

Baptist Covenant Theologies: An Analysis and Evaluation

This paper analyzes and evaluates two Baptist versions of covenant theology as represented by Samuel Renihan's *The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant, and His Kingdom* and Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum's *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*.¹ Renihan's book articulates a contemporary Baptist covenant theology informed by seventeenth-century Baptist covenant theologians and by twentieth century theologian Meredith Kline. This version of covenant theology often goes by the name 1689 Federalism.² In 2012 Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary published *Kingdom through Covenant* to argue for Progressive Covenantalism as an alternative to covenant and dispensational theologies. The covenant theology they critiqued was specifically paedobaptist, and Progressive Covenantalism is a Baptist alternative. This naturally raises the question of the relation of 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism to one another as well as an evaluation of each.³

* Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

¹ Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant, and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2020); Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). For this paper I am using *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* as the primary reference point since it is similar in scope to Renihan's book. I have read *Kingdom through Covenant*, the pertinent essays in *Progressive Covenantalism*, and Wellum's essay in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies* and will refer to these resources when appropriate. Other resources expounding 1689 Federalism include Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, 2nd ed. (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2016); Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642-1704)*, Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, Vol. 16 (Oxford, UK: Regent's Park College, 2018); Richard C. Barcellos, ed., *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: Regular Baptist Academic Press, 2014). I have read Denault's book and from the relevant essays in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage*. I have consulted *From Shadow to Substance*.

² The 1689 in the name 1689 Federalism is a reference to the Second London Baptist Confession which is often called the 1689 Confession. For more information on why the date 1689 was attached to this confession, see Renihan's post, "Editions of the 1LCF and 2LCF," <https://pettyfrance.wordpress.com/editions-of-1lcf-and-2lcf/> accessed 5/20/2023. Brandon Adams makes an important clarification regarding the name: "the label '1689 Federalism' is not intended to mean that it is the only view permitted by the 2nd London Baptist Confession. The confession was written broadly enough to embrace a multitude of views. However, 1689 Federalism was the actual covenant theology held to the majority of baptists of that day and it helps explain the changes that they did make to the confession on this point." "Brief Comments/Clarifications on the T4G Covenant Theology Panel," <https://contrast2.wordpress.com/2020/04/17/brief-comments-clarifications-on-the-t4g-covenant-theology-panel/> accessed 5/20/2023.

³ Daniel Scheiderer, a 1689 Federalist compared, the two systems in "Progressive Covenantalists as Reformed Baptists," *Westminster Theological Journal* 82, no. 1 (2020): 137-52. Richard Lucas, who is a Progressive Covenantalist, compared the two systems in "The Past and Future of Baptist

Covenants: Definitions and Classification

Before analyzing each system's understanding of the covenants, each system's definition of *covenant* and the way they classify covenants is important to understand.

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

Renihan defines a covenant as “a guaranteed commitment” that includes sanctions.⁴ The force of the covenant comes in its sanctions.⁵ Renihan distinguishes between the form and matter of a covenant. “The matter of a covenant is the commitments of the two parties.”⁶ There are two forms, or kinds, of covenant: law and grace.

In a law covenant, the law is “the matter of the covenant”; the law becomes covenantal when sanctions are present.⁷ In a law covenant “the promise [of the covenant] must be earned.”⁸ Renihan is careful to observe that it is not the presence of laws that makes a covenant a *law covenant*. In a grace covenant, “the blessings are external to the covenant partner and are imputed to him apart from merit or works. One does not need to earn the blessings of the covenant, but rather one simply receives the blessings.”⁹ Nonetheless, laws are still given in such a grace covenant.¹⁰

Having established these two kinds of covenants, Renihan then qualifies that “not all covenants between God and man follow this rigid binary.”¹¹ This binary obtains when “obtaining perfect righteousness” is the concern of the covenant, but it is not maintained when external righteousness and temporal blessings are the concern.¹²

Renihan argues that membership in the covenant is based on the relation of a person to the head of the covenant.¹³ Every covenant has a federal head, excepting the Mosaic covenant, in which case “the Davidic covenant ... provides a federal head.”¹⁴ This principle of membership by relation to federal head is significant for Renihan's Baptist approach to covenant theology. The way federal heads represent those within the covenant differs according to covenant.¹⁵ In some cases the federal head represents “his natural posterity,”

Covenantal Theology: 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26, no. 1 (2022): 116-63.

⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 40, 42-43.

⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 45-46.

⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 46.

⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 47.

⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 48.

⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 48.

¹⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 48.

¹¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 49.

¹² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 49. Renihan observes, “That Abraham's descendants would multiply and inherit Canaan was a free promise protected by sanctions (Genesis 15). But whether individuals, families, and tribes would enjoy that inheritance depended on their obedience, a commitment that was likewise sanctioned (Genesis 17:14; Exodus 24:7—8; Deuteronomy 27—28).” Ibid., 49-50.

¹³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 51.

¹⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 50.

¹⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 53.

but the is not the case of every federal head.¹⁶ Thus, the fact that children of covenant members are themselves members of a given covenant does not mean that this arrangement pertains to all covenants.

Finally, Renihan argues that “God’s covenants delegate dominion.”¹⁷ The covenant of works and the Noahic covenant govern the kingdom of creation. The Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants govern the kingdom of Israel, The covenant of redemption and covenant of grace govern the kingdom of Christ.¹⁸ Renihan is quick to clarify that these are not “unrelated” kingdoms with “their own parallel destinations” but that “they all terminate in one kingdom of God under one king, Jesus Christ.”¹⁹

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Gentry and Wellum define a covenant as “a relationship involving an oath-bound commitment.”²⁰ Elsewhere they note, “At the heart of covenant, then, is a relationship between parties characterized by faithfulness and loyalty in love.”²¹ They further specify four features that are true of the biblical covenants.

(1) A covenant does not necessarily begin or initiate a relationship. It can formalize in binding and legal terms an agreement between parties who have developed a relationship before the covenant is made....

(2) There is conventional language for initiating covenants or treaties that is standard in the Old Testament. The standard expression for initiating a covenant is “to cut a covenant” (*kārat bērit*; 21:27, 32)....

(3) A covenant gives binding and legal status to a relationship by means of a formal and solemn ceremony. As a general rule, covenants belong to the public rather than the private sphere....

(4) Covenant making involves a commitment or oath or promise and, frequently, signs or witnesses. Here the parties of the treaty solemnly swear to the agreement. While an oath is an important part of the covenant, it is not the covenant itself.²²

Gentry and Wellum observe that two kinds of covenants existed in the ancient Near East, “(1) the suzerain-vassal treaty and (2) the royal charter or land grant.”²³ They reject, however, attempts to categorize the biblical covenants according to these two types (or as conditional and unconditional), arguing that the biblical covenants have elements of both.²⁴ In fact, they argue that “there is a deliberate *tension* within the covenants” since every

¹⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 52.

¹⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 53.

¹⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 54.

¹⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 55.

²⁰ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 132. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of *Kingdom through Covenant* are from the second edition.

²¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 54.

²² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 58–59, cf. Gentry & Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 184.

²³ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 49.

²⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 50, 255.

covenant requires a faithful covenant partner and since all human covenant partners fail. In the end, it is the Son who enters as the needed faithful covenant partner.²⁵ They argue, “It is only by maintaining the dual emphasis of unconditional/conditional in the biblical covenants, leading us to their fulfillment in the unbreakable new covenant grounded in God’s obedient Son, that we appreciate Scripture’s incredible Christological focus.”²⁶

Also important to Gentry and Wellum’s scheme is a hard division between the phrase *kārat bērit* and the phrase *hēqīm bērit*. They claim:

An exhaustive study of all cases of *bērit* in the Hebrew Bible reveals a completely consistent usage: the construction “to cut a covenant” (*kārat bērit*) refers to covenant initiation while the expression “to establish a covenant” (*hēqīm bērit*) means to affirm (verbally) the continued validity of a prior covenant, i.e. to affirm that one is still committed to the covenant relationship established in a preexisting covenant. Sometimes *hēqīm bērit* can have a more particular or specific use meaning to carry out or fulfill the obligations of a covenant made previously, i.e., to make good on one’s commitment, obligation, or promise.²⁷ Finally, as may be deduced from the title, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, Progressive Covenantalism sees a tight linkage between the covenants and the establishment of God’s kingdom. They root the kingdom theme in God’s rule over his creation. However, because mankind has rebelled against God’s kingship, there is now a distinction between God’s “sovereignty” and “the coming of his *saving reign*.”²⁸ This saving reign is brought about progressively through the covenants that God established. Now, through the new covenant established by Christ, God’s kingdom has been inaugurated though it still awaits its consummation.²⁹

Comparison and Evaluation

Definition of Covenant

Renihan’s definition of a covenant is attractive. However, the Noahic covenant does not appear to include sanctions.³⁰ Gentry and Wellum’s definition of a covenant is therefore the superior definition.

Types of Covenants

The categorization of biblical covenants is complex. A distinction is often made between suzerainty-vassal covenants and royal grant covenants, between conditional and unconditional covenants, between law or works covenants and promise or grace covenants. Often there is an equation between suzerainty-vassal covenants, conditional covenants, law

²⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 255-56.

²⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 256.

²⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 60.

²⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 244.

²⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 245-47.

³⁰ While not addressing sanctions directly, John Ball argues that the Noahic covenant does not have “stipulations.” John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London: G. Miller, 1645), 3. Ball is probably incorrect that there are no stipulations or duties to the Noahic covenant, unless he means that there are no duties upon which the promises of the covenant are conditioned (which may well be his meaning). However, it raised the question in my mind as to whether there were sanctions for disobeying the Noahic covenant. None seem to be indicated in Genesis 8 or 9.

covenants, and works covenants on the one hand and royal grant covenants, unconditional covenants, grace covenants, and promise covenants on the other hand.

Those who are critical of the distinction between two kinds of covenants make a variety of objections. First, some cast doubt on the accuracy of mapping the ANE treaty types to the unconditional/conditional distinction. Jonathan Leeman, who aligns with Progressive Covenantalism, says,

I am not convinced that Christian scholars gain as much theologically as they think they do by equating conditional law covenants and unconditional promise covenants with ancient Near Eastern suzerain treaties and royal grants respectively. The royal grant was hardly unconditional insofar as it was given *as a response* to some type of loyal service.³¹

This is a valid critique. It would be best not to ground theology about divine-human covenants in a typology of the human-to-human covenants of Israel's neighbors.

Second, critics of the distinction will argue that putative law or works covenants, such as the Mosaic covenant, should also be considered grace covenants since they were graciously given.³² But those who make the law/grace distinction do not deny but affirm that all divine-human covenants are graciously given.³³ Law, works, or conditional covenants, are covenants in which the fulfillment of the promises depends on the obedience of the human partner.

Third, critics will argue that putative unconditional covenants should also be considered conditional in some respects because they have conditions or expectations for obedience within them.³⁴ Those who make the conditional/unconditional distinction do not deny that every covenant has expectations or laws that are part of the covenant. Instead, they argue that in some covenants "the reception of the benefits is not *dependent* on obedience to these demands."³⁵ For instance, God's covenant promise to never again destroy the earth with a Flood does not depend on obedience to Genesis 9:1-7.

Fourth, critics will argue that the covenants themselves contain both conditional and unconditional elements.³⁶ However, the claim that covenants can be both conditional and unconditional at the same time seems to create a logical problem. A covenant either does or does not condition promises upon obedience to covenant stipulations. The only alternative would be for certain promises of a given covenant to be conditioned upon obedience while other promises remain unconditional. But this is not the alternative that Renihan or Gentry and Wellum propose. Renihan suggests that the binary does not obtain when the

³¹ Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 253, n. 28.

³² Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 141-42.

³³ Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 40. Note that some theologians are averse to speaking of *grace* in connection with the creation covenant since that covenant was established prior to the Fall. Nonetheless, these theologians would still acknowledge that God condescended to man in the making of this covenant with him.

³⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 664.

³⁵ Lunde, 39.

³⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 665.

concern is external righteous and temporal blessing. Perhaps he has in mind that the obedience in such a case need not be *perfect*. This, however, does not resolve the logical problem. Gentry and Wellum also do not seem to distinguish conditional and unconditional promises within covenants (though there is movement in this direction with the Davidic covenant). It seems that their true position is that all covenants are conditional, and that Christ fulfills the conditions—thus rendering the promises sure (unconditional?) for those in Christ. This would resolve the logical problem, but it runs into an exegetical problem. Paul in Galatians seems to distinguish the Abrahamic and new covenants (which he designates *promise* and *faith*) from the Mosaic covenant, which he designates as *law*.³⁷ Similarly, in Ephesians Paul distinguishes the covenants of promise (the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants) from the Mosaic covenant.³⁸

Even with these clarifications in place, it must still be acknowledged that much of this disagreement exists because of the complexity of the biblical data, which will be examined in connection with the individual covenants.

Covenant Heads

Renihan's claim that every covenant has a covenant head is also initially attractive. However, his concession that the Mosaic covenant does not have a federal head proves fatal to making this a universal feature of divine-human covenants. The expedient of making David the federal head of the Mosaic covenant simply will not do. First, the Davidic covenant is a distinct covenant from the Mosaic covenant. Second, how were the Israelites in the hundreds of years from Moses to David related to the Mosaic covenant?³⁹

Kārat Bērīt and *Hēqīm Bērīt*

Gentry and Wellum make much of the distinction between the phrase *kārat bērīt* and the phrase *hēqīm bērīt*. Again, this is initially attractive, as they use it to support the existence of the creation covenant and the singularity of the Abrahamic covenant. However, on closer inspection, the claim that *hēqīm bērīt* always refers to establishing an existing covenant leads to insuperable problems. For one, it leads them to consider the creation and Noahic covenants as the same covenant. But if any covenant is a covenant of works, it is the creation covenant which brought the covenant curse on all mankind due to Adam's

³⁷ For an argument that *promise*, *law*, and *faith* in Galatians refer to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and new covenants, respectively, see T. David Gordon, *Promise, Law, Faith: Covenant-Historical Reasoning in Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2019), 29-30. For the Mosaic covenant being different in kind from the Abrahamic and new, see *ibid.*, 39-41. Both these points are developed at length in the rest of the monograph.

³⁸ Paul refers to plural covenants that are tied to citizenship within Israel to which the Gentiles will be brought near through Christ from the Mosaic covenant, which Christ abolished in his death. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 358-59; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 156 (though he does not mention the Davidic covenant).

³⁹ Renihan could possibly argue that just as Old Testament saints were party to the new covenant through their union with Christ, who was yet to come, the same could hold true with Israelites and David. However, the proleptic connection between Old Testament saints and the coming Christ is due, in part, to the fact that the new covenant had not yet been cut. The Mosaic covenant was cut hundreds of years before David.

disobedience. And if any covenant is an unconditional covenant, it is the Noahic covenant, which has promises for all creation that are not conditioned on human obedience. It is most likely that *heqim berith* refers to the initial making of a covenant in Genesis 6:18; 9:9, 11, 17; Exodus 6:4; Ezekiel 16:60-62.⁴⁰

Kingdoms and Covenants

Despite Renihan's qualifications about the relatedness of his three kingdoms, it is best to see a single, unified kingdom running from Genesis 1:28 through to the end of Revelation. This is the kingdom that encompasses all creation with an appointed man ruling under God. Since Adam's fall, this kingdom was in disorder due to human rebellion, but it was re-established with Christ as the perfect, obedient Man. Thus, the Progressive Covenantal view with its singular kingdom through covenants (plural) is a superior model.

Typology

Typology plays an important role in both 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism. Without understanding their approach to typology, understanding their views of the specific covenants will be difficult.

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

A specific understanding of typology is key to Renihan's version of covenant theology. He defines "a typological relationship" as a "divinely ordained analogy and escalation"⁴¹ Renihan proposes four axioms on the relation between the type and antitype.

