PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN LIGHT OF THE COVENANTS

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A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
at Reformed Theological Seminary

Charlotte, North Carolina
June 2016
Accepted:

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The Rev. Guy P. Waters, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how the message of evangelists today should be richly informed by the covenants of Scripture. I will show how the New Testament itself witnesses to the fact that many of the Old Testament covenant promises are still available to be inherited through union with Christ, giving special attention to what this means for the gospel preaching of evangelists. I will demonstrate how Christ has fulfilled, or recapitulated, the conditions of all God’s previous covenants, endured their curses (if applicable) and inherited their blessings, and how all those who are united to Christ by faith become fellow heirs of these promises with Him.

Truly the blessings of the New Covenant are great, the promises of God in the gospel are great and the joy that we should feel is great, because our Saviour is a great Saviour and our salvation is a great salvation. By using the ‘means’ of covenant, which God Himself has used throughout time to work His way towards our appearing with Christ in glory, I hope to display in some measure the wondrous riches of this great gospel which we as evangelists are called to herald. Not only will the insights here deeply enrich the preaching of every evangelist, and the pastoral discipleship of every minister, but perhaps more importantly, the very glory of God will be displayed as we learn and preach in deeper, fuller ways of His love, generosity, kindness, wisdom, sovereignty and grace, as we look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.
DEDICATION

To Danielle, my love, my friend, whom God chose as my covenant partner for this journey. Only you know how impossible this would have been without you. Thank you. I love you.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this dissertation is that the content of an evangelist’s gospel should include, on balance over time, the offer to sinners of inheriting in Christ all the promises of the Old Testament covenants.

Understanding the Gospel

In the following quote, while comment on his own evangelistic preaching, DA Carson addresses the fact that when sinners come to Christ, they are *motivated* to do so, and that there is a plurality of these “motivations” which are held out to sinners in Scripture. Carson states:

Most of us, I suspect, develop fairly standard ways, one might even say repetitive ways, to appeal to the motivations of our hearers when we preach the gospel. Recently, however, I have wondered if I have erred in this respect—not so much in what I say as in what I never or almost never say…. All of the biblically sanctioned motivations for pursuing God, for pursuing Christ, say complementary things about God himself, such that failure to cover the sweep of motivations ultimately results in diminishing God…. The point to be made is simple: any failure to appeal to the full range of biblically exemplified and biblically sanctioned motivations not only means that there are some people we are not taking into account, but, more seriously, that there are elements in the character and attributes of God himself that we are almost certainly ignoring.¹

¹. Donald A. Carson. "Motivations to Appeal to in our Hearers when we Preach for Conversion." *Themelios (Online)* 35, no. 2 (July 2010): 258, 264.
In 2 Peter 1:4 the Apostle Peter says that through the knowledge of Christ God has “given to us exceedingly great and precious promises.” Similarly the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians, “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Cor 1:20). This seems to be part of the point Carson is trying to make, that the fact that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ brings God glory through us.

The first thing to note from these verses is that Paul says that these promises are to be inherited “in Christ,” and it is partly to this that this thesis is addressed. Why are these promises only “in Christ,” why is it that sinners can inherit them by being united to Him, and how does such a union with Him take place?

Then the other issue from these verses to which this thesis is addressed is the plurality of that word “promises.” Peter says that God has “granted to us his precious and very great promises.” Paul says that “all the promises” of God are yes and amen in Christ. But what are these promises? When were they made, and to whom did God make them? Why are they located “in Christ” alone? And why does Scripture tell us that they are “precious” and “very great”? Exactly what promises are Peter and Paul referring to? Perhaps another way of getting at the question is to ask, if the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) is what the Greek word means, “good news,” if it is the good news of God’s promises in Christ, then just how good is that “good news,” and just how good are the promises?

These are all crucial questions. In every generation there is a group of people who are communicating the good news of the Gospel to that generation and it is my great desire that we as that group of ministers in our own day will faithfully declare the whole counsel of God to our world, including all that God demands of sinners and all that He offers them in His
Gospel. And while much theology has been done on the covenantal framework of Scripture, and although Reformed Christians have always rightly contended for a single plan of salvation throughout redemptive history, there has been very little written about how an appreciation for the Old Testament (OT) covenants—together with their promises, obligations and threats—should inform the message of an evangelist to the unconverted today. Having benefitted from the insights of this study personally, I realize that my own evangelism has often limited itself to offering forgiveness of sins and an “eternal life” which has been far too narrow in what it comprehended, not including the many other benefits inherited by those in Christ in terms of the promises given in the OT covenants.

This has naturally filtered into our discipleship as well, leaving many Christians without a whole-Bible, covenantal understanding of “what is the hope of His calling” and “what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18). This of course then leads to a diminishing of the glory of God—it robs Him of glory:

An emaciated gospel leads to emaciated worship. It lowers our eyes from God to self and cheapens what God has accomplished for us in Christ. The biblical gospel, by contrast, is like fuel in the furnace of worship. The more you understand about it, believe it, and rely on it, the more you adore God both for who he is and for what he has done for us in Christ.2

As Gilbert so rightly says, theology and doxology shape one another, and central to understanding this wondrous, God-glorifying gospel is the concept of covenant. Commenting on Jesus’ words, “This is My blood of the covenant”, in Matthew 26:28, Presbyterian minister Jonty Rhodes comments:

Most Christians have at least some understanding that Jesus shed His blood so that we might be forgiven. Far fewer, I suggest, would be able to explain what Jesus meant by calling His blood covenant blood.²

Understanding why Christ’s blood was indeed ‘covenant blood’ will help us see that His inheritance in the saints truly is rich and glorious, and it will help us preach the gospel more clearly.

For these reasons, then, it will be argued that the Covenants of Scripture hold the key to our understanding what the “exceedingly great and precious promises” of the Gospel are, which “in Christ are yes and amen to the glory of God through us”. And by bringing the subjects of covenant and evangelism together in a Biblically faithful and practically helpful way it will be shown how understanding the promises of God in the covenants of Scripture can remarkably enrich the preaching of evangelists today.³

Literature Review

The literature available which treats covenants and evangelism together is very scarce. In fact, in my own research I did not find one work dedicated to the subject of how an understanding of the covenants of Scripture should inform our evangelistic preaching of the gospel. Having said that, one can enhance one’s understanding of both topics individually, and then piece together some of the scholarly views on their combination by researching works within the following four categories:


4. With these goals in mind, I will assume a covenantal view of redemptive history and will not enter the Reformed-Dispensationalist debate. I will also assume an agreement that the office of evangelist still stands in the church today, or at least that pastors are still called to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5).
Works on Preaching and Evangelism

These books and essays were helpful to see to what extent scholars in this field do consciously reference the promises, obligations and threats of the OT covenants. Included in this research was a review of the preaching of well respected Reformed evangelists from church history, especially the sermons of George Whitefield and Charles Spurgeon, and Michael Green’s work *Evangelism in the Early Church* was also most helpful in this regard. Sinclair Ferguson’s book *The Whole Christ* was a great asset, especially in helping me guard against unbiblical applications of what we know about God’s sovereignty to the message of the gospel. Machen’s timeless *Christianity and Liberalism* will always speak to these issues, especially regarding the gospel’s being by its very nature an account of historical facts as interpreted by all of Scripture (facts which profoundly include His covenantal dealings with man in the years since creation). Spurgeon’s *All of Grace* and Greg Gilbert’s *What is the Gospel* were very helpful as a summary of what conservative evangelicals of past and present consider to be the good news, and D.A. Carson’s 2010 article from *Themelios*: “Motivations to Appeal to in our Hearers when we Preach for Conversion” was also particularly pertinent. Metzge’s *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel Wholly by Grace Communicated Truthfully and Lovingly* was enlightening, more for how it did not treat the covenants than for how it did, and both Piper’s *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* and Packer’s *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* were helpful in applying the insights from God’s sovereignty in the Abrahamic Covenant to the ministry of preachers.
Works on Covenant Theology

Works on covenant theology, including works on redemptive-history. Among others, the main works consulted were as follows: Clowney’s *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the OT*, which is a readable Reformed work on redemptive-history. Pascal Denault’s *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology* was very helpful to understanding where some of the main differences between paedo- and credo-baptists lie when it comes to the covenants of Scripture. The compilation of essays entitled *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* included an amazingly helpful taxonomy of views regarding how the Covenant of Grace, the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant all relate to one another, and how one can understand certain comments of the Apostle Paul about the nature of the Old Covenant. Horton’s *Introducing Covenant Theology* was especially helpful in understanding the alternate ‘republication’ theory of the Mosaic Covenant. The other four books which spoke directly to the covenants of Scripture, all of which were exceedingly helpful, were Marshall’s *Biblical Truth Simply Explained: Covenants*, Packer’s *An Introduction to Covenant Theology*, Rhodes’s *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God’s Unfolding Promises to His People*, and O Palmer Robertson’s *The Christ of the Covenants*. I also want to mention with gratitude Jewish scholar Michael Avioz for his essay, “*The Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7: conditional or unconditional?*”—despite my disagreements with its conclusions, I respect Avioz’s honest wrestling with the issues and I am indebted to him for a better understanding of how Jewish people understand the Davidic Covenant today.
Commentaries

Perhaps more than many dissertations, the redemptive-historical nature of this thesis demanded that I treat much Biblical material, not only at the points where the covenants are dealt with, but also in tracing how the whole story of redemption has unfolded and how its various pieces relate to one another. For this reason there was a constant demand for exegesis of both OT and New Testament (NT) books, passages, as well as many single verses or pericopes that ranged from Genesis to Revelation. In this regard, of the older commentators John Gill, Matthew Henry and John Calvin’s commentaries were constant companions, and then as I followed the trail the modern commentators Belcher, Bergen, Brown, Edwards, English, France, Green, Grudem, Hendriksen, Kruse, Lucas, Mathews, O’Brien, Stott, Tidball and Wilcock were all consulted with profit.

Systematic Theologies

I include in this works like Burke’s The Message of Sonship (helpful in understanding the promises of the Davidic Covenant), i.e. books given to certain systematic theological themes. These were consulted on a multitude of topics like “covenants,” “evangelism,” “soteriology,” “Christ” or “Messiah,” “evil,” “sin,” “the fall,” “sovereignty,” “calling,” and many others. There were numerous books of this nature but the main contributions came from Berkhoff, Grudem and Williams. Chris Green’s The Message of the Church was very helpful, especially his chapter on 1 Peter 2 and its implications to the church’s inheritance of the promises of the Mosaic Covenant, and John Murray’s great work on soteriology Redemption Accomplished and Applied was informative on how God actually applies the blessings of the OT covenants to the elect in space and time (the ordo salutis being
something I needed constantly to bear in mind). Then the main Old and New Testament ‘Introductions’ consulted were, for the NT that of Carson & Moo, and for the OT that of Dillard & Longman (whose theology of Jesus as the Israelite “remnant of one” was supremely helpful).
CHAPTER 2
COVENANTS AND THE PURPOSES OF GOD

The following words of the great Scottish Presbyterian minister James Orr capture well the principle that must be the starting point of our discussions:

From Genesis to Revelation we feel that this book is in a real sense a unity. It is not a collection of fragments, but has, as we say, an organic character. It has one connected story to tell from beginning to end; we see something growing before our eyes; there is plan, purpose, progress; the end folds back on the beginning, and, when the whole is finished, we feel that here again, as in the primal creation, God has finished all His works, and behold, they are very good.¹

Or perhaps it was captured equally as well by Edmund Clowney:

Anyone who has had Bible stories read to him as a child knows that there are great stories in the Bible. But it is possible to know Bible stories, yet miss the Bible story. The Bible is much more than William How stated: “a golden casket where gems of truth are stored.” It is more than a bewildering collection of oracles, proverbs, poems, architectural directions, annals, and prophecies. The Bible has a story line. It traces an unfolding drama.²

Indeed, when we read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation we can hardly avoid noticing that it proceeds according to a plan. “Beginning with the creation of the world, the Bible then relates and interprets a series of historical events that lead to the grand climax and goal of the world’s history.”³ If this is true then it follows that understanding the grand plan of God is essential to rightly understanding any part of Scripture. There is an “organic

¹ James Orr, The Problem of the OT (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 31-32.
³ Daniel Fuller, The Unity of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 22.
character,” as Orr put it, a fundamental unity in the Scriptures that reveals a single unchanging plan which God has been, and still is, outworking through space and time. In short, God uses history.

This relates directly to the message of the evangelist. The gospel is news—good news to be sure—but it is news. It is the relaying of a set of historical facts, events of actually human history, together with an explanation of what those events mean to us. The early church was not simply built around a way of life. It was a community built firstly upon a series of events which had recently taken place, together with a Scripturally-informed understanding of what those events meant to them and the world. The message of the early church was: “Here are the facts of what has happened—we are witnesses to these things, we have seen them with our own eyes—and here is the meaning of those facts as interpreted by all of Scripture (for the Scriptures foretold the things that have happened in these days).” These two elements (historical events, together with their meaning according to Scripture) were inseparably combined in the witness of the early church. John Gresham Machen wrote of the importance of understanding this:

From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name “gospel” or “good news” implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth; and when the meaning of the happening was set forth then there was Christian doctrine. “Christ died”—that is history; “Christ died for our sins”—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity…. These two elements are always combined in the Christian message. The narration of the facts is history; the narration of the facts with the meaning of the facts is doctrine. “Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried”—that is history. “He loved me and gave Himself for me”—that is doctrine. Such was the Christianity of the primitive Church.4

God uses means to achieve His ends. God Himself has orchestrated the events of history, and He has done so for a purpose. This fact is what makes the concept of the ‘relevance of history’ a reality. The Bible relates these events and then it explains the meaning of those events, i.e. it tells us what God has done, and why. One of the first things we learn in Scripture is that the history of God’s creation began almost immediately with the rebellion of man and his fall into a state of sin. Hence a key principle for understanding this unfolding plan is that it is a story of redemption. Evangelists must be able to communicate and explain these redemptive events of the past because God has decreed that the means by which redemption comes to His elect is through their faith in the Man who stands at the center of them all.

So then, what has God done? As we progress through the Scriptures the outstanding principle that we find is that God has unfolded redemptive history progressively by making successive covenants with man. So great is the Reformed conviction on this point that in his Systematic Theology J. Rodman Williams says, “It would be no exaggeration to say that a proper understanding of covenant is essential both to an apprehension of the whole Bible and specifically as preparation for a study of the work of Christ in salvation”.5

If this is true, that God can apply the events of history to us in life changing ways today and that some of the most significant moments in history have been those moments (as recorded in the Bible) when God made covenants with men, then it follows that those covenants are still some of the most relevant, powerful, life-transforming factors in the world

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today. This is so because the promises that God made in those covenants are still available to be inherited today. Perhaps the following illustration will be helpful.

It is like a great King who over a 4000 year period systematically buried all of His treasures until finally “when the fullness of the time had come” (Gal. 4:4) the King sent His Son, the great Prince, who being the rightful heir of all those treasures was the only one worthy to go out and gather them up, and at the price of His own blood He took possession of them. But now, the unexpected and dramatically good news is that through an ancient hidden decree of the King, that was a mystery before the Prince came, through what the Prince has done anyone who now comes to Him in faith, putting their trust in Him, is adopted into the great King’s family and becomes a joint heir of all these treasures with the Prince. And then we, as evangelists, are like the heralds of that King being sent out into the kingdoms of the world to announce the revelation of this mysterious decree and invite all who will come to join themselves to the Prince and enter into His inheritance with Him.

The way the King buried his treasures was, of course, by way of covenant, and so this thesis will trace redemptive history along the following seven Biblical covenants: First the pre-temporal, intra-Trinitarian Covenant of Redemption; Second, the pre-fall Covenant of Works; Third, the Noahic Covenant; Fourth, the Abrahamic Covenant; Fifth, the Mosaic Covenant; Sixth, the Davidic Covenant; and seventh, the New Covenant. These all mark moments of great advance in the unfolding redemptive plan of God.6

6. See Appendix 1 for a fuller explanation for the omission of a “Covenant of Grace” in Gen 3.
O. Palmer Robertson defines a Biblical covenant as a “bond in blood”\(^7\) which requires the death of either party if they do not fulfill their covenant obligations. So a covenant is an oath-bound commitment which structures a relationship in which God graciously makes certain promises to men contingent on their fulfilling certain conditions, failing which certain curses or punishments will ensue. The point I want to stress here is that I will be writing with an assumption that covenants are always *conditional*. By “conditional” I do not mean that the purposes for which God made the covenants could be thwarted—God will most certainly save all those whom He elected before time began (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2). By “conditional” what I mean is that in every covenant, for the member/s to inherit its blessings they, in the words of John Frame, “must respond to God with a living and active faith” (Jas. 2:14—26).\(^8\) And yet it is God who sees to it that this condition is met in His elect (Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 2:12-13).\(^9\) Frame concludes:

> The covenants are unconditional because of God’s lordship attribute of complete control over the creation. They are conditional because of God’s lordship attribute of authority, his right to command and be obeyed.\(^10\)

Another key question is whether or not the *promises* of the various OT covenants are still accessible today. Upon first glance it would appear that they are not. Were the covenants not made with specific individuals and nations? What possible claim have I, a gentile in the 21st Century, upon the promises God made to Adam, or Noah, or Abraham, or Israel, or

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\(^7\) O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 4. For a brief explanation of Robertson’s views concerning how this definition relates to what we are calling the “Covenant of Redemption” and the “Covenant of Works” see Appendix 11.


\(^9\) See Appendix 2 for a fuller defense of the conditionality of all biblical covenants.

\(^10\) Ibid.
David, thousands of years ago? And yet Scripture seems everywhere to indicate that these promises are still valid today. Even in human covenants, says Paul in Galatians 3:15, no one annuls it—how much more in God’s covenants. The writer to the Hebrews says that God’s covenant oaths show abundantly the *immutability* of His counsel and that these should provide strong consolation for us who flee to Christ *today* (Heb. 6:17-18). Tom Marshall notes:

> Gentiles had formerly been “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). But now in Christ Jesus we have been brought near and are “no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people” (Eph. 2:13, 19). Thus *we inherit the covenants of promise* (note the plural), the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenant promises.\(^\text{11}\)

The NT specifically includes all the OT covenants as being inherited by the church:

- **The Covenant of Works:** Paul makes it clear that whereas through the first Adam came death a second Adam has come and given life to people, having become a “life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45).

- **The Noahic Covenant:** This was with all creation anyway, and so we do still enjoy its blessings, and even into eternity a stable physical realm will be ours, hence the Rainbow still being seen around the throne of heaven (Rev 4:3).

- **The Abrahamic Covenant:** Paul says, “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:29)

- **The Mosaic Covenant:** Peter plainly says that the Church has inherited the promises of the Mosaic Covenant—see 1 Peter 2:9-10.

\(^{11}\) Tom Marshall, *Biblical Truth Simply Explained: Covenants* (Trent, UK: Sovereign World, 2003), 51. All I would want to add to Marshall’s insights above is to include the promises of the Covenant of Works which for some reason he omits — for as we shall see eternal, sinless life is a benefit we inherit in terms of the Covenant of Works and so we must not neglect it.
application for evangelists

with these broad-level insights into how covenants structure redemptive history, and how the church comes into possession of the covenant promises through its union with Christ, we may make the following three foundational applications to the ministry of evangelists.

Explaining the Atoning Death of Christ

Commenting on Christ’s use of covenant to explain His death to His disciples at the last supper, Rhodes notes: “The death of Christ stands at the heart of the Christian gospel. And Jesus, for one, thought ‘covenant’ best unlocked the meaning of that death”. And so if what has been said by way of introduction in this chapter is true then let evangelists note that in principle if they are going to explain the atonement (which is most certainly part if their responsibility) it will require an understanding of covenant.

Explaining the Sinless Life of Christ

Luke summarized his own gospel as being an “orderly account” of “all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up” (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1-2). This is the fundamental task of the evangelist, and because so much of what Jesus did during His life was to fulfill, or recapitulate, the conditions of the OT covenants, evangelists must explain the importance of Christ’s sinless life within a covenantal frame.

Explaining Union with Christ

To able to offer the blessings of the covenants to unbelievers the evangelist must be able to communicate how it is that we may find ourselves federally represented by Christ, hence Paul’s words to the Philippians about “gaining Christ” and “being found in Him” (see Phil. 3:8-9). In those verses Paul reveals at least two conditions which the evangelist must preach

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to his hearers for human beings ever to be found “in Christ”: First, we must ‘know’ Him. And this knowledge is not a knowledge of facts alone, but a deep, relationally intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ. And so the evangelist must preach to people with the aim of making Christ known in the fullest sense, that they too may call Him, with all the affection of Paul, “Christ Jesus my Lord”. Second, Paul says that to be found in Christ we cannot be depending on a righteousness of our own, which is from the law, but we must have an alien righteousness imputed to us from God by faith in Christ, for salvation is “not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:9). The evangelist must be found faithful to speak of the sinfulness of men and the impossibility of earning our own righteousness. He must make clear the righteous judgment of God which is approaching and will fall upon all sinners, and he must hold out the free gift of righteousness offered from God by faith in Christ, for only through such an imputation of righteousness can Christ be found as our federal head.\(^\text{14}\)

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14. This will require the evangelist’s being able to communicate in sufficiently understandable terms the workings of penal substitutionary atonement and how Christ’s work on the cross was a death on behalf of sinners. These themes will be taken up in more detail in our discussion of the penalties of the various covenants in the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER 3
THE ETERNAL COVENANT WITHIN THE TRINITY

All four of the great events of history (creation, fall, redemption and consummation) were ordained before anything existed through an eternal decree of God. These decrees included a gracious election of a people whom God would redeem from out of the fallen mass of humanity and give to His Son as a bride (John 6:37-40, 65; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 8, 9, 11, 24; Rom. 8:28-30; 9:9-24; Eph. 2:4-9; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:19; Titus 3:3-7). Turretin and Voetius said:

The decrees are called ‘the definite plan’ (Acts 2:23), ‘the hand and the plan of God’ (Acts 4:28), ‘the good pleasure of God’ ( Eph 1:9), and ‘the eternal providence of God.’ They are called ‘eternal providence’ in distinction from actual providence, which is nothing other than the execution of the decrees of God. They are also called the will of God, and that which God intends to do…That there are decrees in God is shown by Scripture, which uses the expressions ‘foreknowledge’, ‘purpose’, ‘as it has been determined’, ‘plan’, and ‘gracious will’.¹

Many Reformed theologians hold the view that this eternal decree took the form of a pre-creation covenant between the Persons of the Trinity, often referred to as “the Covenant of Redemption”. A number of Scriptures speak of the plan of redemption being one which was made in eternity past.² God chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). The purpose of God for the church was an “eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” ( Eph. 3:11). Paul told the Thessalonians, “God from the beginning

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¹ Francis Turretin, J. Wollebius, G. Voetius, *Reformed Dogmatics: Edited and Translated by John Beardslee* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1965), 47, 337. As difficult as this is to understand, for the purposes of His own glory God included the fall of man in these decrees.

chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13), and to Timothy he said that God has saved us “according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim. 1:9). That is staggering language: “before time began”. We were elect before time itself was even created! The human mind cannot grasp the wonders of it.

Christ spoke of promises made to Him before His incarnation and of a commission He had received from the Father (John 5:30, 43; 6:38-40; 17), all of which reflects a covenant relationship. Similarly Ps. 2:7-9 and 40:7-9 are both covenantal in their arrangement, revealing contracting parties, obligations of the Son and the promise of the Father. Michael Horton says:

> The covenant of redemption … is an eternal pact between the persons of the Trinity. The Father elects a people in the Son as their mediator to be brought to saving faith through the Spirit. Thus, this covenant made by the Trinity in eternity already takes the fall of the human race into account. Chosen out of the condemned mass of humanity, the elect are no better or no more qualified than the rest. God has simply chosen according to his own freedom to display both his justice and his mercy, and the covenant of redemption is the opening act in this drama of redemption.³

In terms of this “Covenant of Redemption” each member of the Trinity plays a unique role. The Father committed to creating (Gen. 1:1) the human race and electing (Eph. 1:4) from it a people to give to His Son. The Son committed to entering a human body (John 1:14; Heb. 10:5) and redeeming (Gal. 4:4-5) the elect with His own blood. And the Holy Spirit⁴ committed to regenerating (Titus 3:5), sanctifying (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2) and empowering (Acts 1:8; Rom. 9:23; Eph. 2:10; 4:7-16) the elect through working a gift of

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⁴ There has been disagreement about whether or not the Spirit was party to the Covenant of Redemption (see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 518-519 for a fuller discussion), but I agree with Grudem that the Spirit, being fully God, must have agreed to His role within the divine decrees and so was not excluded from this covenant.
faith within them. Commenting on this ‘division of labour’ within the Trinity, Berkhof says, “This can only be the result of a voluntary agreement among the Persons of the Trinity, so that their internal relations assume the form of a covenant life”.

To whom, then, were the promises made in the Covenant of Redemption? Jesus said:

I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me…. I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me…. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. [John 5:30, 43; 6:38-39]

During His earthly life Jesus was clearly the party under obligation. He had received a commission from the Father in terms of which certain promises had been made to Him. In addition to the promises of a physical body (Col. 2:9. Heb. 10:5) and the authority to pour out the Holy Spirit upon the elect (Acts 1:4; 2:33) we must note the following three promises made to the Son by the Father:

Covenant of Redemption Promise #1: A people (a bride, as it turns out!) (John 17:6)

Covenant of Redemption Promise #2: A Kingdom (Luke 22:29)

Covenant of Redemption Promise #3: Great glory (John 17:24)

A people, a Kingdom, glory. To inherit these three promises Christ had first to fulfill the obligations mentioned earlier, which of course He did. The night before He died He prayed:

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. [John 17:4-5]

5. See 1 Pet 1:2 in which we see just such a division of these roles described, together with how the knowledge of this should impact our lives.


7. The promises of physical life and the Holy Spirit, as inherited by the church “in Christ” will be dealt with later.
The promises are now His: First, His people have been won and they are now in His hand (e.g. John 10:28; Acts 18:10); Second, He has ascended to the throne of His Kingdom (Heb. 12:2; Rev. 3:21); and third, He has indeed received great glory together with the Father (e.g. 2 Thess. 1:9-10; Rev. 5:13).

Application For Evangelists

God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Our being joint heirs with Christ includes these promises of a people, a Kingdom, and glory (Rom. 8:17).

Covenant of Redemption Promise #1:
A People—The Offer of Inclusion

The prophet Zechariah said that when the Lord’s presence came to Jerusalem, “Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people.” (Zech. 2:11) Evangelists are to invite sinners from every nation to join the people of God. This inseparably includes the promise of being raised by Christ on the last day (John 6:38-40).

Covenant of Redemption Promise #2:
A Kingdom—The Offer of Co-Regency

Despite their guilt sinners may yet hear the words, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34), for if we are Christ’s then it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom, and if we endure we shall also reign with Him (Luke 12:32; 2 Tim. 2:12). As staggering as it seems, what Christ offers sinners in the gospel is to inherit an entire kingdom, and let evangelists say so.
Covenant of Redemption Promise #3:
Glory—The Offer of Exaltation

Third, somehow we will be glorified together with Christ. In Jesus’ great high priestly prayer in John 17 He said, “the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one,” and Paul told the Romans that as joint heirs with Christ we will “be glorified together with Him” (Rom. 8:17). Indeed, to Paul “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18) for while the body of believers “is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory” (1 Cor. 15:43). In a world in which men and women will seemingly do anything to be noticed, to be respected, to have honor and glory before men, if evangelists can make known this promise of our future reign with Christ in which we will have an untainted, clean glory, a glory to which we were elected before time began, what an impact this could have on the heart attitude of a generation, for it is knowledge of eternal glory that releases servant hearts (John 13:3-4).

The Knowledge of Eternal Love

One last blessing that can be ours in Christ in terms of this covenant is the knowledge of having been known personally and loved personally before time even began. I believe this is what Paul is referring to in those majestic verses in Romans 8:35-39 in which he extols the fact that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. In a world in which depression, suicide, insecurity and loneliness are epidemic, what a message the evangelist has for those who will put their faith in Christ. Will we ever
plumb the depths of the comfort that *eternal love* can give us, and will we ever exhaust the sense of safety there is to be found in knowing that we have been loved by our Father from eternity past and will be loved by Him for eternity to come? O God, give the church of our generation evangelists who can speak of this mystery with power and clarity!
CHAPTER 4
GOD’S COVENANT WITH ADAM AND THE FALL

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The crowning piece of His creation came on the sixth day: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). The man He named Adam, and Adam named his wife Eve. They lived in a beautiful garden called Eden and they enjoyed fellowship with God and dignity in the work He gave them. And yet, there was a contingent ‘creation-relationship’ between God and man in the Garden. It does not appear yet as a covenant, but it included the moral law of God written on his heart. As Edward Fisher expressed it in 1645, “Adam heard as much (of the law) in the garden, as Israel did at Sinai; but only in fewer words, and without thunder”.¹ Then, having been given dominion over creation, Adam and his wife were commanded to multiply, fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28).

