

Review of Recent Books on Covenant Theology

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Covenant theologians have recently produced several works explaining and defending covenant theology. In 2020 scholars connected to Reformed Theological Seminary produced a multi-authored work, *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*.¹ The contributors to this volume hold either to a standard Westminster standards version of covenant theology or to the variant developed by Meredith Kline. In the same year Richard Belcher, Jr., also of Reformed Theological Seminary, produced *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology*.² Belcher defends a standard Westminster standards version of covenant theology. In 2021 Stephen Myers of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary published *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture*.³ Myers also defends the standard Westminster standards version of covenant theology. Michael Horton contributed the chapter on covenant theology to the 2022 publication, *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*.⁴ Horton writes from a Klinean perspective.

Each contribution is distinctive. Horton, for instance, has produced a chapter and responses to a four-views book. *Covenant Theology* includes not only chapters on the covenants of redemption, works, grace, and the biblical covenants but also includes chapters that survey the historical development of covenant theology and recent scholarship on the covenants. Belcher's book includes chapters that survey and evaluate variations on covenant theology propounded by John Murray, Meredith Kline, O. Palmer Robertson, W. J. Dumbrell, Paul Williamson, the Federal Vision, confessional Baptists, and progressive covenantalists. Myers's book is the most focused on the biblical covenants, though his first chapter is a brief history

¹ Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

² Richard P. Belcher, Jr., *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Fearn, GB: Mentor, 2020). The chapters on the covenant of works and the Davidic covenant are the same as Belcher's contribution to *Covenant Theology*.

³ Stephen G. Myers, *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021).

⁴ Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds., *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022). Horton has also written *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) and a four-volume study of theology of which *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: WJK, 2007) is the most relevant volume for this paper.

of covenant theology, and his last chapter addresses the impact of his view of covenant theology upon baptism and the Lord's supper.

Of these recent contributions Myers is the most exegetically grounded and the most devotional. *Covenant Theology* often has extended exegetical treatments of the key passages, but the exegesis is less focused than Myers's treatments. It is not always relevant to the argument for covenant theology. This is sometimes the case in Belcher's treatment as well. Horton's contribution to *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies* seems to have been written with an eye toward defending his Klinean approach to other covenant theologians. Thus, he appeals more to Reformed historical theology and less to exegesis than might be expected in a chapter whose task was to persuade progressive covenantalists and dispensationalists of covenant theology.

Of these recent treatments of covenant theology, I judge Myers's treatment to make the best exegetical and theological argument for covenant theology, though in general I judge the Klineans to be more correct in their assessment that the Mosaic covenant is in some sense a works covenant.

The rest of this paper will assess the arguments for covenant theology as they relate to the specific covenants significant to this system. Because Myers provides the most focused argument his work will receive the most attention. Because his brief article does not cover the same ground as the other three books, Horton's treatment will receive the least attention, and I will also draw on other Horton writings to round out his view.

The Covenant of Works

The existence of the covenant of works is contested, even among some covenant theologians. Myers begins his treatment of the covenant of works by acknowledging the objections of John Murray, who noted that the term for covenant (בְּרִית) does not occur in Genesis until chapter 6.⁵ Murray also objects to the label "covenant of works" because he believes that covenants are always redemptive in nature.⁶ Paul Williamson, also noted by Myers as a recent critic of the covenant of works, argues similarly: Scripture nowhere speaks of a covenant in this period, an "oath or covenant rite" is absent, and there is no need for covenants prior to the Fall.⁷ In addition to these dissenters among covenant theologians,

⁵ Myers, 52, referencing, John Murray, "Adamic Administration," *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:49-50; John Murray, "Covenant Theology," *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:217-22.

⁶ Murray, "Adamic Administration," 49. Murray is also bothered by the "works" nomenclature. He thinks this obscures the grace present in the Adamic Administration. Ibid.

⁷ Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Plan*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 55-57.

dispensationalists also tend to doubt the existence of the covenant of works.⁸ Progressive covenantalists hold to a covenant with Adam, but they deny that it is a covenant of works.⁹

Covenant Theology

Myers has three rejoinders to the critiques of the covenant of works. First, the Davidic covenant demonstrates that a covenant need not be labeled as such when it is given. The Davidic covenant is not called a covenant in 2 Samuel 7; the language of covenant is applied only by later Scripture passages (Ps 89:3–4, 28–29). Second, Hosea 6:7 refers to a covenant made either with Adam or with all mankind, and this is likely a reference to the covenant of works. Third, *covenant* first appears in Genesis 6 as part of a Hebrew phrase that indicates the establishing of an existing covenant (rather than the making of a new covenant). This indicates the presence of a covenant or covenants prior to the first use of the word in Genesis 6:18.¹⁰

Belcher also argues that Hosea 6:7 refers to the Adamic covenant.¹¹ Both Myers and Belcher are aware of the three proposed translations (“like Adam,” “like mankind,” and “at Adam”). Belcher prefers “like Adam,” and Myers finds it difficult to determine whether “like Adam” or “like mankind” is correct.¹² Both find “at Adam” to be the least plausible interpretation. Myers observes, “there is no other indication of any covenant being struck there [that is, at

⁸ Ryrie is equivocal in his critique: “The ideas and concepts contained in the covenants of works and grace are not unscriptural. But they are ideas that are not systematized, formalized, and stated by Scripture as covenants. At least the dispensationalist finds the word *dispensation* used of one or two of his specific dispensations (Eph. 1:10; 3:9); the covenant theologian *never* finds in the Bible the terms *covenant of works* and *covenant of grace*. This does not prove that the concepts are not warranted, but it ought to make a covenant theologian go slow before he makes unfounded charges against dispensationalists for using the term *dispensation*. Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 189. Bock is more dismissive, refereeing to it as a “supposed core covenant never actually gets named as such anywhere in Scripture!” He asserts, “God made no agreement here. He simply asked creatures to carry out their responsibilities to him as Creator, as those he had made in his image to bear his likeness.” Darrell L. Bock, “A Progressive Dispensationalist Response,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 223. Vlach notes, “some dispensationalists have affirmed one or all three of these covenants while remaining dispensationalists.” Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2017), 86.

⁹ Stephen J. Wellum, “A Progressive Covenantalist Response,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 205–7.

¹⁰ Myers, 52–55. It is important to note that Myers does not believe that Genesis 6:18 is referring back to the covenant of works.

¹¹ See also Horton, *Introducing*, 90.

¹² Belcher, 27–28; Myers, 54. Turretin, à Brakel, and Vos also preferred “like Adam.” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 8.3.8 (1:575–76); Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1992), 1:365–67; Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012–2016), 2:36. Note that Belcher contributed the chapter on the covenant of works to *Covenant Theology*. The content is virtually identical to that found in *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God*. The citations in this paper are to *Fulfillment*.

the town named Adam]. For God to refer with so much gravity ... to a covenant that is not mentioned anywhere else in the Scripture ... seems exceedingly unlikely.”¹³ Belcher adds that the “at Adam” interpretation requires a textual emendation.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Belcher notes that the Adamic covenant could be in view with any of the three translations, observing that some interpreters think that Hosea is punning in his reference to a broken covenant at Adam such that the breaking of the Adamic covenant is also in view.¹⁵

Finally, Myers and Belcher argue that Genesis 1–3 contains the elements of a covenant. Myers notes that if a covenant is “a binding relationship between parties that involves both blessings and obligations,” a covenant exists in Genesis 1–3.¹⁶ A relationship between God and man is established when God created man in his image. Man is obligated to adhere to the four creation ordinances (procreation, subduing, Sabbath, and marriage) along with “the focal command” (the prohibition against eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil). The reward for adherence to the obligations is eternal life. Thus, all the elements of a covenant are present in Genesis 1–3.¹⁷ Belcher also observes that the elements of a covenant, which he defines as a “legal agreement between two parties that is ratified by certain rituals that emphasize the binding nature of the agreement,”¹⁸ are present in the opening chapters of Genesis: two parties, conditions, blessings and curses, a covenant representative, and a covenant sign (the tree of life).¹⁹ Horton likewise argues that the formal elements of a covenant in are present Genesis 1–3:

a historical prologue setting the stage (Genesis 1–2), stipulations (2:16–17), and sanctions (2:17b) over which Eve and the serpent argue (3:1–5) and which are finally carried out in the form of judgment (3:8–19).²⁰

The New Testament also confirms the existence of the covenant of works. Michael Kruger argues that the Gospels’ emphasis on the active obedience of the Son of Man (an Adamic title) in order to secure our salvation points toward the existence of a covenant of works that must be fulfilled if the covenant mediator is to secure the salvation of all those for whom he

¹³ Myers, 53–54.

¹⁴ Belcher, 27. Note, however, that not all interpreters who take the “at Adam” view believe an emendation is necessary. Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* (Grand Rapids, MI. Baker, 1985), 215–16; Williamson, 55.

¹⁵ Belcher, 28.

¹⁶ Myers, 56. Parr documents that this line of argumentation is found in William Strong and Francis Roberts. Thomas Parr, *Backdrop for a Glorious Gospel: The Covenant of Works According to William Strong* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2020), 25–26. See also Turretin, 8.3.6–7 (1:575–76); à Brakel, 1:356.

¹⁷ Myers, 56–69.

¹⁸ Belcher, 18.

¹⁹ Belcher, 24–26.

²⁰ Horton, *Introducing*, 90.

is covenant head.²¹ Guy Waters observes, “If Paul understands Jesus’s representative work in covenantal terms, and if Paul understands Jesus and Adam to be parallel as representative persons, then we are bound to understand Adam’s representative work in covenantal terms.”²² Waters notes that this parallel is made explicit in 1 Corinthians 15:20–23, 44–49; Romans 5:12–21.²³

John Murray was bothered by the “works” nomenclature. He thought it obscured the grace present in the Adamic Administration.²⁴ Myers grants that the giving of the covenant was gracious (condescending grace, to use his terminology), but the covenant promised eternal life upon condition of obedience, which means that it was not a covenant of redeeming grace.²⁵

Belcher also defends the label “covenant of works,” noting that this terminology is foundational for understanding the work of Christ that is imputed to us for our salvation. First, all people are born sinners and are in need of the gospel because of Adam’s violation of the covenant. Second, it established the principle of “do this and live,” which no one can attain, shows the need for the gospel. Finally, Christ fulfilled the covenant of works so that we can be saved. While wishing to reserve the term grace for God’s redemptive work, Belcher is willing to say that in a wider sense the covenant of works was graciously given.²⁶

Assessment

There are numerous strong arguments in favor of a covenant with Adam. Most compelling is the observation that the elements of a covenant are present in Genesis 1–3. If the elements of a covenant are present, the absence of the label is not a sufficient counterargument.²⁷ The absence of the label in 2 Samuel 7, which everyone acknowledges to be the establishment of the Davidic covenant, confirms this.

²¹ Michael J. Kruger, “Covenant in the Gospels,” in *Covenant Theology*, 216–18

²² Guy Prentiss Waters, “The Covenant of Works in the New Testament,” in *Covenant Theology*, 80. Horton argues similarly. Horton, *Introducing*, 89.

²³ Ibid. The same argument is found in Michael Allen, *Sanctification*, NSD (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 101.

²⁴ Murray, “Adamic Administration,” 49. Progressive covenantalists agree with covenant theologians that God made a covenant with Adam, but they object to it being identified as a covenant of works. Wellum, 205–7.

²⁵ Myers, 71–72.

²⁶ Belcher, 29–35.

²⁷ I would, however, fill out the argument differently than Myers. While Myers is clear that procreation and subduing are blessings and not merely ordinances, I would argue that the text presents them as primarily blessings. 1. This is what the text explicitly calls them. 2. The curse following sin explicitly falls on these blessings. 3. Redemption includes the establishment of a kingdom (subduing) on an earth that is full of humans ruling creation in submission to God. That said, I grant that these blessings do reveal what is normative in God’s creation and that they therefore carry an obligation to live according to them and not contrary to them.

Also compelling is the agreement that 1 Corinthians 15:20–23 and Romans 5:12–21 present Adam as a covenant head. Rolland McCune observes, “The parallelism between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12–21 argues against seminal headship.”²⁸ If the imputation of Adam’s sin and of Christ’s righteousness is rooted in the fact that Adam and Christ are federal (covenant) heads, there must have been a pre-Fall covenant of which Adam was the head.²⁹

Hosea 6:7 is not essential to the argument,³⁰ but it provides welcome textual support. The translation “like mankind,” though possible is not likely. As à Brakel notes, this translation “would take away the emphasis of this text, for the words ‘as Adam’ are added here to maximize rather than minimize the crime. What force of emphasis, yes, what purpose would there be to state that they had broken the covenant like other men.”³¹

The translation “at Adam” is supported by the word “there” in the second line of the verse,³² and this seems decisive for many recent commentators.³³ However, McComiskey notes that ׀ is used by Psalm 14:5 “in a nongeographical sense, pointing to the state of transgression which evildoers are in (v. 4) when divine judgment comes upon them. Here it has a similar function, for it points to the state of those who are in violation of the Mosaic covenant.”³⁴ Or, ׀ could be understood as designating the land of Israel as the place where the covenant was broken.³⁵ Mackay presents yet another option: “the word may function in poetry as an

²⁸ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 2:76.

