

COVENANT THEOLOGY 101



COVENANT BREAKERS
AND THE COVENANT KEEPER

DANIEL R. HYDE

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1

THE BIG PICTURE OF GOD'S PROMISES

Imagine a giant world map. I want you to find one tiny island for me. Are you ready? Ni‘ihau—in the Hawaiian islands. You squint, study the details, trace the lines, and maybe miss the big, bold letters printed across the whole map: *Pacific Ocean*.

Sometimes we do the same thing with our Bibles. We zoom in on words, phrases, verses, paragraphs, and chapters to figure out the doctrines; but we can miss the big picture written in large print across every page: ***God relates to us through covenants.***

That word *covenant* might sound antiquated or complicated, but it's actually the backbone of the Bible. The Hebrew word *berîth* appears more than 280 times in the Old Testament while the Greek *diathēkē* appears 33 times. *Covenant* is the way God reveals himself, relates to his people, and redeems and reconciles us back to himself.

“Covenant theology” isn’t something we impose on the Bible, but is simply the study of God’s promises and the relationships he forms through them. It’s about learning to read the Bible as one unified story of a God who

makes and keeps his promises—a story that stretches from Genesis to Revelation, and even includes *you*.

The story of the biblical covenants (after the Fall) is about *Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper*. Let me introduce you this story, in *Covenant Theology 101*.

The God Who Comes Down

The Bible simply yet powerfully begins with God—not us. “In the beginning, God” (Gen. 1:1). Before there was light or life, time or things, there was the infinite, eternal, and self-sufficient God. He didn’t create because he was lonely or lacking. He created because he is love—and love, by its very nature, overflows.

But here’s the problem: “The distance between God and the creature is so great that...they could never have any fruition [benefit] of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part” (Westminster Confession, 7.1). That’s just a fancy theological way of saying that God had to *come down* if we were ever to know him. And that’s exactly what he did. He came down not only to make us but to make himself known. And the way he chose to reveal himself—to relate to us—is through covenant.

The God Who Keeps His Word

A covenant is a formal relationship, a binding promise. When God enters into covenant, he isn’t negotiating between equals—he’s stooping down to bless, to give, to love. From Adam to Noah, Abraham to Moses, David to Christ, the story of Scripture unfolds as the story of a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. Every covenant reveals something of his heart.

- With Adam, God showed his benevolent life and holiness.

- With Noah, his righteous wrath and preserving mercy.
- With Abraham, his faithful promises and blessings.
- With Moses, his righteous and just law and steadfast love.
- With David, his sovereign kingship and enduring promise.
- And in the new covenant, through his Son, Jesus Christ, God fulfills all previous covenants, revealing his very self in grace, love, and redemption.

Once Adam became a covenant breaker, all the subsequent particular covenant arrangements pointed to one grand relationship—the covenant of grace—where God is the covenant keeper who promises to be our God, and we, by his mercy, become his people. Every page of Scripture, every law and prophecy, every psalm and gospel story, fits within that framework.

The God Who Invites You In

For some of us, we think of Christianity as a list of rules because of a bad experience at church. For others, maybe we had a positive experience, but still, Christianity was more an emotional roller coaster.

But covenant theology says something far richer: *Christianity is a relationship*. Not a casual one, but a covenant relationship with the living God. It's knowing and being known by him, loving and being loved by him.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). The cross is the climax of God’s covenant love—as the Covenant Keeper. There, the eternal Son of God bore the curse that covenant breakers like you and me deserve, so that he might invite unto relationship with him and become covenant keepers in Christ.

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

Over the next ten posts, we'll trace this story together—from the garden of Eden to the new creation. We'll see how each covenant reveals more of who God is and what he's doing in the world. My hope is that you'll come away seeing the Bible not as a collection of disconnected stories, but as one beautiful, unfolding story about a faithful God who comes to the aid of his unfaithful people—about covenant breakers and the covenant keeper.

So, grab your Bible, open your heart and mind, and join me on this journey through the *Covenant Theology 101*. You'll discover that the God who made all things is also the God who keeps his promises—and that those promises find their “Yes” and “Amen” in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

2

OUR COVENANT GOD

Picture an astronomer mapping distant galaxies light years away. Now picture an ant crawling on the ground. The astronomer could observe or even care the ant, but the ant could never comprehend the astronomer. The gap between them is seemingly infinite.

That's something like the distance between God and us. He is infinite; we are finite. Yet the wonder of Scripture is that the Creator of the heavens *stoops* to make himself known. He speaks our language and binds himself to us in love through something called *covenant*.

To study the covenants in Scripture is to see the Bible's big picture, what Michael Horton calls "an architectonic structure, a matrix of beams and pillars that hold together the structure of biblical faith and practice" (*God of Promise*).

Many think Reformed theology is just "TULIP" or the sovereignty of God. This misses the big picture. Tracing the covenants shows how the living God draws creatures into covenant or relationship with him. They open the mind and heart of God to us and ours to him.

As we continue *Covenant Theology 101*, let's meet *our covenant God*.

Starting Point: The Infinite God

The Bible opens with staggering words: “In the beginning, God” (Gen. 1:1). That sets the foundation for everything. God is the starting point—uncreated, self-existent, infinite. The Westminster Confession reminds us that “the distance between God and the creature is so great” (7.1)—not a physical but *ontological* distance. God is God; everything else is creaturely. He alone is immense—unlimited by space; eternal—unlimited by time; infinite—unlimited in every way. When nothing else was, he existed. There was no time when he was not.

Because God is infinite, he is independent of creation—he does not *need* it. Moses saw this when the bush was not consumed by fire (Ex. 3)—the Lord is the Living and self-sufficient God. He is “most free...hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself” and “is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them” (Westminster Confession, 2.2).

Isaiah asks, “Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? (40:13) He says the nations “are like a drop from a bucket” (40:15). Psalm 113 declares he is “high above all nations,” yet “looks far down on the heavens and the earth” (vv. 5, 6). The God who is exalted beyond comprehension also stoops down and “raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap” (v. 7).

“Reasonable creatures” like us “owe obedience unto him as their Creator” (Westminster Confession, 7.1). God is *worthy to be worshipped* (Ps. 18:3) because he is God!

The Need: The Condescension of God

He who is infinitely above us graciously comes near. Westminster continues: “yet they could never have any fruition [*enjoyment*] of him...but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part”(7.1). Because God is infinite, if we are to know him at all, he must come down to us.

Creation itself was such an act—a free decision to share his life. His decision to create was pure “condescension”—coming down to our level because he delighted to, so that *we* could benefit.

The Method: The Covenant of God

How does this infinite, self-sufficient God make himself known?“He has been pleased to express by way of covenant”(7.1).