But Genesis 1-3 makes it clear that God then entered into a more complex relationship with Adam, which we will call the Covenant of Works.² As with all Biblical covenants it included a promise, obligations and a threat. From the presence of the tree of life in the garden it seems an unavoidable conclusion that God instituted a probationary period for


2. Some Reformed theologians deny the existence of a covenantal relationship between God and Adam before the Fall, John Murray probably being the most prominent. For an answer to John Murray’s objections please see Steve Johnstone, A Response to John Murray’s Objections to the Covenant of Works, available here: https://www.academia.edu/5579298/A_response_to_John_Murrrays_objections_to_the_Covenant_of_Works
Adam and Eve. During this period Adam and Eve would be required to obey God perfectly in order to be granted the right to eat from the tree of life. Once they had eaten from the tree they would live forever in a new state of indefectible sinlessness. It would also seem clear that during this probationary period (which Adam and Eve failed to stand) they were kept from eating from the tree of life. It was set in the garden as a sign of the promise which God held out to them of eternal, sinless life.

A Promise, an Obligation and a Threat

The tree of life must have represented the opposite of the threat of death, meaning that the promise of the covenant was eternal, sinless life—being granted a state of moral perfection for all eternity, often referred to as non posse peccare (“not possible to sin”). In order to inherit this promise not only did Adam have to obey the moral law of God written on his heart, but God saw fit to intensify this requirement through a specific test of Adam’s faith and obedience. He was not to eat from ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ (Gen. 2:17). This prohibition would require not only obedience, but humble faith in God as Creator and Lord. During this period Adam was expected to inherit the covenant promises through perfect obedience—something he was able to do (being in a state often referred to as posse non peccare, meaning “possible not to sin” (but also possible not to sin). If Adam were to rebel, however, and not stand the probationary period successfully he would be punished with death (Gen. 2:17). This threat of death appears to be more than just physical death (which did begin immediately with Adam’s sin), but also to have included a spiritual death in

3. It is for this reason that this covenant is often called the “Covenant of Works” because whereas in no other Biblical covenants can persons be saved by their own good works, in this covenant with Adam, despite his status as being posse non peccare being a gracious gift of God, still it was precisely his own good works by which he was now expected to succeed.
the sense of eternal separation from God, represented by Adam and Eve’s ejection from His presence in the Garden. Speaking of this two-fold aspect to the threat of death in Gen. 2:17, John Frame says:

We may, of course, say that man’s spiritual death (Eph. 2:1, 5) dates from the fall. But I believe that the threat of Genesis 2:17 was to Adam’s physical as well as his eternal state. Human death did, in general terms, begin with the fall, but in my view God did not fully carry out the terms of the threat in 2:17.4

Perhaps it would be even more precise to say that physical death is one component of spiritual death. As Grudem notes, throughout Scripture the ‘death’ that sin brings is seen in comprehensive terms: “death, most fully understood … mean[s] death in an extensive sense, physical, spiritual, and eternal death and separation from God”.5

Adam as Federal Head of All Mankind

God made this covenant with Adam as a federal head. Adam was not acting for himself alone. He represented all mankind (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-49), and all of his posterity would share his destiny, eternal life or death, contingent upon his obedience or disobedience during his probationary period. Adam did indeed break this covenant (Gen. 3:6) and as federal head of all his descendants he plunged creation itself and the whole human race into ruin in sin, for which reason we all stand condemned before God.

The Covenant of Works still stands over all mankind, though we are incapable of fulfilling it. We are now born and live in a state known as non posse non peccare


5. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Nottingham, England: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 516. While physical death is spoken of as a consequence of sin (Gen. 3:19), note how in Romans 6:16 Paul contrasts the ‘death’ to which sin leads with the ‘righteousness’ (not physical life) to which obedience leads. This surely equates to Paul’s description of unbelieving man as being “dead in trespasses and sins.” (Eph. 2:1, 5) Clearly then there is a spiritual element to the curse of Genesis 2:17.
(“impossible not to sin”). We are slaves of sin (John 8:34; Rom. 6:6, 16-20). The ‘promise of grace’ in Genesis 3:15 did not replace the Covenant of Works. The Covenant of Works still stands, which is why people still die. Rather, the ‘promise of grace’ was worked out through the covenants of the OT and eventually through the New Covenant itself and thereby provides fulfillment of the original Covenant of Works. Eternal, sinless life is given to the elect in terms of this original Covenant, which explains why the sign of the Covenant of Works reappears in the book of Revelation, where the saints are said to be given the right to eat from the tree of life (Rev. 22:14).

The Promise of Grace

After Adam and Eve’s first sin God confronted them and the serpent and He pronounced the curses of the Covenant of Works upon mankind, and yet He included a promise of grace. The words of this promise were spoken to the serpent: “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.” This is often called the protoevangelium, the first time in history the message of the gospel was proclaimed. It was a solemn oath made by God in which He committed to raising up a human descendent of the woman who would destroy Satan and undo the devastation of Adam’s sin, and it comprehended within it the salvation of every last one of the elect. This Genesis 3:15 “promise of grace” was not a covenant, but it would be worked out over thousands of years by way of covenant. This leads us to perhaps the greatest insight into the covenants of Scripture: The ‘promise of grace’ in Genesis 3:15 included

6. See Appendix 1 for a detailed defense of the position that states Genesis 3:15 does not constitute a covenant, but rather a promise.
within it the promise of regeneration for all the elect. This was of course consistent with the role the Holy Spirit had agreed to play in terms of the Covenant of Redemption. From the point of view of Reformed Systematic Theology this conclusion is unavoidable. We believe that repentance and faith are both gifts of God and that regeneration must precede them both (Ezek. 36:26; John 6:65). Now let the question be asked: Did God know this when He made His promise in Genesis 3:15? “Known to God from eternity are all His works” (Acts 15:18). For Christ’s coming not to be utterly futile the promise of God in the beginning must have comprehended within it the entire work of salvation from start to finish.

Christ and the Covenant of Works

In order for human beings to inherit the promises of the Covenant of Works two things had to take place.

First, the penalty of the broken covenant needed to be paid by a man. The first man Adam broke the covenant, but the second man, the last Adam, endured its curse of death and separation from God on behalf of all who would be forgiven. He paid our death-penalty for us on the cross of Calvary as a penal substitutionary sacrifice. There, separated from God, He cried, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46) And there He died, and from there He was taken to the tomb.

Second, a human being had to succeed where Adam had failed, by offering God a perfect, sinless life. Jesus perfectly kept the moral requirements of the Covenant of Works during His earthly life. “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” said Jesus (John 8:46). They could not, for He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). With
the words “not My will, but Your will be done” (Luke 22:42). He successfully did in the
garden of Gethsemane what Adam had failed to do in the garden of Eden.

And so Christ has now inherited the blessings of the Covenant of Works. He is raised
from the dead, seated at the right hand of God, and He is the Prince of life—eternal, sinless
life—offering the same to anyone who will put their faith in Him and thereby be united to
Him. The right is now His to give to anyone the fruit of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7).

**Application For Evangelists**

The Covenant of Works should enrich the preaching of evangelists as follows.

**The Knowability of God**

First, the Covenant of Works is the reason the deists are wrong. Many people live as
functional deists. They live as if it is impossible to have a relationship with God, and that
God could not enter creation now even if He wanted to. But the Bible teaches that God freely
chose to enter into loving relationships with those whom He created. In fact Paul makes it
clear in Romans 1:21 that all people know God already, but they know that He is at enmity
with them because of sin. So evangelists must herald that through knowing Christ we can
truly know God because He now invites human beings to be forgiven, reconciled and enter
peaceful relationship with Him.

**Alignment to the Spiritual Reality of the World**

Second, the evangelist must represent the truth that mankind has a spiritual enemy who
hates him and hates God. The Fall of man followed a prior fall within the angelic ranks, and
it was the temptation of a fallen angelic creature named Satan that brought about the Fall of man. Let evangelists tell people of the enemy of their souls and urge them to flee for safety into the arms of the One who has crushed the serpent’s head.

Understanding the State of the World

Third, the Covenant of Works explains why the world is in the state it is, and where the solution lies. Many people struggle with the obvious sin and brokenness of the world, with its wars, catastrophes and rampant corruption, and with our relationships on every level being broken by injustice. And of course that great enemy—death—constantly casts its shadow of fear upon every person. In our hearts we know that all is not well, we know that death is somehow a foreign intruder. And when our best political, educational, medical, scientific and social efforts still cannot heal the darkness of our world, the evangelist must point people to the truth of the origin of all this pain, together with God’s solution to it. Evangelists must preach about the literal first Adam and His failure, together with all the consequences of his fall, so that they can preach Christ, the literal second Adam, and His successes, together with what His fulfillment of the Covenant of Works means for those who will put their faith in Him, and for creation itself.

The Nature of Sin as Rebellion

Fourth, the evangelist must speak plainly of the knowledge of God held by all men and the knowledge of sin in their consciences. All men sin with the knowledge that what they do is sinful (“con” = with; “science” = knowledge) and with the knowledge that it is sinfulness against their own Creator. As God’s spokesman the evangelist is under a solemn
responsibility to bring God’s charge against this world, and this charge is the charge of rebellion. Men suppress the truth they know. When God charges men with sinfulness He is not being untruthful, and when He commands them to repent He is not being unreasonable. When men commit sinful acts, or think sinful thoughts, or refrain from doing that which they ought, they are doing so in the full knowledge that it is sin against their Creator whose wrath they will incur (Rom. 1:18). They are rebelling against the light that they have. With this charge put to the sinner, and the punishment of hell explained, the evangelist must then be unapologetic about the fact that the Gospel which he proclaims is a special revelation of God about how men may be forgiven of this rebellion.

Preaching Original Sin and the Promise of Reconciliation in Christ

This leads us naturally to the fifth element of evangelistic preaching which flows from an understanding of the Covenant of Works: reconciliation with God. Let evangelists make the following plain: Our alienation from God is the problem, an alienation that took place in Eden in terms of a broken covenant. And reconciliation to God is the solution, a reconciliation which also takes place through a covenant—the New Covenant. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 Paul describes the evangelistic ministry as being a “ministry of reconciliation,” and the gospel as “the word of reconciliation.” One of the great promises of the gospel is that the alienation that genuinely exists between people and God can be healed. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit in evangelism is to give the sinner a sense of this alienation, that as he sits under the preaching of the gospel he may be overtaken by an awareness of his loathsome filthiness before a holy God. I fear that much evangelistic preaching fails to bring out the truth of the enmity that there is between God and man in
terms of Adam’s imputed sin. Such will be the case when there is only ever a focus on the actual sins of sinners but no mention of the far more fundamental reality of the guilt of all men “in Adam”. Since the Fall the human race, as a race, is an offence to God. We are not born first at peace with Him only to lose that peace one-by-one as we each first sin personally. On the contrary, we are all born depraved and guilty, and then act out our depravity in personal sin. Evangelists must not shy away from this, from telling the people of this world that God is at enmity with humankind in terms of a broken covenant.

George Whitefield addressed this doctrine (called ‘original sin’) in a famous sermon entitled, The Method of Grace, in which he spoke of the need of every sinner not only to repent of their personal sins but of our guilt in Adam. Whitefield thundered:

You must not only be convinced of your actual transgressions against the law of God, but likewise of the foundation of all your transgressions. And what is that? I mean original sin, that original corruption each of us brings into the world with us, which renders us liable to God’s wrath and damnation. There are many poor souls that think themselves fine reasoners, yet they pretend to say there is no such thing as original sin; they will charge God with injustice in imputing Adam’s sin to us; although we have got the mark of the beast and of the devil upon us, yet they tell us we are not born in sin. Let them look abroad into the world and see the disorders in it, and think, if they can, if this is the paradise in which God did put man … However, therefore, some people may deny this, yet when conviction comes, all carnal reasonings are battered down immediately and the poor soul begins to feel and see the fountain from which all the polluted streams do flow. When the sinner is first awakened, he begins to wonder—How came I to be so wicked? The Spirit of God then strikes in, and shows that he has no good thing in him by nature; then he sees that he is altogether gone out of the way, that he is altogether become abominable, and the poor creature is made to live down at the foot of the throne of God, and to acknowledge that God would be just to damn him, just to cut him off, though he never had committed one actual sin in his life. Did you ever feel and experience this, any of you—to justify God in your damnation—to own that you are by nature children of wrath, and that God may justly cut you off, though you never actually had offended him in all your life? If you were ever truly convicted, if your hearts were ever truly cut, if self were truly taken out of you, you would be made to see and
feel this. And if you have never felt the weight of original sin, do not call yourselves Christians.⁷

It is precisely because of this original sin, this corruption of our very natures, that the best works of men are unacceptable to God—even our ‘righteousness’ is defiled by sin. In all this we see that understanding the Covenant of Works is fundamental to our faithfully preaching a gospel of reconciliation. The classic liberal teaching about ‘the universal fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men’ is a travesty of the gospel. It is saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When there is no peace (Jer. 6:14, 8:11). The promise of reconciliation rests upon an understanding of the depths of our alienation from God, and that this alienation is true of every human being, both Jew and Gentile:

It’s not enough to say that Jesus came to save us from sins, if what we mean by that is that he came to save us from our isolated mistakes. It’s only when we realize that our very nature is sinful—that we are indeed “dead in our trespasses and sins,” as Paul says (Eph. 2:1, 5)—that we see just how good the news is that there is a way to be saved.⁸

So let evangelists teach people, with all patience and gentleness, what it means that, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Let them plumb the depths of original sin, not just the shallows of personal transgressions, as they make known to their hearers how great the work of Christ is in reconciling us to God!

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The Promise of Resurrected, Eternal, Physical Life

Sixth, part of the promise of the Covenant of Works which Christ has inherited, and we in Him, is that of eternal physical life. When Christ paid the penalty for the broken Covenant of Works through His separation from God and death on the cross He earned the right to be raised in a physical body and live in it for all eternity. The tree of life did not hold out the promise of some nebulous spiritual existence for Adam, but a physical existence in a physical realm. The promises concerning eternal physical life, through the undoing of what Adam did, are exactly what Paul raises in His discussion of the two Adams in 1 Corinthians 15:42-46:

The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

Evangelists must continually hold out the promise of the great Resurrection Day, and how this future physical existence which we inherit in Christ is one of glorious perfection and strength. I remember preaching in an old age home once, and in the audience was a eighty-year-old woman who had been born with horrific deformity due to her mother’s taking Thalidomide while pregnant. She had only short stumps for arms and legs. But she loved the Lord, and with what delight did she sit and listen as I preached about the resurrection body!

The Promise of Sinless Perfection

And then seventh, the evangelist must clearly bring out the wonders of the promise of living in an eternal state of non posse peccare—that state in which it is impossible for us to sin, and impossible for anyone around us to sin. The great promise of the Covenant of Works is the inheritance of eternally sinless life. Every person we preach to is offered by God the
opportunity to eat from the tree of life: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God’ (Rev. 2:7). and “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

What a thought that we will one day be freed from the relentless onslaught of temptation that plagues our minds and hearts, and often ravages our lives today. What a thought that we will be forever perfectly pleasing to God in all our ways, and that our lives will never again cause anyone pain. What a way to live! And what a thought that every other person around us for all eternity will be perfectly loving, righteous, joyous and peaceful. What a place to live! What a community! The promise that we will live forever in a city in which “righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13) and into which no thing that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie will be permitted (Rev. 21:27)—this promise of an eternal and perfect home is one which the evangelist must declare and invite people to be partakers of through union with Christ.
CHAPTER 5
GOD’S COVENANT WITH NOAH

The epoch between the Fall and Noah (the era of the “antediluvians”) is God’s demonstration to us of what we will become without God’s common grace restraining the evil of all men, or without the external controls of law and government, or without the internal influence of the Holy Spirit through regeneration. These are the three things that keep people from acting out their total depravity, and they are all gifts of God granted through covenant, gifts which were largely absent in the era of the antediluvians.1 By rejecting God’s command Adam had effectively shown God that he wanted the run of the earth to himself, to live without God, indeed to be God (Gen. 3:5). And so for the next ten generations as the earth began to be inhabited by the multiplying human race, God preserved a small remnant of people whom He graciously regenerated, while the rest of mankind He simply left to live out their depravity. Of course, it led to an anarchic bloodbath. So in the days between the Fall and the flood of Noah, God demonstrated the total depravity of man and what we become without His covenantal intervention. It is as if the pages of Genesis 4-6:7 admonish us with the words, “Do not dare to criticize the sovereign, electing, covenantal...

1. A discussion of these three “restraining elements” is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I would argue that God’s common grace in retraining sin (like that spoken of in 2 Thess. 2:7) was “largely absent” in the era of the antediluvians, hence all flesh being corrupted and the earth being filled with bloodshed. Because all men are still equally as depraved, the only things that stop the earth descending into the kind of bloodbath being described there are the common grace of God, the controls of government (which apparently did not exist until the Babel attempt), and the “salt and light” of regenerate believers (who were non-existent in the days of Noah, except for Noah himself, and perhaps his family).
ways of God, for here you see what will become of man without God’s covenantal intervention”.

**Genesis 6—The Prelude to the Noahic Covenant**

Genesis 6:5-12 tells us that in the days of Noah (approximately 2500BC) the wickedness of man was great on the earth. Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. As God looked upon His earth it was corrupt before Him, filled with violence. All flesh had corrupted their way. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man and was grieved in His heart. This does not mean that God was surprised or that He had changed His mind. It is an anthropomorphic way of demonstrating the mysterious truth that God is not untouched emotionally by the evil that necessarily had to be included in His eternal decree.

But Noah found grace. Noah was a sinner and deserving of God’s wrath. But God graciously chose and regenerated him. In Genesis 6:14-22 God then instructed Noah to build an ark. Here we find the first mention of the word ‘covenant’ in Scripture: God promised Noah that He would ‘establish His covenant’ (v18).²

**Genesis 9—The Noahic Covenant**

After the flood, in which all flesh perished except Noah’s family and the animals with them, God then inaugurated the promised covenant with “every living creature” (Gen. 9:12).

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² The same Hebrew word for ‘establish’ (Mwq, qum) is again used in Gen 9:17, indicating that the parties to this particular covenant would actually be God and “all flesh,” hence the “my covenant” being spoken of in Gen 6:18 is probably the Noahic Covenant itself (not a Gen 3:15 “covenant of grace,” which would not have been with “all flesh.”).
Its main purpose was to preserve the earth and its people so that the rest of the covenants could unfold.

The promises of the Noahic Covenant seem to have been first, that never again would all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood (Gen. 9:11), and second, that the ground would never again be cursed because of man—seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night would not cease (Gen. 8:22). The result of these promises was that the earth would remain habitable until the end of the age, allowing the Seed of the woman to be born and tabernacle amongst us in this world, and for all the elect to be born and saved. Thus the decrees of the Covenant of Redemption, and the “promise of grace” in Genesis 3:15, could still be fulfilled.

Regarding the obligations of the Noahic Covenant we might suggest the following: First, Noah was to build an ark and go into it with his family and the animals that God would bring to him. This condition was already fulfilled when the covenant was inaugurated. Second, Noah, like Adam, was to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth, exercising dominion over it (Gen. 9:1-3, 7; cf. Gen. 1:28). Perhaps there was also a third condition attached regarding the treatment of blood and/or life. Noah and his descendant were not to eat flesh with the blood (Gen. 9:4), and whoever shed the blood of man, by man his blood must be shed (vs 5-6). Man now had a responsibility to God to honor His image in man by putting murderers to death. This introduced a penal and judicial structure into the government of the world which would curb the overflowing of wickedness so that what had happened before the flood would not happen to that extent again. The rainbow was then put in the cloud as the sign of God’s covenant with Noah.
Application For Evangelists

The following applications for the ministry and message of evangelists can be made:

The Promise of Finding Ultimate Identity in God

First, evangelists must declare to their audiences that despite the Fall man is still made in the image of God. Man belongs to God. Man is relational, moral, personal and acts with intent, he thinks and feels and makes decisions, all because that is how God is. The very constitution of our hearers is explained by the fact that “we are His offspring” (Act 17:28), and no matter how far they try to run or deny Him, the very fabric of their thoughts and feelings is only explained by His image imprinted upon them. The evangelist is not calling men to come to a stranger, he is calling men to their Creator, to come to the One in whom they will find the very reason for their existence. In a certain sense he is calling them home.

Making Known the Heart of God

Second, the evangelist must present God as being deeply grieved by the sins of men. He must display before the sinner the possibility that God feels about him as He did about those in the days of Noah: “sorry that He had made man on the earth, and grieved in His heart” (Gen. 6:6). What a horrible thought! And so let the evangelist present God as intensely sorrowed, pained, hurt and distressed by the sin of the sinner. Let him represent God just as God in reality is: a feeling God, a God whose emotions are profoundly moved by the rebellion He meets in the lives of the impenitent, a God who is burdened with our sins and wearied with our iniquities (Isa. 43:24), crushed by the adulterous hearts of those who depart.
from Him (Ezek. 6:9). Let the evangelist tell the sinner of how Christ grieved over wicked Jerusalem (Luke 13:34), how He loved and felt compassion for the rich young ruler who would not follow (Mark 10:21), how He looked around at the callous Pharisees with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts (Mark 3:5), and how His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death, so that sinners might have life! And may all this produce a conviction and shame that brings the sinner to his knees.

Preaching the Eschatological Reality of Judgment

Third, the Flood stands as a memorial to God’s power and justice, and itself is a guarantee of God’s future global judgment upon sin. In 2 Pet. 3:5-7 Peter addresses nonchalant sinners saying that the heavens and the earth (all things!) are preserved by the creative word of God, and that just as in the Flood God brought total global judgment on sinful mankind, He has promised to do the same again at the end, this time with fire. Eschatology has always played a major role in the message of evangelists to their generations:

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish … Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. [John 3:16, 5:24]

Indeed Jesus constantly proclaimed the coming judgment (e.g. Matt. 5:20-32; 7:22-23; 12:36, 41-42; 25:41; Mark 6:11; Luke 6:37; 10:12; 13:27; 17:26-30; 19:22; 21:34; John 9:39; 12:48), as did the Apostles (see Paul’s words to the men of Athens in Acts 17:30-31), as also did the early church fathers:

This lively awareness of the peril of those without Christ persisted as a major evangelistic motive in the second century. The stress on judgment in the subapostolic writers is so great that it was the subject of ridicule among some pagans. “We get
ourselves laughed at,” writes Tertullian, “for proclaiming that God will one day judge the world.”

So let us, as Paul did with Felix, reason with men “about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25), and may God grant it that just as “Felix was afraid,” so too would our hearers tremble, and cry with the Philippian jailor, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Act 16:30)

Using the Natural Realm in Evangelism

Fourth, the stability and order of the natural realm, which persists today in terms of the promises of the Noahic Covenant, is a witness to all people of the existence of God. In Acts 17 Paul preached to the men of Athens using the created order as the very platform from which he proclaimed the gospel. He declared to them the God who “made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24, cf. Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). The promises of the Noahic Covenant are the source of this preservation of the natural realm and can be used with similar effectiveness by evangelists today, especially when preaching to un-churched audiences.

The Promise of New Heavens and a New Earth

And fifth, there is a promise for eternity in the Noahic Covenant. The rainbow sign of the covenant is seen again in heaven (Rev. 4:3, 10:1), pointing to the physicality and eternal stability of the new heavens and new earth in which we will live in our own resurrected bodies:

We will live in a physical paradise, complete with mountains, oceans, elephants, hedgehogs, heathland, lagoons, forests and waterfalls. It will be even more beautiful than the first creation, while also no doubt containing many similarities. I imagine the Caribbean islands will be there, the Asian steppe, the plains of Africa. It is a new earth after all. The place the Bible calls heaven is therefore not our final destination— heaven is in fact more like the universe’s best-ever waiting room, where Christians who die now live until Jesus returns. It’s free from sin and suffering, but it isn’t the physical, resurrected universe. On the day Jesus returns, heaven and earth will finally be reunited.4

Biblical salvation entails physical life as it was created to be. Heaven is not a dream land where we will live in a dream state. It is a real place where we will embrace one another, a place where there are many mansions (John 14:2), a place where we will sit at Christ’s table and eat and drink with Him (Luke 22:30), and it is the evangelist’s job to invite people to that banquet, and to tell his audience that there is room enough for them.

In the days following the Flood mankind again began to fill the earth. But still the rebellious heart of man brought enmity with God. This culminated in God’s confusing the languages of those seeking to build a Godless totalitarian state at Babel and scattering mankind throughout the earth. Following this, in about 2100BC in Ur in Mesopotamia, despite the apparent ubiquity of the idolatry of mankind (including Abraham’s own father [Josh. 24:2]), God suddenly appeared to a man named Abraham\(^1\) and graciously made a covenant with him.

Though the word “covenant” is not used in Genesis 12 the main ingredients are present (obligations and promises). Regarding the obligations, \textit{by faith} Abraham\(^2\) had to:

1. Leave his country.
2. Leave his extended family.
3. Leave his father.
4. Go to the land that God would show him.

Then we may list at least seven blessings promised in terms of this covenant:

1. Abraham’s descendants would become a great nation.
2. God would bless Abraham.

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\(^1\) I forgo discussions about the changing of Abram’s name to Abraham in Genesis 17:5 and so will simply use ‘Abraham’ throughout. Similarly with Sarah, who formerly was Sarai.

\(^2\) Note that Abraham’s fulfillment of these \textit{preceded} the official inauguration of the covenant (Gen 15), hence the Abrahamic Covenant’s falling into the “royal grant” category discussed in Appendix 2.
3. God would make Abraham’s name great.

4. Abraham would be a blessing.

5. God would extend blessings or curses upon those who dealt with Abraham.

6. Through all this God would bring blessing to all the earth.

7. God would give Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan.

The Abrahamic Covenant was made with an individual but it included promises to others through him. This effectively meant that if Abraham kept the covenant conditions then his descendants would receive the land and they would become a great nation. Into that nation the Seed of the woman would one day be born and through Him people from every nation would be “blessed”. The point is that the obligations of this covenant fell upon Abraham and Abraham alone. If Abraham obeyed the covenant conditions then the promises for these other groups of people would be secured. If Abraham failed they would be lost. But this seems to introduce an impossible contradiction. I have defended the thesis that the salvation of all the elect was already secured in eternity past in terms of the Covenant of Redemption. Furthermore I have stated that within space and time God had already in the Garden given a “promise of grace” (Gen. 3:15) by which God was oath-bound to sending His Son and saving the elect. But now the entire historical outworking of this “promise of grace” seems to be made contingent upon the obedience of one man, and a fallen man at that. How is it that after God had made an infallible promise of salvation to the earth that He could then use the obedience of men like Abraham in future covenants in order to fulfill that original promise? What if Abraham had disobeyed? How can God make a promise and then use the obedience of people later to fulfill that promise? Only a Calvinistic understanding of the
sovereignty of God over salvation, and the gifts of obedience and perseverance (through a gift of faith) which it necessarily includes, can answer that question.

The obligations of the covenant may strike us as being a list of good works (“leave your country, your father, your extended family and go to the land that I will show you”) but Hebrews 11:8 makes it clear that these good works were to be the fruit of faith:

*By faith* Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Abraham obeyed by faith. And Abraham was saved by faith. [Rom. 4:1-3]

“The promise,” says Paul, was inherited “through the righteousness of faith.” (Rom. 4:13) And yet we know that justifying faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). Abraham was depraved and unable to have faith just like any other man, and yet in fulfillment of the “promise of grace” given in Genesis 3:15 God’s call to Abraham was effectual—that is, together with the call to obey God gave Abraham a gift of faith which brought about (“effected”) Abraham’s obedience. God is sovereign even over the obedience of people. By a gift of faith Abraham irresistibly, and yet willingly, began obeying God and as time would tell he did indeed inevitably fulfill the obligations of God’s covenant with him. And by this obedience “the blessing of Abraham” promised to all nations was secured.