1. "Types reveal something greater, and other, than themselves."⁴² He elaborates, "The escalation of typology is not merely quantitative, but qualitative."⁴³ For instance, the manna and the rock are qualitatively different from Jesus (John 6:32-33, 58; 1 Cor 10:4), which is what is to be expected when "shadow" and "substance" are compared (Col. 2:17; Heb 8:5; 10:1; cf. 9:23-24).⁴⁴
2. "Types function on two levels," first in their "immediate and provisional context" and, secondly, in their "final and Messianic context." For example, animal sacrifices "satisfied the demands of the Mosaic covenant" so that Israel could "remain in Canaan" while also pointing forward to Christ's substitutionary atonement on the cross."⁴⁵ This two-level typology is not the same kind of thing as the present already-not yet fulfillment of the new. The already enjoyed blessings of the new covenant are partial fulfillments of the *same* realities that will be fully enjoyed later whereas (according to axiom 1), the types are something "other" than the antitype.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ For further argumentation, see Brian C. Collins, "The Covenant of Grace: A Critique of the Concept in Stephen Myers's *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture*," *Journal of Biblical Theology and Worldview* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 36-38.

⁴¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 28.

⁴² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 31.

⁴³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 32.

⁴⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 32.

⁴⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 33.

⁴⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 34.

3. “Types terminate in their antitypes.”⁴⁷ This axiom means that the type passes away when the antitype arrives. For instance, animal sacrifices (the type) were ended because of the sacrifice of Christ (the antitype).⁴⁸

4. “Types are positive and negative.”⁴⁹ Renihan’s point here is that types not only prefigure the antitype but also, at times, contrast with the antitype. For instance, animal sacrifices were typological not only in pointing forward to Christ’s sacrifice but also in the fact that they were themselves insufficient to deal with sin. David was a type of Christ not only as Israel’s king but also as a sinner who showed the need for David’s greater Son.⁵⁰

Renihan says these axioms of typological interpretation arise from observing apostolic hermeneutics, which Christian interpreters are obligated to imitate in their own interpretation of Scripture.⁵¹

According to Renihan, Paedobaptists fail to observe the escalation and two-tiered nature of typology:

For some, typology was not about something other and greater; it was about two phases of the same thing. So, circumcision and baptism are two outward forms of the same thing. Passover and the Lord’s Supper are two outward forms of the same thing. Israel and the church are two outward forms of the same thing. They are, as David Dickson said, only as different as the way a man dresses in his youth and in his maturity.⁵²

By contrast, Renihan sees circumcision as other than baptism. Circumcision had its own meaning within the contexts of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants as well as a typological function pointing forward to baptism.⁵³ When baptism arrived, circumcision ceased.

Renihan believes that even the covenant promises of the Israelite covenants were typological. This is significant enough to warrant quoting Renihan at length:

The kingdom of Israel and its covenants were typical shadows of Christ, the substance. As types, they were their own entities serving their own purposes in their own contexts. Yet also as types, they pointed upward and onward to something greater than themselves. The promises of the prophets contributed a great deal to pushing the Israelite hopes beyond their present situation to something more ideal, something more perfect, something more permanent.

Yet, for all the quantity of revelation given to Israel, it was given through the mode of mystery and the medium of typology. The promises of the future kingdom and covenant of Messiah are all contained within the language of the typical realm. The revelation of the

⁴⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 35.

⁴⁸ “This is the argument of the author to the Hebrews.” Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 34.

⁴⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 35.

⁵⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 35.

⁵¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 29, 35.

⁵² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 38-39.

⁵³ This is my extrapolation of Renihan’s argument.

perfected future through the imperfect present, that is, the typological nature of the kingdom of Israel and its covenants, constituted the mystery of Christ.⁵⁴

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Gentry and Wellum first differentiate typology from allegory: “The major difference is that typology is grounded in *history*, the *text*, and *intertextual* development” whereas allegories “are not grounded in authorial intent” and rely “on some kind of extratextual grid to warrant its explanation.”⁵⁵ They follow Richard Davidson in their definition of typology: “Typology is the study of the Old Testament salvation-historical realities or ‘types’ (persons, events, institutions) which God has specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated and consummated) in New Testament salvation history.”⁵⁶

It is important to them that typology “is *prophetic* and *predictive*.”⁵⁷ Typology is not a matter of human interpreters retrospectively detecting patterns in the biblical text. Typology is “divinely given and intended.”⁵⁸ This does not mean that typology was always understood as such when it was being enacted, but it does mean that it was always part of the divine plan.⁵⁹

Typology is first characterized by “a *repetition* of the ‘promise-fulfillment’ pattern of redemptive-history so that various types find their fulfillment in later persons, events, or institutions.”⁶⁰ However, typology is not only characterized by repetition, it is also characterized by “*escalation* as the type is fulfilled in the antitype.”⁶¹ For the Progressive Covenantalist, this escalation always runs through Jesus Christ: “ultimately *all types first find their fulfillment in Christ before they have application to us*.”⁶² This escalation accounts for “*discontinuity* between the old and new in God’s unified plan” as types give way to the antitype.⁶³

Finally, Gentry and Wellum claim that all types are connected to biblical covenants: “to reflect upon typological patterns and their development is simultaneously to walk through the biblical covenants.”⁶⁴ The culmination of all types in Christ is due to the fact that all the covenants terminate in and are fulfilled by the new covenant.⁶⁵

Comparison and Evaluation

Though Progressive Covenantalism and 1689 Federalism at times differ in emphasis, their approach to typology is similar. Their definitions are conceptually identical. Both see types

⁵⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 144.

⁵⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 39.

⁵⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 39.

⁵⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 39.

⁵⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 39.

⁵⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 40.

⁶⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 40.

⁶¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 41.

⁶² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 41.

⁶³ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 42.

⁶⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 42.

⁶⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 254.

as something God intended, both highlight the issue of correspondence, and both include escalation as part of their definition.

While there is much to praise in these presentations of typology, refinements are needed. First, escalation, while pervasive, may not be a universal feature of typology. For instance, Israel was pictured as Yhwh's wife in the Old Testament whereas the church is the bride of Christ (with the marriage awaiting the eschaton) in the New Testament.⁶⁶ Either the wife/bride imagery is not typological, or this is an exception to the typical escalation dynamic.

Second, while the escalation from type to antitype is often qualitative, as in the examples Renihan provided, it is not always qualitative. Renihan appeals to Hebrews 10:1 in support of this point, but Hebrews is speaking specifically about the law regarding sacrifices. Renihan needs to provide exegetical justification for extending the shadow imagery to all types. There are types in which the type is a part and a partial fulfillment of the whole and the final fulfillment. This is the case with the land in the time of Joshua and Solomon (a type of the new creation) and Old Testament Israel (a type of the church). Arguably, the same is true of persons who served as types of Christ. For instance, Christ is a man and an Israelite king, just as David was.⁶⁷

Third, if types are not always other than their antitypes (as in Renihan's axiom 1), then types do not always pass away when the antitype arrives (as in Renihan's axiom 3). Axiom 3 holds true for circumcision, tabernacle, and sacrifices. But the land of Israel will not pass away when the new creation arrives but is instead part of the renewed creation. Likewise, if Israel under the Mosaic covenant was a type of the church, the nation does not pass away when the church arrives. Rather, redeemed Israelites are now part of the church.

Fourth, while Christ is central to the fulfillment of typology, not every type is a directly a type of Christ as both Renihan and Gentry and Wellum seem to indicate. The Day of Yhwh is a case in point. The historic, typological days of Yhwh are fulfilled *by* Christ, not *in* him, when he returns in judgment on the nations.

Fifth, Progressive Covenantalism's claim that all types are tied to the biblical covenants is also too sweeping. Again, the Day of Yhwh is an exception to this claim.

⁶⁶ "The nuptial theme extends throughout both Testaments, and one can say with confidence that Christ fulfills the entirety of the OT. However, the NT fulfillment of the OT nuptial theme may be more preliminary and provisional than the NT fulfillment of many other OT themes because of the eschatological shift: the OT pictures God's people as his wedded wife, while the NT portrays the church as the betrothed bride, awaiting the future consummation. Therefore, the nuptial theme is more complex than a simple pattern of prophecy and fulfillment, such as 'a ruler will come forth from Bethlehem' and then 'Jesus was born in Bethlehem.' In fact, the nuptial theme may appear to run in the opposite direction: in the OT God's people are portrayed as God's wedded wife, but in the NT they are depicted as his betrothed bride, whose marriage is not yet consummated. This eschatological shift in the nuptial theme would appear to be contrary to the *Steigerung*, or 'escalation,' characteristic of biblical typology, in which the NT antitype surpasses and transcends the OT type." Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2003), 71.

⁶⁷ Indeed, there is strong continuity as he is David's seed.

Finally, to make covenant promises themselves types is contrary to the nature of promise. As Craig Blaising observes,

A promise entails an obligation. When somebody makes a promise, they're not just stating something, they are doing something. They are forming a relationship and creating an expectation that carries moral obligation. Failure to complete a promise is a violation of one's word. It is a serious matter. Certainly, we can make promises with conditions. The language of promise will make that clear. But once the promise is made, a relationship has been enacted and an expectation has been grounded in personal integrity.⁶⁸

Hebrews, a book very much concerned with typology, also speaks to covenant promises: “when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath” (Heb. 6:17). Blaising comments, “The promise and the oath are referred to as ‘two unchangeable things’ (Heb. 6:18). To the recipients, these speech acts function as ‘a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul’ (Heb. 6:19). God's word is certain, which means His people can confidently rely on what He promises.”⁶⁹

These qualifications in place, both 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism have much helpful to say about typology. For instance, the emphasis that typology is not merely matter of reader observation but is a result of providential ordination is important. The same could be said of Gentry and Wellum’s clear distinction between allegory and typology.

The Covenant of Redemption

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

The covenant of redemption is affirmed in 1689 Federalism. Renihan notes, “In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul teaches that salvation is the result of a purpose given in Christ Jesus ‘before the ages began.’ In Titus 1:2, Paul says that eternal life was promised ‘before the ages began.’” This eternal purpose and promise is presented “metaphorically in the mode of a covenant transacted between the persons of the Trinity.”⁷⁰ Renihan identifies the parties of this covenant as the Father, Son and Spirit (Isa 42:1-7; 49:8-9; 50:4-9; Lk 4:17-21).⁷¹ In this covenant the Son obligated himself “to become incarnate, to obey the law perfectly, and to offer Himself up as the substitutionary sacrifice for a special people” (John 10:17-18, 27-29; Ps 2:6-9; Ps 110:4; Isa 61:1-2; 17:8).⁷² The Father obligated himself to provide the Spirit and all else needed for the Son to accomplish his mission.⁷³ The covenant of redemption is a works covenant in which the Son must accomplish his work to receive the reward, which is “*resurrection and exaltation*” (Isa 42:6; 49:8; 50:7-9; 53:10-12; John 17:4-5; Acts 13:34-37; Phil 2:8-11).⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Craig A. Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” in *The People, The Land, and the Future of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 160.

⁶⁹ Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” 161.

⁷⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 152.

⁷¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 152-53.

⁷² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 154.

⁷³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 154, 156.

⁷⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 154, 156-57.

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Gentry and Wellum only mention the covenant of redemption in their description of covenant theology. They articulate a generic critique, but they don't specifically identify the critique as their own:

Some have questioned the use of the term *covenant* to refer to the eternal pact between the triune persons since Scripture is silent about such a *covenant* (although Scripture speaks of God's eternal *plan*) and since certain definitions of covenant would not apply to intra-Trinitarian relations.⁷⁵

They further note, "If *covenant* is defined solely in terms of ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties, then God's eternal plan is not covenantal, since Scripture knows of no suzerain-vassal arrangement between the persons of the Godhead."⁷⁶ However, they also provide the response that covenant theologians give to this objection without further critiquing the covenant of redemption. It seems that Gentry and Wellum affirm the substance of what covenant theologians affirm in the covenant of redemption but are hesitant about using covenant language to describe this eternal plan of God.⁷⁷

Comparison and Evaluation

The two systems seem to be in substantive agreement regarding the covenant of redemption. At issue is the designation *covenant*. The essence of the objection seems to rest on Wellum and Gentry's view that Scriptural covenants follow the suzerain-vassal pattern of the ancient Near East. But if it is acknowledged that the covenantal language for an agreement or plan within the Godhead is metaphorical (as, indeed, the language of "agreement" and "plan" are), and if ancient Near Eastern forms are derivative from God's covenant-making rather than as determinative of the kinds of covenants God may enter into, then there seems to be no necessary objection to the language of *covenant* to describe

⁷⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 77.

⁷⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 77, n. 89.

⁷⁷ In the first edition, there was wording that might have implied acceptance of the covenant of redemption: "[G]iven that Scripture speaks of these kinds of arrangements, plans, and promises under the category of 'covenant,' it is legitimate to think in terms of an intra-Trinitarian covenant." Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 1st ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 60. However, in the second edition, this is qualified: "Give that the Scripture teaches such a *divine plan*, roles, and promises, it is legitimate, covenant theology insists, to think of God's eternal plan in *covenantal* terms." Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed., 79. The first edition also included an explicit affirmation of the covenant of redemption: "No doubt, while Scripture does not specify a formal agreement within the one being of God, given the Bible's teaching on God's plan before the foundation of the world, election, and salvation, there is ample reason to think that the relations between the persons of the Godhead are legitimately described as covenantal." Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 1st ed., 656. The section in which this statement is made is dropped from the second edition. The significance of these changes between editions is not clear. In a 2022 article in the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, which Wellum edits, Progressive Covenantalist Richard Lucas quotes these passages from the first edition and concludes, "Out of all the covenants, the covenant of redemption is the one that should find the least disagreement between 1689 Federalism and progressive covenantalism." Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 123-24.

the commitments of the Father, Son, and Spirit to one another in the execution of redemption.

The Covenant of Works / The Covenant with Creation

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

Some exegetes doubt the necessity of a pre-fall covenant with Adam because God and Adam were naturally in the relationship of Creator and creature.⁷⁸ Renihan responds to this line of thinking by noting that apart from a covenant “God was not obligated to reward Adam’s obedience with anything other than the approval of justice.”⁷⁹ The covenant of works added reward for obedience and sanctions for disobedience.⁸⁰ Man’s responsibility was to “to bring creation to consummation,” which would be “a kingdom of perfect and immutable righteousness” patterned by God’s Sabbath rest.⁸¹ This involved obedience to the moral law that is universally binding and obedience to the positive law, which forbade eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁸² The promised reward was eternal life, symbolized by the tree of life (cf. Rev. 2:7; 22:2).⁸³ The sanction was death, symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁸⁴

The covenant was made with Adam, the head of the covenant, and since he broke the covenant its promises can no longer be obtained by obedience to the covenant.⁸⁵ Renihan immediately clarifies that abrogation of the covenant of works does not entail an abrogation of the moral law nor an abrogation of the creation mandate (which is part of the moral law).⁸⁶ The moral law had a role in the covenant of works, but it has other roles in God’s economy as well.⁸⁷

Renihan also states that Adam was a priest with a commission to guard the garden temple, a prophet who received and was to proclaim God’s Word, and a king who was to rule over creation by extending the garden of Eden.⁸⁸ It is not clear how central this part of Renihan’s argument is to his overall project.

⁷⁸ See John Goldingay, “What Is a Covenant?” in *Key Questions about Christian Faith: Old Testament Answers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 115; Daniel I. Block, “Covenant: A Whole Bible Perspective,” in *The Triumph of Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 64.

⁷⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 60. Even apart from a covenant, however, Adam “was obligated to obey God.” Ibid.

⁸⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 60.

⁸¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 67.

⁸² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 65.

⁸³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 66.

⁸⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 69.

⁸⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 62, 74.

⁸⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 75.

⁸⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 63.

⁸⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 63-65. Regarding Adam’s priestly office, Renihan argues, “Adam was commanded to guard and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15). This temple-task must be understood in priestly terms, not only because those who work in temples are priests, but because the words translated ‘work’ and ‘keep’ in the ESV translation of Genesis 2:15 are the same words ... God used in Numbers 3:6-10 to describe the Levites’ priestly duties in guarding the tabernacle.” Ibid., 63.