²⁹ Interestingly, both McCune (to my recollection) and Murray, whom McCune cites liberally in his section “The Representative or Federal Headship View,” denied a covenant of works. It remains unclear to me how Adam could be a covenant head apart from the covenant over which he was head.

³⁰ B. B. Warfield, “Hosea VI.7: Adam or Man?” in *Benjamin B. Warfield: Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1970), 1:119–20.

³¹ à Brakel, 1:366; cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:565; Warfield, 127.

³² Debate exists over whether the reading “at Adam” would require the prefix to ׀ to be emended from a ׀ to a ׀. Warfield, 124–25. McComiskey says that the ׀ could be read as “in,” noting this as a possible translation of Hosea 2:3. McComiskey, *Covenants*, 215. See also Williamson, 55–56. However, none of the major translations adopt this view of the ׀ in Hosea 2:3. Hwang argues, “The ׀ preposition affixed to ‘Adam’ usually means ‘like, as’ (e.g., 3:1; 4:9) but can mean ‘as at/in’ when preceding a place name (e.g., 11:8).” Jerry Hwang, *Hosea*, ZECOT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 193. However, once again the major translations translate “like,” not “in” in Hosea. 11:8). In the end, McComiskey himself seems to adopt the “like Adam” reading. McComiskey, *Covenants*, 216; McComiskey, “Hosea,” in *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992): 1:95.

³³ Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1997), 162–163. J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 197; George M. Schwab, Sr., “Hosea,” in *Daniel–Malachi*, ESVEC (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 215–216; Hwang, 193.

³⁴ McComiskey, “Hosea,” 1:95.

³⁵ A. A. MacIntosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 236–237; Michael B. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of The Twelve*, KEL (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 71–72; Derek D. Bass, “The Use of the Old Testament in the Old Testament:

exclamatory particle equivalent to ‘Look!’ (cf. Pss 14:5; 37:13; 48:7; 66:5; Zeph 1:14).”³⁶ Against the “at Adam” interpretation is the fact that there is no other indication of a covenant made at this obscure town.³⁷

Thus, the best translation is “like Adam.” This rendering does not face the exegetical difficulties of the other renderings. As Warfield notes, “Any difficulties that may be brought against it, indeed, are imported from without the clause itself. In itself the rendering is wholly natural.”³⁸ This reading also fits best with Hosea’s other quotations and allusions to Genesis, which is focused on covenants.³⁹

Myers’s claim that the terminology used in Genesis 6:18 indicates that a covenant or covenants existed prior to the Noahic covenant is not persuasive. This will be discussed further below.

That the Adamic covenant was a works covenant is evident. By violating the conditions of the covenant Adam brought himself and all those for whom he was a federal head under the covenant curses. New covenants had to be established to bring about the righteous rule of man, the image bearer and vice regent of God.

The Covenant of Redemption

Though the covenant of redemption is pre-temporal, Myers treats it after the covenant of works because it is so closely connected in covenant theology with the covenant of grace. This pattern is followed here.

Myers defines the covenant of redemption, which he also styles the counsel of peace, as the covenant in which the Father elects individuals and gives them to the Son to redeem, in which the Son covenants with the Father to redeem them, and in which the Spirit covenants

Reassessing Hosea 6:7 in Light of Hosea's Pervasive Use of Genesis," in *The Law, The Prophets, and the Writings: Studies in Evangelical Old Testament Hermeneutics in Honor of Duane A. Garrett* (Nashville: B&H, 2021), 224. Note, however, that MacIntosh and Shepherd reject the presence of a covenant in the opening chapters of Genesis, and Shepherd prefers the translation “like mankind.”

³⁶ John L. Mackay, *Hosea*, Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Great Britain: Mentor, 2012), 196.

³⁷ Duane Garret provides one possible explanation for a reference to a covenant “at Adam.”

“Inasmuch as there were shrines throughout Israel at the time of Hosea, we need not be surprised that the town of Adam would have had a shrine, nor need we suppose that the shrine there was in any respects unusual. It appears that Hosea singled out the shrine at Adam not because of some peculiarity about the town, but because of its namesake. The prophet has made a pun on the name of the town and the name of the original transgressor. His meaning is, “Like Adam (the man) they break covenants; they are faithless to me there (in the town of Adam).” Garrett, 162–163.

³⁸ Warfield, 128.

³⁹ Bass, 230.

to apply redemption and to preserve the redeemed.⁴⁰ The covenant of redemption does not seem to play a role in progressive covenantalism or dispensational theologies, though it is not incompatible with these systems.

Covenant Theology

The following lines of evidence are adduced for a covenant of redemption.⁴¹ First, there are passages in which the Father sends the Son, and the Son obeys the Father in order to bring about redemption (John 5:36–37; 6:38; 10:18; 12:49; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4, 11–12, 25–26; Heb 10:5–7).⁴² Michael Horton argues,

In the ministry of Christ, the Son is represented (particularly in the Fourth Gospel) as having been given a people by the Father (6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 6–10; Eph. 1:4–12; Heb. 2:13, citing Isa. 8:18), who are called and kept by the Holy Spirit for the consummation of the new creation (Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:11–13; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:5). In fact, to affirm the covenant of redemption was little more than to affirm that the Son's self-giving and the Spirit's regenerative work were the execution of the Father's eternal plan.⁴³

Second, the Bible “regularly speaks of the salvation of the elect in terms of buying and selling (e.g., Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 6:20; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet 1:18).” Jesus is said to have propitiated the wrath of God (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2). The Spirit brings about the application of redemption (John 16:7–11; Acts 2:33; Eph 1:12–14; Titus 3:4–7).⁴⁴ This all implies that the terms of propitiation and redemption had been agreed upon, as it were.⁴⁵

Third, several passages indicate that the Father rewards the Son for his obedience and that this reward is received by the Son in his role as a covenant mediator (Luke 22:28–30; Rom 5:18; 1 Cor 15:22).⁴⁶ Furthermore, “several passages of the Bible also use language that describes Christ as being ‘chosen,’ ‘ordained,’ or ‘appointed’ as mediator for his people (see,

⁴⁰ Myers, 78. Belcher and Guy Richard offer similar definitions. “The Covenant of Redemption, also called the *pactum salutis* (a counsel of peace), is a pre-temporal agreement between the members of the Trinity concerning the different roles each member would perform to bring about the salvation of God's people.” Belcher, 19. “[A] pretemporal agreement between the persons of the Trinity to plan and carry out the redemption of the elect.” Richard in *Covenant Theology*, 43.

⁴¹ See also Turretin, 2:177–78; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1872; repr., Hendrikson, 2003), 359–62; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt and trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 3:213–14. Vos, 2:85–87.

⁴² Myers, 81–84; Richard, 46, 48. On the covenant of redemption in John 17:1–5, see Brandon D. Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 124, n. 34.

⁴³ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 136–37.

⁴⁴ Myers, 84–85.

⁴⁵ Richard, 46.

⁴⁶ Myers, 85–86. See also Samuel Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace* (1673; repr., Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Tentmaker, 2020), 47–49.

in this regard, Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1–3 with Matt 12:15–21; Luke 22:29; Acts 2:23, 36; Eph 1:4; Heb. 7:22, 28; 1 Pet. 1:19–20).”⁴⁷

Fourth, there are passages indicating that the purposes shared by the persons of the Trinity were eternal (Eph 1:4; 3:8–12; Phil 2:5–11; Rev 13:8; cf. Heb 10:7).⁴⁸

Fifth, there are three key prooftexts for the covenant of redemption. Guy Richard comments,

Thus far we have established that the covenant of redemption was not developed from one or two isolated texts in Scripture but from a complex and thoroughgoing examination of the language that the Bible uses to speak about the relationship between the Father and the Son and the planning and accomplishing of the salvation of God’s people. Sadly, much modern discussion of this doctrine has ignored this evidence and focused on isolated proof texts ... which are less persuasive when taken by themselves.⁴⁹

Nonetheless he holds that three texts persuasively testify to a covenant of redemption when read in light of the previous biblical evidence. The first text is Zechariah 6:13, which he reads as testifying to a covenant of peace between Yhwh and the Branch, who is Christ.⁵⁰ The second text is Psalm 110:4, which testifies to “a covenant between Yahweh and Christ, one in which the latter is appointed as a priest who will intercede on behalf of God’s people forevermore.”⁵¹ The third text is Psalm 2:7 in which a covenant decree is renewed when the Son is resurrected and enthroned.⁵²

Sixth, Richard argues that since Adam’s failure to keep the covenant was known to God, a preexisting covenant between Father and Son is implied. He also reasons to the existence of the covenant of redemption from the existence of the covenant of grace.⁵³

One objection to the covenant of redemption is that it is said to imply that there are three wills in God. Myers grants that there is a great mystery here, but he argues that in fact the one God has one will which consents to each Person carrying out redemption distinctively.⁵⁴ Richard also defends the covenant of redemption by noting that in several of the passages above there is a dialogue between Father and Son. Since this dialogue does not undermine the unity of the Trinity, nor would the idea of a covenant between the Persons. Richard also argues that though the “external works of the Trinity are indivisible,” they are

⁴⁷ Richard, 47.

⁴⁸ Myers 86-87; Richard, 48-49.

⁴⁹ Richard, 50.

⁵⁰ Richard, 51-53.

⁵¹ Richard, 54.

⁵² Richard, 54-57.

⁵³ Richard, 57-59.

⁵⁴ Myers, 79.

not identical (e.g., only the Son became incarnate). Thus, the covenant of redemption is about the indivisible work of the Triune God being carried out distinctly by the three Persons.⁵⁵

Assessment

The passages adduced in the first four points above do indicate some kind of eternal arrangement in which the Father sends the Son with purposes that the Son fulfills. The main question then is whether the language of *covenant* is the best language to capture what these passages describe. Once the analogical nature of all language as applied to the Persons of the Trinity is recognized, the label “covenant” is appropriate to describe these passages.

Regarding the three proof-texts, Psalm 110:4 is the most persuasive for a covenant of redemption. Zechariah 6:13 could be referring to a metaphorical counsel of peace between the offices of priest and king, but an actual counsel of peace requires persons. Thus, a counsel of peace between the Father and Son may well be in view. Finally, though Psalm 2:7 is about the resurrection, the decree could refer to an eternal decree which is carried out at the resurrection. This text does not independently support the covenant of redemption, but it may serve as a supporting text to those already convinced of that covenant from other texts.

The theological arguments under the sixth point are not persuasive. In particular, the covenant of grace is in more doubt than the covenant of redemption, so it will not work to argue for the latter in light of the former.

The Covenant of Grace

Standard covenant theology teaches that the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants are all administrations of an overarching covenant of grace. The parties of the covenant of grace are the Triune God, with the elect being included by virtue of being in Christ.⁵⁶ Covenant theologians differ as to whether this covenant of grace is distinct from the covenant of redemption or whether the covenant of grace consists of the covenant of redemption together with the historical covenant administrations which put it into effect.⁵⁷ Critics of covenant theology argue that this covenant is “hypothetical” rather than clearly expressed in scripture.⁵⁸ Thus, “it is more accurate to think of God’s one plan revealed through a plurality of covenants”⁵⁹ or to link the biblical covenants to “God’s universal

⁵⁵ Richard, 59-61.

⁵⁶ Myers, 97-99; Belcher, 46

⁵⁷ Myers holds the covenant of grace includes the covenant of redemption (and thus God’s eternal plan of redemption) as well as the historical outworking of that plan. Myers, 93-94.

⁵⁸ Ryrie, 189-90; Williamson, 31.

⁵⁹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 655.

purpose.”⁶⁰ Some Baptist covenant theologians believe that the covenant of grace is the *new covenant*. The covenant of grace is revealed beginning with Adam, but it is only “formally given” when the new covenant is established by Christ.⁶¹

Covenant Theology

Belcher argues that the provision of animal skin clothing pointed to the principle of blood needing to be shed in order for sin to be forgiven. He asserts that “God established the Covenant of Grace” in the statement “I will put enmity between you and the woman’ (NIV).”⁶² He further asserts that this covenant was made with Adam and his seed, that the substance of the covenant is constant across time (“the same promise of eternal life, the same mediator Jesus Christ, and the same condition of faith”), and that the one covenant of grace is administered differently at different times.