The question may be asked, “Does this mean that God enters into covenant with us upon the same basis today (i.e. upon a precondition of faith and obedience), thereby placing faith and obedience outside the covenant structure? My answer is that it does not. In the New Covenant, faith and obedience are gifts granted to the elect in terms of the covenant itself, so we do not enter the covenant relationship upon these as a pre-condition. But for the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants the covenant blessings did not include regeneration. God’s entering covenants with Abraham and David in view of their faith (fulness) is something that
is peculiar to those administrations, not being included in the similarities between Abraham and the New Covenant believer (as described by Paul, for instance, in Romans 4 or Galatians 3). But Abraham and David’s faithfulness is explained by the benefits of the New Covenant being applied retroactively to the OT elect (like Abraham and David) and it was because of that regeneration that both men were able to obey the commands God had given them in their own respective covenants. O’Brien comments on Hebrews 9:15, “Jesus identified with the transgressors [of the Old Covenant] and died a representative death for them. His redemptive sacrifice is retrospective in its effects and is valid for all who trusted God for the forgiveness of sins in ancient Israel.” This explains how Abraham could obey the covenant conditions before the actual covenant ceremony was officially inaugurated.4

Understanding the Blessing of Abraham

It seems clear that Abraham knew about God’s promise to send the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head. He was expecting that human-born Saviour. And when God said that through Abraham’s seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, Abraham immediately understood the connection. The promise was clear enough for him to be saved by believing it (Gal. 3:8) teaches us that Abraham understood the gospel message as it was contained in God’s promise to him). This helps us understand the NT’s two-fold description of the promised “blessing” that comes to all nations through the Seed of Abraham:


First, Acts 3:25-26 tells us that the “blessing” of Abraham is the gift of repentance and the forgiveness of sins which issues from it. This blessing has come through Jesus Christ who was sent to “turn away every one of you from your iniquities”. Although repentance requires humility and a level of brokenness, let evangelists tell their hearers that it is nonetheless the blessing of Abraham, because, “[u]nless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3), repentance “leads to life” (Acts 11:18), and “godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted” (2 Cor. 7:10). Repentance is indeed a blessing to be received!

Second, Paul says in Galatians 3:13-14 that the “blessing of Abraham” issues in the sending of the Holy Spirit whom we receive through faith in Christ.

So God is fulfilling His promise to Abraham by granting repentance to people from all nations, forgiving their sins through faith in Christ and filling them with the Holy Spirit. Obviously these are themes which must remain central to the preaching of every evangelist.

The Covenant Ceremony—Genesis 15

As the narrative of Abraham’s life continues into Genesis 15, all of the obligations of the covenant had now been fulfilled through the gracious workings of God within Abraham and His providential workings around him. As far as the promises were concerned some had been fulfilled, others not: God had blessed Abraham, He had made Abraham’s name great, Abraham was himself a blessing to others, and God had extended blessings or curses upon those who dealt with Abraham. And yet, the two main promises were yet unfulfilled:

5. For a more detailed analysis of Abraham’s journey of increasing faith and obedience, see Appendix 3.
The first promise concerned the seed. Abraham’s descendants were yet to become a great nation so that through them all the families of the earth could be blessed. Again, Abraham knew that this comprehended within its scope the promise that from his own seed would come the Seed of the woman, the human-born Saviour of the world. All this was yet to be fulfilled.

The promise concerned the land’s being given to Abraham’s seed.

With the conditions of the covenant having already been fulfilled the inheritance of these promises was now guaranteed, yet there remained a major obstacle to both promises. Abraham had no children, being already in his eighties, and to make matters worse his wife was barren and beyond the age of childbearing. In the interactions that followed Abraham expressed his doubts to God about both promises (seed and land).

Doubts About the Seed-Promise

First Abraham expressed His confusion over the promise of the seed:

Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir! [Gen. 15:2-3]

John Calvin said: “Abraham did not expect some common or undefined seed, but that in which the world was to be blessed,” and for this reason Abraham was “impelled thus greatly to desire seed”.6 Abraham knew that the salvation of the entire world was dependent upon the fulfillment of God’s promises to him, hence the earnestness of his cry. God responded by using the stars as a visible sign of confirmation to assure Abraham of the promise. Abraham

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believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness (v6) (see Acts 4:12, John 14:6, John 8:56).

Doubts About the Land-Promise

With the seed-promise now having been settled for the time being, God Himself then moved the conversation onto the land-promise:7 “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it,” (v7) to which Abraham responded, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” (v8) Perhaps Abraham doubted how all these promises of the Seed would actually be accomplished in space and time. What if something were to go wrong after his death and the land did not actually fall to his descendants? How then could the Saviour be born into the world, for was the land not the place in space and time which God would prepare and use for His coming? So Abraham asked for a confirmation of this land-promise. In response God conducted a typical Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) covenant ceremony.8 Abraham would have been familiar with this ritual for it was commonplace in his day:

The patriarch needs no further instruction. He knows the procedure well. In accord with the custom of the day, Abraham halves the animals and sets the corresponding pieces over against each other.9

But just as the climax of the ceremony was to take place, whereby the two parties were to pass through the pieces of the slaughtered animals together,10 something staggering

7. See Appendix 5 for an important discussion on how the promises of land and seed were interrelated.
10. See for example Jer 34:10-20 (esp. verse 18).
happened. God put Abraham to sleep and passed through the pieces alone. God (whose presence was symbolized by a smoking firepot and a flaming torch) passed through the pieces without Abraham! This was tantamount to undertaking that He Himself would fulfill the conditions that fell upon Abraham and thereby ensure the realization of the promises. “The wonder of this vision is that God Himself takes the oath. He swears to Abram by His own life that He will perform the word that He has promised.”¹¹ Indeed, as we have seen, it was God who had already ensured Abraham’s fulfillment of the Covenant conditions (Heb. 11:8)—in that sense this monergistic act of God was backward-looking. Yet there was far more to it, for within it there was something that looked into the distant future, even to our own days and beyond. Richard Belcher says:

God confirms the covenant promises to Abram of land and offspring by taking upon Himself the responsibility to fulfill the promises. The smoking firepot and the flaming torch symbolize the presence of God as they pass between the slain animals. God is the only party to pass between the animals; this means that He takes it upon Himself to ensure that the promises are fulfilled.¹²

This was something of a reenactment of the Covenant of Redemption itself! This is so significant because it bears directly upon how salvation works in the New Covenant. As we will see, it was through the New Covenant that all these promises would find their ultimate fulfillment, and yet the difficulty seems to be that the New Covenant itself is conditional. While Christ has already paid the penalty for our breaking the Covenant of Works (purchasing our forgiveness), and while He has already lived a sinless life on our behalf (granting us the promise to be able to eat of tree of life), there is still an obligation that the


elect must meet before they can partake in this salvation, is there not? In the New Covenant what does God command us to do if we are to be saved? Paul says that we are saved “by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8), and with direct reference to Abraham he says, “So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham” (Gal. 3:9). So the condition of the New Covenant is that we must exercise saving faith, and the Bible describes saving faith as always including three acts of the sinner himself: Repentance, wholehearted trust in Jesus Christ, and perseverance to the end. But if this is so then how can election to salvation be unconditional? How could God give an unconditional ‘promise of grace’ in Genesis 3:15? This is essentially the same question as we are again faced with here: How could God pass through the pieces of the Abrahamic Covenant sacrifice on His own, given that this amounted to a self-maledictory oath of God that people from every nation on earth would inherit the “blessing of Abraham”?

How could God undertake to do such a thing if each of those elect would need to exercise personal faith in Christ. The answer, of course, is that what God was promising as He walked through the covenant sacrifice alone was the reality of what Reformed theologians refer to as “effectual calling.”13 This was a promise to give repentance, faith and perseverance (the ‘conditions’ of the New Covenant) to all the elect as a gift. This was a promise that the call of the gospel would infallibly produce in the elect sinner the very response that it demands of him. We see an example of this in Luke’s account of Paul’s ministry in Philippi:

Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul [Acts 16:14].

Later when Paul wrote to that same church of the Philippians, he told them: “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”. He was speaking of a

blessing which had come to Lydia, and to them all, in terms of the Abrahamic Covenant. God’s election to salvation has always comprehended the entire process of salvation for those whom He has predestined to life, and every step of that salvation is accomplished in the elect through God’s gracious and sovereign work. As I will comment on below, this should have a profound impact upon the faith with which evangelists proclaim the gospel.

### The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

At some point after the covenant ceremony Abraham’s faith failed again and at the encouragement of his wife Sarah he tried to produce the promised child through Sarah’s maidservant, Hagar. The child was named Ishmael, but he was rejected by God. The promised seed must be a child received and produced by faith in the promises, not by works of the law (Gal. 4:28). Upon this disobedience thirteen more years of silence from God ensued. Then when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, with both he and Sarah now being utterly incapable of having children, God appeared again to him and reaffirmed the promises (Gen. 17:1-8), commanding Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised as a sign and seal of his faith in the covenant promises (Rom. 4:11). Later, it would become a sign of membership in the covenant community of Abraham’s descendants, and act as a type of the regeneration of every true son of Abraham (Rom. 2:29).

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14. Once the grand narrative of Scripture begins to make sense and we see the One Story of God unfolding along the lines of the covenants, any question about the truthfulness of Reformed soteriology should entirely disappear. Even the most controversial of the Doctrines of Grace, so-called “limited atonement,” becomes obvious once we see that the New Covenant was simply a fulfillment of the promises and commitments of the previous covenants. If God had indeed committed not only to sending His Son to die for the elect, but to effectually calling and regenerating them too (as I argue is being portrayed in the Gen 15 covenant ceremony) then all those for whom Christ died will infallibly be saved.
Abraham’s Continuing Walk of Faith

Soon enough the promise of offspring was fulfilled in the birth of Abraham and Sarah’s son Isaac. For a long time God continued to test (in the sense of ‘prove’) the faith of Abraham, because faith without works is dead. But all along Abraham grew in obedience because it was God working in Abraham both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), the very thing He had promised to do in the Garden and had recommitted to when He passed through the pieces of the covenant sacrifice alone. “And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise” (Heb. 6:15). We see this growth in Abraham’s obedience in Genesis 22. Abraham’s willingness to kill Isaac was the fruit of a lifetime of sanctification in which God had strengthened Abraham’s faith to the point where he knew that God could even raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). When we compare that to the level of his faith in the Hagar debacle of Genesis 16 we see a powerful display of the truths of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility being held together in tension. And if it is true that faith is more precious than gold, we should embrace the lifelong testing of our faith which strengthens our assurance and produces patience (James 1:2-6). This is a point which evangelists must not overlook for their own ministry. Jesus was always clear about what following Him would cost (e.g. Luke 14:28-33). He said, “Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). I fear that evangelists who only ever speak about God’s “wonderful plan for your life” without speaking about the “patient endurance” required to withstand the discipline and pruning of God, are not helping potential disciples make a well considered decision for Christ. Such evangelists are asking for their seed to fall on stony ground.
The Abrahamic Covenant Within Redemptive History

The Abrahamic Covenant built on the previous covenants. It advanced redemptive history towards God’s end goal. Noah’s descendants had quickly fallen into the same deplorable state of sinfulness and pride as that of the “antediluvians.” But in the Abrahamic Covenant God now separated to Himself an elect family whom He would later transform into the nation of Israel. Although Abraham himself fulfilled the conditions of the covenant, it was Christ through the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit who was enabling him to do so. “By faith Abraham obeyed….” (Heb. 11:8), and this is “not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8). So even Abraham’s obedience was actually procured by Christ in terms of the New Covenant. In the covenant ceremony God also promised an irresistible grace by which the conditions of the New Covenant would effectually be fulfilled by all the elect.

Application For Evangelists

How should all this affect the manner and content of our gospel preaching? As we look back with a New Covenant perspective upon the seven promises of the Abrahamic Covenant we see the following.

The Promise of Inclusion in the Great Nation of Abraham’s Descendants

First, God promised that Abraham’s descendants would become a great nation, which indeed they did, the nation of Israel. And yet, as we will see shortly, the narrowing of the remnant of Israel eventually focused the status of being an Israelite upon one Man: Jesus
Christ, and the real descendants of Abraham are those who are united to that Man by faith (Gal. 3:7). For this reason the evangelist can tell his gentile hearers that in Christ God has made a way for them to be part of His great and holy nation and share in its inheritance, though by nature they have no claim upon it.

The Promise of God’s Blessings of Forgiveness and the Holy Spirit

Second, God promised to bless Abraham and that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. To be blessed by God is surely a good thing! It is good news that people can be united with Christ, the promised “Seed of Abraham” through whom the blessing of Abraham comes. By being found in Him we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Him (Eph. 1:3). As we have already seen the two main components of this “blessing of Abraham” are: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is so central to the gospel message that one hesitates to leave the following statements as bare as they are, but may these words settle deep into the ears of every person who ever shares the gospel: let no evangelist ever preach the gospel without making these two promises of God clear to his audience—that God is a God who forgives, and that God is a God who empowers! The gospel message is, to say the least, incomplete without its addressing the matter of sin and how God is by His very nature a God who forgives iniquity. And it is equally incomplete without addressing the glorious promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit who empowers and transforms us. Note that these two aspects of the blessing of Abraham are both squarely addressed in Peter’s sermon at Pentecost: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).
The Promise of Bearing the Greatest Name of All

Third, God promised to make Abraham’s name great. The very reason Abraham’s name is still today so great is that through him God sent His only Son into the world. Now Jesus, the Seed of Abraham, has received “the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11). And it is this very name by which we are known and through which we have access to the Father. I am reminded of the words of the Christian martyr Polycarp who, shortly before he was burned, when the proconsul encouraged him to swear by Caesar, said boldly: “Listen carefully: I am a Christian.”15 Indeed, let every sinner know that they too may seek the Lord, be forgiven of their sin and bear the only name worth dying for, for it is the Name which imparts true life and to which every knee will eventually bow.

The Promise of Being a Genuine Blessing in this World

Fourth, God promised Abraham that he himself would be a blessing. Now let every sinner hear this clearly, and let every evangelist proclaim it boldly: Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matt. 12:30). “We know that we are of God,” said the Apostle John, “and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). Christ is the only hope for the world and His church is His light in it. Every sinner must choose, will he accept Christ and so become a blessing to the world, or will he reject Christ and choose rather to “scatter abroad”. There is no middle-

ground, there is no sitting on the fence, and I believe that evangelists have a solemn charge to tell people this. And yet, what a wonderful promise this holds within it! All people long to live a life which is meaningful, a life of significance. Well, let the evangelist exhort his hearers that this is indeed what God offers them in Christ: the chance to “be a blessing,” and to live a life of eternal value and reward.

The Promise of Title to a Heavenly Land

Fifth, God promised to give Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan. In Galatians 3:16, quoting the promises of Genesis 12:7, 13:15 and 15:18, Paul categorically says that the promise of the land was actually made to Jesus Christ. Paul’s point is that it was clear from the beginning that it would not be through all of Abraham’s seed collectively that the land would be secured and the world would be blessed. From the time of Abraham there would be a “narrowing down” of the “seed” through history to a remnant. From among Abraham’s children Ishmael was rejected while God said, “in Isaac your seed shall be called” (Gen. 21:12). Then according to the election of God only one of Isaac’s twin sons was chosen: “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated” (Mal. 1:2-3). Of Jacob’s sons the tribe of Judah was chosen from among the twelve (Ps. 78:68). Then from within the tribe of Judah the family of Jesse were chosen, and from among his sons only David was chosen (1 Sam. 16:1-13). Then Solomon was chosen from among the many sons of David, being specially beloved of God (2 Sam. 12:24-25) and so the promises to Israel narrowed and narrowed through the history of the nation until they terminated on a single individual, the One whom the prophets had foretold. Dillard and Longman describe this well:

Christian readers can readily understand how the NT writers were following the lead of Isaiah himself. In their eyes, Jesus had become a remnant of one. He was the
embodiment of faithful Israel, the truly righteous and suffering servant. Unlike the remnant of the restoration period, he committed no sin ([Isaiah] 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22). As the embodiment of the faithful remnant, he would undergo divine judgment for sin (on the cross), endure an exile (three days forsaken by God in the grave), and experience a restoration (resurrection) to life as the foundation of a new Israel, inheriting the promises of God afresh. As the remnant restored to life, he becomes the focus of the hopes for the continued existence of the people of God in a new kingdom.\(^{16}\)

Jesus is the true Israelite, the “remnant of one.” With this Isaiah agrees. In a clearly Messianic passage the Messiah addresses the Gentiles, saying that Yahweh calls Him ‘Israel’:

Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The L ORD has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, and made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me. And He said to me, “You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.” [Isa. 49:1-3, emphasis mine],

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Paul says that the land that Christ, the Seed of Abraham, inherits is not simply the earthly region of Palestine, but the whole world (Rom. 4:13). Then even further to that, a consistent theme in the book of Hebrews is how the “land” promise is now to be understood as “heaven” itself (Heb. 11:16; 12:22; 13:14), or perhaps what Isaiah, Peter and John all refer to as “the new heavens and new earth” (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). The land originally became the domain of the nation of Israel where their citizenship was linked inseparably to it, but Paul speaks of how the church, the new Israel, has a citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20). The land then subsequently became the domain of the Davidic Kingdom, but Christ as Davidic King came and said: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

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What, then, does this mean for the promises of the gospel which evangelists herald? The promises to Abraham are inherited by those in Christ: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). This fundamentally includes the promise of the land! “I go to prepare a place for you,” said Jesus.

In the gospel God offers sinners not only the opportunity of being forgiven and granted eternal life. He offers them title to a land, a land in a heavenly country where Christ will take us on His return. This was perfectly consistent with God’s promise to Satan in the garden (Gen. 3:15), and was therefore to be understood by Abraham. This explains the comments of the writer to the Hebrews about Abraham’s apparent ‘low view’ of the earthly land of Canaan: “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:9-10). Christ offers every sinner a home, a real home in a heavenly city in a heavenly land. And this home will finally feel like home, where no place on this earth ever will. Christ offers sinners total fulfillment of their desire for belonging. What a powerful promise and yet how difficult to communicate! The English word “home” elicits a certain sense of peace, of acceptance, of rest, of familial love, of natural fit and belonging, and yet these are the very things which we will never perfectly know in this fallen world. But they are the very things that Christ has inherited and offers to anyone who will come to Him. May evangelists pray for the words to communicate this in such a way that it strikes lost sinners deeply as they hear the voice of their Shepherd saying “Follow Me, and I will lead you home”.

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Pointing to the Providential Hand of God

Then sixth, just as God sovereignly worked in the life circumstances of Abraham to bring him to the point of obedience, so too I believe it is entirely appropriate to point out to sinners that they are not hearing our words to them by accident. God controls all things and has brought them there that day, and so let them not spit in His face and scorn the opportunity to be saved, for the God who brought them there today is the same who will judge them tomorrow.

Implications of the Certainty of the Abrahamic Promise

Lastly, we must comment on the strong monergistic elements that pervade the Abrahamic Covenant. It was argued above that the promised “blessing of Abraham” was itself in fulfillment of the infallible decrees of the Covenant of Redemption, and was therefore an outworking of the ‘promise of grace’ given in the Garden. The infallibility of it all was then acted out in the Abrahamic Covenant ceremony. In his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer has a powerful discussion about how a belief in the sovereignty of God should affect the confidence with which we preach the gospel. While I highly recommend Packer’s book for all evangelists, let me highlight one of his comments that pertains to how the total depravity of man renders him incapable of responding to the gospel, but how the sovereign and monergistic grace of God in regeneration overcomes this:

So far from making evangelism pointless, the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility—indeed, the certainty—that evangelism will be fruitful. Apart from it, there is not even a possibility of evangelism being fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has
ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to
preach the Christian gospel.17

The evangelist can preach with faith knowing that God’s elect will respond irresistibly
in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. In addition to the encouragement this offers, it
should have at least two other effects on the ministry and message of an evangelist.

First, it should cause him to think carefully about his methods. Preaching in such a way
that prompts a public prayer of repentance before genuine regeneration has taken place may
lead to spurious converts. If most of the people responding to such calls do not submit to
being baptized into a local church, and do not persist in the faith after their initial
“conversion,” then the evangelist has great cause to question the genuineness of these
conversions and his methods in procuring them.

Second, where sinners may fear committing to Christ out of a sense of an inability to
“see it through,” the evangelist has every Biblical warrant to promise them, based upon the
promises of the Abrahamic Covenant itself, that God’s Spirit will empower them to do so.
Evangelists must tell people that the God of the Bible is not a God of a mere moral
improvement of man as he is. No, the God of the Bible transforms people from the inside out.
He promises: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the
heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). The evangelist
may tell his audience with all the confidence of Scripture that genuine saving faith will lead
to a life of growing, albeit imperfect, obedience. And God will also ensure that this faith and
obedience persevere to the end. So let the evangelist tell his hearers:

Come to Christ in all your weakness and inability. Come to Christ with nothing in
your hands and no promises in your mouth. Come to Christ with a contrite heart and

Originally published 1961), 104.
with your eyes squarely upon the cross, and you will find that He makes all things new and He completes every good work that He begins!
Isaac had twin boys, Jacob and Esau, and Jacob had twelve sons. One of the twelve, Joseph, though initially rejected as ruler and deliverer of his family, was eventually raised up by God to be exactly that: their ruler and deliverer in the land of Egypt to which the family eventually migrated because of a worldwide famine. Generations passed in Egypt and the family grew prolifically, eventually being enslaved by the Egyptians: “But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt” (Acts 7:17). Then, in 1525 BC, during the bondage of the Children of Israel in Egypt, an Israelite man was born who would change the face of human history. His name was Moses. As illustrated by the quote from Stephen’s sermon above, the Bible is clear that what God was about to do with this man—and the covenant he would mediate—would bring a major advance in redemptive history, in direct continuity and partial fulfillment of what God had promised Abraham. In order for the blessing of Abraham to come to all nations, the world would first need to know what sin was specifically so that it could seek forgiveness, and it would need to know how that forgiveness was to operate. It would also need to witness the unswerving justice of God in His treatment of sin. The world would need a revelation of the nature of God, that He keeps mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children. But this kind of revelation would require the kind of covenantal
dealings which would be impossible for the whole earth to enjoy without the ubiquitous presence of the Holy Spirit (something which would only be granted in the New Covenant). God would need to select one nation from amongst the earth, enter a covenant with them, placing them in their own land, with their own laws and ceremonial practices, and somehow dwelling in the midst of them as their God. As Walther Eichrodt states:

God's disclosure of himself is not grasped speculatively, not expounded in the form of a lesson; it is as he breaks in on the life of his people in his dealings with them and molds them according to his will that he grants them knowledge of his being.¹

As this knowledge of Him then increased in that nation God could begin to send prophets to reveal more and more about the coming Seed of the woman so that in the end this nation would be prepared to receive Him when He came. This was Israel’s calling: to be a womb for the Messiah! Not for their own good only, but so that the blessing of Abraham could come to all the nations as promised.

And yet further to the various redemptive-historical advancements listed above, if the thesis of this dissertation is true then there was another advancement that God brought through the Mosaic Covenant: it introduced further promises which would be inherited by the NT church.² This is a key principle for knowing how the Mosaic Covenant can find its rightful place in the message of evangelists today.


2. The opening paragraphs of this chapter, together with what follows, express my own views of the continuity of the Mosaic Covenant with all that had gone before, and how it actually advanced redemptive history beyond the Abrahamic Covenant. The place of the Mosaic Covenant, and how it relates to the previous covenants (including the Gen 3:15 ‘covenant of grace’, for those who hold to it) is a notoriously controversial subject within the walls of the Reformed camp. See also Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David Van Drunen, The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 2009. Brenton Ferry’s article lays out the eight major Reformed views (see pages 80-90). I hold to the “Misinterpretation Theory” as he describes it.
Inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant—Exodus 19-24

Exodus 19-24 recounts God’s making His covenant with Israel after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. As Israel camped before the mountain, God prepared the scene for the covenant ceremony. The days preceding it were fearful for the people. God’s holiness and their sinfulness began to be made clear by the appearance of an awful cloud of engulfing fire and smoke on the top of the mountain. During this time God called Moses up the mountain where He began, as is typical in ANE treaties, by recounting His goodness to Israel. He then made a series of staggering promises to them, to which we will give much attention in what follows below. In accordance with covenant ceremonial practice the people ratified the Covenant: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do,” they said (Ex. 19:8). The people were then required to prepare themselves ceremonially because God Himself was going to encounter them. Bounds were set at the base of the mountain and only Moses and Aaron were permitted to cross them (even if an animal were to cross the bounds it was to be killed). Then with one last terrifying blast of a trumpet and a final warning for the people to respect the presence of God, Yahweh spoke with a voice audible to the entire nation and He gave them the Ten Commandments. When God had finished, a great sense of sin fell upon the people and they trembled with fear, telling Moses that he should rather ascend the mountain and get the rest of the law from God—they did not want to hear that terrifying voice again. Moses did so, and in the three remaining chapters of the covenant document we read of further laws given to him, further promises, the covenant sacrifice, and a covenant meal.

3. For a review of why God constituted Israel as a nation and the purpose of the law see Appendix 6.
The Promises of the Mosaic Covenant

Should Israel obey the covenant conditions there were great and precious promises held out to them. We will look at six promises in particular, all of which become the church’s inheritance in Christ. Three of the promises are found in the preamble to the Covenant in Exodus 19:4-7, then three further promises can be found later in the covenant document in Exodus 23:20-26:

Mosaic Covenant Promise #1: “You shall be a special treasure to Me above all people” (v5). No other nation would be able to say that God was their God and they were His people. What an astounding thought that the God who created the universe and owns the whole earth would condescend to adopt a people for Himself and call them His own special treasure.

Mosaic Covenant Promise #2: “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests.” A priest’s function is to bring people to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of others, and to intercede for them. This was God’s call upon Israel, a high and blessed calling that through them God would one day save people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Rev. 5:9).

Mosaic Covenant Promise #3: “You shall be to Me a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). This nation would be holy, that is, set apart for the unique purposes of God Himself. What a privilege!

Mosaic Covenant Promise #4: “I will send an Angel before you” (Ex. 23:20). This was doubtless referring to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and was thus the promise of God’s presence with them. The promised land was geographically located in a place where they had never been before. There was a great river to cross before it could be entered, and once there the enemies of the people of God were too great for them to battle in their own strength.
These insurmountable odds were, however, now able to be surmounted because of the presence of God Himself with the people, preparing the way before them.

Mosaic Covenant Promise #5: “I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries” (Ex. 23:22), a promise that would become more precious as the years were to unfold.

Mosaic Covenant Promise #6: The inheritance of the land of Canaan, and God’s blessing in it (Ex. 23:23-26).

Christ Inherits the Mosaic Promises

Jesus Christ, the Seed of Abraham and the true Israelite inherited all six of these promises. Given the equivalence of the Abrahamic and Mosaic promises, Paul makes Christ’s inheritance of them abundantly clear in Galatians 3:16: “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” With the six promises listed above in mind:

1. Jesus was the precious cornerstone (God’s special treasure) (1 Pet. 2:6): If the Israelites were to be “a special treasure to Me above all people,” then Christ, as the remnant of one, the faithful Israelite, is supremely a special treasure to His Father above all people.

2. If the Israelites were to be to God “a kingdom of priests,” it was Christ who first and foremost fulfilled this, being God’s great High Priest and King of God’s eternal Kingdom: Hebrews 8:1; John 8:36.

3. God had promised that the Israelites would be “a holy nation”. It was this very thing they failed to fulfill but then came Christ, born into the nation itself, living a holy life,

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4. It is enlightening to see that all six of these promises of the Mosaic Covenant are substantially the same as the six promises of God to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant. See Appendix 7 for a comparison.
fulfilling the promise as “the Holy One of the nation of Israel” (Acts 3:14) and constituting a new people as God’s holy nation.

4. God had promised the Israelites that their journey to the promised land would be attended by the presence of God Himself. Later, however, the prophets spoke of how the presence of God was being withdrawn from the nation (Ezek. 10). But then came Christ, and at His baptism the Spirit came upon Him and remained upon Him (John 1:32) and He would later give this testimony about God’s presence being with Him: “He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone” (John 8:29).

5. God promised the Israelites that He would “be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to their adversaries”. In its fullest sense this statement can only possibly be made of Jesus Christ, for in the end the only people God will oppose are those who reject His Son. It is Christ’s enemies whom God will oppose for eternity (Rev. 21:27).