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Progressive covenantalism also affirms a covenant with Adam. They acknowledge that the language of cutting a covenant is absent from Genesis 1-2, but they speculate that this may be because cutting animals as part of making a self-maledictory oath would not be suitable in the pre-fall world.⁸⁹ However, they reject the idea that covenants themselves are not needed, and thus not present, before the Fall. The marriage covenant is a pre-Fall institution.⁹⁰ On the other hand, there are positive indications of a covenant with Adam, most notably the fact that “Jesus is the head of a new covenant community” in parallel to Adam as the covenant head of all mankind.⁹¹ In addition, Wellum argues there are several elements of a covenant present in these chapters: “not only are covenantal elements present such as the Lord/vassal relationship, the obedience-disobedience motif (Gen 2:16–17), but also God identifies himself by his covenant name: Yahweh (Gen 2:4, 5, 7, 8; Ex 3:13–15). God creates Adam as God’s image-bearer and son (Lk 3:38), which are covenantal terms and assume a covenant relationship.”⁹² Hosea 6:7, carefully exegeted, also supports a covenant with Adam.⁹³ Jeremiah 33:18-26 is also taken to support a creation covenant; the argument that this passage refers to the Noahic covenant is parried by the assertion that the Noahic covenant is a “renewal” of the creation covenant.⁹⁴

The creation covenant is significant because it is through that covenant that Adam’s sin is passed on to his progeny.⁹⁵ It is also significant because it serves as the origin of much of the typology that finds its fulfillment in the new covenant: “the rest of the seventh day in Sabbath..., which leads to ultimate salvation rest in Christ...; Eden as a temple sanctuary tied to creation, which finds its end in Christ as the new temple and the new creation; and marriage, which points to a greater reality, viz., Christ’s relationship to his people.”⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 70.

⁹⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 70.

⁹¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 70; cf. 258.

⁹² Stephne J. Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), 89; on the *image of God* indicating a covenant relationship, cf. Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 77.

⁹³ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 254-57.

⁹⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 267.

⁹⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 262.

⁹⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 262. Gentry and Wellum provide eight arguments that Eden was a temple: “1. The garden in Eden is characterized by the presence of God.... 2. When humans were cast out of Eden, *kěrûbîm* (“cherubim,” i.e., guardian creatures) were stationed east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24).... 3. In the center of the garden in Eden is the tree of life.... 4. The responsibility and task given to Adam in the garden is ‘to serve/work it and to keep it.’ ... Thus Adam is portrayed as a kind of Levite who fulfills his role or task by maintaining the priority of worship. 5. According to Genesis 2:10, ‘A river flows out of Eden to water the garden.’ This river brings fertility and life to the entire world.... 6. The river giving life to the garden divides into four as it issues from Eden. Since water flows downhill, this fact clearly indicates that Eden was an elevated place. In the ancient Near East, temples were situated on mountains because that is where the heavens meet the earth.... 7. The garden is the place of divine decrees. After placing man in the garden (Gen. 2:8, 15), God gave commands to the man there.... 8.

Progressive Covenantalists are cautious about identifying the creation covenant as a covenant of works. On the one hand, Gentry and Wellum state their agreement with the primary tenets of the covenant of works:

We affirm that Adam is created as God's image-son, a priest-king, and humanity's representative head, to rule over creation and to put everything under his feet (Gen. 1:26–31; Psalm 8). We also affirm that God, as Creator and Lord, rightly demands perfect obedience from his covenant partner, which, sadly, Adam does not render, thus bringing sin and death into the world and placing all humanity under guilt and condemnation (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:1–24; Rom. 5:12–21; Eph. 2:1–3). Furthermore, in light of the end of the Bible's story, we affirm that Adam's original situation was temporary and not permanent, which the tree of life seems to imply, as a fully obedient Adam at some point would have been granted eternal life.⁹⁷

On the other hand, they qualify this affirmation by stating, "However, it is best to view the creation covenant in more gracious terms." They explain:

The command, then, given to Adam in Genesis 2:16–17 did not create a "covenant of works" relationship subsequent to creation; instead, Adam, by virtue of his creation as God's image-son, was already in a filial relation with his Creator-covenant Lord.... [H]e did not have to merit or earn more favor to remain in his present covenant relationship. As a creature, what was required of Adam was full devotion, obedience, and covenant loyalty to his Creator and Lord. Even if the tree of life implies some kind of subsequent granting of eternal life, as Anthony Hoekema reminds us, it still "must be understood as a gift of God's grace." Adam's relationship to God, then, was "not an impersonal relationship between 'contracting parties'" in which a certain amount of merit must be earned but rather a relationship to be lived and fully enjoyed.⁹⁸

In addition, the Progressive Covenantalists think that the covenant of works framing "tends to create too sharp a disjunction between creation and the subsequent redemptive covenants." In their view, "it is better to view the covenant of creation in more continuity with later covenants, as *foundational* to them and not as their foil."⁹⁹ Finally, Gentry and Wellum argue "*all* the biblical covenants also demand an obedient, human covenant partner."¹⁰⁰ Thus, the creation covenant is not uniquely a works covenant.

The tree of knowledge in the garden in Eden was recognized as 'pleasant to the sight, good for food and to be desired to make one wise' (Gen. 3:6). These characteristics are echoed by Psalm 19, where the covenant/Torah/law is described as 'making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, and enlightening the eyes.' Referred to as the 'testimony,' the covenant/Torah was kept in the ark in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary (Ex. 25:16; Deut. 31:26). Touching the ark brought death, just as eating from the tree of knowledge did (2 Sam. 6:7; Num. 4:20)." Ibid., 88-90. Each of these descriptions of Eden is said to have a parallel with the tabernacle or temple. Wellum identifies Adam as a priest-king, but the prophetic office does not seem to be touched on. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 90.

⁹⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 675-76.

⁹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 676; cf. Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 257.

⁹⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 677.

¹⁰⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 664.

Comparison and Evaluation

The major difference between 1689 Federalists and Progressive Covenantalists is over whether the creation covenant is a covenant of works. In one sense, there is no disagreement over this matter since, as argued above, Progressive Covenantalists seem to understand *all* the covenants to be works covenants. Further the objections raised against the works label (e.g., the covenant was graciously given, the relationship was personal, etc.), are not contrary to what is typically meant by a works covenant. As noted above, the gracious giving of a covenant and gracious components within a covenant do not make a grace covenant or necessarily prevent a covenant from being a works covenant.

Positively, Progressive Covenantalists are right to emphasize all the ways in which the creation covenant sets the themes for all the succeeding covenants. However, this does not prevent it from being a works covenant since the redemptive covenants were put in place to restore what was lost in when the creation covenant was broken.

Finally, there are some areas in which these systems need refinement. For instance, what Renihan calls the creation mandate is better seen as identifying the blessings of the creation covenant.¹⁰¹ And while the temple theme has its roots in Eden, it is best not to see Eden as a temple.¹⁰²

Genesis 3:15 and the Covenant of Grace

Analysis of 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism

Renihan does not believe that the covenant of grace was established in God's curse of the serpent. Rather, he understands Genesis 3:15 to be "the beginnings of the revelation of a new Covenant of Grace."¹⁰³ Renihan probably chose this wording because, for 1689 Federalists, the new covenant *is* the covenant of grace.¹⁰⁴ Genesis 3:15 is the first revelation of this future covenant.

Gentry and Wellum speak of Genesis 3:15 as the "*protoeuangelion*," and they argue that from this promise "the Bible's entire storyline unfolds through the covenants, reaching their telos in Christ."¹⁰⁵ However, they do not see Genesis 3:15 as initiating or announcing an overall covenant of grace.¹⁰⁶

Thus, while 1689 Federalists and Progressive Covenantalists together reject the idea of an overarching covenant of grace of which the biblical covenants are administrations, they differ in how they speak of the covenant of grace. As noted above, for 1689 Federalists the

¹⁰¹ Brian C. Collins, "Kingdoms and Covenants: Evaluating David VanDrunen's Two Kingdom, Natural Law Approach to Culture," *Journal of Biblical Theology and Worldview* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2021), 44-45.

¹⁰² See Daniel I. Block, "Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence," in *From Creation to New Creation: Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 3-29.

¹⁰³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Denault, Kindle locations 1085-1149.

¹⁰⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 263.

¹⁰⁶ Oddly, Gentry and Wellum seem to place Genesis 3:15 within the creation covenant. Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 263; Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 90-91.

covenant of grace is another name for the new covenant. The Progressive Covenantalist discussion of the covenant of grace occurs in conversation with the paedobaptists. In that context Wellum says,

progressive covenantalism does not deny the theological concept of “the covenant of grace” if one merely means “the one plan of God.” However, it contends that covenant theology too quickly subsumes the biblical *covenants* under the larger category of “the covenant of grace,” which results in a failure to account for both the *continuity* of God’s plan over time *and* significant covenantal *differences*, especially in the new covenant.¹⁰⁷

Wellum also suggests avoiding the terminology *covenant of grace*. He notes that while using theological labels that are not derived from Scripture is often appropriate, when the label “leads us to ignore specific covenantal discontinuities across redemptive-history, then it is unhelpful, misleading, and illegitimate.”¹⁰⁸ Gentry and Wellum conclude, “we cannot speak of ‘the covenant’ in the way the theologians of classic covenant theology do, because this language is never found in the Bible. Instead, we can speak only of the covenants (plural), i.e., the covenant with creation, the covenant with Abraham, the Israelite covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant.”¹⁰⁹

Comparison and Evaluation

Both systems are correct to not see the establishment of an overarching covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15. The necessary elements of a covenant simply are not to be found in that passage.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, biblical evidence for an overarching covenant of grace is lacking.

¹⁰⁷ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 82; cf. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 655.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen J. Wellum, “Baptism and the Relationship between the Covenants,” in *Believer’s Baptism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 127.

¹⁰⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 234. When Gentry and Wellum give “because this language is never found in the Bible” as a reason for not speaking of “the covenant,” they are not making the simplistic argument that only biblical wording can be used to describe theological concepts. The terminology of “covenant with creation” and “Israelite covenant,” which they use, are not themselves directly biblical terms. Gentry and Wellum are instead making the more substantive observation that speaking of “the covenant” rather than “the covenants” stands *in contrast* with how the Bible *does* speak.

¹¹⁰ “It must be conceded that the formal conclusion of a covenant is lacking, which, moreover, would have been incomprehensible to Adam and Eve.” Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, trans. Annemie Godbehere et al., vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–2016), 124. Despite this concession, Vos still wants to see a covenant made in Genesis. Nonetheless, the concession is telling. The lack of biblical grounding is also seen when examining Petrus van Mastricht’s argument for the covenant of grace. Here he adduces the following biblical support: “It is elegantly spoken of in the parallelism between the first and second Adam (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22), that is, just as (1) the first Adam was the foundation of the legal covenant, so the second Adam exists as the foundation of the evangelical covenant. Just as (2) the first had his own natural seed, for whom he procured sin and death (Rom. 5:12), so the second has his own seed, for whom he procured righteousness and life (Rom. 5:15-17; Isa. 53:10-11; Ps. 22:30-31; 110:3; Heb. 2:13), which seed is the elect, those given to him by the Father (John 17:2, 9, 24), his sheep (John 10:15-17, 28-29), inasmuch as they are elect in Christ (Eph. 1:4-5), as if born from him, as the ‘Father of eternity’ (Isa. 9:6), and thus his children (Heb. 2:13). Just as (3) the violation of the natural covenant implicated the first Adam himself together with his entire seed in sin and death, so religious obedience to the covenant

This is not the same as saying the words *covenant of grace* are lacking in Scripture. Both 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism argue for the existence of a creation covenant even though the opening chapters of Genesis do not use that language. Further, 1689 Federalism argues for a covenant of redemption even though that wording is not found in Scripture. The objections to an overarching covenant of grace run deeper: the same kind of evidence that supports the covenant of redemption and the creation covenant is lacking for an overarching covenant of grace of which the biblical covenants are mere administrations. In fact, the biblical evidence runs counter to the concept. The Progressive Covenantalists are correct that the Bible regularly speaks of covenants in the plural rather than in the singular. They are also to correct in their concern that reducing the biblical covenants to administrations of a covenant of grace “results in a failure to account for both

of grace implicates the entire progeny of the elect and believing in righteousness and life (Rom. 5:18-19).” Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans., Todd M. Rester, ed., Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2023), pt. 1, bk. 5, ch. 1, XII. (4:19). Note, however, that none of these passages support a temporal covenant of grace. They either refer to the new covenant or to election (and thus the covenant of redemption). The same is the case with Witsius. See *The Economy of the Covenants* (1822; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 3.1.5 (1:283-84). Nor do van Mastricht’s arguments that Genesis 3:15 establishes a covenant of grace fare any better. “The establishment of the covenant of grace is confirmed by the Scriptures and reasons. V. Therefore it is evident through the text that in this first promise the covenant of grace is represented, and that without delay God substituted the covenant of grace for the violated covenant of works. So then: (1) there is a mention made of a new covenant, and God promises that he will erect a new covenant, either by establishing it, or by renewing it (Jer. 31:31, 35; 32:40; Heb. 8:8ff.). For (2) not without the universal and entirely hopeless destruction of the whole human race could God have chosen not to establish the covenant of grace, once the covenant of works was violated, since not inflicting death upon the violator of the covenant, or after sin giving eternal life on account of good works, or expecting perfect obedience from man dead in sins, then on account of that obedience rewarding him with eternal life, are inconsistent with his being God. Moreover, (3) out of the covenant of grace, the divine goodness, love for man-kind, mercy, long-suffering, and kindness most brilliantly shines forth (Rom. 9:23). Finally, also (4) to restored sinners there is supplied from the covenant of grace a more effective stimulus to love, thankfulness, submission, reverence, and the other duties of religion.” Mastricht, Pt. 1, bk. 5, ch. 1, V (4:12-13). A promise was given without delay, but the actual covenant was not inaugurated until the death of Christ. Those who were to be saved before the inauguration of this covenant were included as they looked forward to it by faith. In response to argument (1), The new covenant is indeed the covenant of grace, but it is not new in contrast to the Adamic covenant of works but in contrast to the Mosaic covenant of works. In response to argument (2), because God is eternal, the establishment of the new covenant, even though thousands of years in Adam’s future, sufficed to provide salvation for people of all ages. Arguments (3) and (4) are both true, but they do not demonstrate that a covenant of grace was established in Genesis 3:15. Witsius also mounts three arguments for a covenant of grace that is unified in substance: “We therefore maintain, agreeable to the sacred writings, that to all the Elect, living in any period of time, 1st, One and the same eternal life was promised. 2ndly, That Jesus Christ was held forth as the one and the same author and bestower of salvation. 3rdly, That they could not become partakers of it in any other way, but by a true and lively faith in him. If we demonstrate these three things, none can any longer doubt, but that the covenant of grace must be, as to its substance, only one from the beginning. For, if the salvation be the same, and the author of it the same, the manner of communion with him the same, it is certain the covenant itself cannot be more than one.” Witsius, 3.2.2 (1:292). All that Witsius says is true if the new covenant is the covenant of grace. For a critique of the covenant of grace concept in the best recent paedobaptist treatment of covenant theology, see Collins, “The Covenant of Grace.”

the *continuity* of God's plan over time *and* significant covenantal *differences*, especially in the new covenant."¹¹¹ Their affirmation of "the one plan of God" and 1689 Federalism's affirmation of the covenant of redemption provides for the necessary continuity while also allowing for the necessary differences among biblical covenants.

The Noahic Covenant

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

Renihan holds that while the covenant of works governed an unfallen creation, the Noahic covenant was given to govern a "cursed kingdom of common grace."¹¹² While the Flood was in a sense a recreation event, the creation that emerges is still fallen (Gen 8:21).¹¹³ Thus, the repetition of the creation mandate occurs in the context of the fall: human dominion brings "fear and dread."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, instead of being commissioned to make the world a temple, the Noahic covenant merely commissions people to faithfulness in cultural endeavors in the common kingdom.¹¹⁵

Though Renihan sees this as a common kingdom covenant, he does think that it advances God's plan of redemption because it "creates a stable platform upon which God's plan for salvation can play out."¹¹⁶

The parties of this covenant are God and "all the earth," including "all people."¹¹⁷ The covenant promises that a Flood will never again destroy mankind through a flood and that the regular order of creation will continue. Though the covenant imposes obligations, the fulfillment of the promises is not conditioned on the fulfillment of the obligations by the human parties of the covenant.¹¹⁸

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Progressive Covenantalists understand the Noahic covenant to be a renewal of the creation covenant. They argue at length that "the construction *hēqîm bērit* in Genesis 6 and 9 indicates that God is not initiating a covenant with Noah but rather is affirming to Noah and his descendants a commitment initiated previously."¹¹⁹ They also argue that since the Flood narrative is, in a sense, a recreation of the world, the Noahic covenant is a renewal of

¹¹¹ Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 82; cf. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 655.

