

The Covenant of Grace: A Critique of the Concept in Stephen Myers's *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture*¹

by Brian C. Collins²

Covenant theologians have recently produced several works explaining and defending covenant theology. In 2020 scholars connected to Reformed Theological Seminary produced a multi-authored work, *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*.³ In the same year Richard Belcher Jr., also of Reformed Theological Seminary, produced *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology*.⁴ In 2021 Stephen Myers of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary published *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture*.⁵

Each of these books has its own strengths, but of these recent contributions, Myers is the most exegetically grounded and the most devotional.⁶ Myers's book makes the best recent exegetical and theological argument for covenant theology, and this paper will critique his argument for an overarching covenant of grace, of which the post-Fall biblical covenants are administrations.⁷

Genesis 3:15, the Noahic Covenant, and Inauguration of the Covenant of Grace

Stephen Myers argues for a unified covenant of grace on the grounds that God has a unified goal (dwelling with his people), that this goal is realized for individuals in a unified way (by faith in God's gospel promises), and that throughout redemptive history there has been one unified people of God.

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³ Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, eds., *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

⁴ Richard P. Belcher Jr., *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Fearn, GB: Mentor, 2020). The chapters on the covenant of works and the Davidic Covenant are the same as Belcher's contribution to *Covenant Theology*.

⁵ Stephen G. Myers, *God to Us: Covenant Theology in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2021).

⁶ Though *Covenant Theology* had several exegetically focused essays, these essays tended to not to be as focused in their argumentation as Myers's. The exegesis was not always relevant to an argument for covenant theology.

⁷ I affirm an Adamic Covenant, which I understand to have been a covenant of works. Further, once the analogical nature of all language as applied to the Persons of the Trinity is recognized, the label *covenant* is appropriate to describe Scripture texts that indicate some kind of eternal arrangement in which the Father sends the Son with purposes that the Son fulfills through the empowerment of the Spirit. Convincing arguments for these covenants are found in the works cited above. Thus, this critique of covenant theology focuses on the arguments for an overarching covenant of grace.

However, progressive dispensationalists and progressive covenantalists affirm all three of these truths while not holding to a unified covenant of grace. Adherents of these views think that the covenant of grace concept flattens out the biblical covenants so that important distinctions among them are minimized or denied.⁸ Thus it is important to turn to Myers's exegetical case for the covenant of grace.

Myers appeals to the phrase וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי (“But I will establish my covenant”) in Genesis 6:18, arguing that הַקִּים בְּרִית is never used for making a new covenant.⁹ It indicates “perpetuating a previously existing covenant.”¹⁰ Although Genesis 6:18 contains the first occurrence of the term *covenant* in the Bible, he argues that this construction demonstrates that the Noahic Covenant cannot have been the first covenant made.

Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum (both progressive covenantalists) have provided the most detailed argumentation for this understanding of הַקִּים בְּרִית, and they claim that Genesis 6:18 refers to the perpetuation of the creation covenant. Myers responds that the creation covenant was a covenant of works violated by Adam. Since the Noahic Covenant is “the establishment of an altogether different covenant, on different terms, with different requirements” from the original works covenant, it cannot be perpetuating the covenant of works.¹¹ Therefore, Myers concludes, it must be perpetuating the covenant of grace, which was “first announced” in Genesis 3:15:¹²

Prior to God's covenantal interaction with Noah, there was a previously existing covenant that was concerned with the salvation of God's people and that was of such a character that it could be meaningfully renewed with subsequent generations of human beings. This previously existing, redemptive, transhistoric covenant was the covenant of grace.¹³

Myers is correct that the Adamic Covenant was a works covenant, and he is therefore correct to conclude that the Noahic Covenant, which is not a works covenant, cannot be identified as the same covenant.¹⁴ However Myers's proposal has its own difficulties.

⁸ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 22–23; Stephen J. Wellum, “A Progressive Covenantalism Response,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2022), 208–10.

⁹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright ©2016 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹⁰ Myers, 106, 131; cf. Miles V. Van Pelt, “The Noahic Covenant of the Covenant of Grace,” in *Covenant Theology*, 119.