Human covenants are between equals for mutual benefit. God’s are for *our* benefit. Francis Turretin said, strictly speaking, a covenant cannot exist between God and humans because we’re not equals (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*). Johannes Cocceius described covenant as “the divine declaration of the way of receiving the love of God as well as the union and communion of becoming partaker in Him” (*The Doctrine of The Covenant and Testament of God*). We call this “a relationship with God.” It’s the deepest experience of happiness according to Herman Witsius (*The Economy of the Covenants*). “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant” (Ps. 25:14).

At the bush, God revealed himself as the covenant God of Moses’ fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6). He had not forgotten his people’s suffering: he saw, heard, knew, and came down (Ex. 3:7–8). When Moses asked his name, God answered, “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14)—“I will be what I will be.”

This “Tetragrammaton” (“four letters”)—*Yahweh*—is God’s self-revelation. We do not name him; he names himself (Bavinck, *The Doctrine*

of God). What he was to the patriarchs, he was to Israel, and he will be forever to his people. That same promise is for those who know Jesus Christ: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

To covenant breakers, I say: this is your covenant God—*infinite, unbounded, self-sufficient, and yet mercifully near.* The infinite One has made himself known, not through vague spiritual impressions, but through covenant promises that reveal his heart. He is the Covenant Keeper.

He is the God who speaks.

He is the God who stoops.

He is the God who saves.

He has revealed his heart to you by way of covenants—will you give him yours?

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OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A parishioner once introduced me to a friend saying, “This is my pastor—he’s like my dad.” I laughed and said, “That’s kind of you, but I already have kids of my own!”

Relationships differ. I love my wife as a husband, my children as a father, and my congregation as a shepherd—but not all in the same way. Each relationship has its own shape and structure, its own kind of love and commitment. What exists between my wife and me isn’t what exists between my children and me, nor between my parishioners and me.

Having seen who our covenant God is in our last post, we now turn to what that means for us personally: what kind of relationship does this God invite us into?

It’s important for us to speak clearly about our “relationship” with God. What kind of relationship is it? Scripture tells us it’s unlike any other; it’s not casual—it’s covenantal. It’s a relationship that God himself establishes, defines, and secures in love.

The Bible teaches that *covenant* is the way the infinite Creator relates to us, his finite creatures. Our relationship with God is covenantal, as the Westminster Confession says:

“the distance between God and the creature is so great...they could never have any fruition of Him...but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant”(7.1).

Because God is God and we are his creatures, we owe him obedience and worship. Yet we can only enjoy him as our ultimate blessedness because he has come down to us in covenant love.

A covenant is the formal way God enters into relationship with us. Psalm 25:14 describes it: “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.” “Friendship” (*sod*) means intimate companionship. Our relationship with God is deeply personal. Covenant theology is about this reciprocal relationship—God communicates himself and his gifts to us; we respond in love to him. It’s knowing and being known by God (Gal. 4:9). As Jesus’ said, “I *know* my own and my own *know* me, just as the Father *knows* me and I *know* the Father” (John 10:14).

Knowing and being known describes communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Continuing *Covenant Theology 101* let’s explore the essence of *our relationship with God*.

The Archetypal Relationship Between Father and Son

Before understanding our relationship with God, we must realize there’s another—a higher one—between the Father and the Son (and, Scripture adds, the Holy Spirit). This is the *archetype* or blueprint of all divine-human communion.

Before a house is built, an architect draws blueprints. The architect's idea gets put onto paper. Likewise, before we exist, the perfect fellowship is that which exists eternally between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's the pattern: "as the Father *knows* me and I *know* the Father."

The Father knows and loves the Son; the Son knows and loves the Father. Ancient theologians called this *perichoresis*—the intimate, mutual indwelling of the persons in one another. They are distinct yet each one's constant, perfect love and communion pervades one another.

The very word *Father* speaks of love—eternal and perfect. The Father has and will always love his Son. The Son loves the Father. The Father loves his Son perfectly; and vice versa. It's so holy, we can scarcely imagine it, since our experiences of fatherly love are often marred or lacking. Yet there is a pure archetype of love. It exists in God alone.

The Analogous Relationship Between Us and God

This archetypal relationship has relevance for us. The love that eternally flows between Father and Son becomes the pattern and source of our communion with God. "I know my own and my own know me, *just as* the Father knows me and I know the Father."

Through Christ, we are drawn into that very fellowship. The Puritan Thomas Manton wrote, "Believers have a room in Christ's heart as Christ in the Father's bosom" (*Works*). God's love for his eternal begotten Son is of an infinitely greater quality and quantity than I can even conceive, let alone experience as a creature. But I can experience it *by analogy*. As much as my infinite Father can love a finite creature like me, so I'm loved.

We see this beautifully in John 17. Jesus gave eternal life to all the Father gave him (v. 2). He explained "eternal life" as "they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (v. 3). When he prayed "for

those who will believe in me through [the apostles'] word" (v. 20), he asked, "That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you (*perichoresis!*), that they also may be in us" (v. 21). That's covenantal relationship! This relationship("glory") between Father and Son (v. 22) is extended to us: "I in them and you in me...so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (vv. 22–23). Finally, Jesus declares, "I made known to them your name...that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (v. 26).

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

I have all kinds of relationships—with my wife, my children, and my congregation. So do you. But none compares to this: the relationship we have with our covenant God. The love that exists between the Father and the Son has been opened to us through Jesus Christ.

Ponder that. Through covenantal grace, covenant breakers are welcomed into communion with the Covenant Keeper. This is not a cold contract but a living bond of love with the Triune God.

This is what covenant theology is all about: our relationship with God—the Covenant Keeper.

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THE COVENANT OF WORKS WITH ADAM

A young knight was newly sworn to the Round Table. At a Christmas feast, a green warrior entered King Arthur's hall with a challenge: strike him down, then receive the same blow in one year and a day. Gawain accepted and struck off his head. One year later, he sought the Green Knight to fulfill his oath. At a lonely castle he faced tests of loyalty, yet accepted a green sash for protection.

When he finally faced the Knight, the return blow barely scratched him. The Knight revealed the test was not about strength, but *trust*. Gawain failed—the test exposed him. Ashamed, he wore the sash in failure. Yet his honesty restored his honor.

The old tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* echoes something far older. Long before Camelot, another man faced a *divine* test. Adam was called to trust his Lord's word, but failed, trusting the deceiver's lie instead. Yet that failure reveals a deeper story: the covenant God made with Adam.

Let's consider the covenant relationship between God and Adam. This covenant is called *the covenant of nature, creation, or law*. With the

Westminster Confession, we especially call it *the covenant of works* (7.2) because the LORD’s relationship with Adam threatened death and promised life on the basis of obedience.

Continuing *Covenant Theology 101*, let’s explore the essence of *the covenant of works with Adam*.

Was There a Covenant with Adam?