¹¹² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 83.

¹¹³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 78.

¹¹⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 79.

¹¹⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 80.

¹¹⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 82.

¹¹⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 82.

¹¹⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 82.

¹¹⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 60; cf. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 187-95.

the creation covenant.¹²⁰ This is further confirmed by the content of the covenant, which mirrors those of the creation covenant.¹²¹ This makes Noah a “new Adam.”¹²²

In this covenant Noah has the responsibility to “fill the earth,” the same blessing Adam received in the creation covenant. However, in this covenant animals are given to humans for food and are thus fearful of humans. Human life, however, is to be protected and life for life is required if a human is killed.¹²³ God commits himself to never destroying the world again with a flood.¹²⁴ This is something that God would have been justified in doing repeatedly due to man’s sinfulness. But, “This is a covenant in which God binds himself, God obligates himself, and he will maintain the covenant in spite of human failure.”¹²⁵ One line of evidence that this covenant entirely depends upon God is fourfold identification of this covenant as “my covenant,” that is, God’s covenant.¹²⁶ Even Noah’s initial sin and nakedness (echoing Adam’s nakedness needing to be covered after his sin) does not abrogate the covenant.¹²⁷

This covenant was made between God and all creation as long as the earth exists.¹²⁸ It demonstrates that, even though subsequent covenants will narrow in scope, God’s redemptive purposes encompass the whole world.¹²⁹

Comparison and Evaluation

Both discussions of the Noahic covenant are similar and helpful. Both systems seem to recognize the Noahic covenant as a promise or unconditional covenant, even if they do not use those labels. Renihan’s proposal is distinct from Progressive Covenantalism in proposing that the Noahic covenant establishes a common kingdom. This is the same argument David VanDrunen makes in his two-kingdom theology.¹³⁰ While it is true that the Noahic covenant is full of common grace, its similarity with the creation covenant makes it unlikely that the Noahic covenant is establishing a distinct kingdom. The approach of Progressive Covenantalism is here superior in that it sees the Noahic covenant as contributing to the establishment of a single, redemptive kingdom. However, Progressive Covenantalism stumbles in treating the creation covenant and the Noahic covenant as basically the same covenant. To be sure, Progressive Covenantalists recognize that the Noahic covenant is a renewal that takes place in the context of the Fall. But they fail to reckon with the fact that the creation covenant was a covenant of works. Obtaining the blessings of the covenant depended on the obedience of Adam. The blessings of the Noahic covenant, depend on God alone. As they rightly observe, God “will maintain the covenant in

¹²⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 61.

¹²¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 62.

¹²² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 62, 263.

¹²³ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 62-64.

¹²⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 66.

¹²⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 66.

¹²⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 66.

¹²⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 66.

¹²⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 64-65.

¹²⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 264.

¹³⁰ David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 79.

spite of human failure.”¹³¹ If the Creation covenant is a works covenant and the Noahic covenant is a promise covenant, they cannot be the same covenant.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

Renihan argues that the Abrahamic covenant “established a new realm, a new kingdom,” the kingdom of Israel.¹³² For this reason the land promise is central to the Abrahamic covenant because it is fundamental to the establishment of the Israelite kingdom.¹³³ This covenant is focused on the Israelite kingdom, but it is a “subservient” covenant because it was designed to serve the universal blessing.¹³⁴ Abraham is the federal head for this covenant, and the members of the covenant are covenant members by virtue of their relationship to Abraham.¹³⁵ But the receipt of the universal blessing comes through a connection to Abraham’s seed rather than through a genealogical connection to Abraham.¹³⁶

The covenant promises were first stated in Genesis 12, but the covenant was cut in Genesis 15.¹³⁷ “Genesis 17 is expansion of the covenant,” and this expansion is crucial for Renihan’s understanding of covenant theology since it aligns the Abrahamic covenant, in part, with the covenant of works:

God's demand for loyalty in Abraham's offspring is of utmost importance.... The verb “to keep” is the same verb used in Genesis 2:15 when God placed Adam in the garden to work and keep it. In other words, this is a demand for strict obedience from Abraham and his descendants. The way in which they will keep the covenant is the circumcision of all males on the eighth day after their birth.... A sanction was put in place to guarantee the fulfillment of this commitment. Failure to keep the demand of the covenant will result in disinheritance.¹³⁸

According to Renihan, God placed himself under potential sanctions when he passed through the animals in Genesis 15. In Genesis 17 Abraham and his seed similarly come “under threat.” He argues, “if they did not obey, they would be cut off from the people just as their flesh had been cut off.”¹³⁹ This formulation creates a “tension” that Renihan acknowledges: how can the people come under sanctions when in Genesis 15 God unilaterally “guaranteed promises”? Renihan proposes that this tension is “resolved in that although the promises were nationally guaranteed, they were not individually

¹³¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 66.

¹³² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 86.

¹³³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 88.

¹³⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 88-89.

¹³⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 88.

¹³⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 88-89.

¹³⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 91.

¹³⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 91-92.

¹³⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 92.

guaranteed.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, God will certainly fulfill his promises to the nation, but disobedient individuals will not enjoy those promises.

Because of the conditional, circumcision aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, Renihan aligns the Abrahamic covenant with the Old Covenant, which also includes the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. These covenants are connected because they “are made with the same parties (Abraham's offspring) in the same kingdom-realm (Canaan) with the same promises (blessed life in Canaan) with the same precepts (positive laws) and the same penalties (disinheritance).”¹⁴¹ In this Renihan makes a tight connection between the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants:

The Abrahamic Covenant anticipates the Mosaic Covenant in that it tells the Israelites that they will be disinherited if they don't keep the covenant. Circumcision is the first among many positive laws and covenantal obligations that determine whether the Israelites enjoy the blessings that God provides. From Genesis 17 onward, they can forfeit their inheritance through disobedience. That is a prominent feature of the Mosaic Covenant, and it's important to see it begin in the Abrahamic Covenant.¹⁴²

Renihan relates the Abrahamic covenant to the new covenant typologically: “the unilateral and free gift of the earthly typical promises most clearly demonstrate the unilateral and free gift of the heavenly antitypical promises to the elect.”¹⁴³ Second, the Abrahamic covenant “promises the Mediator of the New Covenant to be born from” Abraham’s seed.¹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Renihan is careful to clarify that members of the new covenant receive the realization of the promises made to them only through the new covenant: “Their heavenly inheritance did not come to them through the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenant of circumcision. Their inheritance came through the one promised in the Abrahamic Covenant and His covenant, the New Covenant of grace.”¹⁴⁵ This insistence distinguishes the Abrahamic covenant from the covenant of grace.

Though Renihan seems to speak of a unified Abrahamic covenant with different aspects,¹⁴⁶ Richard Lucas asserts that 1689 Federalism identifies “two covenants with Abraham: the covenant of circumcision (cf. Acts 7:8) with the physical seed of Abraham which is the foundation of the Mosaic covenant and is *a* covenant of works; and the new covenant promise made with the spiritual seed of Abraham and is the unconditional covenant of grace.”¹⁴⁷ However, the reality is more complex. Evidently there is disagreement among 1689 Federalists about whether Nehemiah Coxe, a significant predecessor to their system, held to one or two Abrahamic covenants. Those who think that he did hold to two covenants

¹⁴⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 93. Notably Renihan seems to indicate that the Abrahamic covenant as already been fulfilled. Ibid., 94-95.

¹⁴¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 97.

¹⁴² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 98.

¹⁴³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 100.

¹⁴⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 100.

¹⁴⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 93-94.

¹⁴⁷ Lucas, “The Past and Future of Baptist Covenant Theology,” 134; cf. Richard P. Belcher, Jr., *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Fearn, GB: Mentor, 2020), 213-18, 221-26.

do not necessarily believe that he should be followed on that point.¹⁴⁸ Pascal Denault seeks to clarify the complexity of the 1689 view of the Abrahamic covenant:

If Abraham had two distinct posterities, unmixed, and if they were both in a relationship with God by way of covenant, these two posterities had to find themselves in two distinct covenants. Consequently, several Baptists considered that God had concluded two covenants in Abraham: the covenant of grace with Abraham and his spiritual posterity (the believers) and the covenant of circumcision with Abraham and his natural posterity (the circumcised). This does not mean the Baptists saw two formal Abrahamic covenants. The Baptists, as we have seen, considered that the covenant of grace did not manifest itself as a formal covenant before the establishing of the new covenant. They did not consider that the covenant of grace was formally established with Abraham in Genesis 12, but that it was only revealed and promised to him. They saw only one formal Abrahamic covenant: the covenant of circumcision officially established in Genesis 17, all the while clearly differentiating this covenant from the promise (the covenant of grace) that God had previously made.”¹⁴⁹

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Progressive Covenantalists understand Abraham to be a new Adam.¹⁵⁰ Just as God spoke the creation into existence from nothing, so God would do the same with the promises to Abraham (Rom. 4:16-17). “Therefore, according to the New Testament, as we read Genesis 12-25, we are to view the call of Abraham as a kind of ‘new creation.’”¹⁵¹ More, significant, the Abrahamic covenant reiterates the blessing of being fruitful and multiplying from Genesis 1:28 (Gen 12:2-3; 17:2, 6, 8; 22:16ff.; 26:3-4, 24; 28:3; 35:11-12; 47:27; 48:3-4).¹⁵² The promised land is viewed as a return to Eden, the sanctuary where God is worshipped.¹⁵³ The promise that God will make of Abraham a great nation is set against the table of nations and the rise of Babel in Genesis 10-11. In counterpoint to the nations opposed to

¹⁴⁸ Brandon Adams, “Some Disagreement with Coxe on Galatians 3:17,”

<https://contrast2.wordpress.com/2017/05/25/some-disagreement-with-coxe-on-galatians-317/> accessed 8/3/2023.

¹⁴⁹ Denault, Kindle location 1900-1908. Mark Jones and Ted van Raalte describe the seventeenth-century Baptist Philip Cary’s view of the Mosaic covenant as a mixed covenant view. They also note his dependence on Nehemiah Coxe, John Tombes, and Benjamin Keach. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 731-32. Jones and van Raalte indicate that Cary and Keach taught that Abraham and the elect Israelites were under two covenants, a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. But this is not to be read as if there were two covenants made with Abraham; rather the covenant with Abraham was mixed, containing elements of both the covenant of grace and the covenant of works. Ibid., 734, 740. If Jones and van Raalte are rightly understanding Cary and Keach (and if I am rightly understanding Jones, van Raalte, and Renihan), Renihan’s view may differ slightly from that of Cary and Keach in that I do not understand him to take the covenant of grace and covenant of works as covenants standing above the biblical covenants of which they take part. Jeffrey Johnson also indicates that Coxe, Cary, Keach, Tombes, Hercules Collins, and others held to a single Abrahamic covenant that was mixed with both legal and gospel elements. Jeffrey D. Johnson, “The Fatal Flew of Infant Baptism: The Dichotomous Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology*, ed. Richard C. Barcellos (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2014), 226-27.

¹⁵⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 94.

¹⁵¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 95.

¹⁵² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 95-96.

¹⁵³ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 97.

God, “Genesis 12 presents a political structure brought into being by the word of God, with God at the center and God as the governmental head and ruler of that community. In other words, we have the kingdom of God brought into being by means of the covenant.”¹⁵⁴ Thus Gentry and Wellum conclude from Genesis 12,

For now, in chapter 12, we note that although the context, expressions, idioms, and language are completely different from the creation narrative and the image of God in Genesis 1:26–28, the *ideas* are identical. Abram (and the nation that comes from him) constitutes an Adamic figure. God intends to establish his rule over all his creation through his relationship with Abram and his family: *kingdom through covenant*.¹⁵⁵

While promises were given in Genesis 12, the covenant was not cut until Genesis 15. Gentry and Wellum outline four stages in the giving and confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant:

1. The Giving of the Promise: the Call of Abram (Genesis 12)
2. Making the Covenant: the Promise of Descendants and Land (Genesis 15)
3. Affirming the Covenant: the Sign of Circumcision (Genesis 17)
4. Abraham’s Obedience and Confirmation of the Promises by Oath (Genesis 22)¹⁵⁶

When the covenant is cut in Genesis 15, the smoking fire pot and flaming torch that passed through the divided carcasses represent God (also symbolized by cloud/smoke and fire in Exodus) taking a self-maledictory oath: “May I become like these dead animals if I do not keep my promise(s) and my oath.”¹⁵⁷ That God alone passes through the animals “is quite remarkable and shows that the promise depends upon him and him alone.”¹⁵⁸

This sounds like an affirmation that the Abrahamic covenant was an unconditional covenant. However, in a discussion in which they reject Williamson’s proposal of two Abrahamic covenants, an unconditional covenant in chapter 15 and a conditional covenant in chapter 17, they say, “We would argue that God guarantees the faithfulness of both partners in the Abrahamic covenant, but still requires faithful obedience on the part of Abraham to bring the blessing to the nations promised in the covenant.”¹⁵⁹ Genesis 17 required Abraham to walk before God and be blameless. They argue that to walk before God is to “serve as his emissary or diplomatic representative.”¹⁶⁰ This chapter also includes the requirement of circumcision for inclusion within the Abrahamic covenant. Thus, Genesis 17 (and Gen 26:3, 5, 24) require “Abraham’s obedience” for the “fulfillment of the promises.”¹⁶¹

Thus, there is a “tension”: God has placed himself unilaterally under a self-maledictory oath which obligates him to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant, but God has also required Abraham’s obedience if the covenant is to be fulfilled—something the text indicates he did

¹⁵⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 104.

¹⁵⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 105.

¹⁵⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 98.

¹⁵⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 110-11.

¹⁵⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 111.

¹⁵⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 118.

¹⁶⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 114.

¹⁶¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 126.

not do blamelessly. They resolve this tension by arguing that God in the person of Jesus Christ will come under the self-maledictory oath of the Abrahamic covenant on the cross; he will be the obedient Son who fulfills the covenant obedience.¹⁶²

Typology is also important to the Progressive Covenantalist view of the Abrahamic Covenant. This leads Wellum to conclude that “the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant will occur in two stages: first, in the nation of Israel who will live in the Promised Land and serve as a kingdom of priests under the Mosaic covenant (Ex 19:4–6; Deut 4:5–8). Second, in Christ, Abraham’s royal, singular seed will bless all nations (Gen 17:4–6; cf. 22:17b–18; 49:8, 10; Is 9:6).¹⁶³ The “national/physical and typological elements”¹⁶⁴ are relegated to the typological stage of fulfillment, and the “spiritual elements” of the covenant are fulfilled in the church.

Progressive Covenantalists argue that both covenant theologians and dispensationalists fail to understand the typology of the Abrahamic covenant. They argue that paedobaptist covenant theologians “‘flatten’ the Abrahamic covenant by reducing it primarily to spiritual realities while neglecting its national and typological aspects. This is why the genealogical principle ... is applied in exactly the same way across the canon without transformation.”¹⁶⁵ By applying the genealogical principle from the Abrahamic covenant to the new covenant, paedobaptist covenant theologians fail to account for the fact that Abraham’s seed is “biological (e.g., Ishmael, Isaac, sons of Keturah), ... biological-special (e.g., Isaac, Israel), typological (e.g., Christ, Gal. 3:16), and, as applied to all believers, spiritual (Gal. 3:26–29).”¹⁶⁶ The genealogical principle does not apply to Abraham’s spiritual seed.¹⁶⁷

Progressive Covenantalists argue that dispensationalists fail to understand the typology of the land promise. They argue that from the beginning the land promised to Abraham was a type of something greater. First, the fact that all acknowledge that there is an “international” dimension to the Abrahamic covenant points to the fact that the land promises should not be limited but should take on an international dimension.¹⁶⁸ They conclude:

Within the Abrahamic narrative, there is a hint that the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant will occur in two stages: first, in the nation of Israel, which will live in the Promised Land and serve as a kingdom of priests under the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19:4–6; Deut. 4:5–8); second, in Christ, Abraham’s royal, singular seed who will bless all nations (Gen. 17:4–6; cf. 22:17b–18; 49:8, 10; Isa. 9:6).¹⁶⁹

Second, the Old Testament text does not give borders for Israel that are “consistent and precise” (see Gen. 15:18–21; Ex. 23:31; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:2–4). These shifting borders

¹⁶² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 126-27.