¹¹ Myers, 107. Wellum does not deny a works element to the covenant with Adam. He simply does not want to reduce the covenant to a covenant of works since there are important aspects of this covenant that are carried forward in redemptive history. This concern is valid, but it is met by seeing those elements reappear in redemptive covenants.

¹² Myers, 107; cf. Van Pelt, 120. Myers, in distinction from some covenant theologians, clarifies, “To be certain, the covenant of grace does not begin in Genesis 3:15, but in these words God first speaks to humanity of His eternal purpose” (120). For Myers the covenant of grace “includes both the eternal, intra-Trinitarian counsel of peace and the outworking of that counsel in history” (96).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁴ See Charles Lee Irons, “*Hēqīm Bērīt* in Gen 6:18: Make or Confirm a Covenant?,” unpublished paper (3 February 2018), 5.

First, it is likely that **הַקִּים בְּרִית** can refer to the initial making of a covenant.¹⁵ As Victor Hamilton observes, the word **קום** in the Hiphil “means literally ‘to make stand, to erect.’” Hamilton concludes, “God ‘erects’ a covenant with Noah.”¹⁶ Indeed, **קום** in the Hiphil conveys several senses. It can refer to confirming an existing covenant (Lev 26:9), to fulfilling an existing covenant (Gen 17:7, 19, 21), or (when negated) to failing to fulfill an existing covenant (Jer 34:18). Arguably, it can also refer to the making of a covenant (Gen 6:18; 9:9, 11, 17; Exod 6:4; Ezek 16:60, 62). This variation of senses should not be surprising since **קום** has a wide semantic range.

In Exodus 6:4 God uses **קום** to refer to making a covenant with the patriarchs. Gentry and Wellum argue that God is referring to his action during the exodus to fulfill the land promise part of the Abrahamic Covenant.¹⁷ Thus God was establishing the Abrahamic Covenant during the time of the exile. But **קום** occurs here as a non-initial perfect, indicating past tense (as the translations uniformly recognize). This verse could refer to the *making* of the Abrahamic Covenant rather than to its fulfillment.¹⁸

Ezekiel 16:59–63 is another instance in which **הַקִּים בְּרִית** refers to the making of a covenant. Gentry and Wellum initially granted that this passage was an exception to their rule.¹⁹ They have since revised their view, however. They now argue that the two covenants in view are the Abrahamic Covenant (indicated with red lettering) and the Mosaic Covenant (indicated with blue lettering):²⁰

⁵⁹ For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the **covenant**,⁶⁰ yet I will remember my **covenant** with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish [הַקִּמוֹתַי] for you an everlasting **covenant**.⁶¹ Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the **covenant** with you.⁶² I will establish [הַקִּמוֹתַי] my **covenant** with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD,⁶³ that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.

¹⁵ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1950), 1:275; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville, B&H, 1996), 367.

¹⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 316.

¹⁷ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 159. Gentry later adjusts his argument, “Note that covenant is in the singular. If *hēqīm bērit* means to ‘make a covenant,’ then how was one covenant made with three people at three different times? But if *hēqīm bērit* means to affirm a promise or keep an obligation, then I can see how the one covenant was established not only with Abraham, but also with Isaac and Jacob. In the narrative of Genesis, God appeared to each of the three patriarchs and verbally affirmed or repeated the one covenant to them.” Peter J. Gentry and Jason T. Parry, “*hēqīm bērit* in Gen 6:18—Make or Confirm a Covenant? A Response to Charles Lee Irons,” unpublished paper (2018), 7. This is a stronger argument than the one originally made, and it could account for why the more ambiguous term was used. However, the covenant was originally cut with Abraham and that sense may not be entirely absent when YHWH says that he established his covenant with Abraham.

¹⁸ See Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 98.

¹⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 475–76.

²⁰ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 219–20.