Some object because Genesis 2 never uses “covenant.” Yet the elements are present. Here are five reasons to believe there was a covenant with Adam:

1. Absence of the word doesn’t mean absence of its reality. The Davidic “covenant” (2 Sam. 7) isn’t called that until Psalm 89.
2. After God “cut” a covenant with Abram (Gen. 15), he “established” it (Gen. 17). The first use of “covenant,” God “establishes” it (Gen. 6:18)—assuming a covenant *already* existed.
3. In creation (Gen. 1:1–2:3), God is called *elohim*; in Adam’s story (2:4–25), he’s called Lord God (*Yahweh elohim*)—including his personal covenant name.
4. Hosea called Judah to repentance because, “like Adam” (*ki ’adam*) they transgressed the covenant” (6:7)—the plain reading is as Adam broke covenant in the garden, Israel did.
5. Genesis 2 contains all the elements of a covenant:
 - **Parties:** the Lord God and Adam (vv. 5–16).

- **Law:** “the Lord God commanded the man...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat”(vv. 16, 17).
- **Threat:** “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (v. 17).
- **Promise** (implied from the threat): “do this and live.”
- **Signs:** the trees—knowledge of good and evil as test of obedience (v. 17) and the tree of life as sign of eternal fellowship (v. 9).

What Kind of Covenant was Made with Adam?

The *covenant of works* means “life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (7.2).

God commanded humanity to “be fruitful and multiply...fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). He “put [Adam] in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15) and “commanded” (2:16): “*You may* surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *you shall not* eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (2:17). Adam was free with one restriction. Obedience would bring life; disobedience, death.

This obedience was central. Paul calls Adam “a type of the one who was to come” (Rom. 5:14), paralleling Adam and Christ: Adam’s disobedience brought condemnation and death; Jesus’ obedience brought justification and life. Both were representatives. What we say of Christ’s obedience, we may say of Adam’s potential obedience. Christ obeyed; Adam could have.

But how can we say this of a mere creature who couldn’t have any blessedness from God unless he voluntarily condescended (WCF 7.1), that

his obedience would bring life? Adam, created upright and able to obey, existed “at the beginning of his ‘career,’ not the end” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*). His obedience wouldn’t have earned eternal life by merit. It was the Creator who stooped to covenant, binding himself by *promise* of eternal life for obedience. Augustine said, “God became our debtor, not by receiving any thing, but by promising what he pleased. For, it was of his own bounty that he vouchsafed to make himself a debtor” (Cited in Witsius). Eternal life was disproportionate to the temporal and creaturely obedience of Adam.

What Was the Goal of this Covenant?

The goal was fellowship with God. The tree of life signified this (Gen. 2:9). The Lord generously filled the Garden with trees for refreshment—shade, fruit, and water (Gen. 2:9, 16). The tree of knowledge tested Adam’s obedience; the tree of life signified life “glorifying God and enjoying him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 1). Turretin said, “As often as he tasted its fruit, he...recollect[ed] that he had life not from himself, but from God” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*); Augustine called this tree a “sacrament” (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*).

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

But Adam failed. In him, we became covenant breakers.

Yet the story doesn’t end there. A second Adam came—the Covenant Keeper. Where the first Adam failed his test, Jesus fulfilled it. Adam hid behind a tree; Jesus hung upon one.

When you trust in him, you no longer wear a sash of shame, but Christ’s white robe of righteousness. The second Adam has restored what the first lost: eternal life. In him, the promise is ours: “to the one who conquers I

will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7) and to partake of its healing "leaves" (Rev. 22:2).



THE MOTHER PROMISE

When a child first learns to ride a bike, a parent promises, “I’ll be right here. I won’t let go.” The child, wobbly and afraid, trusts that voice behind them. The parent, then, has to let go. The child falls, skin scraped, and pride bruised. Through tears, they look back expecting anger—but instead see the same voice walking toward them with open arms: “Get up. Let’s try again.”

That’s what grace looks like in action. The promise of love comes first; the fall exposes weakness; yet the same promise meets us again, stronger than before. Genesis 3:15—called the *mother promise*—is God’s “I’ll be right here.” Humanity fell hard, but the promise of redemption was already chasing us down. From that moment, all of Scripture unfolds as God’s story of picking up his fallen children and fulfilling his word, no matter the cost.

Covenant theology helps us understand how God reveals himself throughout the story of Scripture. We should want to read our Bibles the way God intended them to be read. And studying how God’s covenants all

fit together helps us read all the diverse parts of Scripture as parts of the one unified story.

In the Garden, God entered into a relationship with Adam in the form of a covenant. The covenant law was that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die—implying that if he were obedient, he would live. This is why we called it the “covenant of works.” The life Adam would receive would be eternal and heavenly in the presence of his Creator.

When Adam broke that covenant, God entered into another kind of relationship with Adam, Eve, and ultimately us—the covenant of grace. The Westminster Confession says: “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace” (7.3). One of the proofs offered is Genesis 3:15. In the midst of judgment upon the serpent, the Lord made a promise: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” This verse is called *the mother promise* because from it all of God’s gracious work of saving sinners is given birth.

Continuing *Covenant Theology 101*, let’s explore this *mother promise*.

Its Context: Judgment

The judgment context of this promise reminds us that we can’t understand rightly God’s grace unless we first understand our guilt. The covenant threat was, “In the day you eat of [the tree of knowledge] you shall surely die.” Adam broke that law because he chose his own desires instead of the Lord’s. That’s why John said, “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

Then came the judgment. “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the

garden” (Gen. 3:8). When a child hears the sound of their parent’s footsteps coming near to their room, how do they feel? Are those footsteps happy or sad? It depends on what they’ve done. If they just woke up in the morning, it might be the happy sound that breakfast is ready; but if they’re hiding, that sound brings dread. The word “sound” is used in Old Testament contexts to communicate the sound of approaching hoofbeats. But these are the sound of the Lord’s coming. And they hid because they knew it was judgment time!

Its Content: Grace

Yet in this moment of judgment, God didn’t close the book on humanity. The covenant threat was death, but they didn’t die—at least physically. Why? Grace. “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jas. 2:13).

Note the shift between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace highlighted in the pronouns. In the covenant of works God says, “*You* shall...” (2:17); in the covenant of grace, he says, “*I* will...” (3:15). The covenant of works rested on *Adam*’s obedience; the covenant of grace rests on *God*’s gracious desire to save sinners. Think of that child hearing their parents’ footsteps after disobedience. The door opens, and the child expects punishment—instead, the parent kneels down and says, “I forgive you.” The mother promise is like that, but infinitely better!

God promises to bring redemption through conflict—“I will put enmity” between the serpent and the woman, between their offspring. This war will end with victory: “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Adam should have crushed the serpent’s head. The Lord promises to do it himself.

But how can he be so gracious after threatening death? Because he is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in his promise to come (Rom.

3:26). God did not set aside his justice but satisfied it. He sacrifices an animal in the place of Adam and Eve, then covered them with its skin as a sacramental sign of a sacrifice to come. What a gracious God!