¹⁶³ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 92-93.

¹⁶⁴ To use wording from Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 265.

¹⁶⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 814.

¹⁶⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 815.

¹⁶⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 816.

¹⁶⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 828-29.

¹⁶⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 830.

are an indication that the promised land is not defined but expandable.¹⁷⁰ Third, when the Abrahamic covenant is read in light of the creation covenant it becomes clear that “*the land [is] a type or pattern of the entire creation.*”¹⁷¹

Wellum argues that in making these moves Progressive Covenantalists are *not* changing the meaning of the Old Testament texts.¹⁷² Rather the Progressive Covenantalist understanding seems to be as follows: In Genesis 15, 17, and 22 God made promises to Abraham's seed. This seed was not defined in the Old Testament, but the New Testament defines the seed of Abraham as Christ and the church in Christ. Thus, when Progressive Covenantalists read Genesis 15, 17, and 22, they read Abraham's seed as referring to Christ and the church in him *in those passages*. Likewise, the land promised in the Abrahamic covenant is not, even in the Old Testament, restricted to the land of Canaan. To read the seed and land promises in these ways is not changing the meaning of the Genesis 15, 17, and 22 any more than reading the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 as Christ changes the meaning of that OT text.

Comparison and Evaluation

Progressive Covenantalists are correct to see in the Abrahamic covenant a restoration of the covenant blessings promised in the creation covenant. Both covenants have blessing, seed, and land promises. However, Progressive Covenantalists are likely wrong to identify every covenant head as a new Adam. Adam and Christ play unique covenantal roles with respect to the human race. Every human is either in Adam or in Christ (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22). For this reason, Christ is not only called the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45), but he is also called the “second man” (1 Cor 15:47). Given the “first man Adam” and “second man”/“last Adam” contrast, it seems a problem to have third, fourth, and fifth Adams preceding Christ.

Both systems are correct to see an initial presentation of the covenant promises in Genesis 12 followed by the cutting of the covenant in Genesis 15. Both are correct to see the way in which God cut the covenant as indicating that God unilaterally “guaranteed promises” (in Renihan’s language)¹⁷³ or indicated “that the promise depends upon [God] and [God] alone” (to use Gentry and Wellum’s language)¹⁷⁴

The difficulty for both comes with Genesis 17. The 1689 Federalists see Genesis 17 as an “expansion of the covenant” that brings in a works element alongside the unilateral guarantees of Genesis 15. The Progressive Covenantalists, rightly in my view, understand Genesis 17 as “affirming the covenant” rather than altering it. Paul argued in Galatians

¹⁷⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 831.

¹⁷¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 831-32.

¹⁷² Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 215.

¹⁷³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 93.

¹⁷⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 111.

3:15-18 that the Mosaic covenant could not transform the Abrahamic covenant into a law covenant after it had been ratified as a promise covenant.¹⁷⁵

Nonetheless, everybody must reckon with the circumcision requirement as well as the statement of Genesis 17:1-2—“walk before me and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you.” The Progressive Covenantalists wrongly resolve this seeming contradiction by arguing that since Abraham did *not* walk blamelessly before God, God brought Christ under the self-maledictory oath of Genesis 15. Stephen Myers critiques this position with admirable clarity:

In Genesis 15, God declares that if He ever fails in His covenantal promises, He will be undone. That, of course, is not the same thing as Jesus’s death on the cross.... Jesus’s death on Calvary was the great fulfillment of God’s covenant promises, not a self-malediction suffered because of their failure. The divine death symbolized in Genesis 15 was not the death of Calvary; indeed, it is a death that is impossible, and that is precisely the point of God’s enacted revelation to Abram.”¹⁷⁶

The 1689 Federalists take a different path in reconciling Genesis 15 and 17, and their solution is equally problematic. Contrary to their claims, circumcision does not place those in the Abrahamic covenant under covenant sanctions, making the Abrahamic covenant a works covenant. Genesis 17:14 is not saying that the covenant promises depend, even for individuals, upon the obedience to the covenant. This passage is about who enters the covenant. It teaches that males who were uncircumcised by their parents were excluded from the Abrahamic covenant and considered Gentiles. Of course, in the Old Testament period, a Gentile could always enter the Abrahamic covenant and become an Israelite. For a man, this would involve circumcision. Thus, the circumcision requirement is not a work that those within the covenant must keep in order to avoid covenant curses (there are no covenant curses in the Abrahamic covenant) or receive the covenant blessings. Circumcision marked who was considered Abraham’s physical seed in the period before the new covenant.

In a sense, the 1689 Federalists are correct to link circumcision with the Mosaic covenant. When the Mosaic covenant came into effect, it bound Abraham’s physical seed and all who had joined them via circumcision to obedience to the Mosaic law. When the new covenant is inaugurated, all the promises of the Abrahamic covenant are mediated through that covenant. Both Abraham’s believing physical seed and believing Gentiles enter the new covenant by faith.¹⁷⁷ The new covenant is not entered by physical generation, so the sign of circumcision falls away and is replaced by baptism, the sign of the new covenant. Thus 1689 Federalism is correct to see circumcision as a link between the Abrahamic covenant

¹⁷⁵ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New London Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1961), 129; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 226; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 223; Gordon, *Promise, Law, Faith*, 132, 133.

¹⁷⁶ Stephen G. Myers, *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2021), 176.

¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Abraham’s spiritual seed before Christ also received their covenant benefits through faith, as Abraham did.

and the Mosaic covenant, but they are wrong to assume that these covenants are of the same kind.

Regarding Genesis 17:1-2 and 22:15, 18, it is important to keep the sequence of events in mind (as Paul explains in Romans 4). An unconditional covenant was cut with Abraham who received the promises by faith alone. The calls for Abraham's subsequent obedience are calls for Abraham to demonstrate his faith by his works (cf. James 2:21-23).¹⁷⁸ These statements do not make the fulfillment of the covenant conditional upon Abraham's works, as in a works covenant. Thus, the 1689 Federalists are wrong to associate the Abrahamic covenant with the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, and Progressive Covenantalists are wrong to see it as a mixed covenant.

Finally, something must be said about the physical and national aspects of the Abrahamic covenant. Richard Lucas argues that 1689 Federalists and Progressive Covenantalists agree that the Abrahamic covenant "includes both spiritual and physical/national aspects" *and* that the new covenant does not.¹⁷⁹ He distinguishes how the two systems reach this shared conclusion by noting that 1689 Federalists posit two Abrahamic covenants and a two-tier typology while the Progressive Covenantalists recognize both conditional and unconditional elements within the same covenant *and* sees the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant take place in "two stages": "first, in the nation of Israel who will live in the Promised Land and serve as a kingdom of priests under the Mosaic covenant... Second, in Christ, Abraham's royal, singular seed will bless all nations."¹⁸⁰ While there is a difference here, it is perhaps less sharp once the acceptance of a single Abrahamic covenant by many 1689 Federalists is recognized.

Both these systems err in presuming that the new covenant does not have national and physical aspects. The new covenant promises the redemption of the nation Israel (Hosea 2:14-15; Isa 54:5-8; Jer. 3:135-37; Jer. 50:4-5), a generation of Israelites who will all be taught of Yhwh and at peace (Isa. 54:13), the removal of shame from Israel and the righteousness of a coming generation of Israel on display before the nations (Isa. 54:4; 61:8-11), the reunion of Judah and Israel (37:16-22), the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Jer. 31:38-40), the reign of the Davidic Messiah (Isa. 55:3-4; Eze 34:23-24; 37:22, 24-25), the restoration of the people of Israel to the land of Israel—a land purged of abominations, fecund and safe (Hosea 2:18, 21-22; Jer. 32:37, 41, 43-44; Eze. 11:17-18; 34:25-29; 36:24, 28-30, 33-35; 37:21-22, 25). The national aspects of the new covenant are irrevocable: "Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: If this

¹⁷⁸ On Abraham in James 2, see Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 163-64.

¹⁷⁹ Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenant Theology," 133-34. "For the paedobaptists these ["spiritual and physical/national aspects"] exist within the same covenant but express themselves as an external (administration) and internal (substance) distinction of the one covenant of grace (which is functionally equated with the Abrahamic covenant *and* the new covenant)." Ibid., 133.

¹⁸⁰ Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," 92-93 as cited in Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenant Theology," 134, ellipses from Lucas.

fixed order departs from before declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever” (Jer. 31:35-36).

It simply will not do to relegate the national and earthy matters to a lesser kind of covenant. These matters are part of both the Abrahamic and the new covenants because they are precisely what is needed to restore the creation that has been cursed by the Fall. Nor is it plausible to simply read Abraham’s seed in Genesis 15, 17, and 22 as Christ and the church or to read the land promises in these chapters as directly referring to the new earth. The seed of Abraham is specified in chapter 15 as those who will be slaves for four hundred years in Egypt (Gen 15:13). This seed, which is promised the land of Canaan, is the seed that is physically circumcised (Gen 17:8-9). The borders of the land of Canaan are specified as being between the river of Egypt and the Euphrates River as well as being the land inhabited by “the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites” (Gen 15:18–21). To be sure, sometimes the phrase *seed of Abraham* is directly applied to Christ. Note that God promised Abraham that a singular seed would “possess the gate of his enemies” and that through this singular seed “all the nations of the earth” would “be blessed” (Gen 22:17-18). But within this same context Abraham’s seed is also said to be the physical descendants of Abraham: “I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore” (Gen 22:17). Thus, within Genesis 22:17-18 the singular messianic seed, Abraham’s physical seed, and the Gentiles (whom Paul includes among the “sons of Abraham” by faith, Gal 3:7) are all mentioned distinctly. Despite Wellum’s protestations that Progressive Covenantalists are *not* changing the meaning Old Testament texts,¹⁸¹ when seed and land are flattened out to smooth away reference to national Israel and the land of Canaan, such reinterpretation *is* happening.

It is much better to take a both/and approach. Everything that Progressive Covenantalism says about the seed of Abraham now encompassing all those who are in Christ and the land promises encompassing the entire new creation is true—without negating any of the specific promises made to ethnic Israel or about the land of Canaan.¹⁸²

The Mosaic Covenant

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

Renihan closely links the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Both govern the same kingdom, the kingdom of Israel.¹⁸³ The Mosaic covenant is “a large expansion on the initial command of circumcision in the Abrahamic Covenant.”¹⁸⁴ This expansion on the Abrahamic

¹⁸¹ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 215.

¹⁸² Some people are puzzled as to why dispensationalists emphasize the physical, ethnic, and land aspects of the covenants. They seem to think that such an emphasis distracts from the spiritual blessings of the covenants. But the Bible does not draw a dichotomy between these. Even if one granted that the regeneration of the soul was more significant than the resurrection of the body or the restoration to the land, Paul still says that the resurrection is essential to the gospel. The physical aspects are thus not an extra but an essential part of God’s plan of redemption.

¹⁸³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 122.

¹⁸⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 107.

covenant is necessitated by the growth of Israel into a nation that will possess a land.¹⁸⁵ With regard to individuals within the covenant, Renihan identifies the Mosaic covenant as “a covenant of works for life in the land of Canaan.”¹⁸⁶ If the people are going to enjoy the covenant blessings in the land, they must keep the laws of the covenant.¹⁸⁷ In both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, God showed Israel prior grace “before demanding obedience with a threat of disinheritance.”¹⁸⁸ In Exodus 24:3-8 the people place themselves under covenant sanctions for disobedience to the law. Thus, Renihan argues, “This is a covenant based on obedience to the law. It has an oath of obedience and sanctions directed at those who must obey. If Israel obeys the law, they will enjoy the benefits of the covenant.”¹⁸⁹ If Israel breaks God’s law “they will be cursed and even exiled.”¹⁹⁰

Nonetheless, Renihan rejects the claim that the Mosaic covenant is *the* covenant of works. While it “revives the Covenant of Works in key ways, ... it is not the same covenant. Notably, a sacrificial system was provided to deal with Israel’s sins. The forgiveness offered was “earthly forgiveness”; its forgiveness applied only to the “purification of the flesh” and life in Canaan.¹⁹¹ Further, the law, the gift of the land, and God’s dealing with Israel despite its disobedience all demonstrate God’s goodness to Israel under the Mosaic covenant.¹⁹² Finally, though individuals and even generations of Israelites came under the covenant curses, God also remembered his covenant promises and “preserved Israel long enough to bring about the seed.” Even though Israel rejected Jesus, he showed grace to Israel in his earthly ministry.¹⁹³

The 1689 Federalists also make use of the moral, civil, and ceremonial law distinction. They argue that the moral law has enduring validity for the new covenant believer, and they include the Sabbath command as part of the enduring moral law (with new covenant observance of the Sabbath occurring on Sunday).¹⁹⁴ Thus, despite labeling the Mosaic

¹⁸⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 107.

¹⁸⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 110.

¹⁸⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 105.

¹⁸⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 105.

¹⁸⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 107.

¹⁹⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 108.

¹⁹¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 114-15. Richard Lucas says that 1689 Federalists see the Mosaic covenant as a subservient covenant. Lucas, “The Past and Future of Baptist Covenant Theology,” 137. This is a logical deduction since this was John Owen’s view, and Owen’s view of the Mosaic covenant is endorsed by 1689 Federalists. Note that Owen’s discussion of the Mosaic covenant is reprinted as chapter 10 of *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage*. That said, Renihan does not use the subservient covenant language to describe his own view in *The Mystery of Christ*, and Lucas’s documentation cites Renihan’s description of John Cameron and John Owen’s views in *From Shadow to Substance*, rather than Renihan’s own view.

¹⁹² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 112-13, 115-17.

¹⁹³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 116; cf. 108.

¹⁹⁴ Renihan notes that he is will not deal with these issues in *The Mystery of Christ* (12, n. 2) and refers readers to Richard Barcellos, *Getting the Garden Right: Adam’s Work and God’s Right in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2017). In an earlier publication Barcellos wrote, “The whole Law of Moses, as it functioned under the Old Covenant, has been abolished, including the Ten Commandments. Not one jot or tittle of the Law of Moses functions as *Old Covenant Law* anymore....

covenant a works covenant, they have a high view of the moral law and its continuing value under the new covenant.

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Gentry and Wellum observe, “[I]t is the interpretation of the relation of the old covenant to the new that is the basis of all the major divisions among Christians; i.e., all denominational differences derive ultimately from different understandings of how the covenant at Sinai relates to us today.”¹⁹⁵

Though they acknowledge the labels Mosaic, Sinai, and Israelite covenant, their preferred designation is the old covenant (2 Cor. 3:14; cf. Heb. 8-9).¹⁹⁶ This title draws a contrast between this covenant and the new covenant. Nonetheless, they do not want to make this a contrast between a law covenant and the covenant of grace.¹⁹⁷ They insist that the old covenant was a grace covenant since it “is based on grace and grace motivates the keeping of the covenant, just as we find in the new covenant.”¹⁹⁸ They acknowledge that the covenant is introduced in conditional terms in Exodus 19:5-6, but they argue that the conditional language is not setting down conditions that must be met for the blessings to be obtained but rather present a condition “where the ‘then clause’ spells out what is inherent in the ‘if clause.’”¹⁹⁹ To their thinking, this removes the old covenant from being characterized as a law covenant. And yet, they also grant that “the old covenant is predominately bilateral in orientation.”²⁰⁰ Nor do they read blood ritual in Exodus 24 as indicating that Israel would come under covenant sanctions if they broke the covenant. Rather, they argue that a wedding ceremony is being typified: “Two people who are not related by blood are now, by virtue of the covenant of marriage, closer than any other kin relation.”²⁰¹

Gentry and Wellum also take the time to discuss the relationship between the covenant cut in Exodus and that cut in Deuteronomy (29:1). They argue that Deuteronomy is “a renewal and expansion of the Sinai covenant.”²⁰² They note that this renewal was necessary since Israel broke the covenant while it was being inaugurated and then died in the wilderness due to unbelief. The next generation would then enter into the covenant for all succeeding generations. The terminology *hēqîm bērit* would not have been proper, since God does not

However, to acknowledge that the Law of Moses no longer functions *as Old Covenant Law* is not to accept that it no longer functions; it simply no longer functions *as Old Covenant law*.” Later he writes, “The New Testament is very clear that the law of the Old Testament is still authoritatively binding on the Church, though not always in the same way that it was as originally given.” Richard Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology* (n.p.: Winepress, 2001), 61.