However, Ezekiel 16 is about Jerusalem in particular rather than about the nation Israel generally. The covenant made with Jerusalem in its youth, which covenant she broke, is likely the covenant in which YHWH chose Jerusalem as his own dwelling place and the seat of the Davidic ruler (cf. Ps 132:13–17).²¹ The covenant that YHWH will make in the future is the New Covenant (the emphasis on knowing YHWH is an important part of the New Covenant), a covenant which includes the restoration of the city of Jerusalem (Jer 31:38–40; 32:36–41). The Abrahamic Covenant has no promise regarding the restoration of Jerusalem. Since the New Covenant, a covenant still in Ezekiel’s future, is the one that YHWH will establish, **הַקִּים בְּרִית** here refers to the making of a covenant rather than to the confirmation of an existing covenant.²²

The claim that **הַקִּים בְּרִית** is sometimes used to indicate the making of a covenant is consistent with the semantic range of **קום** in the Hipil. There are other passages in which the word carries the meaning of “set up,” “make,” or “found” something (Josh 4:9; 2 Sam 3:10; 1 Kgs 7:21; Ps 78:5; Amos 9:11).

One additional problem exists for those seeking to argue for the covenant of grace from the occurrence of **הַקִּים בְּרִית** in Genesis 6:18. If the expression refers to the continuation of the existing covenant of grace, made initially in Genesis 3:15, does the statement **כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת־אֲבָרָם בְּרִית** (“YHWH cut a covenant with Abraham,” Gen 15:18) mean that the Abrahamic Covenant is a new covenant, distinct from the covenant of grace? Progressive covenantalists could affirm this, but no covenant theologian who adheres to an overarching covenant of grace would affirm that position. Nonetheless, the logic of the argument from **הַקִּים בְּרִית** in Genesis 6:18 seems to entail it.

It is worth nothing that Myers’s formulation is superior to those who would argue that a covenant of grace is *cut* or *established* in Genesis 3:15. A covenant is the ratification of obligations and promises made between at least two parties with sanctions and a solemn oath of commitment.²³ In Genesis 3:15

²¹ Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, The Preacher’s Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 1989), 135; Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in *EBCRev*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 722.

²² Irons comments, “These two occurrences could be taken in the ‘confirm’ sense, but it seems more likely that they are actually looking ahead to the new covenant that God ‘will establish’ with Israel in the future” (9).

²³ This definition was formulated by surveying the instances in Scripture in which a covenant is made and by surveying the following resources. M. Weinfeld, “**בְּרִית** *brith*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:256, 264; E. Kutsch, “**בְּרִית** *brith* obligation,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:258–60; D. F. Estes, “Covenant (OT),” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:790; J. B. Payne, “Covenant (In the Old Testament),” *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 1:1001; P. R. Williamson, “Covenant,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 420; P. R. Williamson, “Covenant,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 139; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:203; John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1953), 31; William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977), 113; O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 4, 11; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 15, 20; Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 61, 63; Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 2–4; Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 475; Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 43; Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology

God pronounced a judgment on Satan, and this judgment entailed a righteous seed of the woman who would bring about the judgment. But this implied promise does not have all the elements of a covenant. Geerhardus Vos conceded that “the formal conclusion of a covenant is lacking,” noting that the idea of a covenant among humans needed to develop first.²⁴ Myers escapes this difficulty by arguing that the covenant of grace is “announced” in Genesis 3:15. Recall that for Myers, the covenant of grace is both “the intra-Trinitarian counsel of peace and the outworking of that counsel in history.”²⁵

However, while Myers’s formulation resolves the problem of Genesis 3:15 not being the formation of a covenant, it seems to create another problem. The biblical covenants are made with different parties from the parties of the covenant of redemption (=counsel of peace). The Noahic Covenant was made with all flesh. The Abrahamic Covenant was made with Abraham and his seed. The Mosaic Covenant was made with the nation Israel. The Davidic Covenant was made with David and his seed. How then can these various covenants be administrations of a covenant made between the three members of the Trinity? The covenant partners are different. Perhaps Myers would argue that these administrations of the covenant of grace are themselves distinct covenants. But in that case, what is the difference between distinct covenants working out a unified plan of God established in the covenant of redemption and the distinct covenants being considered part of an overarching covenant of grace? One difference could be that Myers’s model requires more continuity between the covenants, but this paper will argue that an overemphasis on continuity creates a problem with the biblical data.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the non-elect in several of the biblical covenants creates difficulties. Myers understands the participants of the covenant of grace to be the Father, Christ (with all the elect in him), and the Spirit. But the Noahic Covenant was made between God and all of Noah’s seed (elect and non-elect) and with every living creature (Gen 9:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). It seems odd for administrations of the covenant of grace to have covenant partners that differ from those of the covenant of grace. Myers addresses this problem later in the book, noting that even though the covenant of grace “includes only the specific number of the elect given to the Son in the counsel of peace . . . in its administration it affects far more men and women.”²⁶ Thus,