Belcher also notes that the covenant of grace is made with Christ and all the elect in him. This raises a problem since the sacraments of the covenant of grace are administered to “believers and their children.” This leads Belcher to assert that “a person can be part of the Covenant of Grace legally but not in relationship with God.”⁶³

Belcher does a good job explaining the covenant of grace within standard covenant theology. But he does not make exegetical arguments for these points; he simply asserts them.

The same is true of John Currid’s contribution to *Covenant Theology*. Currid’s chapter is full of insights about the consequences of sin and about the exegesis of Genesis 3:15. But in the section labeled “Commencement of the Covenant of Grace,” no argument made in defense of the heading. Currid simply quotes O. Palmer Robertson to the effect that in Genesis 3:14–19 “God chose to obligate himself to the sinner.”⁶⁴

Michael Horton says, “The *protoeuangelion* ... announces a gracious covenant. Without setting aside the original covenant, God promulgates a covenant of grace in anticipation of

⁶⁰ Williamson, 31.

⁶¹ Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Birmingham, AL: 2013), 62–63.

⁶² Belcher, 38. See also Bavinck, 3:197; Vos, 2:124.

⁶³ Belcher, 46. He asserts that this is just as true under the new covenant as it was under preceding covenant administrations, and he supports this claim with an appeal to Romans 11: “Romans 11:16–24 sets forth a holiness that comes from being engrafted into the tree that is not the inward holiness that is a result of the Spirit’s work in the life of a believer.” Ibid. He argues that the fact that Israel and the church are pictured as an olive tree shows continuity in “this principle of covenant administration.” Ibid.

⁶⁴ Currid, “Adam and the Beginning of the Covenant of Grace,” in *Covenant Theology*, 103.

the second Adam whom he will send.”⁶⁵ Horton claims that the sacrament of this covenant is the clothing of Adam and Eve in garments of skin (though Horton seems to indicate that this sacrament is displaced by circumcision and then by baptism as the covenant of grace is administered by the Abrahamic and new covenants).⁶⁶

Stephen Myers mounts an exegetical case for the covenant of grace. He appeals to the phrase *וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי* (“But I will establish my covenant”) in Genesis 6:18. Myers (and Miles Van Pelt) argue that the *heqim berith* is never used of making a new covenant. It indicates “perpetuating a previously existing covenant.”⁶⁷ Although Genesis 6:18 contains the first occurrence of the term “covenant” in the Bible, they argue that this construction demonstrates that the Noahic covenant cannot have been the first covenant made. Gentry and Wellum have provided the most detailed argumentation for this view, and they claim that Genesis 6:18 refers to the perpetuation of the creation covenant in the Noahic covenant. Meyers responds that the creation covenant was a covenant of works violated by Adam. Since Noahic covenant is “the establishment of an altogether different covenant, on different terms, with different requirements” from the original works covenant,⁶⁸ it cannot be perpetuating the covenant of works. It must be perpetuating the covenant of grace, which was established in Genesis 3:15.⁶⁹ Myers concludes, “Prior to God’s covenantal interaction with Noah, there was a previously existing covenant that was concerned with the salvation of God’s people and that was of such a character that it could be meaningfully renewed with subsequent generations of human beings. This previously existing, redemptive, transhistoric covenant was the covenant of grace.”⁷⁰

Meyer’s final argument for a unified covenant of grace is that God has a unified goal (dwelling with his people), that this goal is realized for individuals in a unified way (by faith in God’s gospel promises), and that throughout redemptive history there has been one unified people of God.

Assessment

Myers’s argument from the unified goal, received in a unified way for a unified people of God is not sufficient to establish a covenant of grace. Progressive covenantalists and progressive dispensationalists both affirm all three of these truths while not holding to a

⁶⁵ Michael S. Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: WJK, 2005), 93.

⁶⁶ Horton, *Lord and Servant*, 93.

⁶⁷ Myers, 106, 131; cf. Miles V. Van Pelt, “The Noahic Covenant of the Covenant of Grace,” in *Covenant Theology*, 119.

⁶⁸ Myers, 107.

⁶⁹ Myers, 106-7; cf. Van Pelt, 120.

⁷⁰ Myers 107.

unified covenant of grace. A unified plan of God advanced through distinct covenants is compatible with these points.

Myers's argument thus depends on the claim that *heqim berit* is never used to refer to the initial making of a covenant and on the claim that the Adamic covenant, as a covenant of works, cannot be the covenant which the Noahic covenant is perpetuating.

Myers is correct that Adamic covenant was a conditional covenant. He is therefore correct to conclude that the Noahic covenant, as an unconditional covenant, cannot be identified as the same covenant.⁷¹ However Myers's proposal, that Genesis 6:18 refers to a covenant of grace established in Genesis 3:15, has its own difficulties. Myers understands the participants of the covenant of grace to be the Father and Christ (with all the elect in him). But the Noahic covenant was made between God and all of Noah's seed (elect and non-elect), indeed with every living creature (Gen 9:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). The Noahic covenant and the covenant of grace cannot be the same covenant if they are made with different parties.

There is no plausible covenant of which the Noahic covenant is a renewal. It is best, therefore, to recognize that *heqim berit* can refer to the initial making of a covenant.⁷² The word קום in the Hifil "means literally 'to make stand, to erect.'" Victor Hamilton concludes, "God 'erects' a covenant with Noah. Thus, the verb may indicate that God here institutes a new relationship."⁷³

Indeed, קום in the Hifil conveys several senses. It can refer to confirming an existing covenant (Lev 26:9). It can also refer to fulfilling an existing covenant (Gen 17:7, 19, 21) or failing to fulfill an existing covenant (Jer 34:18). And, arguably, it can also refer to the making of a covenant (Gen 6:18; 9:9, 11, 17; Exod 6:4; Ezek 16:60, 62). This variation of senses should not be surprising since קום has a wide semantic range.

In Exodus 6:4, God uses קום to refer to making a covenant with the patriarchs. Gentry and Wellum argue that God is referring to his action during the exodus to fulfill the land promise part of the covenant.⁷⁴ But קום occurs here as a non-initial perfect, indicating past

⁷¹ See further under the discussion of the Noahic covenant. See also Charles Lee Irons, "Hēqīm Bērīt in Gen 6:18: Make or Confirm a Covenant?" Unpublished paper (2/3/2018), 5.

⁷² H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1950), 1:275; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, NAC (Nashville, B&H, 1996), 367.

⁷³ Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 316.

⁷⁴ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 159. Gentry later adjusts his argument, "Note that covenant is in the singular. If *hēqīm bērīt* means to 'make a covenant,' then how was one covenant made with three people at three different times? But if *hēqīm bērīt* means to affirm a promise or keep an obligation, then I can see how the one covenant was established not only with Abraham, but also with Isaac and Jacob. In the narrative of

tense (as the translations uniformly recognize). This verse could refer to the making of the covenant, not to its fulfillment.⁷⁵

Ezekiel 16:59–63 is another instance in which *heqim berit* refers to the making of a covenant. Gentry and Wellum initially granted that this passage was an exception to their rule.⁷⁶ However, they have since revised their view. They now argue that the two covenants in view are the Abrahamic covenant (indicated with red lettering) and the Mosaic covenant (indicated with blue lettering):⁷⁷

For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the **covenant**,⁶⁰ yet I will remember my **covenant** with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish [הַקְּמוֹתִי] for you an everlasting **covenant**.⁶¹ Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the **covenant** with you.⁶² I will establish [הַקְּמוֹתִי] my **covenant** with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD,⁶³ that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.

However, Ezekiel 16 is about Jerusalem in particular rather than about the nation Israel generally. The covenant made with Jerusalem in its youth, which covenant she broke, is likely the covenant in which Yhwh chose Jerusalem as his own dwelling place and the seat of the Davidic ruler (cf. Ps 132:13–17).⁷⁸ The covenant that Yhwh will make in the future is the new covenant (the emphasis on knowing Yhwh is an important part of the new covenant), a covenant which includes the restoration of the city of Jerusalem (Jer 31:38–40; 32:36–41). The Abrahamic covenant has no promise regarding the restoration of Jerusalem. Since the new covenant, a covenant still in Ezekiel’s future, is the one that Yhwh

Genesis, God appeared to each of the three patriarchs and verbally affirmed or repeated the one covenant to them.” Peter J. Gentry and Jason T. Parry, “heqīm bērit in Gen 6:18—Make or Confirm a Covenant? A Response to Charles Lee Irons,” unpublished paper (2018), 7. This is a stronger argument than the one originally made, and it could account for why the more ambiguous term was used. However, the covenant was originally cut with Abraham and that sense may not be entirely absent when Yhwh says that he established his covenant with Abraham.

⁷⁵ cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 98.

⁷⁶ *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 475–76.

⁷⁷ *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 219–20.

⁷⁸ Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, *The Preacher’s Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1989), 135; Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 722.

will establish, *heqim berit* here refers to the making of a covenant rather than the confirming of an existing covenant.⁷⁹

The claim that *heqim berit* is sometimes used to indicate the making of a covenant is consistent with the semantic range of קוּם in the Hifil. There are other passages in which the word carries the meaning of “set up,” “make,” or “found” something (Josh 4:9; 2 Sam 3:10; 1 Kgs 7:21; Ps78:5; Amos 9:11).

One additional problem exists for those seeking to establish the covenant of grace based upon the occurrence of *heqim berit* in Genesis 6:18. If *heqim berit* refers to the continuation of the existing covenant of grace, which was made initially in Genesis 3:15, does the statement כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת־אֲבְרָם בְּרִית (‘‘Yhwh cut a covenant with Abraham’’; Gen 15:18) mean that the Abrahamic covenant is a new covenant, distinct from the covenant of grace? No covenant theologian would affirm that position. But the logic of the argument from *hequm berit* in Genesis 6:18 seems to entail it.

Finally, it is simply not the case that Genesis 3:15 establishes a covenant. Genesis 3:15 is a statement of judgment directed to Satan. To be sure, this judgment contains a statement of the gospel. But, unlike the covenant of works, the full complement of covenantal elements are not present.

It is best, therefore, not to accept an overarching covenant of grace of which the following covenants are mere administrations. The untenability of this scheme will become even more apparent as the biblical covenants are surveyed.

The Noahic Covenant

Covenant theologians differ about several issues related to the Noahic covenant. Is the Noahic covenant in 6:18 the same Noahic covenant as that found in chapters 8–9, or are there two distinct Noahic covenants? Is the Noahic covenant a common grace covenant, or is it a redemptive covenant? Is the Noahic covenant a unilateral, unconditional covenant, a bilateral, conditional covenant, or something beyond those categories?

Progressive Covenantalists tend to see the Noahic covenant as a renewal or furthering of the creation covenant whereas covenant theologians, while acknowledging links reject this interpretation.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Irons comments, ‘‘These two occurrences could be taken in the ‘‘confirm’’ sense, but it seems more likely that they are actually looking ahead to the new covenant that God ‘‘will establish’’ with Israel in the future. This seems supported by the statement: ‘‘I will establish for you an everlasting covenant’’ (Ezek 16:60).’’ Irons, 9.

⁸⁰ Belcher, 51-52, 235-36.

Covenant Theology

One covenant or two?

Miles Van Pelt argues that the Noahic covenant in Genesis 6:18-21 is a different covenant from the covenant described in 9:8-17 (a position associated with Meredith Kline). He argues that the covenant made in 6:18-21 is made with an individual, Noah, while the covenant made in Genesis 9 is made with all creation. The covenant in 6:18-21 promises that Noah and his family will be protected during the Flood while the covenant in 9:8-17 promises that God will never again send a Flood. When God remembers Noah (Gen 8:1), he is remembering the covenant made in 6:18-21; in the future he will remember the covenant made in chapter 9, and he will not again destroy the world with a flood. Thus, there are two distinct covenants made with Noah.⁸¹

Myers and Belcher argue that there is a single Noahic covenant. Myers argues, “in both Genesis 6 and 8:20-9:17, God is pursuing the same purpose..., through the same mediator (Noah), affecting the same residual parties (the portion of creation first brought through the flood and then present in Genesis 8-9).”⁸² Belcher simply asserts that Genesis 6 “anticipates the formal initiation of the covenant in Genesis 9.”⁸³

Redemptive covenant or common grace covenant?