¹⁹⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 133.

¹⁹⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 136.

¹⁹⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 141.

¹⁹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 142.

¹⁹⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 142. The example they give is: “If you accept my offer to teach you, and you devote yourself to learning Hebrew and other cognate languages, you will have the satisfaction of being a Semitics scholar.” Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 267.

²⁰¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 166-67.

²⁰² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 177.

need to reaffirm the covenant; rather the people need to “affirm loyalty to Yahweh in the face of earlier faithlessness and covenant violation.”²⁰³

Progressive Covenantalism also has a specific view of the old covenant’s relation to the Christian. Gentry and Wellum observe:

Scripture views the “old covenant” as *temporary* in God’s plan; or better, it is a crucial part in God’s redemptive purposes, yet when that to which it points arrives, the covenant with Israel as a *whole covenant package* comes to its end and Christians are no longer under it as a *covenant* (Gal. 3:15–4:7).²⁰⁴

In seeing the old covenant as “a whole covenant package,” Progressive Covenantalists reject dividing the laws in this covenant into the moral, civil, and ceremonial categories.²⁰⁵ They argue that these categories are read into the text rather than found in the text. Further, “the ceremonial, civil, and moral laws are all mixed together, not only in the Judgments or ordinances [Ex 21-23] but in the Ten Words as well (the Sabbath may be properly classified as ceremonial).”²⁰⁶ The Sabbath is taken as the “sign ... of the old covenant.”²⁰⁷ Schriener argues that the “Sabbath is not mentioned in the creation narrative” nor observed by the Patriarchs; it is not a creation ordinance.²⁰⁸ In the New Testament the Sabbath is done away with as were the dietary laws and circumcision.²⁰⁹

When Progressive Covenantalists say that the old covenant was “temporary” they mean that Christians are not under the Mosaic law as their covenant law.²¹⁰ Nonetheless, while “the Mosaic law has come to an end as a whole ... the Mosaic law as a whole continues to serve as a helpful, yet indirect guide” for Christian living. It is not the moral law alone that remains relevant to the Christian but the whole law can impart wisdom for Christian living.²¹¹ Wellum explains,

²⁰³ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 177, 183. “The expression *hēqîm bērit* is never used in a situation where a partner fails and now needs to uphold a commitment made previously. No, Israel needs to renew the covenant by making a covenant to keep the earlier one.” Ibid., 183.

²⁰⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 265.

²⁰⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 266; cf. Jason C. Meyer, “The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds. (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 87. Stephen J. Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics,” in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 217.

²⁰⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 167.

²⁰⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 162; cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 159.

²⁰⁸ Schreiner, “The Sabbath Command,” 160, 161, 168.

²⁰⁹ Schreiner, “The Sabbath Command,” 176-180.

²¹⁰ Meyer, “The Mosaic Law,” 88.

²¹¹ Meyer, “The Mosaic Law,” 91. Wellum asks, “What is our standard for ethics? How do we establish moral norms?” He answers, “all of Scripture is our standard, and it alone establishes moral norms.... Although Christians are not ‘under the law’ as a covenant, it still functions as Scripture and demands our complete obedience.” Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics,” 216.

For example, if we ask, does the Levitical sacrificial instruction apply to us today?, the answer is no, if we mean as God's covenant instruction to Israel. We, as Christians, live after Christ, who by his glorious work has brought the OT sacrifices to their telos (Hebrews 5–10). Yet Leviticus as Scripture does apply to us in diverse ways—as prophecy, instruction, and wisdom—but now only in light of Christ. What is true of Leviticus is also true of the law covenant (e.g., circumcision, food laws, civil laws, and Decalogue).²¹²

Comparison and Evaluation

Progressive Covenantalism and 1689 Federalism diverge on the nature of the Mosaic covenant. Because they reject the conditional/unconditional distinction, Progressive Covenantalism rejects the characterization of the Mosaic covenant as a works covenant. At this point the 1689 Federalist position is superior. The Mosaic covenant is introduced as a conditional covenant: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex. 19:5-6).²¹³ While Gentry and Wellum argue that this is not a “reward conditional” but a “speech act conditional” in which the apodosis is inherent in the protasis,²¹⁴ this is unlikely for several reasons. First, as the 1689 Federalists correctly observe, the people place themselves under the sanctions of the covenant when the blood is sprinkled on them in the covenant cutting ceremony (Ex 24:8). This stands in contrast to the Abrahamic covenant in which God alone took upon himself the maledictory oath. It is unlikely that this blood rite simply signified marriage with no idea of sanctions given that the ceremony was performed in conjunction with the people professing, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (24:7). Second, later passages within the Mosaic covenant indicate that if Israel keeps the covenant, it will receive the covenant blessings, but if it breaks the covenant, it will receive the covenant curses (Lev 25:2-45; Dt 8:11-20; 28:1-66; cf. Lev 18:5). Third, the prophets understand the Mosaic covenant as conditional. Hosea alludes to Exodus 19:6, indicating that Israel's rejection of God has resulted in God rejecting Israel “from being a priest to me” (Hos 4:6). Earlier, God had declared through Hosea, “you are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hos 1:9). This seems to be the result of the violating the Mosaic covenant, and it stands in contrast to the enduring promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Hos

²¹² Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics,” 222.

²¹³ Gentry and Wellum would prefer to translate as T.D. Alexander does, “Now if you will truly obey me and will keep my covenant, and be for me a treasured possession out of all the peoples, for all the earth in mine, then you yourselves will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” T. D. Alexander, *Exodus*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 358; cf. Gentry and Wellum in *Kingdom through Covenant*, 351, 356. This translation differs from the ESV, and all other major Bible translations, by delaying the apodosis to verse 6, “then you yourselves will be for me a kingdom of priests” whereas the other translations begin the apodosis in verse 5, “then you shall be My own possession” (NASB). I find the traditional translation more natural. The phrase, “be for me a treasured possession” seems to be an action of God toward Israel rather than an action of Israel toward God. The alternative translation seems to put too much weight on the idea that כִּי at the beginning of verse 6 is serving as a discourse marker. This seems to be an instance of discourse analysis placing undue emphasis on formal features of the text at the expense of the meaning of the phrases involved.

²¹⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 351.

1:10-11). Jeremiah describes the Mosaic covenant in conditional terms (Jer 11:1-5), and he implies that a new covenant is needed because Israel broke the Mosaic covenant (Jer 31:31-32). Fourth, the new covenant restatement of Exodus 19:5-6 drops the conditionals: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). It is beside the point to note that the Mosaic covenant was preceded by God’s gracious redemption of the nation and given graciously. As noted already, these facts can both be true of works covenants.

Nonetheless, while the 1689 Federalists are correct that the Mosaic covenant is a works covenant, they are wrong to limit this to the typical realm of Israel’s life in the land.²¹⁵ It is best to understand Leviticus 18:5 as promising eternal life on condition of obedience. Leviticus 18 stands at a major hinge in the book of Leviticus. The content shifts from the cultic matters which predominated in the first part of the book, climaxing in the Day of Atonement, to focus on holiness of life.²¹⁶ Thus, Leviticus 18:5 comes at a strategic point in the book. What is more, Leviticus 18 alludes strongly to Genesis 2-3. Kiuchi observes, (1) “The laws in vv. 6-23 mandate the making of strict distinctions between man and woman, and between humans and beasts, thus highlighting the created order.”²¹⁷ (2) The repeated concern with “uncover[ing] nakedness” (mentioned in every verse in Lev. 18:6-19) alludes back to the nakedness that had to be covered after the Fall (Gen. 3:7, 9, 21; cf. 2:25).²¹⁸ (3) In Leviticus 18:24 Yhwh refers to “the nations I am driving out [שְׁלֹחַ] before you,” which alludes to Genesis 3:24, where Yhwh “drove out [שְׁלֹחַ] the man” from the garden of Eden to keep him from the tree of life.²¹⁹ (4) With these resonances from Genesis 2 and 3 resounding in Leviticus 18, it is difficult to read “if a person does them, he shall live by them” and not hear an allusion back to Genesis 2:17 where the inverse is stated: “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”²²⁰ Just as death in Genesis 2:17 is understood comprehensively of death in the outer man, death in the inner man, and eternal death, so life in Leviticus 18:5 should be understood comprehensively to include not only life in the land but also eternal life. Kiuchi observes, “The postulate is just like that in Gen. 2-3: if the first man observes God’s commandment, he lives; if not he certainly dies.”²²¹

²¹⁵ There is a typology in the Old Testament in which life in the land anticipates eternal life. But life in the land is not a mere symbol—a symbol that is done away with once the reality arrives. Rather, life in the land was the first stage of a promise that will receive fuller fulfillment in the future when the land is transformed as part of the new creation and the bodies of the righteous are transformed in the resurrection. Leviticus 18:5 thus entailed not only the type but the anti-type.

²¹⁶ Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 226; Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12: A Redemptive-Historical Reassessment,” *Themelios* 45, no. 2 (2020): 246.

²¹⁷ Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 330.

²¹⁸ Kiuchi, 331.

²¹⁹ Kiuchi, 330-31.

²²⁰ Kiuchi, 330.

²²¹ Kiuchi, 332. To be clear, Kiuchi is not arguing that people would be saved by their works under the Mosaic covenant: “The hard fact that all humanity dies implies we fall short of the complete observance of the Lord’s commandments.” Ibid.

The Old Testament usage of *live* [חַיָּה] also supports understanding *live* in Leviticus 18:5 as including eternal life. The very first use of word *live* [חַיָּה] in Scripture refers to eternal life: “lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). The concept of obeying so that one may live is picked up in Deuteronomy, and it certainly includes a promise of life in the land conditioned on obedience (“And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land,” Dt 4:1; “that you may live long in the land that you shall possess,” Dt 5:33; cf. Dt 6:24). But that the life in view goes beyond Israel’s present life in the land becomes clear from Deuteronomy 30:14-20, which serves as a bookend to Deuteronomy 4:1. In the preceding context God presented Israel with the blessings for obedience to the Mosaic covenant and the curses for disobedience (Dt 28). God then declared, “But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (Dt. 29:4). Israel will come under the covenant curses (Dt 30:1). However, God promised that afterward he would bring them into what later prophets term the new covenant, and he will transform their hearts so that they can obey his law (Dt. 30:2-10). In verses 11-14 the focus returns to the time of Moses. He told Israel that this kind of obedience from the heart, though not a provision of the Mosaic covenant (cf. Dt. 29:4), is something that can be received by calling out to God from the heart (Dt. 30:11-14; cf. Rom. 10:6-9).²²² Thus, it is in this context of preaching the gospel of the new covenant that Moses said, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Dt. 30:15). In this context, it is unlikely that life refers merely to physical prosperity in the land. To be sure, the land is present in this text: “then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land [אֶרֶץ]” (Dt. 30:16). But note how this wording recalls Genesis 1:28, with its statement of *blessing* regarding a promise to *multiply* offspring that will fill the *earth* [אֶרֶץ]. This allusion hints that the eschatological restoration of these creation covenant promises is in view—and thus *eternal life* in the land is in view. This is confirmed by the statement, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse” (Dt. 30:19), which alludes to Genesis 2 and 3, where a tree of life and a tree that brought death were set before Adam. When he ate of the tree that brought death, the blessings of the creation covenant were turned into curses. Finally, this section closes with the statement “for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to give them” (Dt 30:20). Notably, the passage highlights that Yhwh promised to “give *them*,” that is the patriarchs, the land. Since the patriarchs did not receive the land during their lifetime, this land promise will be fulfilled after their resurrection. If the Israelites to whom Moses is speaking are also to dwell in the same land, and if tied to dwelling in the land is the fact that Yhwh “is your life and length of days,” eternal life in the land is in view for believing Israelites as well.

²²² Note that this investigation of Leviticus 18:5 brought us to Deuteronomy 30:11-14. This confirms that Paul, in bringing these passages together in Romans 10:5-9, was not pulling texts randomly from the Old Testament. He understood the logic of the Pentateuch. In addition, Paul in quoting Moses to contrast righteousness based on the law and righteousness based on faith was not indicating that Moses contradicted himself. Rather he was contrasting what Moses said about the old covenant and what Moses said about the promises of the new covenant.

Jews prior to Christ understood the Leviticus 18:5 to refer to eternal life,²²³ but most importantly, Jesus understood it to refer to eternal life. When the rich young man came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher what good deed must I do to have eternal life,” Jesus responded in terms of Leviticus 18:5, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:16-17). Paul likewise understood Leviticus 18:5 to promise eternal life on the basis of obedience (Gal 3:12; Rom 10:5).²²⁴

This understanding is also theologically necessary. Jesus was born under the Mosaic covenant, and it was this covenant of works that he kept in our place in order for us to attain to eternal life (Gal 4:4-5).

Some object to this reading on the grounds that Leviticus 18:2-4 indicates that God was already Israel’s God and that God had already redeemed Israel. However, the typical redemption of Israel from Egypt was not a redemption unto eternal life. The Israelites under the Mosaic covenant were still in need of that redemption. Others object to the claim that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works out of fear that it teaches that people under the Mosaic covenant could be saved by works. To the contrary, Moses was abundantly clear that no sinner could actually gain salvation by works (Dt. 29:4; 30:6, 11-14). Only Christ fulfilled the Mosaic covenant by obeying its law perfectly. Still others object to the claim that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works on the grounds that it was graciously given and that it ministered grace. There is no question that the Mosaic covenant was graciously given. Even when Paul was exposing the eternal lostness of unelect Israelites, he extolled the benefits they enjoyed in the Mosaic covenant (Rom 3:1-3; 9:4). However, it is important to note that the grace mediated by the Mosaic covenant came as it pointed those under that covenant to the new covenant. For instance, in Deuteronomy 30 Moses preached the gospel to Israel, and that gospel is located with the covenant documents of the Mosaic covenant. But that gospel message pointed Israel forward to the promises of the new covenant. Likewise, the sacrificial system under the Mosaic covenant provided atonement for Israel. However, it was not the sacrifices themselves that provided atonement. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins (Heb. 10:4), and the prophets repeatedly warned Israel that offering sacrifices apart from repentant hearts worked no spiritual good. The sacrificial system ministered grace under the Mosaic covenant only as it pointed to the new covenant sacrifice of Christ and only as Israelites placed their faith in the new covenant promises to come. The law itself was a gracious gift of God, for it revealed God himself to the people. But to a sinful people, and within the context of a covenant of works, it ministered condemnation to the people. Yet even this condemnation was graciously intended to drive sinners to Christ (Rom 7:7-13; 2 Cor 3:6-7).

²²³ Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 63.

²²⁴ “But if, as most think, we are to take, in this place the words ‘*live in them*’ as meaning ‘eternal life to be got by them,’ the scope of the passage is, that so excellent are God’s laws, and every special, minute detail of these laws, *that if a man were to keep these always and perfectly*, this keeping would be eternal life to him. And the quotations in Rom. x. 5, and Gal. iii. 12, would seem to determine this to be the true and only sense here.” Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (1861; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1966), 329-30.

Regarding the categories of moral, ceremonial, and civil law, the Progressive Covenantalists have the better case. While these categories have some heuristic, after-the-fact value in sorting which commands are more directly applicable to the Christian and which have more indirect application, the Progressive Covenantalists are correct to emphasize that the Mosaic law as a unit has passed away because the Mosaic covenant has passed away. They are also correct to note that all of the Mosaic covenant is Scripture to the Christian, and thus applicable to his life—even though care must be taken in how the application is made since the Christian is under a different covenant. That said, the Progressive Covenantalists do seem to underplay the Sabbath’s creational foundations.