[t]he Noahic administration of the [t]he covenant of grace affected Ham as well as Shem. The Abrahamic administration of the covenant of grace affected Ishmael as well as Isaac, Esau as well

(Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 64; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 132, 141, 152; Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant, and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2020), 40–41, 55; Belcher, 18–19; Myers, 3–4.

²⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012–2016), 2:124. Vos thinks a covenant is presupposed, but this falls short of an exegetical argument for a covenant of grace being established in Genesis 3:15.

²⁵ Myers, 96. Myers is clear that all three members of the Trinity, not just the Father and the Son, have covenanted together in the covenant of redemption: “In that eternal covenant, the Father freely chose specific individuals out of the mass of sinful humanity and covenanted to give them to the Son in order to redeem them as His own children. The Son freely covenanted to purchase those elect individuals through His active and passive obedience. . . . The Holy Spirit covenanted to apply the redemption purchased by the Son to the elect, to gather them and refine them, and to preserve them until the consummation of the age” (78).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

as Jacob. Both faithful Samuel and rebellious Saul came under the auspices of the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace. Both upright Josiah and wicked Manasseh were covered by the umbrella of the Davidic administration of the covenant of grace.²⁷

This response, however, does not really resolve the difficulty. First, the word “affected” is vague. Does “affected” mean “members of” or something less? If the former, why is the membership of a covenant administration different from the membership of the covenant? This leads to a second concern: what is the exegetical basis for reading distinct biblical covenants as administrations of a covenant of grace? At this point the formulation seems to have outstripped the exegesis.

Myers surpassed other recent covenant theologians in seeking to ground the covenant of grace in theologically rich exegetical argumentation. Nonetheless, the preceding paragraphs have sought to demonstrate that the exegetical arguments for an overarching covenant of grace fall short. This lack of biblical warrant is the most significant reason for rejecting the covenant of grace construct.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The overarching covenant of grace construct also tends toward an overemphasis on continuity between the biblical covenants at the expense of their distinctiveness. Some covenant theologians recognize the exegetical difficulties present in this emphasis on continuity, and they distinguish between the Abrahamic and New Covenants and the Mosaic Covenant, with the former two being covenants of promise and the latter being a law covenant. Meredith Kline and Michael Horton are representative of this tradition.²⁸ Myers, however, objects: “Standing at the center of Kline’s covenant theology, the distinction between law covenant and promise covenant is also the point at which Kline must be critiqued. Through his distinction, Kline obscures the unity of God’s covenantal purposes.”²⁹

Myers, by contrast, argues, “In every divine covenant there is both law and promise,”³⁰ and he appeals to the Abrahamic Covenant as one in which the distinction between law and promise covenants will not hold:

In this complex texture of the Abrahamic covenant, the supposed distinction between law covenants and promise covenants continues to break down. If a stark division has to be made between these two covenant types, and each historical covenant has to be placed in one of the two categories—either having practically nothing to do with command and obedience, or being based

²⁷ Myers, 285.

²⁸ Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 16–18; idem, *Kingdom Prologue*, 5; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 14–15, 17–18; idem, *Justification*, *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 2:76.

²⁹ Myers, 47.

³⁰ Ibid.

almost entirely on command and obedience—the Abrahamic covenant is left without any satisfactory category.³¹

Myers argues that the Abrahamic Covenant was instituted in Genesis 12 and then further elaborated in Genesis 15 and 17. On this reading, God began the Abrahamic Covenant by issuing commands to Abram while also graciously giving to him promises that he would certainly bring to pass.