One motivation for seeing two Noahic covenants is a desire to distinguish what is clearly a redemptive covenant in Genesis 6:18 from what is clearly a common grace covenant in Genesis 8-9.⁸⁴

One the other hand, Myers, while granting that the Noahic covenant is universal in scope, does not pit the universalism of the covenant against its redemptive purpose. Instead, he concludes,

In this, we see that the common-grace elements of the Noahic covenant neither exhaust nor essentially reveal the central concern of the covenant. Preserving regularity in the creation is not God’s foremost purpose in the covenant; it is, rather, a result of God’s purpose. Most essentially, God is manifesting His ability and His intention to gather a heart-changed people before bringing cataclysm on the creation, and the divine pronouncement of creational regularity is but a function of that underlying purpose.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Van Pelt, 118-19.

⁸² Myers, 134.

⁸³ Belcher, 52.

⁸⁴ Van Pelt, 127; noted in Myers, 134-35.

⁸⁵ Myers, 140; cf. Bavinck, 3:217-18; W. J. Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 39-41.

For Myers, the rainbow as the sign of the covenant testifies to the covenant's redemptive purpose—to hold off judgment while God redeems a people for himself.⁸⁶ In addition, subsequent Scripture refers to a single, redemptive Noahic covenant that delays the final judgment until its appointed time (Isa 54:9–10; Hos 2:18–23; Jer 33:19–26; Matt 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–30; Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5; 3:1–10).⁸⁷ Belcher also sees both redemptive and common grace elements to the Noahic covenant. He claims that even though the “Noahic Covenant deals with all the creation order, including human beings and animals, while the Covenant of Grace deals with believers and their seed,” it is still proper to see the Noahic covenant as part of the covenant of grace because it is ensuring the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of the covenant of grace.⁸⁸

Law covenant or promise covenant?

Regarding the third issue of debate, whether the Noahic covenant was a unilateral or bilateral covenant, Van Pelt holds that the first Noahic covenant was bilateral while the second Noahic covenant was unilateral.⁸⁹ Horton agrees that the covenant in Genesis 9 was unilateral: “The Noachian covenant too was a one-sided promise on God's part, with no conditions attached (Gen 9).”⁹⁰

Myers argues that the Noahic covenant undermines the distinction between law and promise covenants (or between bilateral or conditional covenants and unilateral or unconditional covenants). First, he argues that even though the covenant promise was given to Noah, Noah had to obey and build the Ark to be saved. Second, Myers argues that within the Noahic covenant there is both promise and command.⁹¹

Assessment

One covenant or two?

It is best to understand Genesis 6:18 as a statement that God will establish a covenant with Noah and Genesis 8:20–21 as the actual establishing of the covenant. There are sound rebuttals to each of Van Pelt's arguments. First, even though God promises a covenant to Noah (singular) in 6:19, this likely points to Noah's role as covenant mediator. Second, 6:18 does not say that the Noahic covenant promises deliverance from the Flood through the ark. Rather, the fact that God will make a covenant with Noah entails this deliverance. Third, the remembrance of Noah in 8:1 need not entail an already established covenant. On the other hand, Myers's arguments are sound. It is best to see a single Noahic covenant.

⁸⁶ Myers, 140–41.

⁸⁷ Myers, 141–47.

⁸⁸ Belcher, 57.

⁸⁹ Van Pelt, 127.

⁹⁰ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 17.

⁹¹ Myers 148–49.

Redemptive covenant or common grace covenant?

It is best, with Myers, to understand the Noahic covenant as a redemptive covenant with common grace elements. The common grace elements are readily apparent. The covenant is made with all of Noah's seed and with all of creation (9:9, 12, 15, 16). The promises entail regular seasons and days, as well as preservation from a universal judgment until the end (8:21-22; 9:11, 15). Yet it is also clear that the covenant forestalls deserved judgment until God completes his redemptive work and brings about the promised eschatological rest.⁹²

Identifying the Noahic covenant as a redemptive covenant causes a significant problem for covenant theologians that Belcher raises but does not resolve. According to Belcher the covenant of grace is made with "believers and their seed," and according to Myers the covenant of grace is made with Christ and all the elect in him.⁹³ It is difficult to understand how a covenant made with all creation is an administration of a covenant made with Christ and all the elect in him. Surely if the Noahic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace, the parties to this covenant should be the same as the parties to the covenant of grace. It is thus better to see the Noahic covenant as a distinct covenant in a series of covenants that further God's redemptive plan rather than seeing it as an administration of a covenant of grace.

Law covenant or promise covenant?

The Noahic covenant is best seen as a promise, unilateral, or unconditional covenant. Van Pelt rightly recognizes this with regard Genesis 9: it "is universal in nature and does not require obedience to experience its benefits."⁹⁴ Myers counters that the Noahic covenant includes commands. But if the Noahic covenant were a law covenant, the commands of the covenant would need to be obeyed to ensure the fulfillment of the promise of no further worldwide floods. The Noahic covenant is a promise covenant because God unilaterally committed himself to keeping this promise despite the fact that so many people throughout history have broken the covenant's commands.

Myers and Van Pelt both err in stating that Noah's obedience was a condition of the covenant. The fact that Noah had to obey and build the Ark to be saved from the Flood is irrelevant to whether the Noahic covenant is a law or promise covenant since the Noahic covenant was established after the Flood.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Myers, Belcher and John Scott Redd all examine the Abrahamic covenant by looking at Genesis 12, 15, 17, and (in Redd's case) 22. The key issues are as follows. Are there multiple

⁹² Van Pelt, 112-13.

⁹³ Belcher, 57; Myers, 97-98.

⁹⁴ Van Pelt, 127.

Abrahamic covenants (one in chapter 15 and another in chapter 17)?⁹⁵ Is the Abrahamic covenant an unconditional, unilateral, promise covenant or a conditional, bilateral, law covenant? How are the promises of the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled, and how does typology factor in?

Covenant Theology

Number and Nature of the Covenants

All three of these authors hold to a single Abrahamic covenant,⁹⁶ but they handle the data differently. Myers thinks that the Abrahamic covenant was instituted in Genesis 12 and then further elaborated in Genesis 15 and 17. This formulation is significant because it undergirds Myers's denial of the distinction between promise and law covenants. He observes that God began this covenant by issuing commands to Abram, and he concludes from this that the distinction between law covenants and promise covenants is a false distinction.

In this complex texture of the Abrahamic covenant, the supposed distinction between law covenants and promise covenants continues to break down. If a stark division has to be made between these two covenant types, and each historical covenant has to be placed in one of the two categories—either having practically nothing to do with command and obedience, or being based almost entirely on command and obedience—the Abrahamic covenant is left without any satisfactory category.⁹⁷

For Redd, Genesis 12 anticipates the covenant, Genesis 15 inaugurates the covenant on the basis of faith, Genesis 17 amends the covenant to make clear that faithfulness is required, and Genesis 22 confirms the covenant. Redd notes that in Genesis 15 God “unilaterally” makes and guarantees the covenant, but Genesis 17 “includes [a] helpful corrective to the previous emphasis on God’s unilateral participation in the covenant.”⁹⁸ Redd explicitly rejects Kline

⁹⁵ Advocates for multiple Abrahamic covenants include Williamson, 84–91; Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, The Servant King* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 74–76. Pascal Denault says that early Baptist covenant theologians held to a twofold Abrahamic covenant: “It is in this way that the Baptists understood that there were two covenants with Abraham, not two formal covenants, but a promise that revealed the Covenant of Grace followed by the covenant of circumcision. In light of Galatians 4.22–31, the theologians of the 1689 considered that the two covenants that came from Abraham (Hagar and Sara) were the Old and New Covenants. The covenant of circumcision, Hagar, corresponded to the Old Covenant; a covenant of works established with the physical posterity of Abraham. The covenant of the promise, Sara, corresponded to the New Covenant; the Covenant of Grace revealed to Abraham and concluded with Christ and the spiritual posterity of Abraham (Gal. 3.29).” Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth Century Particular Baptists and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 122–23.

⁹⁶ So also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 277–80.

⁹⁷ Myers, 159.

⁹⁸ Redd, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Covenant Theology*, 135.

and sides with John Murray by denying that some covenants are conditional and others unconditional.⁹⁹

Belcher holds that though the promises are given in chapter 12, the covenant is not cut until Genesis 15. The way God cuts the Abrahamic covenant shows it to be a unilateral covenant. Chapter 17 does not add conditions that Abraham must meet in order for God to fulfill the covenant (nor is it a distinct covenant). Rather, Abraham is instructed as to the way he should live within the covenant.¹⁰⁰

Horton similarly argues that the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant:

"God alone walks through the severed halves, assuming on his own head the curses of the covenant should it fail to come to pass. Thus, the unilateral promise is signified and sealed in a unilateral treaty ceremony. ... Instead of the covenant servant, God has walked alone through the bloody pieces. Abraham is declared then and there "justified" and "father of many nations," even though everything he sees would seem to suggest otherwise. In both the word and sacrament of this covenant, Yahweh is the promise maker, assuming the burden of fulfilling its conditions in history."¹⁰¹

Those who deny that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional have difficulty maintaining this position. At one point Redd acknowledges that the covenant cut in chapter 15 was unconditional and simply says that chapter 17 prevented "the covenant ceremony in chapter 15 [from being] misconstrued as a universalistic arrangement in which Abram has no responsibility."¹⁰² Myers, when discussing God alone passing through the cut animals in Genesis 15, says, "In doing so, God declares that either He will keep His covenant promises or He Himself will die. The fulfillment of the covenant, then, rests entirely on God, and He guarantees that His promises will be fulfilled."¹⁰³

Typology and Promises

Myers includes in his treatment of the Abrahamic covenant a discussion on the nature of typology. Statements in Hebrews 8:5 and 9:23-24 are central to Myers's understanding of typology:

They [the gifts and sacrifices offered by the high priest] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things [the tabernacle and vessels used in tabernacle worship] to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with

⁹⁹ Redd, 135.

¹⁰⁰ Belcher, 64-68.

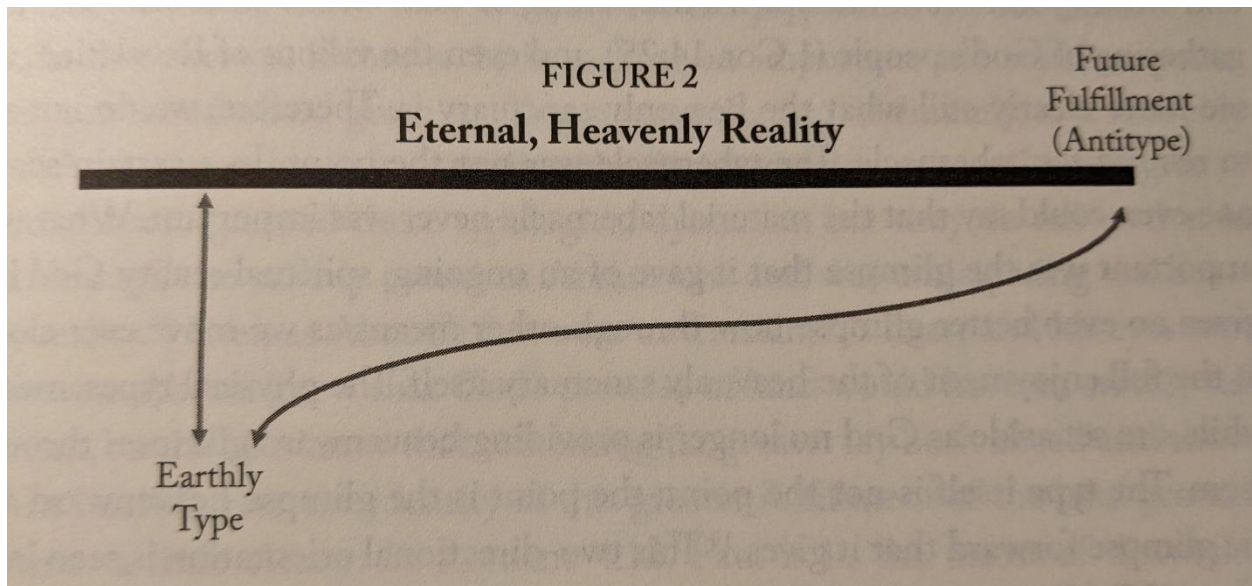
¹⁰¹ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 16.

¹⁰² Redd, 141.

¹⁰³ Myers, 176.

better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Myers argues that types are earthly realities that point believers to a heavenly reality that will come to fulfillment in the future. Thus “types point both forward and upward.” He illustrates this view of typology as follows:¹⁰⁴



Based on this scheme, Myers concludes that though the promises of land, seed, and universal blessing “each had physical fulfillments along the way,” “those physical fulfillments never were the point.”¹⁰⁵ As result, “many types are abrogated and move past any contemporary redemptive significance.”¹⁰⁶

Belcher does not discuss typology at length, but he does argue with regard to circumcision that not everyone who was a covenant member was circumcised in the heart; that is, not all were in a “spiritual relationship with God.”¹⁰⁷ This, of course, will later be applied to the new covenant sign of baptism. Myers argues that the circumcision of all the males in Abraham’s house (and not his biological sons only) demonstrates that “God’s true covenant people would not be defined or delineated by visible realities or ethnic lines.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Myers, 162-63.