The Davidic Covenant

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

The Davidic covenant, like the Abrahamic and Mosaic, governs the kingdom of Israel.²²⁵ This covenant was anticipated by the Abrahamic covenant’s promise of kings from Abraham (Gen 17:6, 6, 16) and the Mosaic covenant’s provision of laws that governed kingship.²²⁶ Furthermore, this covenant provided a federal head for the Mosaic covenant, “the Davidic king.”²²⁷ It promised that the Davidic dynasty would be “established and made sure,” that Israel would receive rest, and that God would be present among his people in the temple.²²⁸ However, this covenant also contains sanctions. If the king did not obey God’s law in the Mosaic covenant, the disobedient king would suffer judgment even as the promises to the Davidic line stand.²²⁹ Nonetheless, the king’s function as federal head of the Mosaic covenant meant a disobedient king put the whole nation at risk of suffering the covenant curses. Indeed, with the reign of Manasseh, the covenant curse of exile became fixed.²³⁰ Nonetheless, the hope of the Messiah, in this covenant guaranteed to come from the Davidic line, was not threatened by the disobedience of individual kings.²³¹

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

The Davidic covenant is the means by which the Abrahamic covenant’s promise of blessing to the nations will be fulfilled.²³² The land promise of the Abrahamic covenant will also be fulfilled through the Davidic covenant: God will “bring rest to his people and give them a place” (Gen 15:18-21; Dt 11:24; 1 Kgs 4:20-21).²³³ The Davidic covenant is also closely linked to the Mosaic covenant: “the king of Israel was to be the administrator of the Israelite covenant.”²³⁴

²²⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 123.

²²⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 123, 127.

²²⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 131. “The Mosaic Covenant had a Mediator, Moses, but not a federal head.” Ibid.

²²⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 127-28.

²²⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 133.

²³⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 132-33.

²³¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 139-140.

²³² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 205.

²³³ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 205.

²³⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 204.

The covenant contains three promises that would be fulfilled for and by David himself: “(1) a great name, (2) a firm place for Israel as the people of God, and (3) rest for David from his enemies.”²³⁵ The covenant itself has two primary promises that will be fulfilled for David’s seed: the eternal establishment of David’s house and the promise that God will be a Father to the Davidic king and the Davidic king will be his son.²³⁶ The sonship promise links the Davidic covenant to the preceding covenants, in which the sonship theme is prominent.²³⁷

Gentry and Wellum also emphasize that the Davidic covenant contains both unconditional *and* conditional elements.²³⁸ They argue that 2 Samuel 7:14-15 indicate that the covenant needs a “faithful son” if it is to be fulfilled.²³⁹ They also argue that Psalm 132:10 and 2 Chronicles 6:42 (when read in light of Psalm 132) teach that Yhwh will keep his covenant promises to David based on David’s faithfulness (with the faithful *David* being understood as Christ).²⁴⁰ Similarly, they argue that the “sure mercies of David” (Isa 55:3; KJV) refer to David’s covenant faithfulness (with *David* again being understood as Christ).²⁴¹ Their point is that, despite the unconditional statements in the Davidic covenant, these conditional statements indicate that the covenant will not be fulfilled apart from a faithful Davidic king—and Jesus is that king.

Comparison and Evaluation

Both systems agree that the Davidic covenant contains certain promises regarding the ultimate Davidic King which will infallibly come to pass along with other promises that were conditioned upon the obedience of the Davidic ruler. At first glance it might seem as though Gentry and Wellum will identify part of the Davidic Covenant as conditional and part as unconditional. But they, in fact, are consistent in seeing the Davidic covenant as essentially a conditional covenant in which the Davidic Son meets the conditions.²⁴² Their understanding of Isaiah 55:3 provides exegetical support for this conclusion. However, this interpretation suffers from several flaws. First, the “sure mercies of David” is in apposition to “an everlasting covenant. It makes the most sense, therefore, for *mercies* to refer to the promises of the covenant rather than to the faithful actions of Christ.²⁴³ Second, the description of David in the following verse is in the past tense (the verb is a non-initial perfect), which better fits a reference to the historical David rather than to “David,” the Messiah. But most importantly, the reference to “steadfast, sure love” seems to be an allusion to 2 Samuel 7:15-16 where God says, “but my *steadfast love* will not depart from him.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made *sure* forever before me” (cf. Ps. 89:1-2, 14, 28, 33, 37, 49). Clearly, the steadfast love in view is *God’s*. That said, in 2

²³⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 192.

²³⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 268.

²³⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 268.

²³⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 192.

²³⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 192.

²⁴⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 198-99.

²⁴¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 200-2.

²⁴² Gentry and Wellum would not call it a conditional covenant, but as argued above, this is essentially their position.

²⁴³ Gentry and Wellum appeal to the fact that the Servant himself is identified with the covenant in Isaiah 42:5; 49:8. Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 202. But this is not precisely the same situation.

Samuel 7 itself, alongside the unconditional promises, God says he will discipline disobedient Davidic kings. Other passages seem to state the Davidic covenant conditionally: “If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel” (1 Kings 2:4, cf. Psalm 132:12). This tension is clarified in Psalm 89:30-37:

If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my rules,
if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with stripes,
but I will not remove from him my steadfast love
or be false to my faithfulness.
I will not violate my covenant
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.
Once for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.
His offspring shall endure forever,
his throne as long as the sun before me.
Like the moon it shall be established forever,
a faithful witness in the skies.

This passage makes clear that the Davidic covenant is fundamentally an unconditional covenant—with one conditional element. Disobedient kings will come under discipline, including the possibility of exile. This conditional element is likely due to the fact that until the coming of Christ, the Davidic covenant ran concurrently with the Mosaic covenant. Thus, the Lord is clarifying that the Davidic covenant will not shield disobedient Davidic kings from the covenant curses of the Mosaic covenant.

Both systems also link the Davidic and new covenants closely together. Gentry and Wellum call the Davidic king the “administrator of the Israelite covenant,”²⁴⁴ and Renihan says the Davidic king is the federal head for the Mosaic covenant, meaning that his failure brings Israel under the covenant curses. However, this seems to be too strong a statement. The narrative of Kings seems to present the kings as leading the people into sin, but the nation as a whole bears responsibility for exile. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Davidic kingship continues for eternity, long after the Mosaic covenant has passed away.

The Old Covenant

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

For 1689 Federalism, the Old Covenant encompasses the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. Renihan is worth quoting at length:

With the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants put together we can clearly see the kingdom of Israel in full. It is what it is because of these covenants by which it was established and through which it was governed. They all have the same parties, precepts,

²⁴⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 204.

promises, and penalties. They are all directed to Abraham's offspring in the land of Canaan. Abraham's federal headship continues to define the people in view in this kingdom. Abraham's inheritance of Canaan continues to determine the boundaries of the kingdom. The Mosaic Covenant simply expands on the obligations of the people in that land. And the Davidic Covenant focuses the kingdom into one person through whom obedience must be rendered, and through whom blessings and curses will fall on the nation....

This is why the Old Covenant includes the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants. Moses controls Abraham and David. The Mosaic Covenant is the most prominent covenant in the Old Testament because it controls whether you enjoy Abraham's covenant and it stands over the Davidic kings who must copy and keep the law. It is impossible to refer only to the Mosaic Covenant when speaking of the Old Covenant because it unavoidably brings along with it the other two covenants that it controls.²⁴⁵

Comparison and Evaluation

For 1689 Federalists the old covenant refers to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. Progressive Covenantalists, on the other hand, apply the label *old covenant* to the Mosaic covenant.²⁴⁶ On this point the Progressive Covenantalists are correct. The one biblical occurrence of “old covenant” (2 Cor. 3:14) most likely refers to the Mosaic covenant, since in the context the Mosaic covenant is contrasted with the new covenant. Furthermore, it is simply incorrect to say that these three covenants “all have the same parties, precepts, promises, and penalties.”²⁴⁷ To be sure, the prominent themes of land, seed, and blessing are found in all three covenants, but the way these covenants promises are spelled out are unique to the three covenants (even as each builds on its predecessor). Further, the penalties are certainly not the same. The Mosaic covenant was a works covenant that was brought in alongside the others and which has passed away with the coming of the new covenant (Gal 3:19, 23-25; Rom 5:20).²⁴⁸ The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are promise covenants, the promises of which the Gentiles have now been made party to (Eph. 2:12-13).

The New Covenant

Analysis of 1689 Federalism

None of the covenants that comprise the old covenant promised a new heart or regeneration to covenant members, but they did threaten sanctions for disobedience. The old covenant was “designed to remind its people of their sin on a repetitive basis.”²⁴⁹ By contrast, the new covenant promised to write God's law on the heart of every covenant member and to bring about new birth through the Spirit so that every member of the new covenant knows the Lord savingly.²⁵⁰ The old covenant sacrifices could only forgive sins on the typical level.²⁵¹

²⁴⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 134.

²⁴⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 136.

²⁴⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 134.

²⁴⁸ Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 267; Moo, *Galatians*, 225; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 373; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018), 300.

²⁴⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 141-42; cf. *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁵⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 164-66.

²⁵¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 162.

By contrast the new covenant promised the forgiveness of sins and justification—not merely on the typical level but in reality. It also promised the internalization of the law.²⁵² Furthermore, the old covenant was made with Israel while the new covenant was promised to include Gentiles (Micah 4:1-4; Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1-10; 56:6-8; Haggai 2:6-9).²⁵³ In sum, the new covenant brought to fulfillment all that the Old Covenant pointed to.²⁵⁴

Faith is the condition for entering into the covenant. However, there are no conditions that require meritorious works of the covenant members.²⁵⁵ The New Covenant is a covenant of works, but Jesus, the federal head of the new covenant, has already fulfilled the conditions and offers the blessings of the covenant by grace.²⁵⁶

In Renihan's system covenant membership is determined by the person's relation to the head of the covenant. Membership in the new covenant is determined by union to Christ, the federal head of the new covenant.²⁵⁷ Thus every member of the new covenant is regenerate. As a result, the members of the visible church, if possible, should be regenerate as well. Those within the church who cast doubt on their profession should come under church discipline.²⁵⁸ Those who apostatize show themselves to have not been part of the new covenant. However, by their membership in the church, they have sinned against the covenant and bear greater guilt.²⁵⁹ This view of covenant and church membership affects Renihan's view of baptism. Since a person enters the new covenant and the kingdom of Christ by regeneration, "the symbol of one's entrance into the covenant" and "the symbol of regeneration and union with Christ" is to be applied only to those who profess faith in Christ (and thus profess to have been regenerated).²⁶⁰

Renihan has a complex view of how the church relates to Israel. On the one hand, the church "the antitype of Israel, and therefore its successor."²⁶¹ On the other hand, Renihan finds the invisible church reaches back to include all the saved from immediately after the Fall.²⁶² Renihan explains, "the church may have begun outwardly after the death of Christ, above all at Pentecost. But inwardly, its people began long before. The church existed in Israel. The church emerged out of Israel. As the womb of Christ, Israel was the womb of the church."²⁶³ Israel "according to the flesh" served the purpose of bringing about the birth of the Messiah. But after the Messiah's birth "the Israel of God" is the church, and the salvation of "all Israel" is the salvation of all the elect Jews *and Gentiles*.²⁶⁴

²⁵² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 142, 161-62.

²⁵³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 141-43.

²⁵⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 142.

²⁵⁵ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 167-68, n. 4.

²⁵⁶ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 171, 174.

²⁵⁷ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 177.

²⁵⁸ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 200.

²⁵⁹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 201-2.

²⁶⁰ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 205.

²⁶¹ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 180.

²⁶² Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 190-91.

²⁶³ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 192.

²⁶⁴ Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ*, 190-91.

Analysis of Progressive Covenantalism

Progressive Covenantalists understand all of the previous covenants to “find their telos (terminus) and fulfillment in Christ, the mediator of the new covenant.”²⁶⁵ Thus, the Christian is not “under the previous covenants as covenants” even as they remain valuable Scripture to him.²⁶⁶

Progressive Covenantalists affirm that the Old Testament presents that new covenant “as both national (Jer. 31:36–40; 33:6–16; Ezek. 36:24–38; 37:11–28) and international (Jer. 33:9; Ezek. 36:36; 37:28).”²⁶⁷ They note that Jeremiah says Yhwh will make the new covenant “with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31) and that this refers to the same nation with which God covenanted at Sinai. However, they also see Old Testament evidence that the Gentiles will be party to this covenant as well (Jer. 16:14–18).²⁶⁸ In addition, they note that the New Testament, in recounting Jesus’s institution of the Lord’s Supper with the “*his disciples*,” clearly indicates that the new covenant was not made with all Israel but was instead “a covenant with those *who are his followers*, regardless of ethnicity—Jew first, and later on, also non-Jew.”²⁶⁹ They handle the Old Testament’s Israel-centric presentation of the new covenant by claiming that these are promises made to “an ‘ideal Israel,’ i.e., a community directly tied to the servant of the Lord” (Isa 65:17; 66:22).²⁷⁰ They grant that the Old Testament says the new covenant will be made “with the ‘house of Israel and Judah’ (Jer. 31:31),” and they explain the inclusion of the Gentiles through typology. Jesus Christ is “the true Israel” and the church is brought into the promises of the new covenant “*through* the work of Jesus Christ.”²⁷¹ Gentry and Wellum also appeal to the olive branch imagery in Romans 11. They understand the olive tree to represent Israel, and they claim that the believing Gentiles have been grafted into Israel why unbelieving ethnic Israelites have been removed from Israel.²⁷² They reject the interpretation of Romans 11 in which ethnic Israel is redeemed and restored to the land *en masse* at the end of the age. Instead, they see ethnic Israelites as being grafted back into the olive tree of Israel at the same time as the Gentiles.²⁷³ They also appeal to Ephesians 2:15, claiming that through Jesus Christ the church can be identified as a “new *Adam*.”²⁷⁴

Most significant for debates between Baptists and paedobaptists, Progressive Covenantalists, Progressive Covenantalists understand the church as the new covenant people of God to be “a *regenerate* community (i.e., constituted by believers born of the Spirit and forgiven of their sin)” (Isa 54:13; Jer 31:33–34) By contrast Old Testament Israel was “a *mixed* community (i.e., constituted by believers and unbelievers).”²⁷⁵ In fact, it was precisely

²⁶⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 269.

²⁶⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 269, 270.

²⁶⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 289.

²⁶⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 225, cf. *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁶⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 226.

²⁷⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 269.

²⁷¹ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 269–70.

²⁷² Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 227.

²⁷³ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 229.

²⁷⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 228.

²⁷⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 270; cf. *Ibid.*, 214–15.

to address the problem of unregenerate hearts within Israel that the new covenant was given (Jer 31:32-34; cf. 2 Cor 3:3).²⁷⁶

Thus far, 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism are agreed. However, despite affirming that there is only one people of God, Progressive Covenantalists hold that the “church is *new* in a redemptive-historical sense precisely because it is the community of the *new* covenant.”²⁷⁷ Thus 1689 Federalism places the accent on continuity while Progressive Covenantalism on discontinuity. Richard Lucas briefly sums up a few further effects of this difference:

In emphasizing the covenantal distinction and Christological connection between God’s people in the old covenant and the new covenant, Renihan’s statement that Old Testament saints’ “experience of salvation was the same as ours” needs a little more nuancing according to progressive covenantalism. Even in some areas of soteriology, we must not read new covenant realities back into the Old Testament, the main example being the indwelling (to be distinguished from regeneration) of the Holy Spirit under the old covenant.²⁷⁸

Having articulated these differences Lucas then reaffirms the following commonalities: “both Baptist covenantal theologies agree that “there is one plan of salvation, rooted in eternity past among the triune persons, unfolded in time through the biblical covenants, and culminated in Christ,” but saving grace is not administered through the old covenant itself, but is found exclusively in the new covenant.”²⁷⁹

Comparison and Evaluation

The 1689 Federalists are precisely right in their contrast of the new covenant with the Mosaic covenant.²⁸⁰ They are also correct in describing the promises of the new covenant and in describing faith as the condition to enter the new covenant, which is otherwise an unconditional covenant. They are also correct to link membership in the new covenant with union with Christ—thus ensuring that new covenant membership is regenerate. However, 1689 Federalism is wrong to understand the new covenant as a covenant of works, the conditions of which were fulfilled by Christ. The new covenant was not inaugurated until

²⁷⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, 230-31.