6. God promised Israel the land of Canaan. This was in direct continuity of the promise given to Abraham that “his descendants (seed)” would inherit the land (Gen. 12:7). But Christ is the One to whom this promise of the Land was actually made (Gal. 3:16).

God made promises to Abraham, and then repeated them to Abraham’s descendants through Moses, but all those promises were actually being made to Jesus Christ, and Christ is the only One worthy to receive them. Let evangelists always remember that the central figure of human history is Jesus Christ. The entire history of this universe is about God’s obsessive and unfathomable love for His Son. And we, the elect, were simply swept up into this as God set His love upon us; and He did so not for our own sakes or for anything good in us, but so that He may unite us to Christ and present us to Him as a bride. “This is My Son whom I love”—this is what all history is about. As preachers we are not to feel ashamed to proclaim
this, though it humbles the pride of man, for it proves to be an inconceivably great blessing for the bride herself!

The Obligations of the Mosaic Covenant

For four hundred years the descendants (seed) of Abraham, being enslaved in Egypt, did not partake in the Abrahamic promises, and so the cry of the Israelites during that four hundred years may well have been, “Will God ever fulfill His promises to our fathers, and if so, how can we be the generation that sees them fulfilled?” The conditions of the Mosaic Covenant were (and still are!) God’s answer to that question.

As we saw in the covenant preamble, the promises of the Mosaic Covenant were preceded by a clear statement of conditionality: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant then you shall…” (Ex. 19:5). But the key question is: what did it mean to “keep the covenant?”

It is my own understanding that Israel’s obligation under the covenant was not perfect obedience to the law. Perfect obedience would not have been sufficient anyway, for all were already guilty at birth in Adam. The conditions, in my view, were three-fold:

1. By faith they were expected to keep the law (Rom. 9:30-33,5 14:23);

5. Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 to show how the Israelites were always expected to put their humble faith in the coming Messiah, and thereby to fulfill the law (not by perfect obedience, but by constant repentance and returning to God in faith). And it was upon this principle of humble faith in the Messiah that the Jews stumbled, turning the law into a law of works by which they tried to earn righteousness for themselves. But whoever says he has no sin makes God a liar and the truth is not in him.

6. Even if we do something in keeping with the law (some “good” work), if it is not done from faith in the heart it is sin, and our “good work” is like a filthy rag that we wrap around our nakedness before God (whereas God would clothe us with a robe of righteousness by faith in His Son). So God required an obedience from faith: “If you will live humbly, with a faith made perfect through works (James 2:22 — i.e. with an obedience in your life that demonstrates that you have genuine faith), you will inherit these promises.”
2. When they sinned they were to repent and return to God in faith (Deut. 30:1-3; Jer. 25:4-6). The sacrificial system demanded humble faith. (Matt. 12:31-34)

3. To believe in the promised Seed, and receive Him when He came. The Israelites were to fulfill the previous two conditions together with faith in the promises of the coming Seed (Gen. 3:15) and Saviour (Deut. 18:15). The sacrificial system was always only given to point to Christ, to stir repentant faith in Christ. Those sacrifices could never on their own take away sins (Heb. 10:8-10).

So the conditions laid upon Israel through the Mosaic Covenant were: *From faith seek to obey, repent when you do not, and look forward to the coming Saviour.* Addressed to man as a sinner, the Mosaic Covenant was not a covenant of works requiring perfect obedience to the moral, civil or ceremonial laws (not even for remaining in the land). Hebrews 3:16-19 is clear: the failure of the Israelites was their faithlessness, not their lack of perfect obedience.

**The Curses of the Mosaic Covenant**

Regarding the *curses* that would fall upon Israel should they break the covenant, there were multiple curses mentioned from Exodus to Deuteronomy, culminating in removal from the land and captivity in the nations. These measures were disciplinary. Finally, however, the ultimate curse of the Mosaic Covenant was exclusion from being God’s chosen nation; that is, being cast out of the covenant and disowned by God (Hos. 1:9), though God is able to graft them in again (Rom. 11:23).

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7. The very reason that the sacrificial system was put in place was to make repentance and restoration available perpetually, not just for individuals, but for the “whole congregation” (e.g. Lev 4:13-21).

8. And many other prophecies of the Messiah which followed during the Mosaic epoch.
At this point it is important to discuss how the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant relate to the gentiles. The Mosaic Covenant was a national covenant with an ethnic people, while the Covenant of Works was with all those “in Adam” (every human being). As discussed in chapter 4 above, every human being stands under the judgment of God as a covenant breaker. We are all counted guilty in Adam in terms of the Covenant of Works and we have all inherited a sinful nature as a result. Because of the corruption of our natures we then also sin in our personal capacities. Paul addresses the federal aspect of our guilt in Romans 5:12 and the matter of personal sin in Romans 3:23. With this in mind, the point that I will now defend is that the curse which lies upon all mankind is the curse of the broken Covenant of Works, not that of the broken Mosaic Covenant. The Covenant of Works surely included a moral law, as I have defended in my discussions above, and it is this moral law, written on the heart and in the conscience of every human being, that people are still accountable for today, and it is their sin against this moral law which accounts for their guilt before God (cf, Rom. 2:12-15). If indeed the law of Moses was given so that by it sin might be seen for what it is (Rom. 3:20; 7:13), this necessarily means that the moral aspects of the law of Moses must have pre-dated the Mosaic Covenant. Those who desire to completely disregard the law of Moses on account of Christ’s having fulfilled it would do well to understand this principle. Yes, the law of Moses has been fulfilled by Christ (Matt. 5:17), “is becoming obsolete,” “growing old” and “ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13), but the moral aspect of the law of Moses was not novel to Moses. It was an expression in human law of the eternal principles of right and wrong as they reside in the Being of God Himself. For if “by the law is the knowledge of sin”
(Rom. 3:20, cf. Rom. 7:7), then this necessarily means that the Law of Moses only made known what sin already was. Sin, and the standard of God’s righteousness of which it is a transgression, predates Moses. This had all already been established the moment God created man in His own image and entered a covenant relationship with him, and it is this standard of righteousness which is in fact, in terms of the original Covenant of Works, still written on the consciences of all men. This is why the curse lies upon all men, not just the Jews.

The fact that Gentiles are outsiders to the Mosaic Covenant means that Gentiles are not under its obligations. Let that truth sink deep into the understanding of every evangelist. Neither are the Gentiles under its curses. But before a Gentile hearer begins to rejoice at this, as if it represents a freedom of sorts, let him remember: neither is he eligible to inherit any of its promises. Paul addresses the Gentile believers in Ephesus, showing them how their exclusion from the Mosaic Covenant was not a blessing, despite what the Mosaic Covenant seemed to have led to in Israel. He says:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:11-13)

Paul says that people who are foreigners to the Mosaic Covenant “have no hope”, and are “without God in the world”. And here we come to a staggering assertion: If anyone wants to be saved, to spend eternity in heaven, they must first become an Israelite. This is because Israel are God’s chosen people. We have just seen that through the promises of the Mosaic Covenant an orphan people were adopted as God’s very own. In the lead-up to the covenant ceremony God would tell Pharaoh, “Israel is My son, My firstborn” (Ex. 4:22). In order for any person to go to heaven they must be part of this “kingdom of priests,” this “holy nation,”
this special people of God’s own. The New Covenant itself, said Jeremiah, would be “with
the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31). This is why Paul’s theology of
the Church’s being the true Israel of God is so precious (e.g. Gal. 6:16)—a theology missed
entirely by the Dispensationalists.9

The great principle of the Gospel is that, “he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is
circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and
circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men
but from God” (Rom. 2:28-29). And so as evangelists we must understand how it is that our
gentile audiences, who are without hope and without God in the world, can become ‘Jews’ in
this sense and thereby inherit the promises of the Mosaic Covenant. The evangelist who
addresses predominantly Gentile hearers must be able to explain why this is so important and
how it happens, which is what makes Peter’s comments in 1 Peter 2:9-10 so important.

The Mosaic Covenant Fulfilled in Christ

God is “slow to anger” but eventually after a thousand years He proclaimed the Mosaic
Covenant to be broken through the Israelite’s lack of faith. The Apostle Paul says in Romans
9:30-33 that they stumbled on the stumbling stone, which was Christ.10 Consequently, they
were ejected from the land and dispersed among the nations. Eventually, however, Jesus
Christ Himself, the True Israelite, came into the world, born of a woman, born under the law,
fulfilling it perfectly so that He might redeem those who were under it.

9. See Pascal Denault, The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground

10. For a treatment of the difficult subject of why Israel failed and what the discontinuities between the Old and
New Covenants are, see Appendix 9.
Christ Fulfilled Its Conditions

As far as the three conditions are concerned, Christ perfectly trusted His Father and so perfectly obeyed the Mosaic Covenant laws (Matt. 5:17), and He did so while actually becoming the fulfillment of its provisions for forgiveness. In addition we should also note:

- Moses was a prophetic type of Christ (Heb. 3:2).
- Moses prophesied the coming of Christ (Deut. 18:15).
- The sacrifices of the Mosaic sacrificial system were only types and shadows pointing to His death on the cross as a sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:12). In Matthew 26:28 Jesus quoted Exodus 24:8 in order to point back to the Mosaic Covenant, indicating that the blood of the Old Covenant, which is vanishing way (Heb. 8:13), was always an imperfect type pointing forward to the perfect blood of the everlasting (New) covenant (Heb. 13:20).

- Jesus is a better priest than those given within the Mosaic system (Heb. 7:11-28).

What this change in priesthood/mediator means for us is that there has also been a change in law (Heb. 7:11-19; 1 Cor. 9:21). The entire Mosaic legal system was temporary and has been replaced by the law of Christ.\(^\text{11}\)

- The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, but once we have come to Christ we are no longer under a tutor (Gal. 3:24-25). If we are in Christ then we have inherited the promises of the Mosaic Covenant. Christians are not under the obligations of the Mosaic law in terms of the Mosaic Covenant.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^\text{11}\) But remember our previous discussions about the moral aspects of the law pre-dating the Mosaic Covenant, and so these did not change when the Levitical priesthood was replaced by Christ as Priest.

\(^\text{12}\) I would say that we are under its moral obligations, but in terms of the Covenant of Works. This does not mean that God’s moral laws have changed. They have always been the same, pre-dating the Mosaic
Jesus “rejected the scribal traditions”\textsuperscript{13} and claimed to be able to rightly interpret the authority and implications of the laws of Moses, “and he does it all with an astounding authority”:\textsuperscript{14} “You have heard it said…but I say unto you….” (Matt. 5).

Whereas Moses’ shining face on the mountain was veiled before the people (Ex. 34:33), at the Transfiguration on the mount Christ’s glory far excelled, while Moses himself looked on (Mark 9:2-4).

Whereas Moses is a servant in God’s house, Christ rules as Son (Heb. 3:5-6).

Whereas the law brought only condemnation to the Israelites, Christ is the end of the law to all who believe (Rom. 12:4). The conviciting, condemning power of the law exhausts its accusations in Christ.

All these fulfillments were metaphorically represented by Christ when He recapitulated the testing of the Israelites—when they failed in the wilderness for forty years, Jesus succeed in the wilderness for forty days.

Christ Bore Its Penalty

Israel is under the curse of God for it broke the Mosaic Covenant (Gal. 3:10) and so any person who converts to Judaism today immediately falls under the curse of the broken Covenant. But these laws are now written on our hearts by the Spirit (no longer on tablets of stone) and have been interpreted for us by Jesus and the New Testament writers. Ferguson helpfully summarizes the matter: “So we are Ephesians 2:15—16 Christians: the ceremonial law is fulfilled. We are Colossians 2:14—17 Christians: the civil law distinguishing Jew and Gentile is fulfilled. And we are Romans 8:3—4 Christians: the moral law has also been fulfilled in Christ. But rather than being abrogated, that fulfillment is now repeated in us as we live in the power of the Spirit.” (Sinclair Ferguson, \textit{The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism & Gospel Assurance — Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters}. Wheaton, Il: Crossway, 2016.)

\textsuperscript{13} Michael Green, \textit{The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Matthew} (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 93.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Mosaic Covenant. But Christ has borne this curse for those whom He represented. Nowhere is this better illustrated that in the common description that the Apostles used of Christ’s being “hung on a tree” (Acts 5:30; 10:39; Gal. 3:13). Part of the Mosaic law was that if any man were hung on a tree his body was to be removed before sundown lest the land be defiled, for he who was hanged was cursed by God (Deut. 21:22-23). The marvel of it is that “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13). The point to note here is that a way has now been made for us to inherit citizenship in the nation of God (plus all its promises) without inheriting its curse.15

Inheriting the Promises of the Mosaic Covenant

Sandy & Giese make this comment about the enduring nature of the Mosaic Covenant and its promises:

God was concerned to grant permanent promises that would ensure the enduring nature of the covenant relationship no matter what might happen. He is not a fickle God. Conversely, God was also concerned that the people of Israel became loyal to Him. He is a jealous God (Exod. 34:14). Therefore, to focus the attention of the people not only on the permanent promise but also on the importance of their faithfulness to Him, He stipulated ongoing obligations by which they must live with Him and one another. The promise was permanent (see Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 30:1-10), but their experience of the covenant blessings (see Lev. 26:1-13; Deut. 28:1-14) as opposed to the covenant curses (see Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 28:15-68) in any particular generation depended upon their loyalty to the Lord and faithful fulfillment of the clearly stipulated obligations of the covenant (see Deut. 30:11-14).16

15. With reference to my comments under the heading Gentiles as Foreigners to the Mosaic Covenant on pages 58-60 above, for Gentiles to inherit the promises of the Mosaic Covenant (which they must if they want to be saved), they have to become Israelites. But the problem with becoming an Israelite is that there is a curse upon its members because they broke the covenant. But when a Gentile believes in Christ he simultaneously becomes a true Jew and receives the benefit of Christ’s having taken the curse upon Himself (so from that point onwards — having now become an Israelite — he can say that Christ bore the curse of the Mosaic Covenant for him).

G. J. Wenham says quite unequivocally, “the Christian church has inherited the privileges promised to the OT people of God”. The point is that although the Mosaic Covenant could be broken, and people could be disowned and cut off from it, yet its promises still endure and have been inherited by the Christian Church. But do the Scriptures confirm this? Is the Church spoken of as the new Israel, and as the inheritors of the promises of the Mosaic Covenant? Why, yes! To see this we now turn our attention to 1 Peter 2:9-10.

The Covenantal Frame of Peter’s First Epistle

Peter wrote his first epistle to mixed congregations made up of both Jewish and Gentile converts, and his purpose was to encourage and exhort believers facing persecution. As one reads though the first chapter of the book one is struck by how immediately and deeply Peter’s argument is rooted in the old covenant. Many NT introductions comment on this. Grudem says that one of the most prominent themes of the whole letter is “the church as the new people of God”, a thought which has far reaching significance should it be true. Carson & Moo bring this principle out in the following commentary:

A distinctive contribution of Peter lies in his repeated insistence that Christians belong to the ancestral people of God. Few documents in the NT so resolutely apply OT language of Israel to Christians. The “inheritance,” a term redolent of God’s promises to Israel, belongs securely to believers (1:4) Christians are those who are promised God’s final salvation and glory. This very salvation, Peter reminds us, was promised by the OT prophets (1:10-12).  


18. See Grudem, I Peter (TNTC), 38-40.

In 1:2, Peter immediately sounds the note of the NT church’s being the real people of God. He says that these Christians, whether ethnically Jewish or Gentile, are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”. Being God’s chosen people is a uniquely Jewish theme in the OT, as is His loving foreknowledge of them. We see this in the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 7:6-8:

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Turning to 1 Peter 2:4-10 we see that Peter quotes some of these very words, applying them to the NT church. Grudem’s comments:

Verse 4 begins a new section (vv. 4-10) in which Peter uses extensive OT imagery to show that NT believers (both Jew and Gentile) are in fact a new ‘people of God’ who have come to possess all the blessings of OT Israel but in far greater measure.²⁰

In verses 4-8, by quoting three OT “stone” prophecies (Isa. 28:16 in v 6; Ps. 118:22 in v 7; Isa. 8:14 in v 8), Peter represents Christ as infinitely superior to the old covenant temple in Jerusalem. He is a living stone, while the stones of the temple were dead, and NT saints may as ‘living stones’ come to Him and be built up together upon Him as the cornerstone, into a spiritual house, which is vastly superior to the physical structure of the Jewish temple. Also, it is all believers who may now come and offer spiritual sacrifices, instead of only the Levites being able to minister in the physical house of the old covenant temple, because all believers are now members of God’s holy priesthood. All our lives as we live them to God’s glory are a sacrifice pleasing to Him, like a sweet aroma arising to heaven. In v 7 Peter

²⁰Wayne Grudem, Tyndale NT Commentaries — 1 Peter (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, reprint 2009), 103.
maintains that this honour is reserved not for the old covenant people, but for those who through faith have become members of the new covenant, while those who reject Christ stumble even as the OT predicted they would.

With the words, “But you…” (2:9) Peter now focuses his gaze squarely upon the Church. This is in contrast with those Jews, the old covenant people, who disobey the Gospel. It is ‘the builders’ (of the old covenant structures) who rejected the stone that has become the chief cornerstone. The religious leaders of Israel, the representatives of the old covenant people, rejected and crucified Christ, and now the church of believing Gentiles and Jews make up the new covenant people. Ladd brings out the sense of what follows:

Israel’s place has been taken by the church, who are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (2:9).…That Peter regards the church as the true Israel is further supported by the fact that he, like Paul (Rom. 9:25-26), applies to the church words that in their OT context refer to the future conversion of literal Israel (Hos. 1:10), “Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (2:10; cf. also Hos. 2:23).

The categories that Peter uses in 2:9-10 are far-reaching in their significance because in them (and some surrounding verses) he claims the inheritance of all six of the promises of the Mosaic Covenant for the NT church:

Mosaic Covenant Promise #1: The Church is now a “chosen generation,” God’s own “special people.”

Mosaic Covenant Promise #2: The Church is now God’s “royal priesthood.”

Mosaic Covenant Promise #3: The Church is now God’s “holy nation.”

Mosaic Covenant Promise #4: The presence of God Himself has now come to the Church in the Person of Jesus Christ. They live in His marvelous light because He has poured out His Spirit upon them, and He will lead them safely home.

Mosaic Covenant Promise #5: The Church may now rest in the midst of persecution from enemies, seeking peace, committing herself to “Him who judges righteously” (2:23).

Mosaic Covenant Promise #6: The Church is made up of those who are given true ‘rest’ in the true ‘land’ of God, where they have “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven” for them (1:4).

But how can this be? And the answer the NT gives us is simply this: because they are “in Christ”, the covenant-keeping Israelite. The glorious truth that we preach as good news to our hearers is that at the end of Christ’s perfectly righteous life those six promises made to Israel through Moses, long dormant and forgotten, rose to life and were inherited by Him! And they are now offered to anyone who will be converted and be united to Him through faith.

**Application For Evangelists**

**Preaching the Moral Law to Awaken a Sense of Sin**

One of the greatest pieces of advice for gospel preachers comes to us from one of the greatest gospel preachers of all time, George Whitefield. It concerns how the moral law was given in order to bring the knowledge of sin. Preaching on God’s question to Eve in Genesis 3:13, “What is this you have done?” Whitefield said:

> What a wonderful concern does God express in this expostulation! “What a deluge of misery hast thou brought upon thyself, thy husband, and thy posterity? What is this that thou hast done? Disobeyed thy God, obeyed the devil, and ruined thy husband, for whom I made thee to be an help-meet! What is this that thou hast done?” God would here awaken her to a sense of her crime and danger, and therefore, as it were, thunders in her ears: for the law must be preached to self-righteous sinners. We must take care of healing before we see sinners wounded, lest we should say, Peace, peace, where there is no peace. Secure sinners must hear the thunderings of mount Sinai, before we bring them to mount Zion. They who never preach up the law, it is
to be feared, are unskillful in delivering the glad tidings of the gospel. Every minister should be a Boanerges, a son of thunder, as well as a Barnabus, a son of consolation. There was an earthquake and a whirlwind, before the small still voice came to Elijah: We must first show people they are condemned, and then show them how they must be saved.  

The Promise of Being a Chosen Generation

In the gospel evangelists address people who are foreigners to God—those who do not know Him, those who are not covered by His mercy—offering them full rights as members of a generation chosen by God and treasured by God. In the OT times even the prophets themselves longed to understand what we can now understand (1 Pet. 1:10-12). At one point in Jesus’ ministry he turned to His disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it” (Luke 10:23-24). There is a strange fortifying and unifying power which comes to a people who know they have been chosen, who know they are treasured by Almighty God. The history of the Jewish nation, with its unearthly solidarity and corporate stamina through trials, testifies to this. Speaking of the Christians to whom Peter was writing, Derek Tidball says:

From the conventional social, economic and political viewpoint, this bunch of foreigners and exiles who had become believers in Jesus Christ were nobodies. But the status conferred on them because of the death and resurrection of Christ meant that they were now the people of God. If they were rejected or ignored by everyone else, the Lord God of the Universe, the one who ultimately mattered, delighted in them and, even more than longing just to be associated with them, took care of them and bestowed significance on them.  


Knowledge of election is a powerful thing, and evangelists must therefore preach and explain the greatness of these rights and privileges offered to all men in the gospel.

The Promise of Being a Royal Priesthood

It is now we, the Church, who live ‘among the gentiles’ as God’s priests. Coming to Christ necessarily means being brought into a priesthood which has destiny and purpose in the earth. Most human beings want to feel as if they are part of something great, something bigger than themselves. Well this is exactly what God offers every sinner in the gospel! Chris Green rightly notes in his commentary on 1 Peter 2:9-10:

Priesthood is for the benefit of others, committed to the expansion of the service of its King…. For Peter the language of ‘calling’ is an aspect of our redemption (1:15; 2:21; 3:9; 5:10). We have been called in order to declare His wonderful work of salvation. That is our purpose…. It really is very simple. Evangelism is at the very center of what we do.24

How many rambling souls have come to Christ in purposelessness, without direction or meaning or anything to set a fire in their hearts, only to find themselves now set ablaze for the task of global evangelization and church-planting. There is work to be done, and it is work of the highest order and of the greatest dignity, work to which God invites every man to give his life: “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,” said Jesus, “but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). So let evangelists tell lost and aimless sinners that a royal priesthood can be theirs and that God invites them into a global story of eternal purpose.

The Promise of Being a Holy Nation

I live in a country, and on a continent, marred by violence and corruption. Our current State President is a disgrace to us. As a South African there is as much reason to feel ashamed of our nation as there is to be proud of her. Many South Africans struggle deeply with this. National identity is something they long to free themselves of, and yet all that is needed is a short trip to another nation and their identity as “South African” is quickly highlighted again. But what God offers every sinner is a new identity, a new nationality, membership of a nation which is entirely holy in God’s sight, one which will endure for eternity, owned and governed by God Himself, a proud and dignified nation in which there is nothing to frustrate or embarrass one, a nation in which our fellow citizens are all “saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). The unity and love of this nation is felt in part in local church today. At least it should be. But one day we will know this unity in all its perfection. This nationality is one which puts our current status in its correct perspective. The shift that this can cause in sinner’s sense of personal identity is so dramatic that even the treasures and allurements of this world that used to have such influence in his life can begin to pale in significance compared with the benefits of his new citizenship, because he now desires “a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Heb. 11:16). So, as evangelists, may there be times that we preach so forcefully of these truths that the hearts of undignified sinners may leap at the grace of God when they hear that He is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

And yet there is also a promise of holiness imbedded here, not for eternity only but for today, and not for the nation only but for every sinner who will repent. A holy nation can
only be as holy as the individual members in it, and the members of this nation will inevitably display the fruit of good works. This is why Peter can urge his readers to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (v11). Though Christians do still struggle with temptation, the new heart which they receive in regeneration brings with it a dramatic break from their previous slavery to sin (this is the thrust of Paul’s rhetorical question in Romans 6:2). And as Green so wonderfully puts it, “This will be in marked contrast to those who tell us that people cannot change, because under the sound and in the power of the gospel we do”. And so let evangelists not just invite sinners into God’s nation, but to a freedom from sin and a personal maturity which they may never have thought possible.

The Promise of Living in the Marvelous Light of Christ’s Presence

Evangelists must use the words “darkness” and “light.” This may seem an overly pedantic restriction, but I do not believe that it is, for this is language that God uses repeatedly to express the truths of the gospel to us. “This is the condemnation,” said Jesus, “that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). “If one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (John 11:10), “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). In the statements of Peter he uses the same metaphor: God calls sinners “out of darkness into His marvelous light”. This is the fundamental task of an evangelist as he preaches to sinners, to shine the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ upon them, “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an

25. Ibid., 257.
inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ” (Acts 26:18). And so let evangelists take this to heart. They must speak to people about darkness, what it is and why all the people of the earth are in it, and then they must speak of that great Light that has dawned upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, calling sinners with all the authority of Heaven to come to it and there find life.

The Promise of a Security Which Liberates Us to Love Even Our Enemies

So much of what drives people is anger, hatred, jealousy, discontent and fear. And yet what God offers in the gospel is a security in Him which liberates the Christian from all such things. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” asks the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:31. When we are wronged, we can forgive, knowing that our God will supply all our need, assured that justice itself will be done in the end. We can give place to wrath; for the Lord has promised, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19). And for this reason the writer to the Hebrews can exhort us: “So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:6) The evangelist must offer such peace, such rest, such security to people going astray, even as he calls them to “to return to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls” (1 Pet. 2:25).

The Promise of an Incorruptible and Undefiled Inheritance

Just as the Israelites were each apportioned an inheritance in the land of Canaan, so too, says Peter in 1 Peter 1:4, have Christians been born again into an inheritance. Their inheritance, however, is very different in some important ways. First, it is imperishable—it will never wear out despite the passing of an eternity of years. Second, it is undefiled—free
from any contamination, dissatisfaction or defect, but is wholly acceptable to God. Third, it will never “fade away”—it will retain its worth and excitement and value and glory, “ever entertaining and pleasing the saints who possess it, without the least weariness or distaste.”

And fourth, it is reserved in heaven for believers—unlike the earthly land of Canaan which was not kept for the Israelites, but taken from them in exile. In some sense the inheritance of the saints exists already, being kept safe by God whose promise and power will ensure that we ourselves will come into its possession (v5). As we have already seen, there is a definite physical reality to this inheritance, for whatever else Heaven will prove to be, it is certainly physical. And the glory and delight of this inheritance will be more than this fallen, tarnished world can ever reveal to us. “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’” (1 Cor. 2:9).

Now, as we bear in mind that the majority of evangelists preach to the poor of this world, how precious is this truth that God offers destitute and orphaned sinners an inheritance of their own, for God would adopt them as His children. So let evangelists call sinners out of their sin, showing them that Christ will not only take them out of their Egyptian bondage, but that He has crossed the Jordan and taken possession of an inheritance for them!

Displaying the Cross

The evangelist must display before his hearers what it cost our Lord Jesus to inherit these Mosaic promises for us, for the covenant had been broken and its horrifying curse had

been pronounced upon Israel. But here we see One coming, the true Israelite, the Seed to whom the promises were made, becoming a man, and willingly taking the curse upon Himself, “having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13):

A sinful nation, Israel could not suffer vicariously to atone for the sins of the world. The sinfulness of the nation made it unacceptable for this role, just as flaws would disqualify any other offering. Only a truly righteous servant could bear this awful load.27

Only a few verses after listing the promises of the Mosaic Covenant that the church inherits, Peter wrote, “He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). The types and shadows of the Mosaic sacrificial system all terminated upon the very body our Saviour. And so too was His soul afflicted, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” was His cry. Silence was God’s response. Christ truly bore the disowning, forsaking curse of the Mosaic Covenant on that cross, so that we might be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that we may proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.” This explains Peter’s reference to Hosea 2:23, where after God had said He would disown His people He prophesied that at some point in the future He would once again say, “You are My people!” And they would say, ‘You are my God!’ Amazing as it is, the dereliction of Christ causes this promise to find its fulfillment upon us who believe in Him. And so blessed be His name! And let every evangelist ever display Christ upon the cross, there bleeding and dying for sinners, the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

Displaying the Active Obedience of a Sinless Christ

But further to this, if Christ inherited the promises of the Mosaic Covenant (and we ‘in Him’) then it necessarily follows that Christ must have fulfilled its obligations. Israel had proven itself incapable of fulfilling the obligations of the covenant (see Jer. 25:4-7a) and so for the promises to be inherited, the outstanding obligations still had to be fulfilled, and here it is that we gain yet a deeper appreciation for the “active obedience” of Christ. “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets,” said Jesus, “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). His thirty-three years on earth were filled with an active obedience to the Mosaic law, not only in outward conformity but in the heart. He perfectly loved the Lord His God with all His heart, soul and strength, and He perfectly loved His neighbour as Himself. God’s testimony about His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased, was that in all things Jesus indeed did “obey [His] voice and keep [His] covenant” (Ex. 19:5). And it is on the basis of this righteousness, this fulfillment of the covenant obligations, that every saint now stands, so that we can now be “found in Him, not having (our) own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:9).

