



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.

2. Title: A Survey of the Divine Covenants

Text – Genesis 3:1-24 and selected passages

Introduction: We continue our journey into - **"The Importance of (Baptist) Covenant Theology"**. Its centrality in the Bible and the implications for us as God's people.

The God of the Bible is a covenant God. Sinclair Ferguson has expressed this reality by saying,

"God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. If you have never thought of Him in these terms, then you have not yet begun to think about Him in the way he wants you to. God's Word describes those covenants, proclaiming Him to be a covenanting God. In a sense, the Bible is the book of His covenant. We even call it that – the Old and the New Covenants [Testaments]!" (A Heart for God, 1987, p. 36, by permission Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA.)

Understanding the biblical theme of covenant is important for every believer because the basis of our relationship with God is through the means of covenant. Covenant Theology is central to the Christian faith.

The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 states the centrality of this covenantal relationship.

"The distance between God and the Creature is so great, that although reasonable Creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of Life, but by some voluntary condescension on Gods part, which he hath been pleased to express, by way of Covenant." (1689 Original Version 7:1)

Now let's define some basic terms that will help us to understand this teaching.

- **What is “Covenant Theology”?**
- **What is a “Divine Covenant”?**

1. **Covenant Theology**, also known as “federal theology” is a theological system that interprets the Bible through the various covenants that God has established with man. Covenant Theology teaches that there is a unified way of salvation in the Old and New Testaments. The one way of salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Jesus Christ alone. Covenant Theology sets forth an arrangement of three primary covenants which are **(1)** The Covenant of Redemption, **(2)** The Covenant of Works, and **(3)** the Covenant of Grace. These three fundamental covenants I will address in later messages.
2. **Definition of a Divine Covenant.** The primary word for covenant in the Hebrew Old Testament is *berith* and in the Greek New Testament the key word used is *diatheke*.¹ **The basic meaning of these words is that of a solemn oath, a pledge, a bond, or promise.** The Divine covenants are an action on God's part, therefore the emphasis in the Bible is upon the sovereign initiation of God. God sovereignly establishes the covenants, and administers the covenants.

Hebrews 6:13-19 is a Biblical example of God emphasizing that the covenant made with Abraham was essentially His “*promise*”, sworn by an oath.

Hebrews 6:13–19 (NKJV)

13 For when God made **a promise** to Abraham, because He could **swear** by no one greater, He **swore** by Himself,

14 saying, “***Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.***”

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained **the promise**.

16 For men indeed **swear** by the greater, and an **oath** for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of **promise** the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by **an oath**,

¹ Berkhof, L. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938.

18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,

God, gave an infallible promise through an oath to Abraham. There is no greater authority than God himself, therefore the promises are certain. Such examples in Scripture are to encourage the people of God, and strengthen faith.

The Puritan theologian **John Owen** helps us in understanding the meaning of covenant when commenting on Hebrews 8:6.

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV)

6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of ***a better covenant, which was established on better promises.***

Owen writes,

*(1.) That every covenant between God and man must be founded on and resolved into “**promises.**” Hence essentially a promise and a covenant are all one; and God calls an absolute promise, founded on an absolute decree, his covenant, Gen. 9:11. . . . **The being and essence of a divine covenant lies in the promise. Hence are they called “the covenants of promise,” Eph. 2:12; —such as are founded on and consist in promises.**²*

Now that we have briefly defined the Biblical term covenant let's move to a brief survey of the Divine covenants found in Scripture. There are six Divine covenants that I want us to look at (1) The Adamic Covenant, (2) The Noahic Covenant (3) The Abrahamic Covenant (4) The Mosaic Covenant (5) The Davidic Covenant, and (6) the New Covenant.

1. The Adamic or The Edenic Covenant – The Covenant of Works (Gen 3:15)

The first Divine covenant was made with Adam in the Garden. While the word “covenant” is not found in the passage, the elements of a covenant

² Owen, John. *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Ed. W. H. Goold. Vol. 23. Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854. Works of John Owen.

are present. Hosea 6:7 may speak of a covenant made with Adam (the word “men” can be translated “Adam” see NASB). Additionally, the Adam/Christ parallel in New Testament passages provide further testimony of the covenant made with Adam (see Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15).

The Adamic was a covenant of works. There is a promise by God to Adam that he may eat of any tree in the garden. But, man was forbidden to eat of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If man disobeyed the command of God the penalty was death.

A Covenant of Works

Genesis 2:15–17 (NKJV)

¹⁵Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat:

¹⁷but 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.”

After the Fall, God graciously pursues the sinful couple in the Garden.

Genesis 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “*Where are you?*”

Notice judgment is announced upon the couple, and the serpent. However, in the midst of judgment there is the promise of redemption.

- First, the serpent is cursed vv.14-15.
- Secondly, the woman is told of suffering and pain v.16.
- Thirdly, Adam is judged vv.17-19.

Genesis 3:14–19 (NKJV)

¹⁴ So the LORD *God said to the serpent*: “Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life.

¹⁵ And *I will* put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

16 To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.”

17 Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life.

18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”

In **verse 15** redemption is Promised. The serpent (the Devil) will be defeated by the Promised Seed of the woman. In **verse 21** we have the death of an animal, a sacrifice, the shedding of blood, and a covering is provided for the sinful couple. Notice God supplied the covering for Adam and Eve.