²⁷⁷ Wellum, “Progressive Covenantalism,” 75; cf. Lucas, “The Past and Future of Baptist Covenant Theology,” 131-32.

²⁷⁸ Lucas, “The Past and Future of Baptist Covenant Theology,” 133. Lucas does not footnote the source for his Renihan quotation, but he provides the following references in support of his description of Progressive Covenantalism: “Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed., 142n91. For a fuller discussion of these salvation *experiential* differences between old covenant and new covenant believers, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, “Rejoinder to Review of *Kingdom Through Covenant*” WTJ 76:2 (Fall 2014): 451-452; John D. Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 157n60; and Wellum, “A Progressive Covenantalism Response,” 206. To better understand the redemptive-historical differences in the Spirit’s role, see James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2006).” Ibid., 158, n. 98.

²⁷⁹ Lucas, “The Past and Future of Baptist Covenant Theology,” 133.

²⁸⁰ Here I am somewhat correcting the 1689 position by limiting the old covenant to the Mosaic covenant.

the death of Christ. The covenant of works which Jesus fulfilled was the Mosaic covenant (Gal 4:4).

Though the Progressive Covenantalist presentation of the new covenant does not cover all the same ground as Renihan's presentation, it seems that the positions are in basic agreement. Both emphasize the importance of union with Christ and that all those who are party to the new covenant are regenerate.

One difference between the two systems lies in the newness of the church. The 1689 Federalists understand the church to have begun inwardly in the Old Testament and outwardly at Pentecost. By contrast, the Progressive Covenantalists, rightly recognize that the church is something new in God's plan of redemptive history, something that comes into being when the new covenant is inaugurated—even as they affirm the oneness of the people of God. The Progressive Covenantalists also have a better sense of redemptive historical progress with relation to covenantal blessings in the move from the Old Testament to the time of the new covenant.

Progressive Covenantalism is correct to recognize that while the new covenant is promised to "the house of Israel and the house of Judah," the Gentile believers are brought into this covenant (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb. 8:6-13; 9:13-15; 12:22-24). However, both systems err in their identification of the church as "the Israel of God" or as "ideal Israel," as the following survey of the key passages used to argue for this view indicates.

Galatians 6:16 is best translated "*And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy also upon the Israel of God.*"²⁸¹ Doug Moo notes that there is a symmetry in this verse that suggests that two distinct groups with two distinct blessings are in view:²⁸²

εἰρήνη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς
καὶ
ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ

Note also the unusual order of "peace" followed by mercy.²⁸³ If the first group, "those who follow this standard," refer to redeemed Jews and Gentiles who receive God's peace, the second group still stands in need of God's mercy. Thus, the reference is to yet unredeemed Israel. The genitive "of God" indicates that the elect remnant of Israel is in view. Paul is

²⁸¹ S. Lewis Johnson, "Paul and 'The Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer, eds. (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 193.

²⁸² Moo, *Galatians*, 402. However, for other reasons Moo does not actually adopt the view articulated here. Some might object to Moo's claim of symmetry on the grounds that the last phrase is significantly longer than the first, but that is only because "τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ" is a longer object of the preposition than αὐτοὺς." Otherwise, the phrases are exactly parallel, other than the addition of καὶ to the second phrase.

²⁸³ Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1920), 357; Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 85-86; cf. Moo, *Galatians*, 402.

expressing his prayer for mercy to be shown to this remnant that they might be saved.²⁸⁴ The rationale for this reading is clear. Paul began Galatians by pronouncing damnation on those who preached another gospel, a Judaizing gospel. Now Paul closes the letter by expressing his hope that God will show mercy to Israel.²⁸⁵ Finally, G. K. Beale persuasively argues that Isaiah 54:10 provides the OT background to Galatians 6:16. Though he argues that “Israel of God” refers to the church, Isaiah 54:10 is about the salvific restoration of the nation of Israel in connection with the day of the Lord. The peace referred to in Isaiah 54:10 is the covenant of peace, or new covenant. This covenant, as may be inferred from the inclusion of the Gentiles in Isaiah 54, includes Gentile believers. The mercy, however, refers specifically to the restoration of the nation Israel (in distinction from Gentiles, who are mentioned within the context).²⁸⁶

Some understand Romans 2:25-29 to identify Christians, Jew and Gentile, as inwardly Jewish.²⁸⁷ This view does not fit the context. Prior to 2:25-29 Paul was dealing with ethnic Jews who boasted in the name “Jew” (2:17) while also breaking the law. Following 2:25-29, he discusses the advantage of being Jewish and of being circumcised, noting that the unfaithfulness of some Jews did not undermine the great benefits given to the Jewish people (3:1-8). Within this context, Romans 2:25-29 presents the thesis that circumcision is only valuable in averting the God’s wrath if the circumcised person obeyed the Mosaic law.²⁸⁸ Obeying the law involves the perfect obedience it required for the obtaining of salvation (cf. Gal. 5:2-4).²⁸⁹ Circumcised Jews who broke the law have their circumcision become uncircumcision, meaning that they have become, as it were Gentiles.²⁹⁰ Though Paul does not quote it here, this claim has good justification in Hosea 1:9 where God declared rebellious Israel, “Not My People.”

²⁸⁴ Burton, 358; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 275; Timothy George, *Galatians*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1994), 440.

²⁸⁵ Burton, 358; Allison, 85.

²⁸⁶ Note also that identifying the church as Israel contradicts the main thrust of Paul’s argument in Galatians, and thus cannot be correct. Notably, the Judaizers held that there should be no distinctions between Jewish and Gentile Christians—Gentiles, they argued, must become Jews by obeying the Mosaic law. Beale’s claim that Isaiah 54 teaches that the Gentiles must “identity with Israel” is ironically close to message of Paul’s opponents—except that Beale has spiritualized Israel. G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6:16b,” *Biblica* 80 (1999): 217, n. 36. By contrast, Paul’s argument in Galatians is that Gentile Christians do not need to become Jews. Thus, it would be out of character with the book for Paul to close by identifying Gentile Christians as Israel. “His point has been to deflate the importance of Jewish identity, so why would he suddenly refer to the church” as Israel. Allison, 86; cf. Robert L. Saucy, “Israel and the Church: A Case for Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 247.

²⁸⁷ John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 93-94; Schreiner, *Romans*, 150.

²⁸⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 177; Schreiner, *Romans*, 146-47; Frank Theilman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 153.

²⁸⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 178; Schreiner, *Romans*, 147 (though with some unhelpful muddling of the role of obedience and sacrifice in the Old Testament era).

²⁹⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 179; Schreiner, *Romans*, 147.

In contrast to the circumcised man who broke the law, Paul posited an uncircumcised man who kept the law and thus receives all the benefits expected from circumcision. Given what Paul will say in chapter 3 about the impossibility of salvation through keeping the law, this is a hypothetical (as in 2:13).²⁹¹ Gentile Christians are not in view in this verse because Paul contrasts the circumcised Jew, who has “the letter,” or the written Mosaic law, and the uncircumcised *who did not have the written law* (2:14). Gentile Christians had the written law, and thus Gentile Christians are not in view in 2:27. Some think that 2:28-29 teach that one may be a “true Jew” and yet be “ethnically a Gentile.”²⁹² However, note that the passage does *not* say anywhere that the uncircumcised man is *a Jew* inwardly. The focus of 2:1-3:6 is on ethnic Jews, and that remains true in 2:28-29. Paul is teaching that being externally Jewish is not sufficient. The Jew who is one inwardly is a converted Jew, a subset of ethnic Israel.²⁹³ In this way Romans 2:29 is parallel to Romans 9:6. The idea that ethnic Jews were in need of circumcision of the heart is an Old Testament teaching (Lev. 26:40-42; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26).²⁹⁴

Though Romans 2:25-29 closely links Jews and Gentiles by teaching that both can have circumcised hearts, it does not actually introduce Gentile Christians into the reader’s consideration, and it falls short of applying the label “Jew” to Gentile Christians.

Much could be said about Romans 9-11, but here it will be sufficient to note that when Paul says in Romans 9:6, “they are not all Israel who are of Israel,” he is not saying that not all physical Israelites are part of the true Israel, the church.²⁹⁵ Even those who think that elsewhere the church is identified as the new Israel recognize that in this context Paul is speaking of a regenerate subset of ethnic Israel. As John Murray put it, “the thought is that there is an ‘Israel’ within ethnic Israel.”²⁹⁶ In addition, Gentry and Wellum are wrong to identify the olive tree in Romans 11 as “Israel.” The natural branches, not the tree, are identified in the passage as Israel.²⁹⁷ Based on the identity of the root as the Abrahamic covenant, one could conclude that the tree is God’s “saving program ... based on Israel’s

²⁹¹ Moo, *Romans*, 180-81; Theilman, *Romans*, 154; cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Greek Text Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 315.

²⁹² Stott *Romans*, 94; cf. Moo, *Romans*, 177; Schreiner, *Romans*, 150.

²⁹³ Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 146-47; Robert L. Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 197-98; Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 269; cf. Longenecker, 322-23.

²⁹⁴ Longenecker, 317-18; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 150. Kruse’s comments on these verses are consistent with the idea that Paul is distinguishing between converted and unconverted Jews in these verses, but I can’t tell for sure if that is his position.

²⁹⁵ Longenecker notes that Ambrosiaster and Chrysostom held this view. Longenecker, *Romans*, 814-15; see also Schriener for a list that spans from the patristic period to the present. Schreiner, *Romans*, 482, n. 11.

²⁹⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:9; cf. Moo, *Romans*, 595, (though not as forcefully as in the first edition, p. 574); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 41; Schreiner, *Romans*, 482-83.

²⁹⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 587-88.

covenants.”²⁹⁸ Alternatively, based on the Old Testament’s use of the olive tree imagery for Israel and the fact that this tree has branches consisting of Jewish and Gentile believers, the tree could be identified with “the people of God, which is composed of both Jews and gentiles.”²⁹⁹

Ephesians 2:15’s reference to one new man does not demonstrate that the church is ideal Israel. Ephesians 2:12 says that the Gentiles, before Christ, were “separated from Christ,” a phrase that is defined by the next two couplets.³⁰⁰ The first couplet is covenantal in focus: the Gentiles were “alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise” (LSB).³⁰¹ Before Christ, the Gentiles had to become citizens of Israel through circumcision and assimilation in order to gain the promises of the covenants. However, now the Gentiles have been “brought near” by the blood of Christ who made “both one” (2:13-14). No longer is citizenship in Israel necessary to obtain the covenant promises.³⁰² When Jesus put an end to the Mosaic covenant³⁰³ and established the new covenant in his blood, he created a new humanity of both Jews and Gentiles.³⁰⁴ Gentiles *as Gentiles* now have the covenant promises extended to them; ethnicity is not erased by the new covenant (Rev. 5:9-10; 21:24). To conclude that Gentiles can only partake of the covenant promise by being, in some way, Israel is to revert to the old covenant.

Finally, identifying Christians as the true circumcision (Phil. 3:3) is not a claim that the church is Israel but is a claim that the church is part of the new covenant, which provides for the circumcision of the heart.³⁰⁵

Progressive Covenantalism and 1689 Federalism get much right about the new covenant, especially in their emphasis upon its newness. Their poor formulations regarding the relation of the church to Israel is their chief error. Why is the relation between the church and Israel a significant issue? First, because exegetical precision is itself important for those who want to know what God has revealed. Second, because God has made promises to Israel, it is part of divine integrity to fulfill those promises. Third, the theological theme of nations runs from Genesis to Revelation. Getting the relation of Israel and the church right is a prerequisite for properly relating all the Gentile nations to the church. Redeemed Jews

²⁹⁸ J. Lanier Burns, “Israel and the Church of a Progressive Dispensationalist,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 277.

²⁹⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 587-88.

³⁰⁰ See Thielman, *Ephesians*, 154; S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 183.

³⁰¹ For a defense of “citizen” over “commonwealth,” see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 357; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 155; Baugh, 184-85. For a defense of “covenants of promise” (KJV, ESV, NASB, LSB, CSB) over “covenants of the promise” (NIV, HCSB), see Baugh, 185, n. 185.

³⁰² “The Gentiles are brought near to Israel in Christ to share with Israel in its covenants, promise, hope, and God. They do not become Israel; they *share* with Israel.” Carl B. Hoch, Jr., “The New Man of Ephesians 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 113.

³⁰³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 376; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 168-70; Rosner, 77-78.

³⁰⁴ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 200; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 378-79; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 179.

³⁰⁵ Saucy, *Case*, 202-3; Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 191.

and redeemed Gentiles from every nation come together to form one new man in the church, without any loss of ethnic identity—which will persist for eternity. Though the covenant promises made to Israel are extended to include Gentiles and Gentile nations, these promises are not cancelled for Israel. If they were, then Israel would be the only nation of all the *not* to receive the covenant promises, which would be exceeding strange. The blindness to this problem on the part of Progressive Covenantalists is due to homogenizing of all the redeemed into a single group without any continuing ethnic or national distinctions in the eternal state. For instance, Wellum denies that nations are “creation realities,” claiming “nation-states ... are more tied to the fall and Babel” than with creation and posits that the fall into nations is “now reversed at Pentecost and the church.”³⁰⁶ However, nations are part of the created order. Psalm 86:9 and Acts 17:26 identify nations as created by God.³⁰⁷ As part of the created order, nations will exist for all eternity (Rev. 21:24-26). Nationhood is not reversed at Pentecost or done away with by the church. Rather Pentecost reveals that the church is a multiethnic body. Since nationhood is a significant theological theme within the storyline of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, Progressive Covenantalism will remain a defective system until it incorporates this theme into its system. In effect nations are a part of God’s good creation that Progressive Covenantalism does not see redeemed in Christ (because they see them as inherently fallen).³⁰⁸

Conclusion

The covenants are essential to any biblical theology as they form the structure of the Bible’s narrative and the key themes of biblical theology. The first covenant was established during the creation week, and covenants are essential to new creation and the restoration of shalom, since covenants are the key means God uses to work out redemption. Thus, covenants are God’s means of restoring man to true worship and the enjoyment of God’s presence. Post-fall covenants are enacted in connection with sacrifice and a priesthood is established, and disestablished, through different covenants. The covenants define God’s law, and thus define what sin and holiness are. The works covenants put God’s justice and wrath on display while the promise covenants display God’s love and grace. Law and gospel are thus intimately linked with the covenants. Further, it is through the covenants that God establishes his people and commits himself to be their God. The incarnation of Christ is an essential part of restoring the broken creation covenant, and the cross work of Christ

³⁰⁶ Wellum, “A Progressive Covenantalist Response,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 219; cf. Richard J. Lucas, “The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel’s Future Salvation,” in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 252-53.

³⁰⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright observes, “The nations of humanity preoccupy the biblical narrative from beginning to end. ... The obvious reason for this is that the Bible is, of course, preoccupied with the relationship between God and humanity, and humanity exists in nations” *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 454.

³⁰⁸ This paragraph has primarily critiqued Progressive Covenantalism because Progressive Covenantalism has explicitly addressed the theological theme of nations while 1689 Federalism has not.

established the new covenant. The gift of the Spirit is a covenant promise now being fulfilled for God's people. Thus, it is through the covenants that God displays his glory.³⁰⁹

The importance of the covenant theme was developed by the Reformed Orthodox of the seventeenth century, and theologians today stand on their shoulders. However, both 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism demonstrate that faithfulness to Scripture required moving beyond some of these initial formulations. Comparison between these two Baptist systems further demonstrates that while sometimes more recent theologians, thinking freshly over the Bible, truly advance our understanding of Scripture, at other times old, but forgotten and recovered, formulations provide the best understanding of Scripture. The wise theologian examines treasures new and old, examining them all against the touchstone of Scripture.

³⁰⁹ This paragraph was written in light of the twenty-eight biblical theological themes found in D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), xix-xx.