Its Climax: Jesus

What did that first sacrifice point to? To the day when the promised offspring would come: “*He* shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise *his* heel.” The Lord would bring this war to its climax in the battle between the true Serpent—Satan—and the Son of God, the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Jesus triumphed, bruising Satan’s head even as his own heel was wounded on the cross. This was prophetic of Jesus’ cross and crown, his death on the tree of the cross and his resurrection from the tomb. “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (John 12:31). On the cross, “God made [us] alive together with him...canceling the record of debt that stood against us...He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame” (Col. 2:13–15). By his death, Jesus “destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

Yet we still wait for the final fulfillment. The serpent still writhes, sin still tempts, but his doom is certain. There is an already aspect to Christ’s victory, but also a not yet fully seen aspect. Jesus has already trampled Satan’s head; what is not yet is our trampling: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20).

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

Behind everything you read in Scripture stands this mother promise. For covenant breakers like us, it is the seed of hope and the spine of redemption. Every covenant that follows—the promise to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David—grows out of this one. From Genesis to Revelation, all the triumphs and especially all the failures of God’s people point forward to

the coming Covenant Keeper—who still says to his fallen children, “I’ll be right here.”

6

THE COVENANT IN THE TIME OF NOAH

After every storm, the lightning and thunder stop, the clouds lift, and light breaks through. Sometimes a rainbow arcs across the horizon. Creation seems to remember: judgment has passed; mercy remains in a promise reflecting across the sky.

“I love you” are powerful words. But love is action. Parents show it through protection, provision, and patience; God shows it in covenant faithfulness. Even after Adam sinned, God showed saving love— withholding judgment by clothing Adam and Eve with animal sacrifice. In the covenant God made with Noah, we see love displayed on a cosmic scale.

The covenant in Noah’s time is rooted in the covenant of grace but it’s not identical with it (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*). It’s a covenant made with all humanity that restrains the curse and serves grace by providing the space for redemption (van Genderen and Velema) and the foundation on which the church would be built (Klaas Schilder cited in van Genderen and Velema).

Continuing *Covenant Theology 101*, let's explore *the covenant in the time of Noah*.

The Continuation of Redemptive Grace

God's saving grace extends through every covenant from Adam to Christ in the *old*, and from Christ to consummation in the *new*.

In the spiritual war between the serpent's seed and Eve's seed (Gen. 3:15), it looks like the serpent is winning in Genesis 6:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...the Lord regretted that he had made man...it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." (Gen. 6:5–7; cf. 6:11–13)

Humanity was thoroughly corrupt. Look around today—ethnic strife, lawlessness, violence, and corruption. The world was more unrecognizable in Noah's day. Then hope broke through storm clouds: "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8).

There was one "righteous man" who was "blameless" and "walked with God" (6:9). His father named him *Noah* ("rest" or "comfort"), hoping that "out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief" (Gen. 5:29). His prayer was for God to preserve humanity through him. Noah wasn't sinless but was faithful—trusting the promise (Gen. 3:15) and being a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5).

God commanded him to "make...an ark" (6:14). Then came the divine assurance:

...I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh... Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant

with you, and you shall come into the ark.(Gen. 6:17, 18)

This covenant isn't merely a covenant of common grace for all creation. When the Lord "established" his covenant with Noah, this was his way of expressing the continuation of an existing covenant. The covenant the Lord "cut" with Adam and Eve in animal sacrifices continued with Noah. Our theological term for this is the covenant of grace. After the Flood, "God remembered Noah"(Gen. 8:1)—not that he forgot, but acted faithfully on his promise.

The Establishment of "Common" Grace

After the Flood, Noah built an altar and offered a sacrifice. "When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma," he vowed: "I will never again curse the ground because of man...Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature...While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease" (8:21, 22).

This covenant was cosmic. God preserved Noah, his family, and creation. He promised stability to a fallen world—what we call *common grace*. This is God's kindness to all people, sustaining life among the undeserving.

After blessing (9:1), God renewed the Edenic cultural mandate: "Be fruitful... multiply...fill the earth" (9:1). Noah and his family were the "the nucleus of a second humanity" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*). God instituted justice to restrain evil and ensure the propagation and flourishing of life: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (9:6).

The covenant's language is universal: "I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you...never again

shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth”(9:10, 11).

In all covenants, there are signs: “I have set my bow in the cloud...it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (9:13). The rainbow is not so much for us, but God, who “remembers” his covenant(9:14–15). God’s warrior bow now hangs in the clouds as on his mantle. It points upward—not at us—because he’ll never again flood the earth in judgment. The storm of judgment passed; mercy arches across the sky.

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

God shows special grace for his people and common grace for all. The rainbow preaches that God’s wrath is real for covenant breakers, but his mercy is greater.

Noah’s covenant set the stage for the comfort of redemption. It preserved the world long enough for the true Ark—Jesus, the Covenant Keeper. As Noah and family were saved through judgment waters, so all in Christ are saved from wrath. As the bow of divine wrath turned down on the cross, the flood of justice fell on Jesus—so that mercy might wash us of our sins.

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THE COVENANT IN THE TIME OF ABRAHAM

In adoption, the most beautiful moment isn't signing the papers but hearing the words: "You are mine." Parents don't choose a child because of merit or potential—they choose out of love. From that moment, the child belongs because of love.

That's the kind of love God showed to Abraham. Out of the world, God chose one man—not because he was worthy, but because of love. God's love changed the world.

He's so monumental redemption history that the Lord calls himself "the God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*" (e.g., Ex. 2:24). Paul calls him "the father of all those who believe" (Rom. 4:11). Our children sing, "Father Abraham, had many sons..."

The one "covenant[*of grace*]" was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel" (Westminster Confession, 7.5). Each administration is like a software update on one phone (Rhodes, *Making Covenants Simple*). We pick up *Covenant Theology 101* in the story of God's covenant of grace in the time of Abraham.

A Sovereign Grace (Gen. 12)

Why Abraham? Out of Shem's twenty-six listed descendants (Gen. 10), why choose this man from Ur? Why not his brothers?

The answer isn't found in Abraham, but God: "that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls" (Rom. 9:11); God has "mercy on whom [he will]...and...compassion on whom [he will]...it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Rom. 9:15, 16). Abraham's story begins not with human seeking, but divine calling: "Go from your country...to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).

Imagine choosing one puppy out of ten—all eager for attention. Why do you choose *that* one? Probably because it was the cutest! With God, he chooses people because he loves them—not because of merit, but to display mercy. Abraham is a pure picture of "love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10).

A Gracious Grace (Gen. 15)

"Gracious grace" is redundant, but captures what grace is—undeserved. Our relationships too often are works-based: we make children earn our love or even give love to our spouse because of what we're trying to get. But God is the fullness of true grace. Abram illustrates that.