Genesis 3:21 (NKJV)

21 Also for Adam and his wife ***the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.***

Notice a few important items from the passage.

- (1) God graciously sought out the sinful couple **v.9**.
- (2) Redemption is Promised in the form of an unconditional Promise 3:15, the **“I will”** statement by God. Clearly, a Promise is made that God will fulfill.
- (3) The shedding of blood takes place and the provision of a covering with the skins v.21.
- (4) The couple and future generations are banished from the Garden, and from the immediate presence of God and access to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:22–24 (NKJV)

22 Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

23 ***therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden*** to till the ground from which he was taken.

24 ***So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.***

Now, from this point forward in the Bible these items become central to the forward movement of redemptive history, (1) the effects of the Fall and sin upon the human race, (2) the need for the shedding of blood – atonement, (3) God’s gracious action toward fallen man, (4) and the Promise of a Redeemer through the Seed of the woman.

Now, our Confession of Faith explains what we have just read, and expounds upon its covenantal significance. Notice the precise language and the words, “**by farther steps**”.

The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689; 7:3

*“This Covenant is revealed in the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of Salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards **by farther steps**, untill the full discovery thereof was compleated in the new Testament; and it is founded in that Eternal Covenant transaction, that was between the Father and the Son, about the Redemption of the Elect; and it is alone by the Grace of this Covenant, that all of the posterity of fallen Adam, that ever were saved, did obtain life and a blessed immortality; Man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms, on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.”* (1689 Original Version 7:3)

So, **Genesis 3**, especially **3:15** become the launching pad for the rest of the Bible in the way of the forward movement and revelation concerning redemption in Jesus Christ. Yes, it is rooted in the Covenant of Redemption from eternity, but in human history, it begins in Genesis chapter 3 and finds its ultimate fulfillment in the New Covenant, the life and death of the Seed of the woman, Jesus Christ.

It is important to notice that the forward movement biblically is **Promise to Fulfillment**, from **Shadow to Reality**.

2. The Noahic Covenant – The Covenant of Preservation

Genesis 6:18 (NKJV)

18 But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.

The covenant made with Noah functions as a way to preserve creation until the fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 3:15. God promises not to destroy the earth again in like fashion. Noah, his family, and the animals are preserved by God in the Ark.

Genesis 8:20–22 (NKJV)

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

22 “While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease.”

Genesis 9:1–17 (NKJV)

1 So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.

3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.

4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

5 Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man.

6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

7 And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it.”

8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying:

9 ***“And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you,***

10 and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.

11 Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

12 And God said: “This is the sign of ***the covenant*** which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.

14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud;

15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

17 And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of ***the covenant*** which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

3. The Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis 12:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you.

2 ***I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.***

3 ***I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.***”

God establishes a covenant with Abraham and through him a great nation will be formed. Jesus Christ is the promised Seed of Abraham and through Christ, the nations shall be blessed.

Genesis 15:1-21 (NKJV)

1 ***After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”***

2 But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

3 Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

4 ***And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”***

5 ***Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”***

6 ***And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.***

7 Then He said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

8 And he said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

9 So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.

13 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.

18 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—

19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites,

20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

Galatians 3:5-9 (NKJV)

5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”

9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

4. The Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant – The Covenant of Law

The Mosaic Covenant provides the legislation for the nation that God redeemed out of Egypt.

Exodus 19-24

Israel Affirms the Covenant

Exodus 24:1–8 (NKJV)

¹Now He said to Moses, “Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.

²And Moses alone shall come near the LORD, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.”

³***So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has said we will do.”***

⁴And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

⁵Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.

⁶And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar.

⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ***“All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.”***

⁸***And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.”***

5. The Davidic Covenant – The Covenant of the Kingdom

The Davidic Covenant, established a kingly line and a throne for the Messiah.

2 Samuel 7:12-16 (NKJV)

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.” ’ ”

Acts 2:29-36 (NKJV)

29 “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne,

31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.

32 This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

34 “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand,

35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’

36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV)

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

6. The New Covenant

The Promised One would come onto the scene of history with the New Covenant. Jesus Christ would fulfill the shadows of the previous covenants, He would bring eternal redemption, and establish the New Covenant Church.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 (NKJV)

31 “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—

32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My

covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Matthew 26:26–28 (NKJV)

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

28 ***For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.***

Conclusion: Observing the promises of God as found in the Divine covenants helps us to see that from the Old Testament to the New Testament there is a unified message. That is a message of a promised Redeemer.

Let me read again from our Confession of Faith as it directly touches upon what we have just seen in Scripture.

*"This Covenant is revealed in the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of Salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards **by farther steps**, untill the full discovery thereof was compleated in the new Testament; - (The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689; 7:3)*

And it is only by this promised Redeemer revealed in these steps that fallen humanity finds forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal life.

The promises of God find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament points us to Jesus as the promised redeemer.

The Apostle wrote,

2 Corinthians 1:20 (NKJV)

20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

As we read our Bible, we see Jesus Christ from Genesis to Revelation, from the Promised Seed of the woman, to the risen, exalted conquering King.

Listen to the words of Jesus.

Luke 24:25–27 (NKJV)

25 Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”

27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.