¹⁰⁵ Myers, 167.

¹⁰⁶ Myers, 163.

¹⁰⁷ Belcher, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Myers, 182.

Assessment

Number and Nature of the Covenants

These authors are all correct to hold to a single Abrahamic covenant. A careful comparison of the promises delineated in Genesis 15 and 17 reveal the promises in both chapters to be the same.

Regarding the nature of the covenants, Belcher has the best position. The covenant is not cut until Genesis 15, and the nature of the cutting reveals the Abrahamic covenant to be unconditional in nature. Chapter 17 does not add conditions to the covenant but instead provides the expectations for life within the covenant.

Redd's statement that Genesis 17 is a "helpful corrective to the previous emphasis on God's unilateral participation in the covenant"¹⁰⁹ is poorly worded. In light of Galatians 3:15 the language of covenant amendment is not ideal, and the effect of this wording seems to nullify the strongly unconditional emphasis of chapter 15.

Myers seems to have created a straw man. Those who hold to a distinction between law and promise covenants do not claim that promise covenants have "practically nothing to do with command and obedience" but explicitly state the contrary. Jonathan Lunde, for example, maintains the distinction between "the 'royal grant' or 'unconditional' covenant" and "a 'conditional' or 'bilateral' covenant." But Lunde also says, "That is not to say that there are no demands placed on people in a grant covenant. Such are always present."¹¹⁰ Nor does Lunde deny that the choosing of the covenant partner is unconditional: "[T]he covenants are always grounded and established in the context of God's *prior grace* toward the people entering the covenant, even in the case of the conditional variety."¹¹¹ The terms *conditional* and *unconditional* relate not to the selection of the covenant partner or to the presence of stipulations. Rather, *conditional* and *unconditional* identify whether the fulfillment of the covenant depends upon the promises of God alone or upon the obedience to the covenant stipulations. The distinction between the two is whether the fulfillment of the covenant blessings hangs on the human partner's obedience to the covenant conditions (a law covenant) or whether the blessings are unilaterally guaranteed by God (a promise covenant).

¹⁰⁹ Redd, 135.

¹¹⁰ Lunde, 39. See also Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 132-34; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 41; Horton, "Covenant Theology," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 44.

¹¹¹ Lunde, 40.

With this understanding, the Abrahamic covenant is a promise covenant. Paul makes this distinction central to his argument in Galatians.¹¹²

Promises and Types

Myers's approach to typology needs correction. First, he is overly reliant on two passages from Hebrews that speak of the typology of the tabernacle and sacrificial system. In the case of the tabernacle, the Holy Places were from the beginning intended to symbolize heaven. But this does not mean that *all* types point to something eternal and heavenly rather than to something physical. Even the tabernacle as a whole pointed to the cosmos and finds its fulfillment in God dwelling with redeemed man in the new creation. Notably, even the heavenly most holy place, the New Jerusalem, descends to the new creation as a physical dwelling place for the redeemed.

Second, in the case of the Abrahamic covenant, the distinction between the initial, typological fulfillments and the ultimate fulfillment is *not* that the former are physical and the latter is heavenly. Myers appeals to Hebrews 11:16, which says that Abraham desired "a better, that is, a heavenly country." But Abraham did not desire a country located in heaven. He looked forward to the day when Canaan could be characterized as heavenly. Again, the city that God has prepared for Abraham will descend from heaven to earth.

Third, it is important for orthodox theology to not oppose the heavenly and spiritual to the physical. The heavenly country promised to Abraham is physical and located on earth just as the spiritual body of resurrected saints is a physical body. The contrast that Scripture draws between earthly, fleshly things and heavenly, spiritual things is not necessarily a contrast between the material and non-material.

Fourth, promises are different from structures like the tabernacle/temple and sacrifices. The latter are inherently typological and thus pass away when the reality arrives. However, promises are speech acts that commit the promiser to perform the thing promised. A promise is not a type. Even though the initial fulfillments of a promise are types of the ultimate fulfillment, these types are not mere symbols but are down payments, as it were, of the full reality to come. For instance, Isaac as the seed of Abraham is a type of Jesus *the* Seed

¹¹² "Note also that in Galatians 3:17, Paul employees the synecdoche 'promise' (ἐπαγγελία) for the Abrahamic covenant. He could have spoken otherwise; he could have spoken of 'the covenant made with your fathers' (Deut. 4:31; 5:3; 7:12; 8:18, et al.), for instance, but he did not. He called it 'the promise.' Was only a single promise made to Abraham? No, several promises were made: to make his descendants numerous, to give him a land, and through one of us descendants to bless all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 15:4-7; 17:1-8; 28:14). Nevertheless, promise-giving so characterized the Abrahamic covenant that the word *promise* could be justly be employed as a synecdoche for the covenant itself." T. David Gordon, *Promise, Law, Faith: Covenant-Historical Reasoning in Galatians*, 30.

of Abraham. But Isaac is not a mere symbol that passes away but a redeemed man who will live forever in the new creation.

Fifth, it is true that the promises of the Abrahamic covenant are universalized so that the seed promise is fulfilled ultimately in Christ. Thus, the seed promise includes all the Gentile believers in Christ. It is also true that the land promise is expanded to include the entire earth. However, these expansions are a function of the universal blessing promise, and the inclusion of the Gentiles in these promises is stated, in seed form in Genesis 22. Because the expansions are explicit, the expansions of the promises do not rest merely upon typology.¹¹³

Sixth, the universalization of the promises does not abrogate the particular promises. Romans 11 makes clear that the redemption of Abraham's physical seed remains part of God's plan. Likewise, the universalization of the land promise does not abrogate the promise for Israel as there are numerous passages that predict a restoration of Israel to the land.

Finally, Myers's treatment of circumcision needs some refinement. He is concerned to argue that the circumcision of non-biological males in Abraham's house demonstrates that "God's true covenant people would not be defined or delineated by visible realities or ethnic lines." This is an argument for continuity between the Old and New Testaments and for the idea that the church is the true Israel. However, ethnicity is not determined simply by genealogy. People who are not genetically related to an ethnic group can be incorporated into that group, and this is what happened when Gentiles proselytized and became Jews. The New Testament does break from the Old Testament in this matter by allowing Gentiles to become part of God's people without adopting a Jewish ethnicity (as marked by circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law).

The Mosaic Covenant

J. Nicholas Reid observes that there are two main positions regarding the Mosaic covenant. The dichotomist position holds that there are two covenants: a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. A trichotomist position holds that there are three categories: a covenant of works, a covenant of grace, and the Mosaic covenant which is subservient to the covenant of grace.¹¹⁴ Related to this concern about the nature of the Mosaic covenant (works, grace,

¹¹³ A weakness in Myers's presentation is an absence of comment on Genesis 22.

¹¹⁴ J. Nicholas Reid, "The Mosaic Covenant," in *Covenant Theology*, 149-50. The labels dichotomist and trichotomist may not be the best labels because a person can hold that there are three covenants, the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace, and yet still be a dichotomist in relation to the Mosaic covenant. Another taxonomy is presented by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's "Committee to Study Repudiation":

View 1: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a covenant of works, promising eternal life and/or salvation upon condition of perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience.

or complex) is the issue of how the Mosaic covenant relates to the New Testament. Progressive Covenantalists, as noted above, reject the concept of an overarching covenant of grace as well as the conditional/unconditional distinction. Dispensationalists are more amenable to seeing the Mosaic covenant as a law covenant. Lutherans also understand the Mosaic covenant as a law covenant.¹¹⁵

Covenant Theology

The Mosaic Covenant Only an Administration of the Covenant of Grace

Reid notes that according to the dichotomist position, which he holds, all the post-Fall covenants are in substance part of the covenant of grace but are differently administered as to their accidents.¹¹⁶ In his view the Mosaic covenant was unilateral in that God unilaterally established it and fulfills its promises of atonement (promises signified in the sacrificial system), but it is bilateral in the expectations for obedience to the law laid down. Further, though an administration of the covenant of grace, it is an “inferior administration” in that it is “Jewish” (rather than universal), “shadowy,” “temporary,” “condemning,” “weak,” and “preparatory.”¹¹⁷

Reid grants that the exile shows there is some conditionality to the Mosaic covenant. However, he argues that the exile did not occur because Israel failed to perfectly obey the law. Though the law required perfect obedience, as an administration of the covenant of grace, it also provided sacrifices and covenant mediators to deal with Israel’s sin problem. Rather, Reid asserts, Israel went into exile because of idolatry, a failure to love God.¹¹⁸

Stephen Myers argues that the Mosaic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace and in no way a covenant of works. First, he notes that Exodus 19 ties the Mosaic covenant to the deliverance of the Israelites, which took place due to the Abrahamic

View 2: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a mixed covenant, containing elements of both a covenant of works and a covenant of grace.

View 3: The Mosaic covenant in substance is a subservient covenant, promising temporal life in Canaan upon condition of perfect obedience to the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws.

View 4: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a covenant of grace, although uniquely administered in a manner appropriate to the situation of God’s people at that time.

Report on the Committee to Study Republication: Presented to the Eighty-third (2016) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” (<http://opc.org/GA/republication.html>). The men who were elected to this committee are Messrs. Bryan D. Estelle, Benjamin W. Swinburnson (Secretary), Lane G. Tipton, A. Craig Troxel (Chairman), and Chad V. Van Dixhoorn.

¹¹⁵ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1971), 8.1.3.2 (1:480).

¹¹⁶ He defines the substance of the covenant to be “forgiveness of sins and salvation” through Jesus. Reid, 152. See also Bavinck, 3:222.

¹¹⁷ Reid, 153-55.

¹¹⁸ Reid, 163-65.

covenant (Exod 2:23–25).¹¹⁹ Second, Myers argues that Exodus 19:4 contextualizes the covenant conditions within God’s gracious deliverance of Israel. Though some see these conditions as evidence that the Mosaic covenant is a works covenant in some sense, Myers argues that the Mosaic covenant must be a grace covenant because the conditions come in the context of grace.¹²⁰ Third, Myers argues that the Mosaic covenant further clarifies the covenant of grace. In particular, he argues that all ten of the Ten Commandments are found in Scripture prior to the Mosaic covenant and that the Mosaic covenant blessedly revealed God’s will more clearly to God’s people.¹²¹ Fourth, Myers argues that the continuity between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants is seen in the way the Mosaic covenant advances the seed, land, and universal blessing promises. The seed promise is advanced by Israel becoming a nation with its own governing laws. The land promise is advanced through laws that govern life in the promised land. The promise of blessing to the nations is advanced by Israel’s calling to serve as a kingdom of priests.¹²² Myers sees Israel’s priestly role stated not only in Exodus 19 but also enacted in Exodus 24. He thinks that in the covenant ceremony there was the ordination of the nation into the priestly role.¹²³ Finally, Myers argues that the Mosaic covenant advances the covenant of grace by the sacrificial system, which taught the seriousness of sin and the need for atonement.¹²⁴

Myers argues that the New Testament also teaches that the Mosaic covenant was part of God’s covenant of grace. It does this in two ways. First, Jesus and the apostles affirmed that the Mosaic covenant taught the gospel.¹²⁵ Second, Moses, Aaron, and the sacrificial system all pointed forward to Christ.¹²⁶ What then of seemingly negative statements about the Mosaic covenant in the New Testament? Myers claims that these arise not from any “defect” in the covenant but from a “regression” back to the Mosaic covenant after the progression forward to the new covenant. Myers argues that the same critique would have been made of someone under the Mosaic covenant who insisted on adhering only to the Abrahamic covenant.¹²⁷

Myers turns to 2 Corinthians 3 to provide a specific example of how seemingly negative language about the Mosaic covenant does not undermine its place within the covenant of grace:

¹¹⁹ Myers, 186-187.

¹²⁰ Myers, 187-89.

¹²¹ Myers, 189-91.

¹²² Myers, 191-93.

¹²³ Myers, 197-98.

¹²⁴ Myers, 199-200.

¹²⁵ Myers, 208.

¹²⁶ Myers, 208-9.

¹²⁷ Myers, 209.