The Absence of God is the Mercy of God

One of mankind’s greatest temptations is to test the Lord. During the days of Moses the faithless children of Israel had demanded that God appear to them and do for them what they wanted from Him (see Ex. 17:1-7). They came not in humility but in pride, demanding that God show Himself and prove His love by ‘jumping through the hoop’ they set up for him. “Is
the LORD among us or not?” they pompously demanded. The proud Sadducees did the same thing as they looked upon Jesus on the cross:

Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ [Matt. 27:41-43]

And so it is with sinners today. They are sorely tempted to make demands of God, to summon Him to show Himself so that they can believe. They demand that He answer for Himself, they even accuse Him of injustice and require from Him an account. But in the light of what God’s manifest presence did on the day He appeared at Mount Sinai, and the impact that it actually had on sinful men and women, Clowney’s comment here is so insightful:

God withholds the burning revelation of His holy presence because He withholds the day of judgment that it must bring. The God of glory has already revealed Himself as the Father of mercy by sending His Son into the world. He restrains the glory of His appearing so that men may respond to the call of His mercy and taste the wonder of His love. Men who demand that God show Himself do not know what they are asking! “Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?” (Mal. 3:2).²⁸

Evangelists must warn sinners of this temptation, they must warn men and women not to come with their judgments of God and their summoning of Him. They must tell their hearers that the presence of God is an awful thing for sinners:

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. [Amos 5:18]

God is not to be tested. The only reason He does not break into this world, and the only reason Christ does not now return, is that God is being merciful to them. His absence is a kindness for it gives them time to repent and be reconciled to Him. The demonstration of His goodness and wisdom has been completed in the death of Christ, displayed in the very Gospel

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which sinners are now privileged to be hearing! So they are not to come with their demands. On the contrary, in the face of Jesus Christ and His gospel God now demands of them humility, faith and submission. Evangelists have a solemn duty to make this clear to those who hear them.

Displaying Christ as Yahweh

Then another insight from the days of Moses must be brought out by evangelists. It concerns the divinity of Christ. Jesus is Yahweh. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the I AM who appeared to Moses. When all is said and done, the gospel is the testimony of Christ. It is about who Jesus is, what He has done and why He has done it, and this cannot be faithfully proclaimed without some reference to the Trinity—that Christ was the divine Son of God, though clothed in human flesh. The seven “I am’s” of John’s gospel bring out to us the goodness of what Christ’s divinity means to us, and so let evangelists use them: Christ is the bread of life, the living bread that came down from heaven from which if anyone eats he will live forever; He is the light of the world which can be followed by people so that they will not walk in darkness but have the light of life; He is the door of the sheep by which if anyone enters they will be saved and go in and out and find pasture; He is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep; He is the resurrection and the life, so that whoever believes in Him, though he may die, he shall live and whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die (and let evangelists then say the very words that Jesus did to Martha: “Do you believe this?”—let evangelists put this question to their audiences and then keep silent, as Jesus did, so that their hearers may answer before God!); He is the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Him; and, He is the true vine, and we the
branches, and whoever abides in Him, and Jesus in them, bears much fruit, for without Him we can do nothing.

The Promise of Blessing in the Land

We have dealt with the promise of the land in our discussions already, but under the banner of the Mosaic Covenant we must deal with a related issue: the blessing in the land. After the Israelites who came out of Egypt broke the covenant with God, and God sentenced them all to a wilderness-death, forty years later, once that generation had passed away, a new generation renewed the covenant with God. The book of Deuteronomy is essentially a record of that covenant renewal, and in it God renewed his promise to bless them in the land (Deut. 28:2-12). After an astonishing list of blessings for city and field; for offspring, produce and livestock; for household food; for travel; for warfare and all industry; and for international reputation, God then spoke these words: “The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand” (Deut 28:12).

Many years later the prophet Malachi reprimanded the people for their covenant unfaithfulness, and it is interesting to note how he pegged God’s covenant blessings upon the land to one particular aspect of obedience—tithes and offerings (note how heavily he leans upon the promises we just cited from Deuteronomy 28:2-12):

You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts. [Mal. 3:9-12 ESV]
If I am to be consistent with the theology I have worked out in the chapters above, I must conclude that Christians are not under an obligation to tithe, while generosity from the heart is commanded. All I want to highlight here is what I have been saying all along, that these promises are inherited by the True Israelite, the remnant of One, Jesus Christ; and then in Him they are inherited by the church. The location of the manifold blessings as described in these OT passages is now in heaven, where Christ is. What I want to make very clear is that I reject any theology which tries to set up a series of “universal principles” or “laws built into creation” by which people can access certain benefits from God, but in a way which is almost independent from Him, which is how the “name-it-and-claim-it” crowd so often treat these matters. The only place any benefits can be accessed is in Christ! And that requires genuine conversion, which brings us into union with Him, and it requires ongoing faith. Being in Christ requires knowing Him and drawing all things through a vital relationship with Him. Material benefits cannot be demanded from “the universe” or even from God based upon some universal principle. Because of the prevalence of the so-called “prosperity gospel” in Africa today I am here applying this principle to tithing but it is central to the entire thesis of this dissertation. Union with Christ is what men need.

So how do these Mosaic promises of material blessing find their expression in the lives of Christians? Are they entirely relocated to our heavenly land only to be inherited after death, or is there a coming of the Kingdom here and now by which these blessings can be ours in this life also? I believe there is an inheritance in this life which we can enjoy. The Israelites would be blessed in the land so that they could prosper, be the head and not the tail (Deut. 28:13), and thus be a witness to the world of the power and covenant love of Yahweh. In the same way, God supplies all the needs that we have today for us and our churches to be
the light of the world and the salt of the earth. This does not mean material wealth for every Christian, or for every church. What it means is that God gives us everything we need in the covenant to fulfill the purposes of the covenant in this world.

It is enlightening to see how the Apostle Paul spoke of material provision and blessing in Philippians 4:18-19, because it is a perfect New Covenant treatment of what God had spoken through Malachi. Paul thanked the Philippian church for the generous financial gift they had sent to him via Epaphroditus speaking of it in terms of a Mosaic Covenant sacrifice, the aroma of which had ascended into heaven and was well pleasing to God. In response to this act of generosity (not some magical prescription) Paul then assured the Philippians that God would supply all their need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. That last phrase must be studied carefully. The miraculous provision of God would come to the Philippians:

- “according to His riches”: material provision is always from God Himself, not from some independent source of universal principle. They are His riches, and He is involved in the decision to give them whenever He does.

- “in glory”: the riches of God, which in this context are material provision on earth, are located “in glory.” They are in heaven, and it is from heaven that they can somehow be given to those on earth whose hearts are found to be generous before God.

- “by Christ Jesus”: The reason why the material blessings of life are located in glory is this: that is where the Man is to whom their inheritance has fallen. Jesus Christ has fulfilled all of the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant and so the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 and Malachi 3 are His! And if any person is going to benefit from them today it will only be through union with Christ, faith in Christ, and generosity out of love for Christ.
This must be kept in mind when reading passages such as 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 which can so easily be taken out of context and preached like a genie in a lamp. Paul’s quotation of Psalm 112 in 2 Corinthian 9:9 tells exactly the same story. Psalm 112 is all about how the man who is faithful to keep God’s covenant commands will be blessed on the earth, and how he will be generous to others. But it is only Christ who has lived up to the standards listed in that Psalm, and so its blessings are only found in Him. Once again we see how a strong Biblical Theology of the covenants can help us understand the promises of God in the gospel. And so may I plead with evangelists that they carefully check whether their evangelistic use of the promises of wealth are honoring to Christ or not. By all means let evangelists tell their hearers of the faithful provision of God to His children, and how He blesses those who are generous, but let them remember that the discretion of when and what to give is always with God, that all is rightfully Christ’s, and that there is a difference between His always supplying our needs, but only sometimes granting our wants.
After the death of Moses and the time of the judges in the promised land, God reluctantly appointed Saul as king. Following his tyrannical and apostate reign God raised up David to rule over His people. Unlike Saul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, David was from the tribe of Judah. As far back as the life of Jacob (Abraham's grandson), the Spirit of God had been promising that the ruler of Israel would come from the tribe of Judah (the fourth of Jacob's twelve sons). Jacob himself had prophetically predicted this on his deathbed in Genesis 49:10, saying, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.” This was a picture of a king sitting on his throne with his son, the heir, sitting between his feet. Then “Shiloh” means “he who is to be sent,” i.e., the One to whom the throne actually belongs. The throne of Israel would pass from father to son until the final and rightful “Son of David” inherited it, and then with Him it would remain forever.

The Shepherds of Israel

In Scripture God often describes the kind of king that He wants for His people as being a “shepherd” (e.g. Num. 27:15-18; Zech. 10:2; Matt. 9:36).¹ In fact, at the very end of the

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¹. For a discussion of the fundamental human need for faithful and godly leadership, see Appendix 8.
earthly \(^2\) kingdom of David, Ezekiel the prophet spoke of the greed of the shepherds of Israel (Ezek. 34:2-6), then declaring the word of God’s solution: “I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd” (v23). The strange thing about this prophecy was that it was given four hundred years after king David died! How could God possibly promise to raise up David to shepherd His people? Of course, he was referring to Jesus. This connection naturally leads us to discuss the life of David and his significance within God’s unfolding plan of redemption. How was it that God established Jesus Christ as Shepherd-King over His people through this earthly kingdom of Israel? And it will be no surprise to the reader, I am sure, that God did it through means of a covenant.

**David the Anointed One**

When Samuel had initially designated Jesse’s son David as the next king (the coronation would only take place years later), he had used the symbolic act of anointing David with oil as a sign of God’s having chosen and set him apart for the task. The anointing oil signified both that God had set the person apart to be holy unto Him (the upward-looking aspect of anointing), and that the person was appointed for a specific earthly task for which he received authority (the outward-looking aspect of anointing).\(^3\) God’s “anointed one,” therefore, was a holy person with an intimate relationship with God, who was set apart for a specific task of leadership amongst God’s people. In the OT we see kings (1 Sam. 16:13), prophets (1 Kings 19:16) and priests (Ex. 28:41) all being anointed with oil in this way.

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2. David’s throne has been relocated to the *Heavenly* Jerusalem where Christ now sits on it for eternity.

After the Davidic kingdom had fallen, for the hundreds of years that followed, the nation of Israel would be praying for “the anointed one,” the promised one who would again sit on David’s throne as King, delivering God’s people and reestablishing the kingdom of Israel. This figure became known as the “Messiah,” which simply means “anointed one” in Hebrew. The NT Greek word for the OT Hebrew word “Messiah” is Χριστός (Christos), which then explains the context to Peter’s God-breathed declaration about Jesus: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Peter was affirming his faith that Jesus was indeed the promised son of David who would sit on the throne of God’s kingdom for eternity.

David’s Faith Shown by His Works

After the death of Saul, David reigned only over the tribe of Judah (and apparently Benjamin too, absorbed somehow into Judah) for seven years, after which the other ten tribes also made David king. Immediately following his ascension to the throne of the whole nation David moved His seat of power from Hebron in the south to the more central location of Jerusalem. At the time it was held by the Jebusites but David defeated them, taking it for himself and calling it the City of David (2 Sam. 5:6-9). “Then Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters and masons. And they built David a house.” (v11) It is important to pause here and notice the following: David built himself a house of cedar, in a city named after his own name. Those two facts will become important if we are to understand the Davidic Covenant. The narrative continues: “So David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted His kingdom for the sake of His people Israel.” There are two words in that statement which speak volumes
about what was soon to take place: David knew. Samuel tells us that David understood two things; first, David knew that his being exalted as king was an act of God. We see that evidenced in how patient David had been while Saul was still alive, refusing to kill “the Lord’s anointed” at least twice (1 Sam. 24:6, 26:9). The second thing David knew was that his being given the kingdom was not for his own sake, but for the sake of “God’s people Israel.”

David knew that he had a high calling upon his life to be a faithful servant, and a Godly shepherd of the people. As I will argue in a moment this was the very condition of the Davidic Covenant, and David’s faithfulness to this calling is why God’s testimony of David was “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will”. God’s own testimony was that all this faithfulness on David’s part was a matter of the heart. David was a recipient of grace. He was a man who had received a new heart and a gift of faith that bore the fruit of obedience. This is crucial to note if we are to understand how it is that David fulfilled the conditions of the covenant that God made with him, which I argue he had already done by the time of its inauguration (it was a “royal grant” covenant—See Appendix 2). As it was with Abraham (that God’s regenerating power had given Abraham the ability to obey, based upon which God then made a covenant with him) so it was with David.

God’s Covenant with David

David was now enjoying the peace and goodness of God in his own house of cedar in Jerusalem, the city bearing David’s own name. But David began to see how inappropriate

4. And I believe that evangelists should pose this question to sinners: “Do you know? Sir, do you know that everything you have achieved and everything you enjoy has been a gift of God? And do you know that God requires you to use it for His glory? Do you know that there is coming a day upon which He will ask you to give an account of what you did with all that He gave you?”

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this was (because “David knew!”). David owed all this comfort and glory to the grace of God, and yet here he was living in a glorious palace while the ark of God dwelt inside tent curtains. David’s regenerate heart knew that this should not be so, and so he confided in Nathan the prophet. Nathan (as a friend) initially encouraged David to go ahead with his plans to build God a house. But God immediately intervened and Nathan (as prophet this time) returned to David, bringing Him a word from God. This prophetic word contained the following:

In verses 5-7 God graciously honoured David’s desire to build Him a temple, something God had never asked any of the judges or rulers of Israel for. God had been happy to live in a tent with his people. He is not a distant God, He is happy to be associated with our wanderings, to tabernacle amongst us. And so one almost gets the sense in God’s words to David that he was “flattered” by David’s request (in a way, of course, which is appropriate for a sovereign, omniscient, perfectly secure God to be!). But in some way, God was telling David that David’s heart was right. God would not actually allow David to build the temple, but God wanted David to know that He was pleased with David’s idea.

In verses 8-9 God recounted the history of His dealings with David (as we have seen, a historical prologue was common in ANE treaties). He told David that all that had come to pass in his life had purely been of sovereign grace: “You have worshiped me and served me these many years, David, and now I want you to know for certain that everything that has happened to you, including your many years of hardship, has been my doing.” God said that He had made David king, and that He had made David’s name great—both of these blessings being in direct continuity with, and fulfillment of, the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:2; 17:6). In verse 10 God then repeated the promise of the land, in continuity with both the
Abrahamic and the Mosaic Covenants. The point of highlighting these continuities is to show that what God was about to promise David was an advancing act of redemptive history.

**Promises of the Davidic Covenant**

In verses 11-17 we read the promises of the Davidic Covenant, and we note that these were made to David, and so David’s faithfulness to the covenant conditions would mean that the promises would be secured by him. The Davidic Covenant promises were as follows:

**The First Promise (v11)**

God would make a “house” for David. There is a play on words in the original Hebrew here. The word for “house” (bah’yith) is also used for all of the following: “palace,” “temple” and “household/dynasty” (in the sense of the organized descendants of a single family). David lived in a “palace” of cedar, he asked to build God a “temple” and in response God promised to build David a “dynasty”.

**The Second Promise (v12)**

God would ensure that David’s own flesh and blood would occupy the throne, and God would “establish his kingdom.” This promise was initially⁵ fulfilled in the life of David’s son Solomon, then in their descendants who reigned in the succeeding generations, but it was

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⁵ I say “initially” because as we shall see, Solomon’s life was only a type of the full fulfillment of these promises in the life of Jesus, the King of the Jews. God’s actual promise to David was: “I will set up your seed (zeh’rah) after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.” The Hebrew word used for “seed” accommodates both a singular and a plural meaning. The language “is rich in Abrahamic allusions” (Trevor J. Burke, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Sonship*, Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011, 73), seen especially Genesis 22:18 which is a promise of the very same nation-blessing “seed” whom God now promises will come through the line of David.
finally and eternally fulfilled in Jesus Christ who was born as a descendant of David according to the flesh (Acts 2:30).

The Third Promise (v13)

David’s heir would build the temple. Again, this promise was initially fulfilled by Solomon who did so.

The Fourth Promise (v13, 16)

David’s descendants would reign over Israel forever. Three times God stated this (once in v13 and twice in v16). Consider what a staggering promise that is. “Forever.” The human mind cannot even conceive the length of time which that represents. And yet God said that David’s Kingdom would last “forever,” that a billion years from now David’s kingdom will still stand, and that one of his physical descendants will still be sitting on his throne reigning over God’s covenant people. What a staggering promise!

The Fifth Promise (v14-15)

David’s heir would stand in unique relationship to God: “I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.” In some sense, David’s heir would be “the son of God.” No one had ever called God “Father” up until this point. Israel as a nation had been called God’s son, but never had an individual been called the “son of God.” This was revolutionary.

The Sixth Promise (v14-15)

God would never forsake David’s heir, though He would discipline Him as a Father when necessary. God would never cast the sons of David off like He had Saul. This was
initially fulfilled in Solomon’s life when, though he turned to idols, God still gave him a son who sat on the throne (Rehoboam).

The Seventh Promise (2 Chron. 33:7-8)

God promised to “put His name” in the temple and in Jerusalem forever, and He would keep the children of Israel in the land as long as they kept God’s covenant with them.

Conditions of the Davidic Covenant

Identifying the conditions of the Davidic Covenant is not as easy as with some of the other covenants, and yet I believe we have good Biblical warrant to say at least the following.

Davidic Covenant Condition #1:
Keep the Law

As king of God’s chosen people, God required that David be a good shepherd, a man after God’s own heart. According to the men of Israel in 2 Samuel 5:2 God had at some point before David’s coronation spoken this very condition to him: “Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’” As far back as the days of Saul, perhaps when Samuel had anointed David, God had told David what kind of king He expected him to be. And by God’s providential workings David had been an actual shepherd, he had needed to live in the wilderness to lead and feed real sheep, and defend them against wolves, lions and bears. David knew exactly what God meant when God said to him, “I will make you king, but when I do you will not be like other kings. I am charging you to shepherd My people.” We see this condition repeated in a Psalm of Asaph: “He also chose
David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; From following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance” (Ps. 78:70-71).

But where would David find an explicit revelation of what it would mean to be a faithful, righteous shepherd-king? David’s death-bed words to Solomon (1 Kings 2:2-4) reveal the answer, as do God’s words during Manasseh’s rule in 2 Chron. 33:7-8: David was to succeed in being a shepherd-king by obeying the Mosaic Covenant. Deuteronomy 17:18-19 is equally clear. The Mosaic law had been given to Israel as a revelation of the moral laws of God—of what is truly good and pleasing to Him. What God required of David was the same as he required of every Israelite: first, a humble, faith-driven obedience to the Mosaic Law—the whole of which hangs upon “love for God and love for man” (Matt. 22:40); second, to repent quickly when he sinned; and third, to look forward with faith to the coming Saviour. In short, he was to be “a man after God’s own heart.” This would be the path for the shepherd-king to tread. Then an inseparable part of this would be to ensure that the people were also obeying the Mosaic law.

Davidic Covenant Condition #2: Rule as a Servant

To be the shepherd-king of Israel, a subsidiary condition laid upon the Davidic king was to be God’s servant. Of the forty-four times God uses the phrase, “My Servant” to refer to an individual in the OT, twenty-four of those are referring to David. And part of this would

6. In the sense of how the Mosaic Covenant conditions were defined in the chapter on that Covenant. I.e. not perfect obedience, but humble and repentant faith bearing the fruit of obedience.

7. Which explains why the Uriah-Bathsheba debacle did not mean a broken covenant: David repented quickly (see 2 Sam. 12:13 and Ps. 51). See also 2 Samuel 24:17 for a fantastic illustration of David’s being a repentant, faithful shepherd-king after his sinful conducting of a census.
mean suffering for the sake of God’s kingdom (Isa. 52-53). This will become important as we see how the Davidic Covenant was fulfilled in Christ who is called God’s “holy Servant” (Acts 4:27, 30).

The Conditions Fulfilled Before the Covenant was Entered

Up until this point David had been a faithful and righteous leader of God’s people, but the supreme act of servant leadership from a Godly shepherd was David’s desire to build a permanent structure for the presence of God amongst his people. I believe the Davidic Covenant was a “royal grant” covenant, i.e., God inaugurated it after the conditions had already been met (like the Abrahamic Covenant). David had already proven to be a regenerate king, walking in God’s laws with humility and shepherding God’s people faithfully. And I believe that when David wanted to establish God’s presence permanently, multi-generationally, in Israel by replacing the tent with a temple, by this “work” David’s “faith was made perfect” (Jas. 2:22). And so this was the catalyst which caused God to then formalize the covenant with Him. We saw this in Abraham’s life. He was already justified when God tested his faith in Genesis 22, and yet there we see how Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son was like a catalyst which caused God to swear an oath to him. I believe 2 Samuel 7 describes something akin to this.

The Davidic Covenant Promises Eventually Fulfilled in Christ

After the final OT prophet, Malachi, there followed four hundred years of silence—a silence filled with heartbreak and longing for every saint who lived during this time. But

when all seemed lost the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. There he appeared to a young virgin named Mary and made the most astounding announcement:

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 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. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. [Luke 1:30-33]

Gabriel was clear: Mary’s miraculously conceived Son Jesus would inherit the promises of the Davidic Covenant. But, other than His genealogical link to David, why could Christ claim these promises as His own? The answer, of course, is the same as we have seen with every covenant: Jesus fulfilled (in this case, recapitulated) its obligations.

Christ Fulfills the Obligations of the Davidic Covenant

First, Christ perfectly kept the Mosaic law. Second, Christ was the Servant who suffered for the sake of the Kingdom. Earlier we summarized the conditions of the Davidic Covenant as such: David was to be a shepherd-king of God’s people. When Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). He was not only claiming to be the Davidic Messiah fulfilling the conditions of the Davidic Covenant, but He was also combining the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 with the Davidic King in one person. Then Jesus added to that the divine “Son of Man” figure from Daniel 7. This was all something the Jews had not considered possible. How could the king who was supposed to conquer all of Israel’s enemies and reestablish the throne of David suffer and die? And how could He do so while at the same time being a divine Person? The explanation is found in
Jesus’ words to Pilate: “You say rightly that I am a king (but) My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:37; 36).

Christ Has Inherited the Promises of the Davidic Covenant

Christ’s fulfillment of the covenant conditions explains why in Gabriel’s declaration above we see the fulfillment of all seven promises of the Davidic Covenant in Him.

Promise #1: God will make David a house

Mary was “of the house of David” (v27) and so in Jesus’ ascension to the throne God fulfilled His promise to build David a dynasty. Jesus is now head of the “household of God” (Eph. 2:19), a royal family of brothers and sisters in Christ who will “receive power over the nations” (Rev. 2:26), and as kings and priests shall reign on the earth forever and ever (Rev. 5:10; 22:5).

Promise #2: David’s seed will sit on his throne after him

Jesus was “the root and offspring of David” (Rev. 22:16), “born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3), and so when Gabriel told Mary, “The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David” God’s promise to establish the kingdom of David’s descendant was fulfilled.
Promise #3: David’s heir would build the temple

Jesus Himself was the temple of God raised up in the resurrection (John 2:19-21) and He went on to build the living temple of the church (Eph. 2:19-22), thus fulfilling God’s promise to David.

Promise #4: David’s descendants would reign over Israel forever

The angel told Mary that Jesus would reign over the house of Jacob forever, and that in fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6-7 His kingdom would have no end. God’s astonishing promise to David that his sons would sit on the throne of an everlasting kingdom was thus fulfilled. The earthly throne of David was only ever a typological representation of the throne of God itself, upon which Christ now sits and reigns eternally (see Rev. 3:21).

Promise #5: David’s son would be God’s son

In the days after David’s death Isaiah prophesied that the coming King of Israel would be both a Son and Mighty God, everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6). Gabriel said that Jesus would be called “the Son of the Most High,” and Jesus called Himself, “the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16). Thus the complete fulfillment of God’s words about the seed of David being God’s son was accomplished in the very Person of Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity. Hebrews 1:5 teaches this explicitly (quoting 2 Samuel 7 as speaking about Christ, whom the writer has just said is “the express image of God’s person”).
Promise #6: God’s mercy would not be taken from David’s son

Jesus was without sin (John 8:46; Heb. 7:26) not requiring God’s discipline. And even when He faced abandonment on the cross He was raised by God on the third day.

Promise #7: God would “put His name” in the temple and Jerusalem forever

It was Jesus who ushered in the heavenly kingdom of God with its New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:3-5, 11, 22) where the very presence of God Himself will be in our midst, where “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple,” (v22) and there all His magnificence (His “Name”) will be displayed before us.

And so in Christ and His Kingdom all the promises to David have been fulfilled. But what does this mean for those “in Him” and for our message and ministry as evangelists today?

Application For Evangelists

How are the Davidic covenant promises to be offered “in Christ” to sinners today?

The Promise of God’s Building David a “House”

The church is now the “household of God” (Eph. 2:19), a family of brothers and sisters in Christ who are themselves now royalty. When evangelists compel sinners to come to Christ and be saved, they are at the same time inviting them to be adopted into a great family, a royal family. Though those to whom we speak may be of no significance to anyone in this world, “profane, and utterly unworthy to associate with godly persons,” yet in Christ they may be “raised to distinguished honor in being admitted to be members of the same
community with Abraham—with all the holy patriarchs, and prophets, and kings—nay, with the angels themselves”. What an incredible privilege to be able to offer sinners! So let us invite the unworthy to join the church, which is the house of God, and find a dignity there which can be found nowhere else.

The Promise of David’s Descendants Occupying His Eternal Throne

Obviously it is Christ who has now permanently fulfilled this prophecy by His having ascended to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33), with all authority having been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). But if anyone is in Christ this inheritance falls to him too. We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28), for it is God’s good pleasure to give it to the Shepherd-King’s little flock (Luke 12:32). Though the details are sketchy, it appears that there will be some kind of economy, if we may call it that, in the new heaven and earth. We will reign (Rev. 22:5), we will receive rewards (Matt. 6:20), and some will have more authority that others (Luke 19:17-19). What an amazing life it will be! And what a privilege for evangelists to be able to invite the weak, lowly and powerless to enter in.

And yet there is an even more staggering gospel-promise enfolded within this Davidic-promise of an eternal throne. Both Isaiah (Isa. 55:3) and Paul the Apostle (Acts 13:34) draw into the domain of this promise the resurrection of Jesus. Their thinking seems to be that in order for the Son of David to be able to sit on David’s throne eternally, death itself would first have to be overcome. In order to reign forever the Son of David would need to rise from the dead. Isaiah and Paul include this in the very promises of the Davidic Covenant, calling the resurrection “the sure mercies of David.” And yet the NT takes this line of thinking even


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further. Paul says that because Christ was raised, so too will all those who are “in Him.” Here 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 is fascinating, because in it Paul speaks of how we who are in Christ will rise as He did on the basis of His being the Son of David. Paul quotes Psalm 110 which speaks of the Davidic Son’s being seated at the right hand of God until His enemies are made His footstool. The final enemy, says Paul, is death. Amazingly, Paul is saying that God’s covenant with David included a promise of the destruction of death itself! Now you don’t have to be an evangelist to get excited about that! Christ, the Son of David, now sits on the throne of heaven with death subdued at His “footstool” and He offers dying people life—resurrected, eternal, physical life. The goodness of this gospel is quite unfathomable, for in it Christ offers people victory over death. He offers them a resurrected body, and a place on His throne from which they will reign with Him over the New Jerusalem forever and ever. So let evangelists say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely!