What Genesis doesn't say is that God choose Abram from a family of idolaters (Josh. 24:2). Yet, after being chosen (Gen. 12), he had his wife lie to save his life out of fear. Yet God didn't revoke his promise; he formalized a covenant with him (Gen. 15). The strange ritual of cutting animals in half, laying them out, and walking through them was an ancient treaty ceremony. Both parties walked between saying, "If I break the treaty, may I be cut in half!" But in Genesis 15, only God passed through as "a smoking fire pot

and a flaming torch" (v. 17): "If this covenant fails, may I be the one torn apart." That's grace. God—not Abraham—bound himself to the terms of faithfulness.

Yet Abram faltered—disregarding the promise of a son through Sarai and taking matters into his own hands with Hagar (Gen. 16). Nevertheless, the Lord reiterated his covenant with the sign of circumcision (Gen. 17). He faltered again—laughing at God's promise (17:17). Then he faltered again—lying in fear (Gen. 20).

Is God gracious or what? Don't ever forget! He patiently bears with Abraham's doubts and disbelief—and ours! His promises don't rest on our perfection, but on his faithfulness! He proves that grace really is gracious.

A Signified Grace (Gen. 17)

The covenant was signified by circumcision:

...I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be God to you and to your offspring after you*...I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land...for an everlasting possession, and *I will be their God* (Gen. 17:7, 8).

Circumcision marked Abraham's family as the people of God's promise. Yet, not all who bore the sign shared saving faith. Both Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob or Esau received the sign, yet they didn't all believe.

The same is true today. The visible church includes wheat and tares, sheep and goats. Paul says the covenant is like an olive tree and some natural branches were broken off that wild branches could be grafted in (Rom. 11). Some families only have one believing parent—but their children are regarded as holy (1 Cor. 7:14) and thus recipients of the sign of baptism.

That's the heart of every covenant relationship God makes with humanity: I will be your God, you will be my people. What grace!

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

Think of that adopted child—prone to tantrums and tears. The parent's love remains as it did with Abraham. God chose and sustained him, then sealed his promise with circumcision.

Abraham broke covenant again and again, but God never let go. That faithfulness runs like a golden thread through Scripture—from the stars of Abraham's sky to the Son born under them in Bethlehem.

Just as God alone walked through the pieces, so God the Son walked through death for us. On the cross, the curse fell on him. His torn body fulfilled the oath: "If I break this covenant, may I be cut in half." It was kept by the Covenant Keeper

Abraham's story tells us that grace begins, continues, and ends with God. He chooses, calls, bears with weakness, and seals his promise of grace through baptism and communion. When you doubt, fear, and waver in faith, remember the God of Abraham, who still says to every sinner adopted into his family: "You are mine."

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THE COVENANT IN THE TIME OF MOSES

Imagine a man born in slavery. He's spent his life under the whip—working, obeying, fearing. One night, the master's house collapses in a storm, and the slaves are told they're free. The man walks out of Egypt's dust, heart pounding, unsure what freedom means. Weeks later, the same voice that rescued him speaks again—not to enslave, but to teach him how to live as a child.

That's the story of Israel—the story of grace.

Psalm 136 recounts it with twenty-six refrains: “his steadfast love endures forever!” The “God of gods” who created “the heavens” (vv. 2, 5) is the same “Lord of lords” who “struck down the firstborn of Egypt...brought Israel out...divided the Red Sea in two...made Israel pass through...led his people through the wilderness...” (vv. 3, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16). Every act from creation to redemption declares his covenant love.

We've seen the covenant differently administered in the time of Adam, Noah, and Abraham. What makes the covenant in the time of Moses difficult is that it's in a form that feels legal (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*;

Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*). One writer said there's no point of theology that has led to more confusion than the Mosaic covenant (Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis: or, a Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants*). Yet, like the substance of the covenants before, it flows from grace and foreshadows Messiah to come.

Continuing *Covenant Theology 101*, we explore *the covenant in the time of Moses*.

Remembering Abraham (Ex. 1–3)

The Mosaic covenant begins with the Lord remembering Abraham.

After Joseph's death, the Lord blessed Israel to be “fruitful” and to “increase[...] greatly” (1:7) in Egypt. A new Pharaoh enslaved them (1:8–14), but “the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied” (1:12). When Pharaoh turned to infanticide (1:15–22), God again acted: “the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied” (1:20). At last, “the people of Israel groaned...and cried out for help.” In response, “God heard...remembered...saw...and... knew.” He “remembered his covenant with Abraham” (2:23–25) and sprung to action.

The covenant of grace made with Abraham was the root of this redemption. God proved that his “steadfast love” or covenant faithfulness, endures forever.

Redeeming Wretches (Ex. 12–15:21)

Through nine plagues God humbled Egypt's gods (12:12). Then came the final blow: the death of the firstborn. To illustrate redemption, each household killed a lamb and marked its blood on the doorposts. “When I see the blood,” God said, “I will pass over you” (12:13). Judgment fell on Egypt, but mercy covered Israel.

That night, after 430 years Egypt, Israel left—just as God had promised Abraham (Ex. 12:40). They crossed the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army drowned. Then Moses led them in song: “You have led in your steadfast love the people who you have redeemed” (Ex. 12:13). “Steadfast love”—God makes and keeps covenants! God didn’t choose Israel because they were mighty, but because he loved them. The Exodus was not reward but rescue.

Feasting in the Wilderness (Ex. 15:22–17:7)

Fresh freedom exposed their unfaithful hearts. Yet the Lord didn’t abandon them—he was administering the covenant of grace.

Just three days after the Red Sea experience, they grumbled about bitter water (15:24). God sweetened it and gave twelve springs (15:27). They “grumbled” again about lacking bread and meat (16:2–3). The Lord rained bread and meat from heaven. They thirsted again, “quarrelling” with Moses (17:2) and “grumbled” (17:3). The Lord told Moses to strike a rock; water gushed out—but Moses hit it twice in anger and defiance (Num. 20). Israel *and* their leader sinned, yet God provided again and again. The wilderness became a banquet of grace!

Freedom wasn’t earned—it was received. Grace doesn’t quit when we grumble—it keeps providing until gratitude grows.

Delivering the Law (Ex. 19–23)

Then came Mount Sinai—smoke and fire, thunder and lightning, with fear (Ex. 19). Then the law.

Things look different from the previous covenant. Francis Turretin helpfully distinguished the covenant of grace in its *internal* and *external* senses. The covenant of grace operated internally with sinners, but externally it was in “a rigid legal economy” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*;

Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*). The laws that speak of personal obedience like Adam's ("do this and live") were accidental (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*).