However, if one looks beyond the negative language, one sees Paul declare that the old covenant was ‘glorious’ (v. 7, 11), that it ‘had glory’ (v. 9), and that it was ‘made glorious’ (v. 10). Certainly, Paul is making a distinction between the old covenant and the new covenant, but that distinction is not a distinction between the old covenant as monstrous and the new covenant as good. Rather, the distinction is between the old covenant as glorious and the new covenant as possessing a glory that splinters all bounds.¹²⁸

In a further argument for continuity between the Mosaic covenant and the New Testament, Myers argues that passages like Matthew 5:17-20; Romans 7:12; and 1 Timothy 1:8-11 teach that “the moral law of the Ten Commandments, which was the Mosaic law, remains.” It is only the ceremonial and civil laws of the Mosaic covenant that have passed away.¹²⁹

Negative statements about the law, such “the law is not of faith” (Gal 3:12; cf. Rom 10:5), refer to the fact that the law was never meant to be a means of justification. Myers takes Leviticus 18:5 to refer to the role of the law in the life of the redeemed, and he understands Paul to be teaching that the role of works in sanctification is not applicable to the economy of justification. Thus, there is a “righteousness that is of the law” (Rom 10:5) for the believer who is indwelt by the Spirit. But that is the righteousness of sanctification, not that of justification.¹³⁰

Belcher’s argument is not as extensive as Myers’s, but it points in the same direction. He begins by noting that the Mosaic covenant is a means of fulfilling the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.¹³¹ Belcher then turns to Exodus 19 and 24, but his comments on these texts are general and do not engage the question of whether these passages indicate the Mosaic covenant is a conditional covenant or not.¹³² Instead, argues for the Mosaic covenant’s inclusion within the covenant of grace with two primary arguments. First, the Mosaic covenant’s initial fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant points to both being part of a single covenant of grace.¹³³ Second, he claims that the phrase “my covenant” applied to the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants (Gen 6:18; 17:2; Exod 19:5) indicates that these covenants are part of a single overarching covenant.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Myers, 210.

¹²⁹ Myers, 212-15.

¹³⁰ Myers, 218-28.

¹³¹ Belcher, 75-77.

¹³² Belcher, 77-83.

¹³³ Belcher, 87.

¹³⁴ Belcher, 88.

The Mosaic Covenant in Some Sense a Law Covenant

Michael Horton, perhaps the most prominent Klinean covenant theologian at present, agrees that the Mosaic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace.¹³⁵

Nonetheless, Horton argues that there are “clear echoes of the original covenant [of works] in the Sinai covenant.”¹³⁶ In particular, “‘Do this and you shall live’ is the formula in both covenants.”¹³⁷ It is this, not the gracious context in which the covenant was given, that identifies it as a works covenant.¹³⁸ Horton distinguishes the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace/Abrahamic covenant in five particulars:

¹³⁵ Horton, “Covenant Theology,” 44. Horton is not always entirely clear on this point. It does not seem to be affirmed in his *Introducing Covenant Theology*, and even in his essay in the four views book, Horton identifies the Mosaic covenant as a “parenthesis” (see below). Guy Waters has a helpful footnote surveying the key literature in this debate: “The most influential republication thesis in recent Reformed exegesis has been that of Meredith G. Kline, ‘Gospel until the Law: Rom. 5:13–14 and the Old Covenant,’ *JETS* 34, no. 4 (1991): 433–46; Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 107–17, 320–23. For those advocating republication in broad sympathy with Kline’s project, see Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000); many (but not all) of the contributors in Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009); David VanDrunen, “Israel’s Recapitulation of Adam’s Probation under the Law of Moses,” *WTJ* 73, no. 2 (2011): 303–24. For critical Reformed engagement with the republication thesis, see, representatively, Cornelis P. Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 3–144; Andrew M. Elam, Robert C. Van Kooten, and Randall A. Bergquist, *Merit and Moses: A Critique of the Klinean Doctrine of Republication* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 364–65n6; D. Patrick Ramsey, “In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg,” *WTJ* 66, no. 2 (2004): 373–400 (though note the response by Brenton C. Ferry, “Cross-Examining Moses’ Defense: An Answer to Ramsey’s Critique of Kline and Karlberg,” *WTJ* 67 [2005]: 163–68); Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant* (Wantirna, Australia: New Melbourne, 2003), 183–84.” Guy Prentiss Waters, “The Covenant of Works in the New Testament,” *Covenant Theology*, 80, n. 3.

¹³⁶ Horton, “Covenant Theology,” 45.

¹³⁷ Horton, “Covenant Theology,” 45. Horton cites the following texts to demonstrate that this theme does characterize the Mosaic covenant: Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 6:24–25; 8:1; 30:15–18; Neh. 9:29; Eze. 18:19; 20:11–21. He also observes, “The character of this covenant could not be more vividly portrayed: Israel had made the oath, and it was sealed by Moses’ act of dashing the blood on the people, with the ominous warning that this act implied. *The Sinai covenant itself then, is a law-covenant*. The land is given to Israel, but for the purpose of fulfilling its covenantal vocation. Remaining in the land is therefore conditional on Israel’s personal performance of the stipulations that the people swore at Sinai. This did not mean that individual Israelites themselves were defined in their relationship to God by law alone rather than by promise, but that the national covenant that Israel made with God was an oath made by the people as a nation, accepting responsibility for their side of the agreement. The conditional language is evident throughout the Torah: ‘If you do this, you will live; if you fail to do this, you will die’ (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 6:24–25; 8:1; 30:15–18; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 18:19; 20:11–21; etc.).” Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 14–15; cf. Michael Horton, *Justification*, NSD (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2:68, 76.

¹³⁸ Horton, *Introducing*, 100–101.

Yet the Sinai covenant itself was a parenthesis in redemptive history. Its distinction from the Abrahamic covenant is obvious in several respects: (1) Moses is the mediator; (2) the people swear the oath, confirmed by the blood that Moses splashed on them. “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” (Ex 24:7–8); (3) the covenant is entirely conditional upon the people’s fulfillment of their pledge; (4) the sanctions (blessing and curse) are temporal, with “long life in the land” for obedience and excommunication and exile for disobedience; (5) this covenant establishes a geopolitical nation, a theocracy, of Abraham’s ethnic descendants separate from the nations.

By contrast, in the promise that God made to Adam and Eve after the fall (Gen 3:15) and the covenants with Abraham—the foundations of the new covenant—(1) God himself is the guarantor and mediator; (2) God swears the oath, confirmed by the theophany of passing between the parts in a vision as a self-maledictory oath; (3) the covenant is based entirely on God’s fulfillment of his pledge; (4) the sanctions are everlasting life or death; (5) this covenant establishes a worldwide family of spiritual offspring through Abraham and Sarah’s single offspring. In addition, the covenant with David is of this type (2 Sam 7). The “sure mercies to David” ground God’s assurance that even though Israel is condemned according to the terms of the Sinai covenant, he will fulfill his greater promises to Abraham and David.¹³⁹

Horton finds New Testament support for seeing the Mosaic covenant as a kind of covenant of works. Notably, Paul throughout Galatians contrasts the Mosaic covenant, “with its ceremonial and civil legislation for life in Canaan,” from the Abrahamic covenant, “the covenant of promise.”¹⁴⁰ To be clear, Horton is not arguing that the Mosaic covenant is simply a republication of the Adamic covenant; he is not arguing that obedience to the Mosaic covenant could bring eternal life.¹⁴¹ Thus, the Mosaic covenant is a “*national* covenant” that requires “*relative* fidelity” so that the people may “*remain in the typological land*.”¹⁴²

Rebuttal of the Mosaic Covenant as a Republication of the Covenant of Works

All three of the other authors surveyed include rebuttals of Meredith Kline’s view of the Mosaic covenant. Reid, while acknowledging that there are different interpretations of Klinean republication and that Kline’s view may have developed over time, holds that in the end Kline taught that the Mosaic covenant was part of the covenant of grace rather than having taught substantial republication.¹⁴³ According to Reid, Kline held that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works only on the typological level and that the merit required was also only typological. Furthermore, typological obedience was imperfect, though it

¹³⁹ Horton, “Covenant Theology,” 53–54.

¹⁴⁰ Horton, *Introducing*, 37–38.

¹⁴¹ Horton, “Covenant Theology,” 44.

¹⁴² Horton, *Introducing*, 38.

¹⁴³ Reid, 166–67.

pointed forward to Christ's perfect obedience.¹⁴⁴ Reid notes that Leviticus 18:5 is the key verse for republication since it articulates the works principle. Some argue that Leviticus 18:5 and its use in the NT demonstrates that there was a works principle within the Mosaic covenant, even though the Mosaic covenant was an administration of the covenant of grace and even though the works principle was not tied to eternal salvation (see Jer 31:33; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12, with Jer 31:33). However, Reid notes that others argue that in Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12 Paul is responding to false teachers who are misusing Leviticus 18:5. A key verse for this interpretation is Romans 9:32, which indicates that by pursuing the law by works rather than by faith, the Jews stumbled. Proponents of this view argue that Leviticus 18:3-4 indicate that command given in verse 5 was to those who are already God's people. Thus, Leviticus 18:5 teaches that the law was a guide to righteous living for those who were already God's people.¹⁴⁵

Belcher likewise rejects the claim that the Mosaic covenant is a republication of the covenant of works. First, he holds that the necessity of perfect obedience to the law is universal. Since the law is prominent in the Mosaic covenant, the Jews rightly understood it to require perfect obedience to the law to avoid condemnation. Belcher says that this was always true of Jew and Gentile and is not unique to the Mosaic covenant. Second, republication is an incorrect interpretation because Israel entered the covenant already fallen. Third, Belcher claims that both the second and third uses of the law are at work, and it depends on the state of the person as to which is foremost. In this Belcher wishes to distinguish the Mosaic covenant and the law that is contained within the covenant. He does not wish to define the covenant as a law covenant. Finally, Belcher argues that the physical blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant are typological. They do not pertain to salvation.¹⁴⁶

Myers objects to Kline's view on four grounds. First, he does not find the distinction between typological and spiritual levels of the covenant exegetically warranted. Second, he doesn't think that the typology works since in Kline's view imperfect obedience is required on the typical level while perfect obedience is required for justification. Third, he is concerned that Kline's view undermines the universal applicability of the Decalogue. Fourth, Myers argues that God's delay in judging Israel was not due to Israel's relative obedience but was due to God's mercy. Finally, Myers takes issue with Kline's argument that Exodus 24 refers to Israel entering into a bilateral covenant.¹⁴⁷ Myers believes that Israel was ordained as a nation of priests in Exodus 24, noting, first, that in Hebrews 9:18-22's

¹⁴⁴ Reid, 167-68.

¹⁴⁵ Reid, 169-70.

¹⁴⁶ Belcher, 88-95.

¹⁴⁷ Myers, 200-205.

interpretation of Exodus 24, the blood purified the people, and, second, that the only other application of blood to persons takes place in the consecration of the priests.¹⁴⁸

Assessment

Both the standard and Klinean versions of covenant theology face the difficulty of integrating the Mosaic covenant into an overarching covenant of grace. There are two ways of approaching this problem. One is to work hard to provide an alternative explanation for evidence that the Mosaic covenant was law covenant and to insist that it is solely a grace covenant. This is the option chosen by Belcher, Myers, and, to a lesser extent, Reid. The other option is to embrace the evidence that the Mosaic covenant was a law covenant and then attempt to relate this law covenant to the covenant of grace. This is the option chosen by Kline and Horton. There is a third way, however. Recognize that the covenant of grace is an unnecessary theological construct and that the difficulty covenant theologians face integrating the Mosaic covenant with the covenant of grace is an indication that the covenant of grace construct should be abandoned.

Assessment of the Kline/Horton Position

There are cogent critiques of aspects of the Kline/Horton position. Myers is correct to object to dividing the Mosaic covenant into typical and spiritual levels. While there are typical aspects to the Mosaic covenant, such as the sacrificial system, the neat split that Kline envisions (a gracious spiritual level and a works-oriented typical level) is an expedient to fit the Mosaic covenant into the pre-existing system of covenant theology. Myers is also correct that God's delay in judging Israel was due to God's mercy. Whether Myers is right to object to a system that accepts imperfect obedience on the typological level but requires perfect obedience on the antitypical level is less clear. Reid is also critical of Kline, but he does not think this objection stands.¹⁴⁹

Myers's argument that Exodus 24 refers to the consecration of Israel as a nation of priests rather than the institution of a bilateral covenant is not, in the end, persuasive. T. D. Alexander argues persuasively that *both* the institution of a bilateral covenant *and* the consecration of Israel as a priestly nation was in view. Alexander, like Myers, sees a parallel to the consecration of priests in Leviticus 8, the only other time that people are sprinkled with blood in the Mosaic system. But Alexander, also accepts Williamson's view that the blood served as a symbol of atonement through death and carried the warning that those who broke the covenant would be liable to death. It is only after the people promise their obedience to Yhwh that the blood is sprinkled on them.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Myers, 197-98.