The Promise of David’s Son Building the Temple

“Every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God,” says the writer to the Hebrews (3:4) Solomon built God a temple, but it was destroyed. Zerubbabel, his descendent, rebuilt it, but this too would be destroyed. Then God prepared a temple (body) for His Son. And today Jesus continues to build, and what He is building is His Church, as the writer to the Hebrews says: “Christ (was faithful) as a Son over His own house, whose house we are” (Heb. 3:6). He has promised: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). God is building something, and everything else in

10. A Temple built to be destroyed and raised up again; a body prepared to be sacrificed and then resurrected (Heb. 10:5).
this universe will fail and pass away. God’s house, the Church, is a beautiful and enduring thing, and He invites sinners to overcome futility by working together with him in building the only thing in this world that will endure. Just before Christ’s death a woman broke an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard and poured it on his head. Some were indignant complaining about the “waste” of such costly perfume, but Jesus commended her. Two thousand years later a missionary martyr named Jim Elliot put into words what was in this woman’s heart: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Every human being is invited by God freely to become a living stone within this spiritual house, to be built together with others in a union and fellowship that will endure forever. But perhaps the most staggering part of this promise is that we the church are being built together by God as a “dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). We can be part of a body of people amongst whom the very Spirit of God Himself will dwell and manifest Himself, so much so that an unbeliever can come into our fellowship and have the secrets of his heart revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among us. Part of the invitation of the gospel is for sinners to join themselves with the church, to be built into this Spirit-filled fellowship, and then in turn to use the gifts they receive from the Spirit to play their part in edifying her.

We live in such a relationally fractured world. I am not loved as I ought to be, even by the closest people to me. And I do not love others as I ought to love them, even those whom I claim to love most. But it will not always be so. God invites the unloved and the unloving to be loved perfectly and to love perfectly. This is the nature of the living Temple into which Christ calls people. Let evangelists so preach of the perfections of this Spirit-filled church

that sinners who love this world may have their hearts turned to be nourished and knit together with her.

The Promise That David’s Son Would Be God’s Son

The prophecy of David’s Son being God’s Son is fulfilled perfectly in the God-man Jesus Christ. According to His human nature He was born into the family of David. Yet He was born of an immaculate conception, the Holy Spirit of God Himself impregnating Mary, and so Gabriel told her: “therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). But here, can it be (as with the rest of the covenant promises) that those who come to Christ and are united with Him by faith also inherit this promise, do they also become children of God “in Him”? And amazingly, as the reader well knows, this is exactly what the NT teaches: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). In Romans 8:14-17 the Apostle Paul speaks of our being made children of God through the indwelling Spirit of Christ and he speaks of how this means we become joint heirs with Christ. We share His inheritance if we are “in Him,” and part of this inheritance is becoming “sons” just as He is a Son. Adoption is a benefit enjoyed by the elect in terms of the Davidic Covenant. The Apostle John brings this out beautifully in Revelations 21:6-7 where he quotes the Davidic Covenant word for word, showing that it is those who have faith in Jesus (those who are “in Him”) who inherit the promise of being adopted as God’s very own children.

This has two implications for the work of an evangelist. First, he must convince his audience, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, of their need to become God’s children, that if they are still in their sins then they are by nature sons of the first Adam, children of wrath,
that they are of their father the devil, and the desires of their father they want to do (John 8:44). This will require the thunderings of Mount Sinai, an application of the law and a thorough searching of their consciences in the light of God’s infinite holiness and justice.

Whitefield notes:

And what says our Lord, “Ye are of your father the devil;” and “the whole world is said to lie in him, the wicked one, who now rules in the children of disobedience,” that is, in all unrenewed souls. Our stupidity, proneness to fix our affections on the things of the earth, and our eagerness to make provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof, evidence us to be earthly and brutes!; and our mental passions, anger, hatred, malice, envy, and such like, prove with equal strength, that we are also devilish. Both together conspire to evince, that in respect to his affections, as well as his understanding and will, man deservedly may be termed a piece of marred clay.¹²

Reading the sermons of men like Whitefield and Samuel Davies one is struck by how long they would preach upon sin, depravity and judgment before finally lifting the sinner’s head to look toward Calvary.

But secondly, once he feels that this has been done, the evangelist must then turn to the gloriously good news that whoever receives Christ, to them He gives the right to become the children of God. And let the evangelist say with the Apostle John, “BEHOLD! Take note! See this! What manner of love is this…?” And let him display it until the Spirit blows the wind of the knowledge of God’s love into the hearts of his hearers. Let him speak of what manner of love moved God to choose sinners to be in His family. Let him tell of its being an unwarranted, an undeserved love—that it is rebels, servants of the devil, that He adopts. And let him speak of the great price God was willing to pay for this, how costly this love is, that this is a love not afraid to pay a price for what it seeks! This is a courageous love. A powerful love. A love that reaches into the darkness of this world, into the very heart of all we have

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done, a love that descended into hell itself! A love by which God was willing to crush His own innocent Son for the sin of sinners so that if they would believe in Him they would not perish, but have eternal life: “See how He was willing to sweat great drops of blood for you, dear sinner, so that you could go free! You have never known a love like this.”

And let the evangelist speak of the *generosity* of this love, that God did not stop simply at forgiving the sin of sinners and allowing them to serve Him, as a slave serves a master. But God says to the sinner, “Now that your sin is dealt with, I will adopt you as My child. I will become your daddy. Yes, I want to be your dad. And I will walk with you, and lead you, and comfort you, and counsel you, and protect you, and teach you. I will delight in having you know Me, in giving you My Spirit and His gifts. Ask good things from Me, that your joy may be full, because I am a good Father.”

And let the evangelist speak of the *eternality* of this love—that it is an unfailing love, that we will not just *live* in Heaven for eternity, but we will be *loved* in Heaven for eternity. Language simply fails us here, but let the evangelist pray for words (Eph. 6:19)!

So many people go about their lives so busy, so distracted, so anxious, so ambitious, that they never ‘behold.’ Let the evangelist tell His hearers to behold! To stop. To think on this. And let the evangelist preach on its wonder as God gives him utterance until the marvel of God’s adoption has melted the sinner’s orphaned heart.

The Promise of Perpetual Mercy

Commenting on God’s promise to chastise David’s sons without removing His mercy from them (and how this would apply to Solomon, and the rest of the Davidic kings, but could not apply to Christ Himself), Matthew Henry wrote:
The supposition of committing iniquity cannot indeed be applied to the Messiah himself, but it is applicable (and very comfortable) to his spiritual seed. True believers have their infirmities, for which they may expect to be corrected, but they shall not be cast off. Every transgression in the covenant will not throw us out of covenant.\(^\text{13}\)

So let evangelists be sure to tell their hearers that Christ offers a salvation which truly saves. He does not offer a temporary solution for their troubled consciences. This is not like receiving a gift which only pays one more month’s expenses. What God offers sinners is a salvation that is eternal, that is once and for all. He offers them something permanent. When we tell sinners that by calling upon the Name of the Lord Jesus they may be saved, we mean it! Completely saved. Forever and ever. Brought into an eternal covenant in which it is impossible for God to lie. What a thing to be able to offer poor sinners, that Christ died to “release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15). So let the voices of evangelists ring throughout the earth beseeching the lost to come home and find eternal rest for their souls. For God has ordained that through our preaching the sheep will surely hear their Shepherd’s voice, and they follow Him, and He will give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of His hand.\(^\text{14}\)

Having said this, however, there is a sense in which Christ did, in fact, know the merciless treatment of His Father in His dereliction on the cross.

Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” [Mark 15:33-34]


\(^{14}\) See John 10:27-28. It is interesting to note how Jesus used the Shepherd-sheep motif so strongly in His teaching on perseverance, an entirely appropriate metaphor if indeed the origin of this promise is found, as I argue, in the Davidic Covenant.
Christ experienced no mercy from God (cf. 2 Sam. 7:15), and none of us will ever know the horror of soul that descended upon Him in that three hours of darkness as He was forsaken. It was because He was abandoned that I, an unclean man, might not be. Sin requires the removal of God’s mercy, but it was the very opposite that God promised the sons of David. The only explanation for this is that the merciless wrath of God was poured out upon the sinless substitute in our place, so that the mercy which should have been His, merited by Him with a sinless life, could be offered freely to a world of sinners who are subject to the wrath of God. The point here is that the mercy that Christ purchased is a limitless, enduring, eternal mercy. It is a mercy that endures forever (Ps. 136). The old Reformed doctrine of “the Perseverance of the Saints” is, in this respect, a gift inherited by Christ in terms of the promises of the Davidic Covenant. And these promises are rightly His, for He is the Son of David, and if we are in Him they become ours as His fellow heirs. And so here the evangelist must tell his audience of the merciless sufferings of the Son at the hands of the Father, how his cries were only met with silence so that our cries might be met with mercy. He must tell the guilty that the merciless, man-abandoning wrath of God was entirely absorbed by Christ in His death on behalf of those who will trust in Him. Let the evangelist tell his hearers, “It is finished”, that Christ is raised from the dead and has become the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. And so ask your hearers, evangelist, ask them, “Will you obey Him, my dear fellow sinner? Will you come and bow your knees to this King? For in Him alone is mercy and eternal salvation!”

And yet there is still something else to be said here. The discipline of God itself, in the life of a believer, is a blessing. Our world is full of religions, books and seminars all of which offer a set of techniques in order to “be a better person.” It seems that many people do desire
to become more “mature” (however they define that). My fear, however, is that many of
them, if asked how God felt about it, would say that even if He exists He is too distant to
care. Some might say that God is there to judge us but not here to help us change. Evangelists
must communicate that part of the promise of the gospel in the Davidic Covenant is that God
will be a good Father to those in Christ, and this includes their personal growth. “For this is
the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3, cf. Heb. 12:5-11). Why can we not tell
sinners that very thing? God desires to take hold of them and change their character for the
good. He desires to father them, to remove what is ugly and immature and to build in what is
honourable, to make them like Jesus. In my view it is entirely appropriate to invite the
immature to come to a Father who cares deeply for their character and who will wisely,
lovingly change them from the inside out so that they may bear fruit, becoming all that God
can re-created them to be.

The Promise of God’s Name in His Temple

God promised both David and his son Solomon: “In this house and in Jerusalem, which
I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever” (2 Chron. 33:7). This
was a repetition of the recurring theme of the covenants: “I will walk among you and be your
God, and you shall be My people” (e.g Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; Jer. 30:22; Ezek.
36:28). This represents the restoration of man’s fellowship with God lost in Eden through
rebellion. This fellowship has been, and is still being, restored progressively. Each new
covenant marked a major step forward towards finally being in the very presence of God
once again, as Adam had been. Indeed, an understanding of what follows is one way of
understanding the entire gospel:
First, in the Noahic Covenant God’s rainbow signified His promise of cosmic stability. In a sense God looked down upon Noah from heaven with a providential care.

Second, God’s presence then seemed to leave heaven as He came down to form a covenantal relationship not just with creation, but with a man and his family. God was now present to lead Abraham, encountering him sporadically to make or confirm certain promises.

Third, the permanence of God’s presence increased yet more with the construction of the tabernacle under Moses where God “dwelt between the cherubim” (Ps. 80:1). Though God’s direct presence would still be inaccessible to the common people (Heb. 9:7) yet this still introduced a permanency of God’s presence unknown even to Abraham.

Fourth, the temple of David/Solomon turned what was mobile and removable into a permanent stone sanctuary, a glorious house for God established in the midst of Israel’s capital.

Fifth, a thousand years later Jesus Christ the Son of God stepped into this world. John says that “the Word became flesh and tabernacled (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In Jesus Christ the very presence of God was walking amongst men, though veiled and humbled as He laid down the external insignia of His glory. But even this was not yet what God had planned.

Sixth, the night He was betrayed Jesus told His disciples, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7). Fulfilled at Pentecost, the church has now become the temple of God in the Spirit, as has each individual Christian. Now God
lives not just with us, but \textit{in} us! Yet we await one last great progression towards being in His presence:

Seventh, after Christ’s return a loud voice from heaven will say, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.” (Rev. 21:3) On that day the city will have no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God Himself will illuminate it. The Lamb will be its light (21:23). Heaven will finally be a place where the full manifest presence of God the Father will be in our midst.

This “Immanuel” theme is one which evangelists must preach, telling the people of this world that God loves sinners,\textsuperscript{15} that He wants to be reconciled to them \textit{so that He may dwell with them again}. So much so, in fact, that He sent His only Son to save us. This theme of God’s desire for fellowship with His people is taken up in the writings of the prophets, and in the parables of Jesus. Isaiah prophesied about a great feast after the Resurrection Day (Isa. 25:6-8) and Jesus told a parable about just such a table being spread by God (Luke 14:16-24). The intriguing thing is that Jesus seemed to speak of this great supper as a literal future event: “I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11), and at the last supper Jesus told His disciples that the wine He was drinking would be His last taste of such “until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29). Indeed, “Blessed are those

\textsuperscript{15} For an excellent treatment of how the truths of Reformed soteriology do not rob us of indiscriminately preaching the love of God for all men, see Chapter 3 in Sinclair Ferguson, \textit{The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism & Gospel Assurance — Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters}. Wheaton, Il: Crossway, 2016.
who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). Regarding the three major OT feasts, Edmund Clowney wrote:

Jesus calls His people to His table, for He is the true Passover. He sends His Spirit upon His assembled disciples at the feast of Pentecost. One great feast remains: the feast of Tabernacles, the great harvest-home feast for all the redeemed. In the heavenly Jerusalem, the author of Hebrews tells us, that festival assembly has already gathered. To that feast we call the nations of the earth.¹⁶

There is an invitation to a supper which God is sending out to sinners. It will be a celebration where hundreds of millions will sit down and eat with their King. Not only will we be in His presence there, but we will eat and drink with Him, talk and laugh with Him, embracing Him and rejoicing together with Him, for with fervent desire He desires to eat this meal with us (cf. Luke 22:15). So let us tell poor, hungry sinners that they are invited to this great feast. They may have a seat there in His presence if they will only come to Him. And let us compel them to do so, even from the highways and the hedges.

The Promise of Access to the Father in His Word and Prayer

As discussed above the promise of God’s presence has eschatological significance, yet its relevance for our lives today, as individual Christians and as local churches, is also great. As Solomon taught in the Proverbs, prayer is a privilege (Prov. 15:8). Access to God is a privilege. The veil in the temple that separated people from the presence of God was a constant reminder of this fact. And while saints in the OT certainly could pray there was still however a sense of separation and the need for a mediating priest (e.g. 1 Sam. 1:17). Today non-Christians are still separated from God’s presence and power. As we saw earlier, Paul describes unbelieving gentiles as being “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and

strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). The situation of the Jews today is no better—Paul the Pharisee says, “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin” (Rom. 3:9). But it is this separation from God, this denial of access to Him, that Christ dealt with on the cross, for it was as He died that “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38). On the eve of His death Jesus spoke to His disciples of how the transition into the New Covenant would bring a greater access to God in prayer (John 16:23-27). When sinners come to Christ they find peace with God and they inherit perpetual and instant access to Him. They may now approach His throne as a throne of grace, and obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). What a promise for evangelists to preach of, for we all have such “times of need”!

Similarly, the transition into the New Covenant brought with it the promise of comprehending the Scriptures, experiencing a fellowship with God in His word which was previously inaccessible (Isa. 29:18; 2 Cor. 3:14-16, 4:6; Eph. 5:14). It is Christ who opens our understanding, that we might comprehend the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), and it is in turning to the Lord that the veil is taken away (2 Cor. 3:16). Many Christians have this testimony: that after coming to Christ the Bible suddenly made sense to them whereas it had previously been dead and boring, but it was now suddenly pulsating with life and power whenever they opened it.

So let evangelists tell blind and powerless sinners that by coming to Christ they are at the same time brought peacefully into the presence of God, and there they will remain. So Christ offers them light, He offers them understanding, He offers them counsel and guidance
in His word; and He offers them access to the God of the universe in prayer by which they may ask for His almighty arm to be stretched out to help them in times of need.

**The Promise of Victory and Rest From All Enemies**

Part of what the Davidic Covenant kingdom would enjoy was freedom from oppression of enemies (2 Sam. 7:10). This is the heritage of those who are led by God’s Shepherd-King. We may pray for His protection and know His peace. This obviously applies both to the “many dangers, toils and snares” through which we will safely come to heaven, and to our final vindication from all our enemies on that Day, but it also fundamentally includes authority over demons for today. This may seem a distant threat to many western Christians, but not to the church of Africa. African people are painfully aware of the reality of the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly realms. In the ministry of Jesus Himself and in that of the apostles after His ascension, as also in early church history,\(^\text{17}\) the casting out of demons was commonplace; and Jesus Himself said that this new authority over demons was being exercised because the Davidic King and His Kingdom had now come (Luke 11:20). In Christ God delivers us “from the power of darkness” conveying us “into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13) This has significant impact upon the demonic influences in our lives (e.g. Mark 9:38; 10:8; Acts 16:18). It may require prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29) but evangelists should not close themselves to the possibility that God will use them for casting out demons, and it is not inappropriate for them when they preach to make this promise of freedom to their hearers on the basis of Christ’s session on His heavenly throne.

\(^{17}\) Church historian Michael Green quotes both Irenaeus and Tertullian regarding their practice of exorcism (note the strong link with the Davidic Covenant promises): “Here was yet another way in which the immensely popular verse Psalm 110:1 had its fulfillment. Jesus Christ is Lord; and in his joyful faith in Christus Victor the ordinary person of the ancient world found a deliverance through Christianity which He could not find elsewhere.” (Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 178-179)
But more can be said under this heading. In Matt. 11:3 we read of how John the Baptist, now in prison, sent messengers to Jesus, asking, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” By “the Coming One” John may have had the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) in mind, or the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15), but if the expectations of the Jewish people are any indication of what his expectancy was then surely he had the Messiah, the Son of David, in mind. Jesus’ response seems to confirm this. He answered by referencing Isaiah 61:1-2 where the prophet had predicted the coming of the Messiah, the anointed One (a prophecy which He claimed to be fulfilled in Himself—see Luke 4:18-21). To confirm that He was indeed the Messiah Jesus said to John’s messengers:

Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me. [Matt. 11:4-6]

The Kingdom of the Son of David had now come and was advancing forcefully, being progressively fulfilled, but in every place in which it came upon men there we see Christ the King’s authority over the kingdom of darkness, not only in the casting out of demons but also in the healing of the sick. This surely must have application to us today for we are to preach the coming of the Kingdom (Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:23, 31), and although the fullness of the Kingdom is yet to come together with its complete freedom of sickness yet where the Kingdom comes there we may anticipate some realization of this freedom today. For this reason I would urge evangelists, while humbly remembering that the Spirit gives these gifts as He wills, that they should not close themselves to the possibility that God will use them for praying for the blind, lame, lepers, deaf and dead to see them healed (Matt 11:4-6), for it is these that the Davidic King who has come sets free.
Preaching Jesus as the Christ

All of the promises listed above under the heading of the Davidic Covenant can be summarized in one short phrase: preaching Jesus as the Christ. Or simply, preaching Jesus Christ.¹⁸ This can be seen in verses like Acts 5:42; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 1 John 2:22; 5:1. Evangelists must know that to “preach Jesus” is to preach Him as “the Christ”, the Messiah, the One anointed by God to sit on David’s throne and rule over God’s everlasting Kingdom. The actual Greek wording of Acts 5:42 ends with “διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελίζοµεν Τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν”; “teaching and preaching the Messiah Jesus.” They were not teaching and preaching Jesus as an isolated phenomenon, but Him as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the promises God had made to the nation through the covenants, especially that crowning covenant of the OT: the Davidic Covenant. The relevance of this to us as evangelists is obvious. If our role is to preach Jesus to our generation we must preach Him as God has presented Him to the world. We must preach Him using the categories that God took four thousand years to establish. We must preach Him as the Christ, and this demands that we understand and teach Him in the light of the OT covenants.

¹⁸. Recall that “Christ” (Hebrew “Messiah”) was not the surname of Jesus, but the title given to the expected Davidic King, which began to be given to Jesus as the revelation of who He was became more clear.
CHAPTER 9
THE NEW COVENANT

With God’s covenant dealings with people in the OT era complete, and with the necessary prophetic types and predictions having been made, the “fullness of time” had now come for God to send forth His Son (Gal. 4:4). All the other “sons” of God had failed (i.e. Adam, Noah, Israel, David, Solomon and the kings of Judah). Would Jesus the Son be any different? Thankfully, yes! And the new covenant that He inaugurated with His own blood dramatically exceeded the Old Covenant in glory (2 Cor. 3:7-11).¹

On the night He was betrayed Jesus shared what has become known as His “last supper” with the disciples. This event was the last Passover meal of the Old Covenant and the first Lord’s Supper of the New. In the OT the Passover was the meal that the Jews celebrated once a year in remembrance of God’s delivering them from slavery in Egypt. At that time they had been told to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses so that the destroying angel would “pass over” their houses while he struck all the firstborn of Egypt. The death of this lamb which “saved” the Israelites was the precursor to the Mosaic Covenant. Now Jesus, during this Passover meal, took bread and wine and gave them to His disciples in an act which symbolized the breaking of His body and the shedding of His blood.

¹ In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul defended his New Covenant ministry, saying that because of the exceeding glory of the New Covenant compared with the Old, “since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech!” (2 Cor 3:12) See Appendix 9 for an important discussion on what made the New Covenant “new” in comparison with the Old Covenant, and may what evangelists read there cause them also to use great boldness of speech in declaring to their hearers the great hope that we have in Christ and the exceeding glory of His New Covenant.
His death, like that of the Passover lamb, would save His people and usher in a new covenant and a new people.

Jesus’ primary concern at this meal was to explain to His disciples the meaning and significance of His death. He made it clear that He was laying His life down willingly (Luke 22:15), that there was divine purpose in what was about to happen, no matter how much it broke His disciples’ hearts. In a sense the whole supper, with its historical significance, and with its conversations and new ordinances, was a teaching on the atonement. Jesus made it clear that to understand the atonement one has to understand the covenants of Scripture, because His death would be both a fulfillment of all the previous covenants and the inaugurating sacrifice for a new covenant. When He “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me”’ (v19), He was emphasizing the vicarious nature of His actions (“given for you”). When He “took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you’” (v20), He was referencing Ex. 24:8, repeating the very words of Moses spoken of the blood of the sacrifice which inaugurated the Old Covenant. The New Covenant which Jeremiah prophesied was now being inaugurated by the very blood sacrifice of Jesus Himself. So Paul could write to the Corinthians and say, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:6).

*Body* and *blood* were the two constituent parts of a sacrificed animal in Mosaic Covenant terminology (the body was burned and the blood was sprinkled). By explaining these things to His disciples at the Passover meal, Jesus was claiming that through His death He would be the real Passover lamb. Therefore, when He came into the world, Jesus said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me” (Heb.
10:5). The sacrifices and offerings of thousands of years of Passovers were not sufficient to take away sins, and so God prepared one final body to be sacrificed. The horrific truth of it all is that God inaugurated the New Covenant by breaking His Son’s body and pouring out His Son’s blood, offering His Son up as a blood sacrifice for sin. Such was the wrath of God for sin! And such is the love of God for sinners! And let evangelists never forget either of them, for in the body of our Saviour the wrath and the love of God are shown together.

Promises of the New Covenant

During the time of the previous covenants, God sent prophets who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to predict one final consummating covenant that would fulfill all the rest. These prophecies are invaluable because in them God announced the promises of the New Covenant hundreds of years in advance. The main prophecies to consult can be found in Jeremiah 31:27-34; 32:26-41; 33:1-26; 50:4-5; Ezekiel 16:60-63; 34:22-31; 36:16-31; 37:12-28. By studying the promises in these prophecies we may extract the following summary: In the New Covenant God was going to bring His people out from exile into the land He had promised them, where He would give them a new heart and a new spirit, writing the law on their hearts. This would empower them to believe and obey (the very thing which was impossible in terms of the Mosaic Covenant and its priesthood). God would make full and final atonement for their sins and “remember their sins no more”. Within this new covenant people of God, Israel and Judah would once again unite, together with the Gentiles, with the

2. See Appendix 9 for an important discussion on the relationship between the Old and New Covenants.
Davidic Messiah as their King. And unlike the Old Covenant, this new covenant would be an “everlasting covenant” (Jer. 32:30) by which He would put His fear in their hearts so that they would not depart from Him (hence guaranteeing their perseverance).

**Conditions of the New Covenant**

As much as our election is unconditional and our salvation is entirely by grace, for the promises of the New Covenant to be ours, together with all of the promises gathered up by Christ from the previous covenants, there are a number of things that had, and have, to take place. I will refer to these as “conditions” of the new covenant, but if the reader would choose other language I will not object. Scripture, however, is clear that before I could find myself “in Christ” and be a fellow heir with Him of all the promises of God, the following had to be done:

First, a perfect man had to fulfill the outstanding conditions of the previously broken covenants, of which there were two: the original Covenant of Works, and the Mosaic Covenant.

Second, a sinless man had to pay the penalty on behalf of sinners for the broken Covenant of Works (that penalty was death), and He had to bear the curse of the broken Mosaic Covenant (being struck, abandoned and forsaken by God).

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3 Fulfilled in the church in which Christ has “gathered together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad” [John 11:52]

4. For a discussion of the “conditionality” vs “unconditionality” of the New Covenant, see Appendix 10.
Third, for any individual to receive the benefits of the New Covenant they must repent, believe in Christ and persevere in their faith to the end.⁵

Christ fulfilled the first and second of these conditions with His sinless life and death 2000 years ago. But what I have been arguing throughout this thesis is that in terms of the Covenant of Redemption, and the Genesis 3:15 “promise of grace,” and God’s passing through the pieces of the Abrahamic sacrifice alone, Christ also ensured the fulfillment of the third of the above conditions. He purchased repentance, faith and perseverance for the elect with His cross-work. These gifts are then applied by the Holy Spirit through regeneration (remember the New Covenant prophecies that promised “a new heart and a new spirit” for God’s people). The great Puritan John Owen put it this way in his book, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*:

And this is the main difference between the Old Covenant of Works and the new one of grace, that in [the former] the Lord did only require the fulfilling of the conditions prescribed, but in [the latter] he promiseth to effect it in them himself with whom the covenant is made. And without this spiritual efficacy, the truth is, the New Covenant would be as weak and unprofitable, for the end of a covenant (the bringing of us and binding of us to God) as the old…. This, then, is the one main difference of these two covenants, that the Lord did in the old only require the condition; now, in the new, he will also effect it in all the federates, to whom this covenant is extended. And if the Lord should only exact the obedience required in the covenant of us, and not work and effect it also in us, the New Covenant would be a show to increase our misery, and not a serious imparting and communicating of grace and mercy.⁶

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5. Of course, these ‘conditions’ are not a prerequisite for being loved by Christ, or for being offered Christ, nor even for coming to Christ. Men do not need to prepare themselves with repentance and faith before God will love them or offer them salvation, or before they can come to Jesus. Rather, repentance and faith are what it means to come to Christ, because Christ is a Saviour from sin. Repentance and faith are descriptions of how the Spirit upon regeneration brings the sinner to Christ, themselves being gifts of God. Yet the means through which the Spirit grants these gifts is through the preaching of Christ and the evangelist’s call for repentance and faith.

Application For Evangelists

In addition to what has already been said evangelists must take heed to the following.

Preaching for Conversion

The great weakness of the Mosaic Covenant was that it did not make provision for the regeneration of the covenant people, but it is precisely this which God promised to do in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). So our first application for the evangelist is this: he must preach for conversion. His role is not to effect moral improvement or more faithful church membership or greater service to fellow man. He is to aim his preaching at nothing less than the complete spiritual regeneration, the new birth, of his hearers (as the apostles did, see Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31). In discussing why George Whitefield had been so used of God, J. C. Ryle said:

Whitefield…. told these thousands at once that they were in danger of being lost for ever - that they were in the broad way that leads to destruction - that they were dead, and must be made alive again - that they were lost, and must be found. He told them that if they loved life, they must immediately repent - they must become new creatures - they must be converted, they must be born again. And I believe the apostles would have done just the same.7

In the words of Whitefield himself (from his sermon, ‘The Potter and the Clay’):

This moral change is what some call, repentance, some, conversion, some, regeneration; choose what name you please, I only pray God, that we all may have the thing. The scriptures call it holiness, sanctification, the new creature, and our Lord calls it a “New birth, or being born again, or born from above.” These are not barely figurative expressions, or the flights of eastern language, nor do they barely denote a relative change of state conferred on all those who are admitted into Christ's church by baptism; but they denote a real, moral change of heart and life, a real participation of the divine life in the soul of man. Some indeed content themselves

with a figurative interpretation; but unless they are made to experience the power and efficacy thereof, by a solid living experience in their own souls, all their learning, all their labored criticism, will not exempt them from a real damnation. Christ hath said it, and Christ will stand, “Unless a man,” learned or unlearned, high or low, though he be a master of Israel as Nicodemus was, unless he “be born again, he cannot see, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

So we must preach for conversion. And as any Biblical Calvinist will tell you this does not imply that we avoid urging upon people a personal response of their will. Although sinners are in one sense passive in their regeneration (John 3:8), yet the mystery is that God still engages their will in the process. “It is a tragedy to see pastors state the facts and sit down. Good preaching pleads with people to respond to the Word of God.” Evangelists must preach at the will of sinners. We must not simply leave our message hanging, as though it were a thing to be admired or recorded, like setting up an altar of remembrance. We are not preaching simply to be able to say that we did! On the contrary, we must call sinners to decide, bringing them to a crisis point, to a cross-roads where they must choose: will they receive Christ or not? We must place Almighty God before them and present His summons in such a way that they know that He requires an answer. As self-contradictory as it seems, we are to command sinners: “Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die?” (Ezek. 18:31) We must urge sinners with Peter, “Repent therefore and be converted!” (Acts 3:19), and in so doing the Spirit will do His work.

