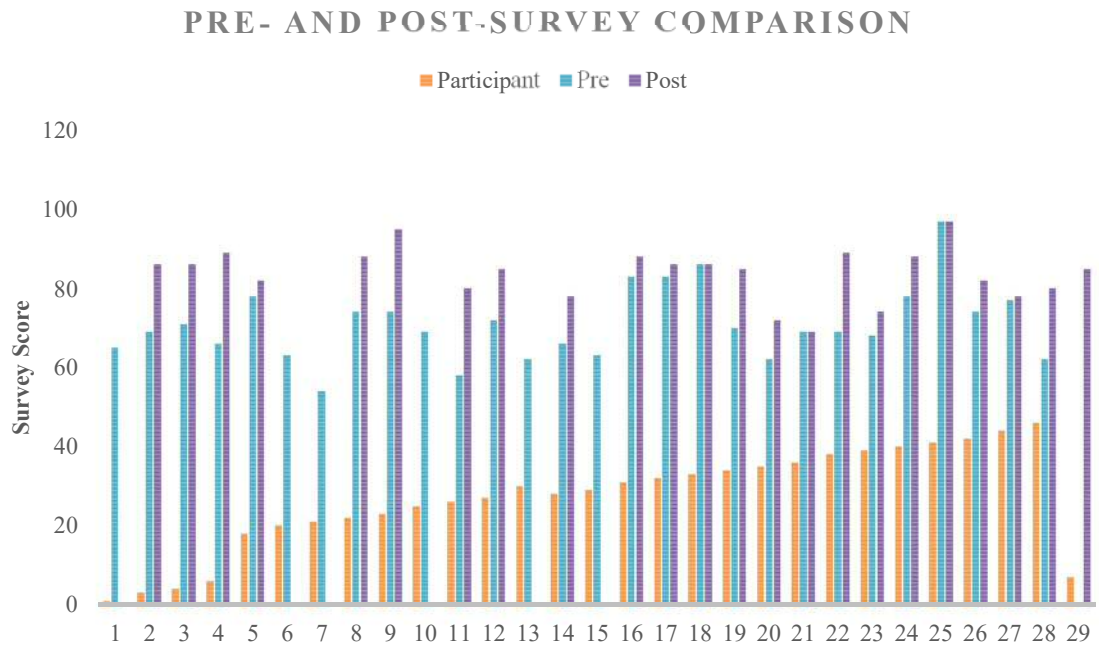


Figure A1. Pre- and post-survey comparison

APPENDIX 7

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY T-TEST

Table A1. T-test: Two-sample assuming unequal variances

	Pre AVG	Post AVG
Mean	70.78571429	83.82608696
Variance	84.84126984	44.87747036
Observations	28	23
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	48	
t Stat	5.842803516	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.35424E-07	
t Critical one-tail	1.677224196	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.35424E-07	
t Critical two-tail	2.010634758	

APPENDIX 8

SURVEY RESULTS

Table A2. Statement 1: Understanding the biblical covenants is important for Christians

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	15	54%	19	86%	32%
Agree	11	39%	3	14%	-25%
Agree Somewhat	1	3.5%	0	0%	-3.5%
Disagree Somewhat	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	1	3.5%	0	0%	-3.5%

Table A3. Statement 2: I know the covenants in the Bible are important, but I don't understand why

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	0 ¹	0%	0	0%	0%
Agree	4	15%	1	4.5%	-10.5%
Agree Somewhat	9	33%	0	0%	-33%
Disagree Somewhat	4	15%	1	4.5%	-10.5%
Disagree	6	22%	7	33%	11%
Strongly Disagree	4	15%	12	58%	43%

¹One pre- survey and post-survey was left blank

Table A4. Statement 3: I have greater security in my relationship with God because of my understanding of the covenants

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		Change
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	
Strongly Agree	7	25%	14	64%	39%
Agree	16	57%	7	32%	-25%
Agree Somewhat	4	14%	0	0%	-14%
Disagree Somewhat	1	4%	1	4%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A5. Statement 4: I understand the difference between a covenant of works and a covenant of grace

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		Change
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	
Strongly Agree	4	15%	10	46%	31%
Agree	12	44%	12	54%	10%
Agree Somewhat	6	22%	0	0%	-22%
Disagree Somewhat	1	4%	0	0%	-4%
Disagree	4	15%	0	0%	-15%
Strongly Disagree	0 ²	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A6. Statement 5: I believe the various covenants in the Bible are interrelated

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		Change
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	
Strongly Agree	9	32%	15	68%	36%
Agree	14	50%	7	32%	-18%
Agree Somewhat	2	7%	0	0%	-7%
Disagree Somewhat	1	4%	0	0%	-4%
Disagree	1	4%	0	0%	-4%
Strongly Disagree	1	4%	0	0%	-4%

²One pre-survey was left blank.

Table A7. Statement 6: I can confidently tell others why the covenants are important

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		Change
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	
Strongly Agree	1	3%	6	27%	24%
Agree	4	14%	10	45%	31%
Agree Somewhat	8	29%	6	27%	-2%
Disagree Somewhat	4	14%	0	0%	-14%
Disagree	10	36%	0	0%	-36%
Strongly Disagree	1	4%	0	0%	-4%

Table A8. Statement 7: The covenants help me to understand the overarching message of the Bible

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		Change
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	
Strongly Agree	6	21%	15	68%	47%
Agree	15	54%	7	32%	-29%
Agree Somewhat	6	21%	0	0%	-22%
Disagree Somewhat	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	1	4%	0	0%	-4%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING MEMBERS AT CALVARY CHAPEL EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH IN VALLEY VIEW, PENNSYLVANIA, WITH A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE COVENANTS

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert L. Plummer

The purpose of this project is to equip the members of Calvary Chapel Evangelical Free Church in Valley View, Pennsylvania, with a biblical theology of the biblical covenants. This purpose was accomplished through an eight-week sermon series covering the covenants, which was paired with a family companion study. The series covers studies on God's covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the church. Biblical theology was utilized to show how the Bible is structured around the covenants.

Chapter 1 defines the goals of the project, ministry context, rationale, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and research methodology. Chapter 2 explains the biblical and theological support for equipping Calvary Chapel Evangelical Free Church with a biblical theology of the covenants. Chapter 3 surveys the theoretical and practical issues related to equipping the church with a biblical theology of the covenants. Chapter 4 details the project's implementation process. Chapter 5 evaluates the project's effectiveness.

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