¹⁴⁹ Reid, 168-69.

¹⁵⁰ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, ATOC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 545-46.

Belcher's attempt to distinguish between the Mosaic law and the Mosaic covenant simply will not work. The announcement of the covenant in Exodus 19 is followed immediately by the giving of the Decalogue, and the Book of the Covenant that follows in chapters 21–23 immediately precedes the cutting of the covenant in Exodus 24. In addition, the New Testament arguably refers to the Mosaic covenant as “the law” (e.g., Gal 3:11–23). Though Belcher is correct to observe that Israel entered the Mosaic covenant already fallen, this fact does not prevent the Mosaic covenant from being a covenant of works. It prevents Israel from meriting salvation through obedience to the Mosaic covenant. However, Galatians 4:4 indicates that Jesus, who was unfallen, was born under and fulfilled the Mosaic covenant. In fact, it seems that the covenant of works that Jesus fulfilled was not the defunct Adamic covenant but the Mosaic covenant. Finally, while there is typology at work in the Mosaic covenant, it is not correct to draw a sharp line between the physical blessings and curses and salvation. While Israel's enjoyment of the physical blessings in the Old Testament were typological, Jesus's fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant will lead to the ultimate fulfillment of these physical blessings.

In sum, Kline and other covenant theologians influenced by him, such as Horton, rightly observe that the Mosaic covenant has a works element. Myers and Belcher, however, do not engage with the texts in which these works elements are found (apart from Exod 19:5–6). For instance, they have no discussion of the passages in which the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience are pronounced.

Assessment of the Standard Westminster Standards Position

Myers provides the most extensive argument for understanding the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace that is in no way a covenant of works. Myers does as good a job as any covenant theologian in arguing for this position. He works hard to defend his view exegetically, and he engages several of the problem texts for his view. But in the end, it seems that he is making the exegesis of hard passages conform to his system rather than providing the most convincing exegesis of the texts under consideration.

Myers's argument that the Mosaic covenant advances the promises of the Abrahamic covenant does not advance his thesis because no one disputes that point. Everything argued under this point is consistent with the view that rejects a unified covenant of grace in favor of a plan of redemption unfolded through a series of distinct covenants.

Second, the fact that the Mosaic covenant was graciously given in order to continue God's plan of redemption does not mean that it is part of a unitary covenant of grace. Nor does the gracious giving of the covenant mean that the Mosaic covenant is a unilateral covenant. Myers emphasizes Exodus 19:4 at the expense of exegeting 19:5–6, and in so doing he blunts the if/then structure of 19:5–6. Exodus 19:4 shows the Mosaic covenant was graciously given

and 19:5–6 show that the blessings of the covenant were conditional upon the obedience of Israel.

Third, while the commandments of the Decalogue appear prior to the Mosaic covenant, and while the Mosaic covenant revealed God's will more clearly, neither of these facts make the Mosaic covenant part of the covenant of grace. Nor does this argument preclude the Mosaic covenant from being a works covenant.

Fourth, the fact that the Mosaic covenant picks up the land, seed, and blessing promises is no surprise. These themes run through all the covenants. However, this does not mean that the Mosaic covenant is an unconditional covenant like the Abrahamic covenant. Passages like Hosea 1 indicate that while Israel went into exile for violating the Mosaic covenant, the promises of the Abrahamic covenant guarantee their eschatological return.

Fifth, the sacrificial system under the Mosaic covenant does not indicate that this is a gracious covenant. Rather, it pointed the Israelites forward to the new covenant, which is *the* covenant of grace.

Myers also fails to account satisfactorily with the New Testament's negative statements about the Mosaic covenant. The New Testament is not only concerned about covenant regression in its negative statements about the Mosaic covenant: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second" (Heb 8:7). This is a statement that recognizes the need for a different kind of covenant. Second Corinthians 3 makes the same point. In his discussion of 2 Corinthians 3, Myers both creates a straw man (no one is saying that the Mosaic covenant is monstrous) and misunderstands Paul's argument. While it is true that Paul sees the both the old covenant and the new covenant as glorious, Paul specifies that the old covenant was an external law that ministered death and condemnation. The new covenant is more glorious because in the new covenant the Spirit gives life and writes the law on the heart. In other words, the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works, and the new covenant is a covenant of grace.

Myers's attempt to make Leviticus 18:5 refer to sanctification rather than justification is ingenious—but it fails to convince. Leviticus 18:5 in its original context is a soteriological promise.¹⁵¹ First, Israel was redeemed from Egypt typologically, but that Israelites were still in need of redemption unto eternal life. Second, the Pentateuch both sets out salvation by obedience to the law and tells Israel that no one will actually be saved in this way (Deut. 30). Jesus speaks in the same way in response to the lawyer's question about how to inherit

¹⁵¹ See Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, AOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 332; Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12: A Redemptive-Historical Reassessment," *Themelios* 45.2 (Aug. 2020): 247-49. Myers acknowledges that Jewish interpreters understood the life in Leviticus 18:5 to be eternal life, but he dismisses this as a later development (221, n. 39).

eternal life, citing Leviticus 18:5 in Luke 10:28. Jesus's usage should be determinative. Third, it is best to see Paul's argument in Galatians and Romans as observing that in the Torah God laid out two possible ways of attaining eternal life. Either obey the Mosaic law entirely and perfectly or look forward to the new covenant's gracious provision of salvation. The Mosaic covenant clearly stated that the first path would be impossible for sinners. Finally, Myers rightly recognizes that in the allegory of Galatians 4 Paul is contrasting a covenant of works with a covenant of grace. Paul identifies the covenant of works as "Mount Sinai," the Mosaic covenant. It simply will not do to say, as Myers does, that "Mount Sinai" refers to "the legalistic abuse of God's law by the Jewish leaders of Paul's day."¹⁵² The point of the allegory is to contrast two types of covenants.

In conclusion, the Old Testament covenants differ in nature. Some are promise covenants, and the Mosaic covenant was a works covenant. In identifying the Mosaic covenant as a works covenant, I do not deny but affirm that God graciously gave it to forward his plan of redemption. I further affirm that it pointed the way to salvation in Christ through the new covenant.

The Davidic Covenant

The Davidic covenant seems to be the covenant given the least attention in covenant theology. Covenant theologians tend to see the Davidic covenant as an extension of the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenants. Dispensational theologians seem to place more emphasis on the Davidic covenant than covenant theologians.¹⁵³

Covenant Theology

Belcher argues that Davidic covenant is the culmination of previous covenants, and he documents the many links between them. For instance, he thinks that the use of Adonai Yhwh, unique in Samuel to these verses, is an allusion to Genesis 15:2, 8 and thus to the Abrahamic covenant. He follows Walter Kaiser's interpretation of 7:19, "This is the Charter for mankind, O Lord God," which picks up on the universal blessing aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. Belcher traces the idea of kingship back through the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants to Genesis 1:26-28. He also argues that specific covenant promises from the previous covenants find their fulfillment through the Davidic covenant. For instance, the promise of numerous seed is fulfilled in Solomon's reign (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 2 Sam 7:0-10; 1 Kgs 4:20) as is the promise of blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3; 1 Kgs 4:34). Solomon's

¹⁵² Myers, 224, n. 49.

¹⁵³ For instance, Darrell Bock, in his chapter on progressive dispensationalism in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, focused on the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants as the covenants of promise. A similar emphasis is found in Robert Saucy's *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*. By contrast David VanDrunen omits the Davidic covenant from his treatment of covenants in *Divine Covenants and Moral Order* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 80.

reign also saw rest in the land (Deut 28:1-14; 1 Kgs 4:25) and Israel's witness to the nations (Deut 28:10; 1 Kgs 4:30). The promise of God's dwelling with his people is furthered by the construction of the temple (1 Kgs 8:54-61).

Finally, Belcher, looking at the specific wording of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7, the outworking of the covenant in redemptive history, and the commentary upon the Davidic covenant in Psalms 89 and 132, argues that the covenant is conditional with respect to "each individual king" but that "the promises of an enduring dynasty and kingdom" are unconditional because they are not "ultimately dependent on the obedience of individual kings."¹⁵⁴

Horton likewise observes, "No matter what David and his descendants do or fail to do vis-à-vis the Sinaitic covenant, God will unilaterally and unconditionally preserve an heir on his throne."¹⁵⁵ Horton argues,

while the two covenants were not intrinsically opposed (one pertained to the status of the nation, the other to the Davidic heir on the throne), they were not the same and tension could—and did—result between them in Israel's history. The love of the law is the goal of both covenants (Ps. 119 is consistent with Jer. 31); the difference is whether such love of the law and obedience to it function as a conditional basis or as the goal.¹⁵⁶

If Horton stresses the distinction between the Mosaic and Davidic covenants, Myers seeks to demonstrate that the biblical covenants stand in continuity with one another as administrations of a unified covenant of grace. He notes several links between the Davidic and the Mosaic covenants. First, though no Israelite kings had been anointed yet, Deuteronomy 17 laid down the law for Israel's kings. Second, the Davidic covenant required faithfulness to the Mosaic law (1 Kgs 2:3-4). Myers also argues that the Davidic covenant establishes an "office of covenant mediator" for the covenant of grace.

Myers notes again the dynamic of promise and obedience within the covenants. In the Davidic covenant "the obedience of the Davidic king is necessary and important," but "God's faithfulness will not be affected by the obedience or disobedience of that mediator."¹⁵⁷ Thus, disobedience brings discipline, but the promises made to David will be fulfilled.

The Davidic covenant poses a problem for Myers because of the exile. In his words, "the exile can appear to be the strongest argument for rejecting the suggestion that there is one, eternal covenant of grace, for in that exile God seems to take away the embodiment of His

¹⁵⁴ Belcher, 176-77.

¹⁵⁵ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 17.

¹⁵⁶ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 17, n. 16.

¹⁵⁷ Myers, 236.

promises only to begin afresh later with Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁸ Myers resolves this problem by appealing to Vos’s dual-level typology. Since the earthly type refers not only to a “future fulfillment” but also to an “eternal, heavenly reality” it does not matter “if the line running from the earthly type to ultimate fulfillment seems to disappear” since “the line from earthly type to heavenly reality remains.”¹⁵⁹

Assessment

Myers and Belcher are correct to see many links between the Davidic covenant and the preceding covenants. The Davidic covenant is pointing forward to Jesus the Messiah, who will bring to fulfillment all the covenant promises. However, these links are not sufficient to show that the preceding covenants are all part of the same overarching covenant of grace. In fact, Belcher demonstrates that the theme of kingship reaches back to the Adamic covenant, which all covenant theologians agree is a covenant of works distinct from the covenant of grace. Thus, the evidence fits best with a plan of redemption worked out in a succession of distinct covenants.

Myers’s claim that the Davidic and Mosaic covenants are part of the same covenant also suffers from the reality that the Mosaic covenant is a conditional covenant whereas the Davidic covenant is unconditional. As Myers and Belcher both note, though disobedience brings chastening for individual disobedient kings, the covenant blessings of the Davidic covenant will infallibly be brought about. This is not the case for the Mosaic covenant. Israel came under the covenant curses of the Mosaic covenant, and a new covenant was the solution to this problem (Deut 30:6; Jer 31:31-34).

Myers’s introduction of the problem of exile is an odd addition to this chapter. Exile is a covenant curse in the Mosaic covenant. To be sure, it does involve the suspension of reigning Davidic kings, but this is not a contradiction to the Davidic covenant which only promises that the Davidic dynasty will never lack a man to reign—not that it will enjoy uninterrupted dominion. Myers’s appeal to Vossian dual level typology as a solution to this perceived problem creates a problem of its own. The mediatorial kingship of Christ is not a “eternal, heavenly reality.” It is an incarnational reality, which means that it is temporal and earthly.

The New Covenant

Because covenant theologians see the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant as administrations of the covenant of grace, they must maintain continuity between these covenants while also taking into account the biblical language that contrasts these covenants.

¹⁵⁸ Myers, 237.

¹⁵⁹ Myers 238.

Paedobaptist covenant theologians also argue, against Baptists, that the new covenant is a mixed covenant that includes both believers and unbelievers.