Preach Christ

The single greatest lesson we learn from the covenants is that we are to preach Christ. Yes, we must herald the many promises of the Gospel as brought out by the covenants, but we must never separate any of them from Him. All is inherited in Him, or it is not inherited at all. Let every evangelist hear Sinclair Ferguson well:

Notice the difference in emphasis here. When the benefits are seen as abstractable from the Benefactor the issue becomes: 1) For the preacher: “How can I offer these benefits?” and 2) For the hearer: “How can I get these benefits into my life?” But when it is seen that Christ and his benefits are inseparable and that the latter are not abstractable commodities, the primary question becomes: 1) For the preacher: “How do I preach Christ himself?” and 2) For the hearer: “How do I get into Christ?” … What we receive in the gospel is not benefits but Christ and therefore the focus of public preaching and private pastoral ministry must be to set forth Christ.10

This is why ‘union with Christ’ has been such a major theme in these pages. Evangelists must call people to come to Christ, and to nothing else, because all the promises are in Him. If sinners come to Christ they get all, if they seek the promises outside of Him they get none. So we preach His sinless life, His bloody death and His glorious resurrection, because there, and there alone, can sinners enter into the Kingdom where the promises are inherited.

The Promise of Forgiveness of Sins for Today

The sub-heading above should be read with the emphasis on the word, “today,” for here we are concerned with the urgency with which evangelists must call sinners to Jesus. Despite the many future promises still to be received by those in Christ, what we offer sinners is

**immediate** release from debt, cleansing from sin, deliverance from judgment, peace with God, and adoption as children. They do not have to wait any longer. They may, indeed they must, come **now**, and they may have all in Christ **now**, for “now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

The Promise of an Obedient Heart

God demands an obedience from faith (Rom. 9:30-32), from a heart that delights in Him. And yet many sinners, particularly those who are feeling the initial drawings of the Spirit and the pangs of a consciousness of sin, are frustrated by their patterns of iniquity and their own disobedient hearts. Evangelists must remember that the gospel call is an effectual call. Obedience is a gospel-gift for evangelists to offer. God offers sinners a new heart and a new obedience, and so should we, for in so doing He grants them this very thing as He moves them to come to Christ.

The Promise of God’s Genuine Pleasure in Us

God spoke from Heaven at Jesus’ baptism, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). Jesus’ life **pleased** God. When Jesus ascended into heaven the Father was completely satisfied with all His Son had done (Dan. 7:13-14)! Every one of us is born with a desire for our own earthly fathers to approve of us in this way, to love us, to be well pleased with us. How much more will it delight our hearts to know that the Ancient of Days, our Heavenly Father, loves us and is pleased with us. How much better to enter Heaven upon our deaths and be met with the delight of God. And so here is a great promise which the evangelist must herald:
Sinner, you may have the righteous life of Jesus credited to your account, as if you had done it. Every good thing Jesus did for thirty-three years, every good thought or kind word, all His acts of love, gentleness, bravery, faithfulness and service to others, every time He restrained Himself in patience, in sexual purity, His entire life of humility, will be attributed to you as you put your faith in Him. What God offers you, an unworthy sinner though you are, is to so clothe you with the righteousness of Jesus that when He looks out of heaven upon you at your baptism He will say those same words: ‘This is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased!’ Won’t you come now, unworthy sinner, and be clothed with righteousness of Christ.

Preaching with love-compelled urgency

And finally, if all this is true, then let evangelists preach with their hearts being poured out for poor wretched sinners. Let us urge them to consider, imploring them to think upon their lost state, and upon the glory of Christ clothed in His gospel. Let us look them in the eyes and beg them to turn from their sin and compel them to come in. It is not beneath a preacher to plead with sinners to come to Christ. Paul did it (2 Cor. 5:20, cf. 2 Cor. 2:4). Evangelists are to preach with tears, with a love for sinners that constrains them to do more than just deliver a message. Though we will never hear Paul or Chrysostom or Whitefield or Spurgeon preach, we get a sense of their hearts in how Spurgeon closed his great tract to sinners, entitled All of Grace:

Reader, meet me in heaven! Do not go down to hell. There is no coming back again from that abode of misery. Why do you wish to enter the way of death when Heaven’s gate is open before you? Do not refuse the free pardon, the full salvation which Jesus grants to all who trust Him. Do not hesitate and delay. You have had enough of resolving, come to action. Believe in Jesus now, with full and immediate decision. Take with you words and come unto your Lord this day, even this day. Remember, O soul, it may be now or never with you. Let it be now; it would be horrible that it should be never. Again, I charge you, meet me in heaven.11

May God give us such a heart and urgency for those to whom we preach.

CHAPTER 10
PASTORAL APPLICATIONS

In conclusion, I would like to return to the words of D.A. Carson in describing his own evangelistic preaching:

Most of us, I suspect, develop fairly standard ways, one might even say repetitive ways, to appeal to the motivations of our hearers when we preach the gospel. Recently, however, I have wondered if I have erred in this respect—not so much in what I say as in what I never or almost never say…. All of the biblically sanctioned motivations for pursuing God, for pursuing Christ, say complementary things about God himself, such that failure to cover the sweep of motivations ultimately results in diminishing God…. The point to be made is simple: any failure to appeal to the full range of biblically exemplified and biblically sanctioned motivations not only means that there are some people we are not taking into account, but, more seriously, that there are elements in the character and attributes of God himself that we are almost certainly ignoring.¹

It is my hope that the arguments contained in this thesis have shown beyond doubt that an understanding of the covenants of Scripture—together with their promises, obligations and threats—is an indispensible guide to what these various “motivations” (as Carson calls them) are. By understanding the redemptive-historical work of God through the covenants scores of insights into our ministry and message as evangelists have been gained. In the face of the sheer number of these, the thought does strikes one that surely a gospel so vast and wide in its scope will require evangelists to spend more than a single sermon or conversation with sinners wherever possible. In fact, the line between evangelistic and pastoral work should at

times be blurred. The kind of instantaneous conversions that took place at Penetcost in Acts 2 or in Cornelius’s house in Acts 10 seem to have been the exception rather than the rule, and even in these cases the converts clearly had a rich OT background, or a knowledge of the ministry of John the baptist—others had sown what was now being reaped. Frequently in the book of Acts Luke tells us that the Apostles remained in new territory for an extended period in which they reasoned daily or weekly with the same people from the Scriptures, showing and pursuading that Jesus is the Christ. In fact, as one reads the Scriptures just referenced it is easy to get the impression that Paul’s preferred evangelistic strategy was, wherever possible, to spend prolonged periods in a single place in order to engage the same people in an extended period of reasoning with them from all the Scriptures. It is also clear that due to persecution Paul often left a city earlier than he desired (e.g. Acts 13:50; 14:5-6; etc). Along these lines, in his commentary on Colossians 2:6 Dick Lucas speaks of the deeper meaning which Paul gave to the concept of ‘receiving Christ’, that it was more than a short prayer for personal salvation, but firstly a receiving of the main doctrines of the gospel, such that people were instructed in the way of salvation, only then followed by a wholehearted surrender to it. Lucas says:

The application of this to evangelism is obviously important if we are to avoid spurious commitments to Christ and the phenomenon of a large number of people dropping out of the Christian race almost before they have begun. To pray with a casual contact to ‘receive Christ’ may show more zeal than wisdom if the basic and


4. It’s interesting to note that when Paul did only have one moment with a gentile crowd in Acts 17:22-34, he did not even attempt to preach Christ or the cross. He simply laid a foundation of monotheism, denounced idolatry and confirmed a coming judgment, concluding with a reference to the resurrection designed as somewhat of a ‘teaser’ for further discourse. The result was that some mocked, but others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” Mission accomplished. Presumably it was this further discourse which then led to the subsequent conversion of Dionysius, Damaris and the others with them.
essential traditions of the Christian story and message have not been made clear and assimilated. Jesus has to be ‘learned’ in order to be ‘received’.5

I would suggest that in order for our ministries as evangelists to successfully help sinners ‘receive Christ’ by way of “learning Christ” we can lean heavily on the covenantal thread that binds the story of redemption together. This is particularly relevant for those who have the privilege of ministering within “prolonged” missional environments, as Paul did in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10).

This leads us then finally to the following: Though this has been an attempt to address evangelists and those doing the work of evangelism, I am sure it has crossed any pastoral man’s mind that the wonders contained in the covenants could fill years of pastoral preaching and teaching for the church. If our job as pastors is to spread a table for our people, showing them the glory of their God and the riches of His inheritance in the saints, surely insights like those we have drawn throughout this thesis should also find their place at that table. For this reason I do hope that the week-in-and-week-out teaching ministry of local church pastors will also be enriched by what is in these pages, adding insight to their exegesis of the passages they preach from. May our covenant-making, covenant-keeping God grant it in His grace.

CHAPTER 11
CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1 we sought to understand the principles relating to the breadth of the Gospel, learning that its benefits are to be found only in Christ and seeking to identify what exactly Peter and Paul were both referring to when they spoke of the plurality of the “promises” given by God in it. We introduced how a lack of appreciation for these promises can lead to a diminishing of the Gospel among preachers today, and a resulting diminishment of the glory of God. We introduced the theme that it is the covenants of the OT which hold the key to a full-orbed understanding of the promises of God in the Gospel.

In Chapter 2 it was argued that God does act, and that He does so in order to achieve His will without being capricious, random or double-minded. But then further to that it was noted, as Paul says to the Galatians, that when the fullness of the _time_ had come, God acted (He sent forth His Son). It was thus seen how God Himself enters space and time and acts within them. For this reason, although our inheritance is something God pre-destined for us according to an eternal purpose (outside of time), it was argued that there is yet a temporal order to the scheme of how God then works that purpose out. This insight then allowed us to see how the historicity of the Biblical accounts is central to the Gospel preaching of evangelists today, and how we can find meaning for ourselves today within them. This then introduced the seven major covenants contained in the thesis: First the pre-temporal, intra-Trinitarian Covenant of Redemption; Second, the pre-fall Covenant of Works; Third, the
Noahic Covenant; Fourth, the Abrahamic Covenant; Fifth, the Mosaic Covenant; Sixth, the Davidic Covenant; and seventh, the New Covenant. This was followed by a definition of covenant, together with an explanation of why their promises are still accessible today. Some initial applications for evangelists were made, including explaining the atoning death and sinless life of Christ and union with Christ.

In Chapter 3 the pre-temporal, intra-Trinitarian Covenant of Redemption was introduced, defined and defended, showing how it explains the subordinate relations of the ontologically equal members of the Trinity within the scheme of redemption. Applications for evangelists included those connected to the people of God, the Kingdom of God and the glory of God, together with an application from the eternality of the love God has for the elect.

Chapters 4 through 9 then dealt systematically with the six remaining temporal covenants. Chapter 4 included a discussion of the Fall of man and its effects upon the human race, together with the promise of grace given in Gen. 3:15. Then, in each case the following seven areas were discussed:

First, the historical situation. We looked at the actual moment in history when God broke in and inaugurated that covenant, including what had led up to that moment and what its immediate impact was. In this we also included an exploration of how each successive covenant built upon the redemptive-historical gains of the previous covenants.

Second, the parties to the covenant. It was discussed who God was making this covenant with. As we learned, God made some covenants with individuals (like in the Davidic Covenant), while others He made with groups (like a nation, in the case of the Mosaic Covenant, for example).
Third, the covenant promises. If the person or nation with whom God was making this covenant were successfully to fulfill the covenant conditions, it was asked what blessings God had then promised they would inherit. It was these covenant promises that then paved the way for the “Application for Evangelists” section at the end of each chapter.

Fourth, the covenant obligations. We learned for each covenant what the conditions were which God laid down and had to be met before that person or nation could inherit the promises. We sought to identify whether or not the conditions of each covenant were fulfilled before the covenant was inaugurated, after, or not at all. We saw that in the Covenant of Works and in the Mosaic Covenant the covenant members (Adam and Israel, respectively) did not fulfill their obligations and thereby broke the covenants and received their curses. In the Noahic, Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, however, it was argued that by grace through faith the covenant members faithfully fulfilled their obligations.

Fifth, the covenant curses, comprising those things which God threatened if the covenant were to be broken. It was argued that for the Works and Mosaic Covenants Jesus endured the curses which had been declared due to the breaking of these covenants.

Sixth, for each covenant it was then demonstrated how Jesus Christ fulfilled the conditions of the covenant (or re-capitulated those conditions if the original party had successfully fulfilled them) and in so doing it was demonstrated how Christ has inherited all of the covenant promises. It was upon this insight that it was argued that all those brought into union with Christ through faith can become co-heirs of these promises with Him.

Seventh, we finally looked at what Christ’s inheritance of the promises means for the message of evangelists. We learned how the promises of each particular covenant should be included in our offer of the Gospel as evangelists. This “Application for Evangelists” section
was the main focus and purpose of the thesis and so took up a significant portion of each of these covenant-specific chapters.

Through this methodical process we have gleaned over sixty separate promises and blessings offered by God to sinners today in the Gospel in terms of the covenants of Scripture. Each of these were expanded upon to one degree or another. In this way the thesis of the dissertation was shown to be valid. It was demonstrated how the content of an evangelist’s gospel should include, on balance over time, the offer to sinners of inheriting in Christ all the promises of the Old Testament covenants.
APPENDIX 1

THE COVENANT OF GRACE

As we trace the various covenants of the OT through time, if we proceed in our discussion (as we have) from the Covenant of Works with Adam directly to God’s Covenant with Noah we are necessarily omitting the so-called “Covenant of Grace” that some see in Genesis 3 after the fall of man. Many Reformed theologians defend the existence of a single “Covenant of Grace” established in Genesis 3:15 which acts as an overarching structure under which every succeeding biblical covenant falls. O. Palmer Robertson, for example, defends this view,¹ saying that God’s words to the serpent, “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 heal”, constituted a covenant, which Robertson calls the Covenant of Commencement.² I must respectfully disagree with this understanding. Although God’s entire speech to the three offenders in Genesis 3:14-19 does include pronouncements of the

1. Though O. Palmer Robertson, in The Christ of the Covenants (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980) wants to re-name the concept, in Christ of the Covenants he wholeheartedly supports a “Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace” scheme of redemptive history. His objections are not to the “general structure of this division” but rather to the names themselves, saying that they poorly describe the two covenants (pg 55). To be clear, my objections are far more radical in that I reject entirely the very existence of a single overarching Covenant of Grace that somehow includes all God’s redemptive work after the fall. I defend the view that after the Fall God gave a sovereign and infallible promise of grace, and that this promise has been outworked in time through God’s making independent covenants which yet built upon one another, culminating in the New Covenant in Christ’s blood, the efficacy of which was applied retroactively to the saints of the OT (see Westminster Confession of Faith, 8.6). So rather than a “Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace” understanding of redemptive history, I argue for a “Covenant of Works/Promise of Grace” scheme in which the “Promise of Grace” is worked out through the means of various covenants, with each covenant building upon the gains of the previous.

curses of the now-broken Covenant of Works, it lacks entirely the elements of a new covenant. There are no obligations and there are no threats for disobedience. What we find in fact is as divine and sovereign a declaration as you will find anywhere in the Bible! God is addressing Satan, not man, and He simply declares what He will do in the future. For His own purposes He will crush the serpent’s head by sending a human-born Saviour. God will undo what Adam did. He simply declares it. There is no need for a covenant here. God is not here entering into a relationship with anyone. He is simply heralding what He will do hereafter.

Some, like Robertson, might fear that this understanding will inevitably lead to a scattering of the rest of the covenants, a de-unifying of them. If it did, then it would need to be rejected because Covenant Theology is the very thing that shows the unity of God’s works in space and time. I do not, however, believe that rejecting the single “Covenant of Grace” at all robs us of the continuity of the covenants of the OT. Both the Covenant of Redemption and the ‘promise of grace’ in Genesis 3:15 maintain this unity. God’s covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David all have this in common: they are God’s progressive means of unfolding what He had promised to do. They are His means in space and time of preparing the world to receive the human-born Saviour who would undo what Adam had done. In fact, the Genesis 3:15 promise is the preeminent thing in Scripture. Covenants are simply the means by which the sovereign promise is eventually fulfilled. This is why the covenants of Scripture can be seen as separate and self-standing, with unique promises, obligations and threats, and yet still be related to one another organically as they progressively served the same goal. Pascal Denault summarizes the view of the seventeenth century Particular Baptists, which supports the view taken here, as follows:
The Baptists believed that before the arrival of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace was not formally given, but only announced and promised (revealed). This distinction is fundamental to the federalism of the 1689 [London Baptist Confession of Faith]. Nehemiah Coxe, the protagonist of this confession of faith, firmly maintains this distinction between the revelation and the administration: “It must also be noted that although the Covenant of Grace was revealed this far to Adam, yet we see in all this there was no formal and express covenant transaction with him.”…The Baptists believed that no covenant preceding the New Covenant was the Covenant of Grace. Before the arrival of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace was at the stage of promise.³

This is also why the “New Covenant” (Luke 22:20) is in fact new, not simply the reworking or blossoming of a previous “Covenant of Grace”. This, I believe, allows us to understand more clearly the discontinuities between the Old and New Covenants.

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Understanding the conditions of each of the major covenants of Scripture is a complex affair. For example, some covenants were inaugurated *after* all the conditions had already been fulfilled. Referencing the works of both Mendenhall and Weinfeld, in their book *Cracking OT Codes* Sandy and Giese have a helpful discussion on international treaty patterns in the ancient Near East and how these (especially the Hittite treaties of the second millennium BC) help us understand the workings of the biblical covenants. They particularly draw a distinction between these Hittite treaties and “royal grants” of the same period. In treaties the obligations went primarily in the direction of the suzerain—the weaker vassal obligating himself to the more powerful suzerain—but with royal grants the oath taken by the suzerain put the obligation in the other direction—the more powerful suzerain obligated himself to the weaker vassal *as a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed*.\(^1\)

This is tremendously helpful to us in understanding how the obligations of certain of the Biblical covenants worked. All the covenants were conditional, but some of them were

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inaugurated after the conditions had already been met, thus making the promises infallible.

As we will see later, God’s covenants with Abraham and David are both examples of this.²

² There is one potentially complicating factor in these discussions: did royal grant treaties, and did the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants, require ongoing conformity to a set of behaviours after the covenant inauguration? As I will argue later, I believe they did (see Ps. 132:11-12). This may surprise the reader. How then can I defend the position that the conditions of these covenants were already completely fulfilled prior to the covenant inauguration? The answer lies in the Scriptural teaching on grace and perseverance. Grace is the key to understanding the covenants of the OT. Grace made the Noahic, Abrahamic and Davidic covenants what they were, and the lack of grace made the Mosaic Covenant what it was. The only reason any human being can continue to please God and keep His covenant is if that person’s heart has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and if it has then they will infallibly persevere. Perseverance is a gracious gift of God (Jer. 32:38-40; John 3:36; 5:24; 6:22-65; 10:27-30; Rom. 8:28-30; 8:35-39; 11:29; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3-14; Phil. 1:6; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 John 2:18-20; Jude 24-25). Both Abraham and David needed to persevere in their faith, but by the time God inaugurated the covenants with them they had both received the grace of God which would itself now guarantee their future perseverance. This is also precisely the case for the Christian today. It is true that we must persevere to be saved (Mark 13:13; 1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:22-23), but our having become a new creation with new hearts that delight in the things of God guarantees this perseverance (Phil. 2:12-13). This is why we can be described in Scripture as both “being saved” (e.g. 1 Tim. 4:16) and “having been saved” (Eph. 2:5, 8). 1 Cor. 15:2 holds these truths perfectly in tension. As John Stott so wonderfully put it in his commentary on 1 Timothy 4:16, “Perseverance is not the meritorious cause, but rather the ultimate evidence, of our salvation (Heb. 3:14).” (John R. W. Stott, The Bible Speaks Today series, The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus [Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996], 124) For this reason I will argue that, unlike the Covenant of Works and the Mosaic Covenant, neither the Abrahamic nor the Davidic covenants could be broken once they had been inaugurated and their promises were infallible. It is this understanding of the covenants, seeing them as conditional and yet infallible, that Jewish scholarship to this day cannot fathom. Michael Avioz, a Jewish scholar from Bar—Ilan University in Tel Aviv, for example, tries to argue for the conditionality of the Davidic Covenant but must in the process forsake its infallibility. His explanation of 2 Sam 7 goes as follows: “Nathan’s Oracle should be classified as a conditional covenant. The author of Samuel wanted to underscore the divine steadfast love enveloping God’s promise to David and his offspring, and thus he downplayed the conditionality of the covenant.” (Michael Avioz, “The Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7: conditional or unconditional?” Göttingen, Germant: Hubert & Co, 2012 [online]; available from https://www.academia.edu/10424741/The_Davidic_covenant_in_2_Samuel_7_conditional_or_unconditional; Internet; accessed 6 April 2016, 43) This seems to be the Jewish way of explaining why David’s throne remains vacant to this day, and why it might always be so. But for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, God’s word through Jeremiah will correct them: “Thus says the LORD: ‘If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne.’” (Jer. 33:20-21) Christ has come in fulfillment of God’s infallible promise through Nathan, a promise which was as secure as God’s Noahic covenant to maintain the natural order of the universe. Again, grace and only grace can explain how such a covenant can be both conditional and infallibly secure at the same time. God could say “I will establish the throne of your seed’s kingdom forever,” (2 Sam. 7:13) and yet still hold out the condition, “If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore,” (Ps. 132:12), and He could make both statements precisely because God in His grace, according to the pre-creation Covenant of Redemption and the Genesis 3:15 promise, had already committed infallibly to sending Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of God, who would perfectly keep God’s covenant and testimony and thereby inherit the throne of His father David.
Unlike the examples above, other covenants were inaugurated before any of the conditions had been fulfilled. This is more in line with the Hittite treaty model. Because of this, unlike the royal grant covenants, this type of covenant could be broken. This is a crucial insight. This type of covenant could be broken through the vassal’s non-compliance with the conditions. As we will see, both the Covenant of Works and the Mosaic Covenant are examples of this, and as it happened Adam and the Israelites respectively did indeed break these covenants through non-compliance.

This matter of all the covenants of Scripture being conditional has particular importance for Calvinists because we talk about unconditional election to salvation, and we defend the complete gratuitousness of salvation without regard to merit or works on our part. Does the concept of conditional covenants cut across these Biblical truths? No, I do not believe so. There is a huge difference between an unconditional covenant (which I do not believe exists in Scripture), and a conditional covenant in which God gracefully, effectually works the fulfillment of the conditions into His elect. When a person is saved and becomes a partaker of the New Covenant through faith, that person does genuinely make an un-coerced choice to repent and believe—it is not forced upon us, we genuinely choose to believe, but only because God Himself has given us a new heart which delights in doing so. Faith is a gift. In this we see that even the New Covenant is conditional (upon repentance, faith and perseverance), but God works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure. He graciously works the fulfillment of those conditions into us. Hence John Frame says:

God’s covenants are unconditional in the sense that God will always carry out the purposes for which he made the covenants. In the covenant of grace, God the Father will certainly save all those he has given to belong to his Son. But they are conditional in that those who would receive those blessings must respond to God with a living and active faith (James 2:14—26). By God’s sovereign plan, however, he sees to it that the conditions are met in those he has ordained for salvation…. The
covenants are unconditional because of God’s lordship attribute of complete control
over the creation. They are conditional because of God’s lordship attribute of
authority, his right to command and be obeyed.³

Then, regarding the unconditionality of our election, first let it be understood that our
inheriting the promised salvation of Genesis 3:15 was conditional on the original stipulations
of the Covenant of Works being fulfilled, and on the penalty of that broken covenant being
paid. Election is only unconditional because Christ Himself fulfilled both of those obligations
on behalf of the elect. There were conditions. It is only that we did not have to fulfill them
ourselves. He did it for us. He lived the sinless life that Adam failed to live and He died to
pay the penalty of Adam’s sin. Further to this, He then works repentance, faith and
perseverance (the conditions of the New Covenant) into the hearts of His elect so that they
can receive their inheritance in Him. So while election is unconditional, the covenants were
not. Grace is not antithetical to the inherent conditionality of all the Biblical covenants.

APPENDIX 3

ABRAHAM’S JOURNEY OF FAITH

Abraham’s faith was initially weak and so he did not immediately fulfill all the obligations of the covenant. Having set out from Ur he stopped short in Haran (considerably north of Canaan). In fact, at this point he had only fulfilled one of the four conditions of the covenant: he had left his home country in the land of the Chaldeans, but he had not yet left his father, nor his extended family (Lot was still with him), nor had he gone to the land of Canaan. God waited for another step of obedience before appearing to Abraham again, which happened when Abraham’s father providentially died in Haran (11:32; cf. 12:4). At that point Abraham, aged seventy-five, took Lot together with all their possessions and servants and travelled to the land of Canaan. Abraham had now effectively fulfilled three of the four conditions—the only outstanding condition was to leave his extended family, i.e. Lot. God immediately appeared to Abraham again in Genesis 12:7, confirming to him that the promise still stood despite the delay in obedience.

In Genesis 12:11 Abraham left Canaan, taking Lot with him, and they went to Egypt because of a famine in the land. It was during this time that God began to fulfill the covenant promises: He blessed Abraham with wealth, and He “cursed those who cursed Abraham” in the events which unfolded with Pharaoh. In Genesis 13:1-4 faith seems to have risen in Abraham again and he returned to Canaan. And yet his frustration is clear as we see him “call on God” (v4). The main promise, that he would have a child who would become a great
nation, was yet unfulfilled and Abraham knew he was getting old. But God did not answer. Just as there had been complete silence in Haran before the death of Abraham’s father, now there was silence in Canaan while Lot was still with Abraham. God was not going to speak to Abraham again until there was complete obedience. But here once more in the account of Abraham’s life we see the grace of the Lord, His faithfulness to His Genesis 3:15 ‘promise of grace,’ and His providential control in order to “work in Abraham both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13): the Lord sovereignly acted to actually cause Abraham to obey. In order to see the last of the conditions fulfilled God brought strife between the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abraham. This was an unpleasant experience and yet we see that it was for Abraham’s good. Calvin comments:

Seeing that the Lord promises the land to the seed of Abraham, we perceive the admirable design of God, in the departure of Lot. He had assigned the land to Abraham alone; if Lot had remained with him, the children of both would have been mixed together. The cause of their dissension was indeed culpable; but the Lord, according to his infinite wisdom, turns it to a good issue, that the posterity of Lot should possess no part of the inheritance.¹

Lot then left and took the land around Sodom as his own. And now finally all the obligations of the covenant had been fulfilled. Abraham had left his country and his father’s house, he had come to the land that God showed him, and now he had left his extended family. Now, notice immediately what happened: As soon as the obedience was complete God spoke again to Abraham and confirmed that the covenant promises were still true and that despite the length of time it had taken for Abraham to obey, God would surely do as He had promised (Gen. 13:14-18). Though God had partially begun to fulfill the promises of the covenant in Egypt, more promises now began to be fulfilled: Abraham was blessed with

military success (Gen. 14:15-16), he was blessed by God’s priest, Melchizedek (Gen. 14:19-20), he was a blessing to Melchizedek in return (Gen. 14:20), and was also a blessing to Lot, the king of Sodom and his people (Gen. 14:16). By the beginning of Genesis 15 God had made Abraham’s name great, with kings and priests seeking him out (Gen. 14:17-18).
APPENDIX 4

UNDERSTANDING ABRAHAM’S JUSTIFICATION

As we seek to apply the complex of events in Abraham’s life to the ministry of evangelists today we must ask why the comment about Abraham’s justification is only made in Genesis 15, when it seems that Abraham was already justified at this point (Heb. 11:8 seems to teach clearly that Abraham had already been justified in Genesis 12 when at that time he had left Ur “by faith”). Calvin, commenting on Genesis 15:6, explains:

If anyone object that Abraham previously believed God, when he followed Him at His call, and committed himself to His direction and guardianship, the solution is ready; we are not here told when Abraham first began to be justified, or to believe in God; but that in this one place it is declared, or related, how he had been justified through his whole life. For if Moses had spoken thus immediately on Abraham's first vocation, the cavil of which I have spoken would have been more specious; namely, that the righteousness of faith was only initial (so to speak) and not perpetual (Calvin here resisting a theology of being justified by faith at the beginning of the Christian life, but made perfect by good works thereafter). But now since after such great progress, he is still said to be justified by faith, it thence easily appears that the saints are justified freely even unto death … the righteousness even of the most perfect characters perpetually consists in faith.¹

This is an incredibly important point for evangelists to grasp, for it regards the very nature of saving faith. Faith that justifies is faith that permanently transforms one’s life and persists to the end. It is in this sense that one’s actions many years after justification can still be said to “justify” one. This also explains how all of the following can be said in Scripture: “By faith Abraham obeyed” in Genesis 12 (Heb. 11:8); “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” in Genesis 15 (Rom. 4:2-3); and “Was not Abraham our

father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?” in Genesis 22 (James 2:21). The fact that these events are spread over a period of more than three decades demonstrates that saving faith is faith that persists and is therefore, as Calvin said of Abraham in the previous quote, how we are justified through our whole lives.
APPENDIX 5

HOW THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISES OF LAND AND SEED RELATE

There is an inseparability of the two Abrahamic Covenant promises of land and Seed. The land-promise, as it related to the earthly land of Canaan, was subservient to the Seed-promise, as it related to the coming of Christ.