Before God gave a single command, he declared, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (20:2). Grace then gratitude; gospel then law. He redeemed them from Egypt "because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers" (Deut. 7:8). God didn't say, "Obey me and I will save you," but "I *have* saved you; now live as my people." Again, Bavinck helpfully says,

The law of Moses...is not antithetical to grace but subservient to it...the covenant of grace took the law into its service...that it might arouse the consciousness of sin, increase the felt need for salvation, and reinforce the expectation of an even richer revelation of God's grace...the law...was not a covenant of works in disguise" (*Reformed Dogmatics*).

As Witsius said, "The law of the covenant of works was repeated, not the covenant of works itself. The covenant of works cannot be entered into with sinners, God did not require perfect obedience, and God did not put them under the curse they would have deserved" (*The Economy of the Covenants*). The law was not a new covenant of works. It was the same covenant of grace in a strict legal form to reveal sin and point to Christ: "The law was our tutor" (Gal. 3:24)—directing hearts to a Covenant Keeper.

Communing with God (Ex. 25–40)

Finally, God taught his people how to dwell with him. The tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrifices were not signs of his distance but his presence. The God who thundered from Sinai came down to dwell among his people.

Every piece of furniture, sacrifice, and priest pointed forward to Christ—the true tabernacle where God meets sinners in mercy.

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

The rescued slave learned slowly. Even after freedom, he longed for Egypt, forgetting the whip was gone. So it was with Israel—and so it is with us, covenant breakers. We forget grace. We grumble in the wilderness. We doubt the God who split the sea. Yet his steadfast love endures forever.

The covenant in Moses' time shows us a God who rescues before he requires, provides before he commands, and dwells with covenant breakers through the blood of the Covenant Keeper. Jesus is the true Moses who delivers us from slavery, feeds us in the wilderness, and writes God's law not on tablets of stone but on our hearts.

When you feel like that freed slave—uncertain, ungrateful, or afraid—remember this: the same God who redeemed Israel still says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out.” His steadfast love endures forever.

9

THE COVENANT IN THE TIME OF DAVID

A man dreams of building the perfect home—beautiful cedar, pure gold, perfectly cut stones. But as he wakes, he realizes the One he wants to build for, has been building *him* all along into a house for himself. He rubs his eyes: “What a strange dream!”

That’s the story of David. It’s the story of grace.

Our lives are stories with beginnings and ends, and in between, moments that make us who we are. Scripture tells the same kind of story—from “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1) to “a new heavens and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1) in the end. In-between is the greatest story ever told of an infinite God, who decided to share his life and love, by way of covenants: with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.

Continuing *Covenant Theology 101*, we explore *the covenant in the time of David*.

David’s Plan: A House for the Lord

David’s wanted to build a house for the Lord. While he “lived in his house and [had] rest from all his surrounding enemies,” he said to Nathan the

prophet, “I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent” (2 Sam. 7:1, 2).

Perhaps he recalled the law that one day the Lord would no longer dwell in a tent like his people but would be located in one place (Deut. 12). Yet the Lord said *he* would choose the location. David was at peace, prosperous, and took initiative to do something for God. His heart was struck that he lived in a cedar house while the King lived in a mere tent.

But God was about to show David that grace always moves the other way. Before David could build anything for God, God was already building something far greater for David.

The Lord’s Promise: A House for David

The Lord replied: “Would you build me a house to dwell in?” (2 Sam. 7:5) The question cut to the heart. God is utterly free to do his will, and not be boxed in by our plans: “The God who made the world...does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life” (Acts 17:24–25).

God never asked for a house. If he wanted one, he’d determine when and where! Who did David think he was to build anything for the Lord: “Would *you* build me a house”—because David was a man of war and blood? (1 Chron. 28:3). He was content to dwell in a tent—among his people, not above them—since the days of the Exodus (2 Sam. 7:6, 7)

What condescension! The Lord of glory was content to stoop and live among his wandering people, like them in tents. One day he’d stoop even lower: “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6–7).

Then came the heart of God's covenant promise. He reminded David of his past faithfulness: "I took you from the pasture...that you should be prince over my people Israel"(2 Sam. 7:8). From shepherd to king—pure grace! His faithfulness was in the present: "I have been with you wherever you went"(2 Sam. 7:9). Some of this language fulfills ancient promises: "I will make for you a great name" (2 Sam. 7:9).That's Genesis 12!"I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place...I will give you rest" (2 Sam. 7:10, 11).That's Genesis 15! Ancient promises were echoing again: rest, land, and a name.

Will this God be there for you when you need him? Contrary to our investments—"past performance is not indicative of future returns"—with God, his past faithfulness is the reason we can trust him now and in the future!

Then a play on words changes everything: "the Lord will make *you* a *house*"(2 Sam. 7:11). David wanted to build the Lord a house of wood and stone, but the Lord would build David a house of flesh and blood—an unending dynasty. There are several guarantees.

- **Not even death** could annul it—God would raise up David's offspring and establish a kingdom after his death (2 Sam. 7:12).
- **Not even sin:** God's steadfast love would not depart as it had from Saul(2 Sam. 7:14, 15).
- **Not even time:**David's throne would stand forever(2 Sam. 7:16).

The Lord would be faithful until the full coming of the kingdom of David's true Son.

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

Here the original promise of a son (Gen. 3:15) comes into focus: through one nation (Gen. 12), one tribe (Gen. 49), and one family: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David” (Matt. 1:1). The carpenter’s son from Nazareth—the Builder’s Son—was the true and greater King David, whose throne will never end.

We are covenant breakers who think we can build something for God—a ministry, a name, a legacy. God doesn’t need our “houses;” by grace he makes us into his house! “You also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). The Davidic covenant tells us salvation isn’t about what we build for God but what the Covenant Keeper has built for us—the Son who became flesh, was crucified, raised to reign forever, and who now makes his home in us by his Spirit. When your plans fall apart, remember: the God who made a house for David is still at work, shaping living stones into a dwelling for his glory.

10

THE PROMISE OF THE NEW COVENANT

A girl tiptoes at the window, waiting for Dad to come home. Shadows stretch, streetlights flicker, and she wonders if Dad's promise still holds. Then headlights appear. The door opens. Hope turns to joy.

That's biblical hope—not a wish, but certainty that what God promised will come because he's shown himself faithful in the past.

God's people have always waited by that window in hope. Each covenant has shined in the darkness. Each has echoed the promise a little louder: "He's coming!" The story moves from shadow to substance until the dawn breaks in Christ.

Centuries after the covenant with David (*ca.* 1000bc), in Jeremiah's days, the clouds of sin darkened that hope. Covenant breaking led to exile. Yet in judgment, God spoke a "Book of Hope" (Jer. 30–33): a *new* covenant was coming when he would write his law on hearts, forgive sins, and dwell with his people forever.

Continuing *Covenant Theology 101*, we explore *the promise of a new covenant*.

The Setting: Hope in the Dark (Jer. 31:31–34)

Israel lived among the ruins of its own broken promises. Centuries of sin led to Babylonian exile. The faithful could only see hope faintly through the darkness. In judgment, the covenant God said “the days are coming...when I will make a new covenant” (Jer. 31:31). This was like the sound of a key turning in a locked door—proof God hadn’t abandoned his people but would give them something *new*—a new covenant.