Covenant Theology

In his treatment of the new covenant Myers is concerned to demonstrate that the new covenant is in continuity with the previous covenants and is, indeed, part of the one covenant of grace with them. This is a tall order since, as Myers notes, “Initially Jeremiah’s words can appear to place a very sharp division between the old covenant and the new covenant.”¹⁶⁰

Continuity and Discontinuity

Myers identifies the following elements of continuity:

1. The new covenant is made with “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah,” which are established by the Abrahamic covenant and “given further shape” by the Mosaic and Davidic covenants.¹⁶¹
2. In the new covenant the law is written on the heart. Myers asserts, “Very clearly, here God is referring to the law given in the Mosaic covenant.”¹⁶²
3. The goal of the new covenant is the same as the goal of the previous covenants: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33).¹⁶³
4. The blessings of the new covenant as described in Ezekiel 37:24–8 are the fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants.¹⁶⁴

Given this continuity, Myers must then explain why the covenant is called “new.” He argues that the Hebrew word translated “new” has “a wide range of meaning” and that “the new covenant is new in the sense that each wave of new fruit [that grows on a given tree] is new.”¹⁶⁵ Myers further argues that the Greek word used to refer to the new covenant in the New Testament is not the word for “brand new” but the word for “a new iteration of something previous.”¹⁶⁶ Myers also clarifies that when God said that Israel “broke” the covenant, the meaning is that its laws were violated rather than that the covenant was put to an end.

These points established, Myers describes what factors make the new covenant new:

¹⁶⁰ Myers 245.

¹⁶¹ Myers, 245.

¹⁶² Myers, 245.

¹⁶³ Myers, 246.

¹⁶⁴ Myers, 246–47.

¹⁶⁵ Myers 247–48.

¹⁶⁶ Myers, 248.

1. The law before the new covenant was “something external, written on tablets of stone.” But in the new covenant, the law will be written on the heart.¹⁶⁷
2. The Holy Spirit will be poured out to enable obedience.¹⁶⁸
3. The sacrificial system has been fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.¹⁶⁹

However, Myers notes three factors that qualify these three statements regarding the newness of the new covenant. First, Myers observes that there is an already/not yet aspect to the promise of the law written on the heart. Thus, the Christian life “is a life still marked by sin in many ways.”¹⁷⁰ Second, the Spirit was active in the Old Testament as well as the New. He, at one point, seems to reduce the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament ministry of the Spirit to the claim that in the New Testament “the Spirit’s work was more clearly understood (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:16) and His power more clearly felt (Acts 5:1-11; Rev. 1:10) by God’s people.”¹⁷¹ Finally, Myers observes that the Old Testament saints were saved by the cross work of Christ.¹⁷² Thus, even Myers’s discussion of the newness of the new covenant ends up focusing on continuity.

Horton, by contrast, emphasizes discontinuity:

To see the new covenant about which Paul is speaking as a renewed Sinai covenant is to miss the most central point the apostle makes. In fact, it is to miss the explicit point in Jeremiah 31, where Yahweh pledges that the new covenant “will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors” at Sinai, which they broke (v. 32).¹⁷³

A key aspect of discontinuity for Horton is the unconditional nature of the new covenant in contrast to the conditional nature of the Mosaic covenant.¹⁷⁴ Horton is not denying that the Mosaic covenant and new covenants are both administrations of the covenant of grace. Rather, he is stressing the difference between the administrations.¹⁷⁵

The Problem of Exile

Myers is concerned that the exile of Israel, especially as it is expounded in Hosea 1, could be read as an “annulment” of the old covenant, thus creating the need for an entirely new covenant.¹⁷⁶ Significantly, God declared Israel “not my people” in Hosea 1, which seems to

¹⁶⁷ Myers, 250.

¹⁶⁸ Myers, 251.

¹⁶⁹ Myers 253.

¹⁷⁰ Myers, 252.

¹⁷¹ Myers, 254.

¹⁷² Myers, 253.

¹⁷³ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 82-83.

¹⁷⁴ Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 84.

¹⁷⁵ Horton, “Covenant Theology,” 45-46. Horton’s views have some affinity with those of John Owen. *Works*, 22:63-77.

¹⁷⁶ Myers, 255.

be an “undoing” of the covenant with Israel. Myers asks, “Does the exile represent a revocation of, or alteration in, the covenant of grace, as Israel goes from being ‘My people’ to being ‘not My people?’” He answers, “Quite simply, the answer to the last question is no.”¹⁷⁷

Myers reasons that since the exile is a reversal of the land promise, the Abrahamic covenant (which promised the land) is the covenant Hosea has in view in 1:9. However, since the validity of the Abrahamic covenant is immediately affirmed in Hosea 1:10, God cannot be revoking his covenant.¹⁷⁸

Myers further claims that in 1:9 God is declaring the Northern Kingdom as not his people, in distinction from Judah which is his people (cf. 1:7). He qualifies this by noting there are Israelites in the Northern Kingdom who are God’s people and people in the Southern Kingdom who are not.¹⁷⁹ Thus, he refines the message of Hosea 1:9: “God is making clear that ‘national Israel’ is not shorthand for ‘the people of God.’ National Israel can be scattered to the winds and God’s covenant with His people remain untouched.”¹⁸⁰ In fact, rather than seeing the exile negatively, Myers argues that it was a step forward toward the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Hebrews 9 and the Unity of the Covenant of Grace

Myers closes the chapter by arguing that Hebrews 9 teaches the unity of the covenant of grace. He sees here an affirmation that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were effective because the blood of Christ shed in the new covenant was in “organic connection” to them. Indeed, he thinks that the covenant spoken of in 9:20 is the covenant of grace that encompasses all the other covenants.¹⁸¹

Rejection of an Over-realized New Covenant

Belcher’s treatment of the new covenant focuses on Jeremiah 31:31-34 within the context of Jeremiah 30-33. Michael McKelvey, who contributed the chapter on the new covenant in *Covenant Theology*, focuses on new covenant passages in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. Both authors make helpful exegetical points on these key new covenant texts, but their chapters are not focused arguments for covenant theology, save on one point.

Belcher qualifies the current fulfillment of the new covenant promises, noting that they are at present “provisional.” He argues that the promised inner transformation is still incomplete. Furthermore, not everyone in the covenant now knows the Lord, as promised on the new

¹⁷⁷ Myers, 256.

¹⁷⁸ Myers, 256.

¹⁷⁹ Myers, 256-58.

¹⁸⁰ Myers, 258.

¹⁸¹ Myers, 260-62.

covenant. Belcher acknowledges that this is a point of debate with Baptists, who hold that only those who know the Lord are part of the new covenant. Belcher demurs, claiming that the threat that Gentile branches may be removed from the tree (Rom. 11), the reality of apostasy (1 John 5:19), the warnings found in Hebrews, and the fact of church discipline all testify that some people who are externally part of the new covenant are not internally members of it.¹⁸²

McKelvey also warns against Baptist readings of the new covenant, which he thinks are eschatologically over-realized. Specifically, he does not think that all in the new covenant will know the Lord until after Christ returns. In contrast to the Baptist understanding of the new covenant, McKelvey argues that Jeremiah 32:39 demonstrates that the children of believers are included within the new covenant. Thus, the children of believers should receive baptism, the sign of the new covenant.¹⁸³

Horton likewise argues, “members of the visible church in the new covenant are in exactly the same place as old covenant believers in this sense. One may be united outwardly to Christ and his visible body and yet not a living branch of the vine.” He concludes, “the covenant of grace (or the church) in both its old and new administrations is for now a ‘mixed assembly,’ consisting of wheat and tares.”¹⁸⁴

Assessment

Continuity and Discontinuity

Myers over-emphasizes continuity between the Mosaic and new covenants. For instance, he states that the law written on the heart in the new covenant “very clearly” is the law of the Mosaic covenant. However, this is not very clear. The law written on the heart in the new covenant does not include circumcision, dietary laws, the sacrificial system, or civil penalties for disobedience. Certainly, significant overlap exists between some laws in the Mosaic covenant and the law that is written on the heart in the new covenant. This overlap accounts for the fact that the New Testament authors can quote from the Decalogue and other parts of the Mosaic code in describing expectations for Christian behavior. But Christians do not follow the dietary laws of the Mosaic code, for instance, because they are under a different covenant with a law that does not include those provisions.

Myers is correct that the new covenant is new because it is internal rather than external, because the Spirit is poured out to enable obedience, and because it is founded on the sacrifice of Christ. However, the three caveats that Myers makes to these points tend to

¹⁸² Belcher, 135-37, 244-47.

¹⁸³ Michael G. McKelvey, “The New Covenant as Promised in the Major Prophets,” in *Covenant Theology*, 197-200.

¹⁸⁴ Horton, “Covenant Theology,” 64, 65.

undercut the newness of the covenant. It is better to conclude that the benefits of the new covenant were not benefits that were offered by the Mosaic covenant. The Mosaic covenant and the prophets pointed forward to the new covenant. Individuals in the Old Testament could, by faith, experience some of the benefits of the new covenant proleptically. In addition, while the Spirit was active in the Old Testament, and while he played an essential role in regenerating OT saints, the Spirit did not indwell Old Testament believers as he now indwells members of the new covenant.¹⁸⁵ Thus, there are substantive differences in the benefits that OT and NT saints experience.

The substantive differences between the new covenant and the Mosaic covenant (“not like the covenant that I made with their fathers”) calls into question Myers’s claim that “new” in the label “new covenant” simply refers to “a new iteration of something previous.” Contrary to Myers, the Hebrew word **שִׁנְיָה** can clearly refer to something that is “brand new,”¹⁸⁶ and the contrast (“not like the [Mosaic] covenant”) points to something new in kind rather than a mere “new iteration of something previous.” Regarding **καινός**, the word used in the New Testament, BDAG lists new covenant passages under the following sense: **“pert. to that which is recent in contrast to someth. old, new...in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by that which is new.”**¹⁸⁷

The Problem of Exile

Myers’s claim that Hosea 1:9 refers to the Abrahamic covenant and is refers only to the Northern Kingdom is does not withstand scrutiny.

First, Myers argues that the Abrahamic covenant must be in view since the exile is “the removal of Israel from the Land of Promise,” which is a promise of the Abrahamic covenant. But exile is one of the sanctions of the Mosaic covenant (Lev 26:33-39; Deut 28:37, 64-65).

Second, the name of Hosea’s daughter, No Mercy, alludes to Exodus 33:19; 34:7 in which God showed mercy toward Israel and established the Mosaic covenant with them despite their rebellion in the golden calf incident. The name of Hosea’s second son, Not My People and his statement, “And I am not I AM to you”¹⁸⁸ is also a reversal of the Mosaic covenant’s promises (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 27:9).

¹⁸⁵ See James M. Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville, B&H, 2006).

¹⁸⁶ Dt. 22:8; 32:17; Jos 9:13; Jdg 15:13; 1 Sa 6:7.

¹⁸⁷ BDAG, s.v., **καινός** sense 3b.

¹⁸⁸ For justification for this translation, see J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 990-100; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC (Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 33.

Third, in breaking the Mosaic covenant, Israel made itself like the Gentiles: not God's people. However, Hosea 1:10 contrasts the broken Mosaic covenant with the future hope that Israel (and the Gentiles) has via the Abrahamic covenant (1:10 alludes to Gen 22:17).

Fourth, Myers is correct that in 1:7 the Lord distinguishes between Israel and Judah. God will have mercy on Judah (for a while longer) while he no longer will have mercy on Israel. But in the end the judgment of exile will fall on both kingdoms, and both will be restored under the rule of the Messiah (1:11).

Read rightly, Hosea 1 presents the Mosaic covenant as a bilateral covenant that Israel has violated such that it has come under the covenant curses. The Abrahamic covenant, by contrast, is presented as a unilateral covenant which provides hope for restoration.

Hebrews 9

The covenant mentioned in Hebrews 9:20 is not the covenant of grace but is clearly the Mosaic covenant (Hebrews is here quoting Exodus 24:8). The whole passage draws comparisons and contrasts between two different covenants.

No Over-realization of the New Covenant

As a Baptist, I deny that the claim that all new covenant members are regenerate and know the Lord over-realizes the eschatology of the covenant. To be sure there are eschatological aspects to the covenant that await fulfillment, such as the land promises. But the fact that everyone in the covenant knows the Lord is part of what makes the new covenant the new covenant.

McKelvey's claim that Jeremiah 32:39 includes the unregenerate children of believers in the new covenant fails to take into account the context of this statement. Jeremiah 32:39 is a millennial promise. The Israelites referred to in this verse are gathered back not simply from Babylon or Persia but from "all the countries," and they are made to "dwell in safety." Furthermore, they will be given "one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever." Thus, the children spoken of here would be Israelite children born during the Millennium, and this verse would refer to all Israel being saved.

Conclusion

Covenant theology is a venerable theological system. Its arguments for the covenant of redemption and the covenant of works withstand critical scrutiny. However, its claim of an overarching covenant of grace encounters numerous problems, and it should be abandoned—as it has been by Baptist covenant theologians, progressive covenantalists, and dispensationalists.