A careful reading of Genesis 15:8-21 seems to imply that God’s covenant with Abraham was only to provide assurance of the promise of the land. But then Genesis 22:17-18 seems to imply that God’s oath was only for the promise of the Seed. Yet in Genesis 17:1-8 God speaks of the covenant as including both aspects: Seed and land. Also, in Acts 3:25 Stephen included the promise of the Seed in the Abrahamic covenant. So it seems that the covenant in Genesis 15 actually confirmed all of the promises which God gave to Abraham. The main point is that the promise of the Seed and the promise of the land go together. They are inseparable, for one serves the other. This is so because as we have been saying from the beginning, God uses means, physical means, to achieve His ends. We live in physical bodies in a physical world, and we need somewhere to live. So God prepared a physical land in which the descendants of Abraham could live with freedom as their nation developed in order for the Genesis 3:15 “promises of grace” to unfold in space and time. This need for a physical land climaxed when the fullness of the times had come and Jesus came into the world. And Paul says that according to the promises made to Abraham, when Christ came the “land” was then given to Him (Gal. 3:16). But the most fascinating part of it all was that the
land of Canaan had only ever been a type of the domain which Christ would be given, and Paul tells us in Romans 4:13 that this was indeed the whole world! This gives greater meaning to the words of Jesus: “My Kingdom is not of this world”. We must conclude that the giving of the land to the children of Israel was integral to the fulfillment of the promise to send the Seed. Once the Seed had come, the promise of the land was relocated to “that better, heavenly country where God has prepared a city for us” (Heb. 11:16). The giving of the land to the nation of Israel was merely a step towards the coming of Jesus Christ and His inheriting of the whole world, or as Marshall puts it, “The land of Canaan, we discover, turns out to be but a staging post on the way to world dominion, that is, the kingdom of God.”

APPENDIX 6

THE CONSTITUTION OF A NATION

The Mosaic Covenant constituted a nation under the laws of God. We must remember that at the time of the Exodus Israel were not yet a “nation.” Part of God’s end goal, as we have seen, is that His people live in a Kingdom eternally under His Son as their Shepherd-King. But for God’s people to be a kingdom, they first had to become a nation, and what makes a group of people a nation is its subjection to a common set of governing laws, together with a single government that maintains a judicial and punitive system for those who break the laws. Within such a nation common culture will develop, certainly, but the main thing in a nation is its law and the authority structure which enforces it. And so the giving of the law constituted Israel into a nation.

The other major aspect of the law of Moses was the sacrificial system it established. Although sacrifices already existed, the Mosaic Law implemented a system of sacrifices on a much grander and more formal scale.¹ Over the next 1500 years God established entire categories of thinking in the consciousness of His people. The concepts of how blood makes atonement for sin, and of how the death of a substitute sacrifice could cover over the transgressions of people, were worked into the very fabric and daily routine of the nation. Forgiveness through penal substitutionary atonement became a much clearer concept. Of course, this was all necessary for the Seed of the woman to come, because Christ’s work as

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¹ For example, Abel (Gen 4:4), Noah (Gen 8:20) and Abraham (Gen 22:13) had all offered sacrifices to God.
Saviour is deeply imbedded in the concepts of sin, righteousness, judgment, blood sacrifice, atonement, and penal substitution.

Then regarding the moral aspects of the law of Moses, Reformed theologians have always taught that the law had (and has) three uses.

First, a civil use: To curb vice with the threat of temporal punishment.

Second, an evangelistic use: To show us our sin in the light of God’s holy nature, thus showing our need for a savior and driving us to Christ.

Third, a sanctifying use: As a guide for a way of life for already redeemed people as they “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16).

Israel’s law could function in these three ways because it was a revelation of the righteous requirements of God. Whereas all men had, up until this point, only been given a general sense of God’s existence and power, and a general sense of sin through the light of conscience, the law of the Mosaic Covenant now made a complete summary of God’s will explicitly clear to God’s people. In this way God gave His elect the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). It is hard for us to put ourselves in the shoes of the Israelites the day they first heard the booming voice of a dreadfully holy God speaking the words of the Ten Commandments. They had never heard these before, and yet their consciences bore witness that these laws were right and true, because they were in fact an exposition of a pre-existing moral law which is written on every human heart in terms of the Covenant of Works. Sinclair Ferguson puts it this way: “The Decalogue … was simply a transcript in largely negative form, set
within a new context in the land, of the principles of life that had constituted Adam’s original existence.”

But through the commandment sin now became exceedingly sinful (Rom. 7:13) as the awful reality of God’s holiness was displayed to the Israelites. These were the very acts they had been committing and it was as if the law shone a light upon their sinfulness. And it humbled them. And yet the purpose of this terrifying law was actually to bring Israel back to seeking God for forgiveness in the coming Seed of the woman, the Seed of their father Abraham, the Saviour whom God had been promising to send from the beginning. That is, the purpose of the moral law was to stir faith, not works. Perhaps better said, the purpose was to stir works through faith.

In all these ways the Mosaic Covenant brought a major advance in redemptive history. God’s people were now not only a family, but a nation with a divine law, with a knowledge of God’s power, God’s righteousness and their own sin, an understanding of penal substitutionary atonement, soon to be living in their own land with the presence of God in their midst. The Jews, however, turned the law into something completely different, something it was never meant to be: a rulebook by which they thought they could earn God’s favour.


3. Represented by the Tabernacle which God instructed them to build for Him.
APPENDIX 7

A COMPARISON OF THE ABRAHAMIC AND MOSAIC COVENANT PROMISES

The promises made to Abraham are substantially the same as those made to Israel through Moses. This can be seen in the following comparison:

1. A special treasure: God’s special love for Israel was originally expressed to Abraham in Genesis 17:7.
2. A kingdom of priests: A priest brings people to God, and this was originally seen in the Abrahamic promises in Genesis 12:3 and 22:18.
3. A holy nation. God had promised to make of Abraham “a great nation” (Gen. 12:2), and of course the point of making Abraham into a great nation was so that they could be “holy”, or set apart from the other nations of the world, so that through them He could work out His plan of redemption.
4. The presence of God. God had said to Abraham, “Go … to a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1)—a promise of His presence now repeated to Israel.
5. God’s being an enemy to their enemies, precisely the same as God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3.
6. The land promise, seen originally in God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:7 and 15:18.
APPENDIX 8

WHY PEOPLE NEED FAITHFUL AND GODLY LEADERSHIP

As we saw in our discussions of the Noahic Covenant, one of the means by which God has ordained that His common grace will be felt in the earth is through the institution of human government. Human beings are weak and will go astray without faithful, Godly leadership. In fact, we are designed to become like our king—we will emulate those who lead us.

As God unfolded His great story of redemption, by the time of David He had transitioned the people from being a family under Abraham with each family having its own head (there were elders of the people), to being a nation under Moses (and the judges who followed him) with a common law governing their national life. And yet, whatever it was about the status of the judges that caused this, the four hundred and fifty years of their leadership demonstrated that they were still incapable of leading the people effectively. We see this in the staggeringly independent, non-prescriptive words of Joshua: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” (Josh. 24:15), and the book of judges tells us that at that time, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

As the history of Israel would prove after the days of David, whenever there was a righteous king the whole nation would turn back to God, but when there was a wicked king he would draw the people away from God and lead the whole nation into idolatry. One of the
most common refrains that God uses in the book of Kings to describe an evil king was to
compare him to Jeroboam and say: “he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart
from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin” (e.g. 1 Kings 15:26,
34; 22:52; 2 Kings 13:2; 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28, etc).

But through all this God was slowly, through space and time, teaching the people about
Godly leadership and submission to His authorities. He was taking Adam’s sinful race
through a historic journey to finally get us to the point where we could submit to Jesus Christ
as King of a heavenly Kingdom. Yes, we are born to become like our King and when we
finally arrive on those shores then we will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John
3:2). As Paul told the Romans, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be
conformed to the image of His Son.” (Rom. 8:29)
APPENDIX 9

WHY ISRAEL FAILED AND WHY THE NEW COVENANT DOES NOT

Any thorough treatment of the Mosaic Covenant, and its relationship to the New Covenant, will at some point need to address the issue of why the Israelite’s broke it, and hence why they never fully inherited its promises. On the contrary, the curses of the covenant fell upon them. Our answer to this will have far-reaching consequences to our soteriology and ecclesiology.¹

Why Did Israel Fail?

I stated in chapter 7 above that it was humble faith in the Messiah, and the obedience that inevitably issues from it, which was required in terms of the Mosaic Covenant. But Israel failed to offer this to God and they broke the covenant. The Apostle Paul explains why this happened:

Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. [Rom. 9:31-32]

This stumbling stone is Christ. Indeed as the writer to the Hebrews amazingly, and yet quite plainly, says, the Gospel itself was preached to the Israelites! But they did not benefit because they did not believe (Heb. 4:2).

Jeremiah explained the outworking of this faithless, self-righteous approach in Jeremiah 25:4-9. There he maintained that it was unrepentance (which is the inseparable companion to

¹. In my view, understanding what will now be presented is one the greatest proofs of Baptist Calvinism.
faithlessness in the Messiah) that broke the Mosaic Covenant. Unrepentance comes from self-righteousness, and self-righteousness comes from lack of faith in the Messiah. And yet this simply takes the question one step backwards, for now we must ask, why did the Israelites not believe? What explains their lack of faith?

This is why in Jeremiah’s famous prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 it is repentance and faith that God promised graciously to grant His people through the New Covenant. If an evangelist is ever going to understand what it is that God has promised in the gospel he must grasp this prophecy of Jeremiah.

Israel’s Failure in the Light of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the New Covenant

Jeremiah 31 is an extremely important passage to Jesus and the NT writers in explaining the work of Christ and His Spirit (e.g. Matt. 26:28; Mark. 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8-13, 9:15, 10:15-17, 12:24).

This prophecy came to Israel in days of incredible darkness. God was judging the nation for its unfaithfulness. The theological “problem” which the prophets were addressing was that despite God’s promises to Abraham and David, the children of Israel were losing their land and the Davidic throne was about to fall (Israel in the north was already in captivity and Judah in the south was about to be carried off by the Babylonians). How could this be, given all that God had promised? The New Covenant was Jeremiah’s answer to this “problem.” In the midst of this judgment God was promising a coming day of blessing, including a return of the exiled people to the land (vs 23-28). No longer would God’s covenant people be bound to either judgment or blessing based upon their familial and ethnic identity (29-30). On the contrary, a new day was coming in which God would make a new covenant. This new
The New Covenant would not be like the old Mosaic Covenant in that each member would enter into the New Covenant community through personal knowledge of God, not through family birth (34). Much ink has been spilled on the continuities and discontinuities between the Old and New Covenants, and in my view Jeremiah 31:33-34 is often not given the place it deserves in these discussions, for it is perhaps the clearest statement in Scripture about what the discontinuity is between the two covenants. Jeremiah plainly says that in the Old Covenant most Israelites, despite having the law on tablets of stone, did not know the Lord personally. But in the New Covenant no covenant member would need to be told to “know the Lord.”

Every New Covenant member, from the least to the greatest of them, would have the law written on his heart and would have a living, saving relationship with God. And every member of the New Covenant would be forgiven permanently of his sin.2

A great question now looms over us: Why was this New Covenant necessary? I said that it was repentant faith in the Messiah, issuing in obedience from the heart, that was required in

2. This has profound implications upon who should be baptized. If baptism is the initiatory rite into the New Covenant people of God, just as circumcision was in the Old Covenant, then it must be applied only to members of the covenant people. In the Old Covenant the covenant people were an ethnic people, with a mixture of regenerate and unregenerate individuals. Natural birth was the predominant entry point into the covenant people. This is why circumcision was to be performed on the children of Israelites, for those children had by way of natural birth entered the covenant people. But Jeremiah plainly says that this will not be the case in the New Covenant. It is spiritual birth that brings someone into the New Covenant community, and every member in that community knows the Lord, is forgiven of sin and has the law written on his or her heart. To my mind, Jeremiah could not be any plainer on this, and so I must respectfully disagree with my paedo-baptist brothers and sisters on the matter of who should be baptized. This, in turn, can have a dramatic impact upon what response an evangelist commands of his hearers. What form of evangelistic “appeal” is Biblical? As a charismatic, Calvinistic credo-baptist I have found myself torn between the vehement debates on both sides of this question, with men like Billy Graham on the one side and men like Iain Murray on the other (Murray violently opposed such appeals in his book Revival and Revivalism). But my views on credo-baptism and a charismatic baptism in the Spirit have led me to embrace a consistent post-evangelism appeal which includes exactly what Peter commanded on the day of Pentecost: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” I realize not all will be able to agree with this conclusion, but for my part it has given me what I take to be a solid, Biblical way to close an evangelistic sermon, and it has the benefit of identifying to the leaders of the church who these individuals are whose hearts the Lord is opening, and of laying out for them (in conversation afterwards) a clear path towards being baptized into the life of the local church. (For well presented paedo-baptist arguments, see Doug Wilson, To a Thousand Generations — Infant Baptism: Covenant Mercy for the People of God [Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996]; or David F. Wright (ED), Baptism: Three Views [Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 2009].)
the Mosaic Covenant. But this is no different to the requirements in the New Covenant. We too are required to exercise repentant faith in the Messiah, with our works showing our faith thereafter. So if the requirements were essentially the same (though the outward administration of this was admittedly very different under Moses) then why did God “find fault” with the Mosaic Covenant? Why does the writer to the Hebrews say:

But now Christ has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “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. [Heb. 8:6-8]

And here we come to the heart of this entire matter. In Romans 9:30-33 Paul says that the Israelites broke the Mosaic Covenant because they had no faith (see also Heb. 4:2). But the reason why they had no faith was this: “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (2 Cor. 2:14). They did not believe in the promises because they could not. The Israelites had an inability to believe, and therefore they could not persevere in a life of growing Spirit-led obedience to God (James 2:18). Let me be clear about what I am saying: it is not simply that the Israelites would not believe, the Bible teaches us that the root of the problem was that they could not believe. To quote Moses, “the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day” (Deut. 29:4). Paul’s majestic discussion in Romans 11 of how the salvation of the Jews and the salvation of the Gentiles are interlinked addresses this very point:

What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.” And David says: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow
down their back always.” I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. [Rom. 11:7-11]

Faith in Christ is impossible with an unregenerate heart. And this was the problem with the Old Covenant - it did not produce in its subjects a new heart. The law was written on their tablets of stone but not written on the tablets of their hearts. And because the Israelites were still hard of heart they had no faith in God and they had no love for God. And so the obedience required by the law was impossible because no one will obey a God whom they do not believe and do not love. The Bible speaks about the absolute incapacity of man to have faith. The Israelites (and every unregenerate man or women today) could not believe because God had not taken out the hard heart, or “circumcised their hearts”, and so they turned to idols and did not obey the laws of God. But now through the prophet Jeremiah God promised that through the New Covenant He would overpower the stubborn, rebellious heart in each of His elect, sovereignly overcoming their inability to repent, believe in Christ, and obey. Moses himself predicted this:

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live…. And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today. [Deut. 30:6,8]

Speaking of this promise of a new heart which liberates a slave of sin to believe and obey, Robertson says:

A full appreciation of the radicalness of this provision of the new covenant [to write the law in our hearts] may be seen only in the context of Jeremiah’s strong emphasis on the wickedness of the human heart (e.g. Jer 3:17, 7:24, 9:14, 11:8, 12:2, 17:1). Only as man is seen as unchangeable (totally depraved) from Jeremiah’s perspective can the hope of a new covenant be appreciated fully. Of course, it must be remembered that the old covenant also expected a change of heart. The law of God was to be in the heart of the old covenant participants. However, only in the new
covenant is provision made for the writing by God Himself of the law in the human heart.³

The failure of the Old Covenant was not that it was a covenant of works, its failure was that it was a “covenant of faith” (to use a novel term, meaning that it was a covenant requiring faith) but the terms of the covenant did not impart faith to the people. Faith was the one thing which proved impossible for them. The Mosaic era was a multi-generational lesson to the elect that salvation is entirely by grace alone. In addition to the death of Christ which finally dealt with sin (which the sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant never could do on their own) the great change that the New Covenant brought was that its benefits included the gift of faith itself. When we understand this discontinuity between Old and New Covenants we see the irrefutable proof of Reformed soteriology. When God passed through the pieces of the Abrahamic Covenant sacrifice alone He was promising to do this very thing, to give the “seed of Abraham” a new heart through regeneration which would make repentance and faith possible for them. And so we see that although the Mosaic Covenant did advance redemptive history, yet the promise of regeneration for all God’s covenant people given to Abraham was not fulfilled in the Mosaic Covenant. A further covenant had to be made for that promise to be fulfilled. The Mosaic Covenant on its own, therefore, could not save. But to the OT elect the Mosaic Covenant was never seen in isolation from the Abrahamic Covenant (and the “promise of grace” that preceded it). Men like David and Jeremiah were saved through the ministry of both covenants, Abrahamic and Mosaic working together. The Mosaic Covenant gave them the knowledge of sin and drove them to Christ in repentance (Rom. 3:20 and Gal. 3:24). For them it could do this successfully because in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant they were regenerated and granted the gifts of repentance, faith and perseverance

But in the New Covenant not only the “remnant” of God’s people but all God’s covenant people would be regenerate in this way.

In conclusion, then, my main contention is this: the shift from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant was not from “requiring works” to “requiring faith.” Rather, the shift was from “requiring faith, but not granting it” to “requiring faith, and granting it through grace.” Without grace there is no faith, for faith is a gift of grace. And without faith all one is left with is works of the law to merit salvation. I believe this explains the so-called “law-gospel antithesis” between the Mosaic and the New Covenants in verses like John 1:17, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The Mosaic Covenant was not meant to be treated as a system of works, but without the gracious gift of faith this is what the Jews turned it into. It is in this sense that Paul says in Galatians 3:18, “For if the inheritance is of the law (narrowly conceived as the Jews of his day were treating it), it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” On the contrary, the law had an entirely different purpose, different to how the Jews were conceiving it, which is what Paul then goes on to explain. Similarly, the deficiency of the Levitical priesthood under the Mosaic Covenant was that the priests could not impart this repentant heart of faith to the people, which explains the comments of the writer of the book of Hebrews about why a “better priesthood” in “the order of Melchizedek” was to be sought. What we all need is a priesthood that is able to impart a new heart to us. And because the Israelites rejected salvation by faith in Christ, they turned the law into something it was never meant to be: a

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4. In The Pillar NT Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), Peter O’Brien comments on Hebrews 9:15, “Jesus identified with the transgressors [of the Old Covenant] and died a representative death for them. His redemptive sacrifice is retrospective in its effects and is valid for all who trusted God for the forgiveness of sins in ancient Israel” (328).

5. See Ferry, Works in the Mosaic Covenant, 80-82.
law of works. It was this self-righteous approach to Moses that Paul condemned in Galatians and Romans when he spoke of “the works of the law” which cannot save (Rom. 9:32; Gal. 2:16, 3:2, 3:5), which “give birth to bondage” (Gal. 4:24) and which only bring a curse upon those who seek to be justified by them (Gal. 3:10). It was in this sense that “the law is not of faith” (Gal. 3:12).  

What made the New Covenant “New”?  

As I have argued, I depart from a traditional Reformed understanding of the covenants in that I do not see a covenant being made in Genesis 3:15. Instead I have called God’s words to the serpent “a promise of grace,” for that is exactly what I think it was. God then used a historical tool, covenants, repeatedly throughout history in order to enter relationships with chosen people, with each covenant building upon the gains of the previous and advancing the state of affairs towards God’s end goal. This is one of the reasons I take exception to Jonty Rhodes’ description of the New Covenant as being “the same covenant as Abraham, albeit an

6. In this way I would probably be found in the “Misinterpretation Theory” camp explained in Ferry’s taxonomy (see Ferry, *Works in the Mosaic Covenant*, 89-90). I see the Mosaic Covenant as a genuine advancement upon the Abrahamic Covenant, and I see both of them serving to bring about in space and time the fulfillment of the Genesis 3:15 “promise of grace.” And yet I am also anxious to emphasize why the Mosaic Covenant was insufficient on its own to save. It was merely a step towards that which would finally see the serpent’s head crushed and the fall of Adam undone. Moses brought us further than Abraham (as discussed in chapter 7) but he did not take us all the way: not only did the Mosaic Covenant not bring regeneration and the gift of faith, but the actual Sacrifice which takes away all sins (of both Old and NT saints) was not offered in terms of the Mosaic Covenant. Furthermore, neither the Abrahamic nor the Mosaic Covenants brought the gentiles into a covenant relationship with Yahweh. As I have defended above, the Abrahamic Covenant was with an individual (and in some sense also with his descendants) and the Mosaic Covenant was with the nation of Israel. It was only in the New Covenant that gentiles were invited (through being united with Christ) to enter into a covenant relationship with God without having to join ethnically with the nation of Israel.
updated edition.” The New Covenant was not an “updated edition” of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was a new covenant, just as each successive covenant always was.

Michael Green identifies three main characteristic that Jeremiah saw as marking the New Covenant (in Jer. 31:31-34). First, it brought an internalizing of the law, writing it on the hearts of God’s people. Second, it brought the personal, saving knowledge of God to every covenant member. And third, in Green’s own words:

It would convey forgiveness of sin: ‘I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more.’ The Old Testament sacrificial system did not convey forgiveness of sins. It is important to remember that. It is not as if God decided that the death of animals would atone for sins in the Old Testament but then changed His mind. The death of Christ atoned for all the sins of all the sinners who had ever been or who ever would be, as well as those who were alive at the same time as He. The sacrificial system pointed forward to that sacrifice of Christ, but could not itself take away sins.

As God made each new covenant throughout the times of the OT He bound Himself to the future blessings they promised. In other words, He made promises for the future: “I will bless you”; “I will make your name great”; “I will make of you a great nation”; “I will bless all the families of the earth through your seed”; “I will give you a land”; “I will make you into a kingdom of priests”; “You will be a holy nation”; “Your seed will sit on your throne”; “I will give you a new heart”; “I will remember your sins no more”; and so on. The thing to note is the future tense in all of those promises. What makes these future tense verbs so complex, however, is that, as we have seen, the first and immediate fulfillment of those promises often failed to bring about a permanent inheritance of them. Many of these promises were only typologically inherited by the initial recipients or their descendants, but were fully and finally


inherited by Jesus Christ, to whom the promises were actually all being made (Gal. 3:16).

And it is here that we meet another major difference with the New Covenant: what had been promised through the previous covenants was now going to be granted in the New Covenant. The New Covenant fulfilled the previous covenants. That is worth considering, because the implication is that in order for the promises of the previous covenants to be fulfilled they all required yet another covenant. The old covenants were therefore completely insufficient, impotent one might say, but the New Covenant is infinitely better because it requires no further covenants to make it effective. It brings with it the power to actually do, to give today, all that the previous covenants could only promise for the future. This is why the writer to the Hebrews could say, “so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22).

9. What makes this issue even more complex is that Christ has extended the process of actually delivering the inheritance to His people over a period of time (called “the last days” — Act 2:17, Heb 1:2, etc), though He has already successfully purchased it. All the promises have now been secured infallibly for the elect, for Christ has inherited them and His people are in union with Him, and yet the actual possession of these promises has for the elect both a ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ element. The Kingdom has come, and yet the Kingdom is still to coming.

10. In The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), James R. Edwards makes a good observation on this point with regard to the cup of wine. He says that Jeremiah’s New Covenant promises explain why in the Old Covenant ceremony the blood was only sprinkled on the people (Exo 24:8), but in the New Covenant it is “imbibed into believers.” (427)
Some writers are at pains to label the New Covenant as being “unconditional” (see Denault, 148-153), but they essentially hold the same view I have expressed in Chapter 9 above. It was conditional in the sense that certain conditions needed to be met in the elect, but unconditional in the sense that Christ effectually calls His elect and thereby graciously, irresistibly ensures their fulfillment of those conditions. Denault indeed quotes John Owen favorably as saying:

I do not say the covenant of grace is absolutely without conditions, if by conditions we intend the duties of obedience which God requires of us in and by virtue of that covenant; but this I say, the principal promises of it are not in the first place remunerative of our obedience in the covenant, but efficaciously assumptive of us into covenant, and establishing or confirming in the covenant.¹

I agree with John Frame when he says:

The new covenant is unconditional in that its very content is God’s unconditional gift of a new heart, fulfilling all covenant conditions. But it is conditional in that those conditions are real and necessary. We are justified by faith alone, not by any effort to earn our salvation (Rom. 3:23—24; Eph. 2:8—9). But the faith by which we are justified is a living and obedient faith (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:10; James 2:14 —26).²

So I still prefer to call the New Covenant “conditional” because I am anxious not to lose sight of the full participation (mind, will, emotions) of the sinner who comes to Christ. We are not robots when we come to Christ, and yet God is so great that He can, without violating our


personhood, still *effectually* call His elect to Christ. So I think that maintaining the language of “conditional” leads to a more accurate, and more God-glorifying explanation of what actually happens when someone is brought into the New Covenant through faith.
APPENDIX 11
O. PALMER ROBERTSON’S VIEWS ON THE COVENANTS OF REDEMPTION AND WORKS

First, there is some difference in nomenclature in Robertson. What we have called “the Covenant of Works” Robertson calls “the Covenant of Creation”, and what we have called “the Gen 3:15 promise of grace” (and what many Reformed theologians have called “the Covenant of Grace”) Robertson calls the “Covenant of Redemption”.

Furthermore, Robertson does not believe in a pre-creation covenant between the members of the Trinity, what we have called “the Covenant of Redemption”. He says:

Affirming the role of redemption in the eternal counsels of God is not the same as proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son. A sense of artificiality flavors the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God’s eternal counsels.¹

Robertson goes on to say that the more recent understanding of covenants being sovereignly administered (as opposed to being mutual contracts) makes it even less likely that the decrees of God constituted a covenant. Yet in response we must note that even in Scripture we see covenants being made between peers (like between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:32), Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:28), David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3), and in the covenant of marriage). My own views on the Covenant of Redemption are made clear in Chapter 3.

Lastly, despite there being no blood sacrifice to inaugurate the Covenant of Works, Robertson defends this as being a “bond in blood” by pointing to the threat of death for

disobedience. “Clearly this relationship between man and his Creator may be described as a ‘bond of life and death sovereignly administered’” (Robertson, 86).
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