The Promise: A New Covenant

God promised this covenant would be *new*—not because his grace had changed, but because the way it reached his people afresh.

Throughout Jeremiah’s Book of Hope, the new covenant is described as Jerusalem emerging from its ruins (30:18–34), as another wilderness experience (31:1–6), as another exodus (31:7–14), and as entering anew the Promised Land (31:23–30). Then he speaks 31:31–34.

The end of the legal administration. The particular legal administration of the covenant of grace with Israel was a national covenant; Jeremiah said it was soon to end: “not like the covenant that I made with their fathers... my covenant that they broke” (31:32) Jeremiah spoke to those who related to God through the law and spoke in terms they knew. The law would be prominent in a new way: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33). The Mosaic covenant was written on stone and administered through sacrifices and ceremonies. It pointed to grace but its legal structure couldn’t give it. The new covenant would do what the old could only foreshadow: change hearts: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jer. 31:33).

The law that once condemned would now be written in love. What God required, he provided.

The end of human mediators. “No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer. 31:34). Moses, the Levitical priests, and the prophets were all described as the “teachers” (Deut. 4:1; 2 Chron. 17:7–9; Ezra 7:10; Jer. 32:33). Light was on the horizon when they wouldn’t be needed as mediators. There would only be the divine-human mediator—Jesus!

The end of ceremonies. Not only does he write the law on his people’s hearts (Jer. 31:33) but he will “forgive their iniquity” (Jer. 31:34) apart from ceremonies “and...remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:34). God’s “forgetfulness” was mercy. The slate is wiped clean, not because sin was ignored, but because it was punished at the cross.

The People: A New Family

The new covenant joined the houses of Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31), long divided by sin. This pointed beyond to a worldwide family. The Holy Spirit applies Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews 10 to the new covenant church—God’s family that stretches across nations (Jews *and* Gentiles) and generations but one in Christ. Believers are “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), “a chosen race, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). This covenant gathers from all lands into one Church.

The Fulfillment: Christ Our Mediator

On this side of Jeremiah’s clouds, we enjoy the full sunshine of the covenant Israel could only glimpse as a ray! “Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is

better" (Heb. 8:6). Jesus' once for all offering for all sacrifice is better than the priests' daily sacrifices (Heb. 10 quoting Jer. 31:31–34).

Centuries later, Jesus lifted the cup at the Last Supper and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The hopeful wait was over. The father had come home.

At the cross, Christ bore the curse of the broken covenant so that sinners could receive the blessings of the new.

The new covenant rests not on our obedience but on the perfect obedience of the Son. His blood doesn't just cover but cancels sin. His Spirit doesn't just instruct hearts; he indwells them.

There is no more need for priests between God and man; we have a great High Priest.

The Consummation: All Things New

The story that began in Genesis ends with its fulfillment: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people" (Rev. 21:3).

What Jeremiah glimpsed, John saw in full sunlight—a redeemed people, renewed creation, and reigning King. The new covenant will one day be complete; faith will become sight; waiting will turn to worship.

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

We are all like that waiting child at the window, restless in the dark, wondering if the promise still stands. The new covenant assures: The father has come home in the Son. The Spirit now lives in our hearts as the seal of that promise.

When you feel weary in the waiting—when sin seems too close and grace far off—remember: the One who said, "I will make a new covenant," has already made it in his blood.

The Covenant Keeper fulfills every promise.

One day the door will open again—not to another covenant, but to the home he's prepared for us.

11

THE CONSUMMATION OF THE COVENANT

In the heart of an old city stands a ruined cathedral. Once radiant with light, it now lies in decay—windows shattered, walls cracked, arches darkened by soot. But a master restorer takes up the work. He doesn't demolish it; he renews it. Day after day, he replaces what's broken, polishes what's dull, and breathes life back into stone. In time, what was lost becomes more glorious than before.

That's the story of Scripture. From the fall in Eden to the new Jerusalem, God has been restoring what sin has ruined until the whole creation shines again with his glory.

Although “the distance between [an infinite] God and the [finite] creature is so great” and while we “owe obedience unto Him as their Creator,” we “could never have any fruition [benefit] of Him as...blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part.” He’s bridged this chasm “by way of covenant”(Westminster Confession 1.1). Covenants are the formal way he enters into relationship with us. Covenant theology is

all about this reciprocal relationship—God communicates himself and his gifts to us and we respond in love.

Revelation 21 vividly pictures the consummation of that relationship. It's the goal of the original covenant in the Garden. Everything God ever intended for us reaches its final restoration.

Concluding *Covenant Theology 101*, we explore *the consummation of the covenant*.

The Climax of Creation

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (Rev. 21:1). In a world that thinks everything ends in decay, the story of Scripture ends with the counter-cultural theme of renewal. Where is everything going?

The God of unchanging continuity. He isn't going to destroy creation, but restore it by removing sin's curse and bringing what he once called “very good” (Gen. 1:31) to perfection. Like a master craftsman, he won't scrap his work but refine it. *Paradise Lost* must be turned into *Paradise Regained*.

The God of regeneration. When we are born again, we become a “new creation” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). We're not erased and remade, but renewed: a new self comes from the old. The continuity that joins our old and new selves joins the old and new worlds as Jesus called his return “the regeneration” (Matt. 19:28; NASB).

The God of resurrection. Jesus' resurrection confirms this pattern—the same body that was laid in the tomb was raised in glory. In his resurrection, the “natural” was transformed into the “spiritual” (1 Cor. 15). So too, the world that groans under sin (Rom. 8) will rise purified like a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, a seed becomes wheat.

This is important for how we view the present world and what we hope for in the world to come.

When John says “the sea was no more,” he uses Old Testament imagery of the sea as chaos and rebellion. The sea has great power (Ps. 107:23–30), poses mortal danger (Ps. 69:1–2); thus is an apt image for the nations’ tumult against God (Isa. 5:30, 17:12). In the new creation, nothing will oppose God. Storms will be stilled forever. The Restorer’s work will be done—peace will reign.

The Climax of the City of God

This renewed creation will be filled with renewed people: “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

“New Jerusalem” isn’t made of stone or steel, but people—the church perfected and triumphant in glory. It is the bride of Christ, who “has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7–8). She wears “fine linen”—“the righteous deeds of the saints.” “The holy city” is the “bride adorned for her husband...the Lamb” (Rev. 21:2, 9).

Then the imagery switches to a city, with “a great, high wall, twelve gates” (Rev. 21:12) and “twelve foundations” (Rev. 21:14). These twelve gates have “the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel...inscribed” (Rev. 21:12). The twelve foundations had the “names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14). All of this shows that redemption unites people from every covenant age. Salvation is from the Jews and extended to the nations.

