



**Gospel Highway**

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Talks given at Reformed Ministers' Conference 2016, Kuala Lumpur, by Pastor Steve Clevenger of Covenant Reformed Baptist Church, Warrenton, Virginia, USA.

## **1. Title: Introduction to Covenant Theology**

### **Text – Luke 1:67-79**

#### **Luke 1:67–79 (NKJV)**

**67** Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

**68** “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people,

**69** And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,

**70** As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began,

**71** That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us,

**72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant,**

**73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:**

**74** To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,

**75** In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

**76** “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,

**77** To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,

**78** Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;

**79** To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

**Introduction:** Today we begin a study of **"The Importance of (Baptist) Covenant Theology"**. My hope is that you will begin to grasp how central this teaching is to the Bible and that you will appreciate the implications of this teaching for Christians.

Covenant theology is at the heart of Biblical Christianity. For example, on the most basic level, we think of the organization of our Bibles as Old Covenant and New Covenant. The Scriptures speak of our salvation in term of “covenant.” For instance, when Christians gather to partake of the Lord’s Supper we are reminded of the Words of our Lord when He says,

**Luke 22:20 (NKJV)**

**20 . . . “*This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.*”**

And as we are reading the Old Testament we continually stumble upon passages that speak of the “covenant” that God made with the Patriarchs. For example, when God appeared to Abraham we read,

**Genesis 17:7–8 (NKJV)**

**7** And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

**8** Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

The importance of the Bibles teaching concerning covenant cannot be overstated. It is a persistent theme in Scripture. The word “covenant” appears in the Bible over 300 times.

In pointing out the significance of this Biblical teaching Charles Spurgeon said, ***“The doctrine of the divine covenant lies at the root of all true theology.”***<sup>1</sup>

Now, let’s look a few places in the Bible where we can see how the subject of “covenant” is grounded in the Scriptures. Also, how it unifies Scripture and how it relates to redemptive history.

Let’s begin by turning to Luke’s Gospel chapter one.

Our passage begins with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist.

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, C. H. “The Wondrous Covenant.” *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*. Vol. 58. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1912. 517.

## ***An Angel Announces the Birth of John the Baptist***

### **Luke 1:11–17 (NKJV)**

**11** Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

**12** And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

**13** But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

**14** And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

**15** For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.

**16** *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.*

**17** *He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, (OT Quote, Malachi 4:5-6) ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

The angel announces to Zacharias that he will have a son, and he will be the forerunner to the Old Testament prophesied Messiah. The ministry of John the Baptist would fulfill the Words of Isaiah 40:3-5 (see Luke 3:3-6) and Malachi chapter 3 and 4 where the Baptist is the future Elijah.

### **Malachi 4:5–6 (NKJV)**

**5** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

**6** And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Notice the use of the word “covenant” in Malachi 3:1.

### **Malachi 3:1 (NKJV)**

**1** “Behold, I send My messenger (John the Baptist), And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant (Jesus Christ), In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts.

With the angel's announcement of the arrival of John the Baptist (My messenger) it is evident that God's covenantal dealings with Israel are unfolding. There is a clear connection from the end of the Old Testament (Malachi) to the beginning of the New Testament, the Gospels (Luke). So, we see a unified Biblical scheme, and we are getting hints that behind this unity are God's covenantal dealings.

Secondly, let's move forward along to verses 26-33.

### **Gabriel Announces Christ's Birth**

#### **Luke 1:26–33 (NKJV)**

**26** Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

**27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

**28** And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

**29** But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

**30** Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

**31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

**32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. (2 Samuel 7:14-17)**

**33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."**

Now the announcement of the angel moves from the forerunner to the Christ. Mary is told that His name is to be Jesus, and He will be the Son of God, and fulfill the promises made to David. Verses 32 and 33 recall 2 Samuel 7:14-17, Isaiah 9, and many other Old Testament passages. Again we have the theme of God's covenant. This is the covenant God made with David known as the Davidic Covenant.

#### **2 Samuel 7:11–17 (NKJV)**

**11** since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. ***Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house.***

**12** ***"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.***

**13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.**

**14** I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.

**15** But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you.

**16 And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” ’ ’**

**17** According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.

### **Isaiah 9:6–7 (NKJV)**

**6** For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,** To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

So, as we see God’s covenantal dealings unfold, we notice Biblical unity, but also a movement of promise to fulfillment, from types or shadows to antitype or reality.

Next, in verses 46-55 we see Mary’s Song.

### **Mary’s Song of Praise** (also known in the Latin as the “Magnificat”) **Luke 1:46–55 (NKJV)**

**46** And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord,

**47** And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

**48** For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

**49** For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.

**50** And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.

**51** He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

**52** He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.

**53** He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty.

**54** He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy,

**55** As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

Mary praises the Lord, and rejoices in God whom she calls “Savior.” In chapter 2 the angel applies this title “savior” to Jesus.

**Luke 2:11 (NKJV)**

**11** For there is born to you this day in the city of David *a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

There are Old Testament themes interwoven throughout Mary’s praise, but notice in verse 55 how she links the promise of the birth of Jesus to the covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 17.

**Genesis 17:7 (NKJV)**

**7** And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

Consequently, we are noticing how the saints in the Old and New Testament, like Mary, understand “covenant” and God’s covenantal dealings with His people. Mary recognizes the birth of Jesus as a fulfillment of God’s covenant promises. She believes that the fulfillment is a saving act of God.

And lastly, let’s look at verses 67-79. Here we have Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist prophesying concerning John’s ministry.

**Zacharias Prophecies of John’s Ministry**

**Luke 1:67–79 (NKJV)**

**67** Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

**68** “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people,

**69** And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David,

**70** As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began,

**71** That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us,

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**73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:**

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**75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.**

**76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,**

**77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins,**

**78 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;**

**79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”**

There is so much that could be said about this passage, but let's just touch a few items. Notice verse 72 and 73, and how Zacharias understands the ministry of John the Baptist and the coming Messiah as the fulfillment of the promise made to the patriarchs. He recognizes this as an act of God fulfilling covenant promises. He links covenantal promises made to David (v.69) and covenantal promises made to Abraham (v.73). Zacharias, like Mary, believes that this act of God in fulfilling His covenantal promises will result in redemption for God's people.

**Conclusion:** Let me close with a few thoughts.

1. I hope as we have started this journey concerning “covenant theology” that you are starting to see the importance of this doctrine. That this is not some obscure teaching in the Bible, but in fact is found throughout Scripture and that it is a major theme of the Bible.
2. Secondly, it is vital that you grasp the importance of covenant theology and its relation to the biblical teaching of redemption. In other words, the structure of redemptive history is grounded in the theme of covenant. We have a better understanding of the great redemptive acts of God on behalf of His people as they are seen in the light of His covenantal promises.

The covenantal promises of God strengthen faith, give us hope and assurance. We see examples of this in the passages that we

read today. Did you notice how the fulfillment of God's covenant promises strengthened faith in Mary and Zacharias?

3. Lastly, consider that we are gathered here today as God's people, His church, because He has established a covenant with us, through His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the pinnacle of redemptive acts, God sent His Son into the world to die for sinners.

**Luke 22:20 (NKJV)**

**20 . . . *"This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.***

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