The symmetry (Rev. 21:15, 16, 17) signifies completeness and that the Bride is as numerous as that “great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (7:9). Its

dazzling brilliance of jewels (Rev. 21:18–21) signifies that the Bride is a masterpiece of divine craftsmanship—the finished restoration of the ruin begun in Eden.

The Climax of the Covenant Relationship

Finally comes the voice from the throne:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

This has been the heartbeat of every covenant we’ve traced. From Adam to the New Covenant, God has promised: “I will be your God, and you will be my people.”

That promise resounds as fulfilled. The “dwelling place” or tabernacle/temple is gone; God’s own presence is the sanctuary: “*he* will dwell with them.”

This covenant relationship embraces all “peoples” (plural) since Christ “ransomed people... from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). In Abraham’s greatest Seed, “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

The friendship of God has become the fellowship of glory.

Then comes the voice of the Covenant Keeper himself: “Behold, I am making all things new... Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true” (Rev. 21:5).

That verse helps us summarize our series. From the Garden’s promise of life, to the rainbow in Noah’s sky, from Abraham’s tent to Moses’ mountain, from David’s throne to Christ’s cross, the story of the covenants has traced one unbroken line of grace. Each covenant revealed more of the Father’s heart for his children, and every failure of covenant breakers pointed

forward to the faithfulness of the Covenant Keeper. The story that began in Eden ends here—in a renewed creation where the promises of God find their perfect “Yes” and “Amen” in Jesus Christ.

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

The master restorer never gives up on his creation: from the first spark of light in Genesis to the final gleam of glory in Revelation.

Every covenant has been part of the restoration project—laying foundations, shaping walls, preparing the final unveiling. The covenant of works showed the design; the covenants of grace displayed the repairs; the new covenant finished the structure in Christ’s blood.

At the end of all things is the reveal. The great Restorer steps back to admire his completed work—a renewed creation, a radiant bride, a reconciled people.

When you look around at a world ruined by sin and your heart still under repair, remember: God doesn’t abandon what he starts. The same hands that carved the heavens and shaped humanity from dust are restoring everything through the Son.

One day, when the work is done, the Restorer and the restored will dwell together forever.

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more” (Rev. 21:3–4).

Then we’ll see the finished cathedral of God’s covenant of grace—every arch of mercy, every window of redemption shining with the light of the Lamb.

The Covenant Keeper’s project will be complete.

Covenant Breakers will rest.

And together, in covenant communion, we will live as the house of the Lord forever.

12

LIVING IN COVENANT WITH GOD

When my kids were little, we had an unwritten family tradition: every Friday night was “pizza night” with a book, maybe a movie, and lots of laughs. Maybe you have a small way like this to protect relationships from the chaos of life? But one Friday, after a long week, I lost track of time, and forgot. Before I could say anything, one of my kids said, “Dad, it’s Friday! You promised.”

That stopped me. *I promised.* And promises shape us.

That’s what covenant life is all about—living under promises that shape who we are, how we love, and how we live. The God who keeps covenant has called us to live as his covenant people. We’ve spent this series tracing his faithfulness from the Garden of Eden to the glory of eternity. Now, how do we live in light of it?

As a conclusion to our series, let’s reflect on what it means to live in covenant with the Covenant Keeper today—people who reflect that relationship in our worship, community, family, and mission.

Covenant Shapes Our Worship

Worship isn't our attempt to reach God; God already came down. It's our response to this gospel.

When we gather for worship, we're stepping into the rhythm of the covenant relationship—God calls, and we respond. That's why our services begin and end with God's Word: in a call to worship and parting benediction. It's a covenant conversation. The Lord initiates; we reciprocate.

We don't come to church to perform, impress, or earn; we come to meet with the covenant God who has bound himself to us in love. Every Lord's Day is a renewal ceremony where he reaffirms his promises to his people and we renew our vows to him in faith, love, and hope.

When we remember that, every ordinary Sunday becomes holy ground.

Covenant Shapes Our Community

Covenant theology teaches that God always works through a people. He didn't save Noah alone but his household. He didn't call Abraham as a solitary believer but promised, "I will be God to you and to your offspring after you."

The church is that covenant community today. We are not spiritual freelancers; we belong to one another. "We, though many, are one body in Christ" (Rom. 12:5).

That means church membership isn't a formality—it's family. In baptism, God marks us as his own and places us in the visible household of faith. At the Lord's Table, we share covenant fellowship with him and one another.

To live in covenant means we love, serve, forgive, and bear with one another, because our Father has done the same for us. The covenant community is not perfect, but it's authentic. It's where grace gets practiced.

Covenant Shapes Our Families

When God makes covenant, he includes children in the promise. That's not sentiment—it's theology. Covenant parents don't raise their kids hoping they'll one day belong to God; they raise them as those who already do. This is why we "baptize yo babies!"

That changes everything. Family devotions aren't optional extras; they're covenant renewal around the dinner table. Discipline isn't punishment but discipleship—training children to walk in covenant love. And our marriages? They're living parables of Christ and the church, displaying the faithful love of the Covenant Keeper.

Covenant homes aren't perfect homes. They're places where repentance is normal, forgiveness flows freely, and promises are kept even when feelings fail.

Covenant Shapes Our Mission

The covenant promise has always had a missionary heartbeat: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). We live as covenant members by carrying the promise forward: the church collectively is called to "make disciples of all nations" by "go[ing]...baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [and] teaching [the nations] to observe all that [Jesus] commanded." How? In the power and presence of Jesus: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Every act of evangelism, every cup of cold water, every word of truth and mercy is an echo of that promise. God is gathering a people from every tribe and tongue into his covenant family, and he does it through ordinary Christians living out ordinary faithfulness in the world.

You don't have to be a missionary across the ocean to live covenantally—you just have to remember the promises across the street.

Covenant Shapes Our Hope

Covenant theology ends where it began—with God keeping his word.

When the master restorer finishes his work, when the Father brings his children home, we will see that every covenant has led us to Christ, and every promise has led us home. Until that day, living in covenant with God means trusting the Covenant Keeper.

We fail, but he forgives. We wander, but he restores. We doubt, but he remains faithful.

That's the rhythm of covenant life—broken people kept by unbreakable grace.

Covenant Breakers and the Covenant Keeper

The God who called Adam to trust, who rescued Noah, chose Abraham, redeemed Israel, and crowned David, is the same God who calls us to live in faith and obedience today. He hasn't changed; "his steadfast love endures forever."

So, live as members of the covenant of grace—worshiping with reverence, loving your church deeply, nurturing your family faithfully, and joining his mission joyfully.

And when you falter—and you will—remember this: the strength of the covenant never depended on you in the first place anyway!

It rests on the One who said, "This is my body...this cup is the new covenant in my blood." So, eat and drink in faith and be assured.

The Covenant Keeper is still keeping his people.