First, the distinction between works/bilateral/conditional covenants and promise/unilateral/unconditional covenants needs to be clarified. Those who distinguish these two kinds of covenants do not claim that promise covenants have “practically nothing to do with command and obedience” but explicitly state the contrary. Jonathan Lunde, for example, maintains the distinction between “the ‘royal grant’ or ‘unconditional’ covenant” and “a ‘conditional’ or ‘bilateral’ covenant.” But Lunde also says, “That is not to say that there are no demands placed on people in a grant covenant. Such are always present.”³² Nor does Lunde deny that God’s choosing of the covenant partner is always unconditional: “[T]he covenants are always grounded and established in the context of God’s *prior grace* toward the people entering the covenant, even in the case of the conditional variety.”³³ The terms *conditional* and *unconditional* relate not to the selection of the covenant partner or to the presence of stipulations. Rather, *conditional* and *unconditional* identify whether the fulfillment of the covenant depends upon the promises of God alone or upon obedience to the covenant stipulations. The distinction between the two is whether the fulfillment of the covenant blessings hangs on the human partner’s obedience to the covenant conditions (a law covenant) or whether the blessings are unilaterally guaranteed by God (a promise covenant).³⁴

Second, God cut the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, not in Genesis 12. Genesis 15:18 indicates that YHWH cut the covenant with Abraham “on that day.”³⁵ Jeremiah 34:18–20 explains that in cutting a covenant, an animal or animals is cut in two and the covenanted parties pass through the pieces to testify that YHWH can do to them what was done to the animals if they violate the covenant.³⁶ John Scott Redd observes, “It is evident that [YHWH alone passing through the cut animals] emphasizes the unconditionality of the covenant.”³⁷ In fact, Myers himself observes, “God

³¹ Myers, 159.

³² Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenant Discipleship*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 39. See also Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 132–34; Saucy, 41; Michael Horton, “Covenant Theology,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 44.

³³ Lunde, 40.

³⁴ “Again, we must be cautious to say that these two legal foundations, law and promise, do not exclude the presence of laws or promises in the one or the other in an absolute sense. Their mutual exclusivity has reference only to the basis for enjoyment of blessings. So, in a covenant of works, when obedience has been rendered, blessings promised are enjoyed. Conversely, in a covenant of grace, after promises have been received, laws are introduced. In the first case, the promise must be earned while in the second case the law delivered does not subvert the promise already given.” Renihan, 48.

³⁵ Mathews, 2:176; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 16; idem, *Justification*, 2:77; Belcher, 65.

³⁶ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 80; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 16; Belcher, 64; Myers, 175.

³⁷ John Scott Redd, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Covenant Theology*, 140.

Himself walks the aisle of self-malediction. In doing so, God declares that either He will keep His covenant promises or He Himself will die. The fulfillment of the covenant, then, rests entirely on God, and He guarantees that His promises will be fulfilled.”³⁸ Myers’s statement is a perfect description of an unconditional covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant provides a significant challenge to the covenant-of-grace construct. This is evident in the numerous proposals from covenant theologians regarding how to relate the Mosaic Covenant to the covenant of grace. Some propose that the Mosaic Covenant is a mixed covenant (a covenant of both works and grace), others that it is a subservient covenant (a works covenant subservient to the covenant of grace), and still others argue that it is only an administration of the covenant of grace and in no ways a works covenant.³⁹ Some non-covenant theologians, especially Lutherans, hold that the Mosaic Covenant is a covenant of works that promised salvation upon obedience (which condition no human except Christ could fulfill).⁴⁰

³⁸ Myers, 176.

³⁹ Mark Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant,” in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Oakville, CT: Vandenberg & Ruprecht, 2011), 187–88, citing *Vindiciase legis*, 222, summarizing the taxonomy of Anthony Burgess. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s “Report on the Committee to Study Republication” (2016) follows the same taxonomy, which they credit to John Ball, Anthony Burgess, Francis Roberts, and Francis Turretin. The proponents of the various views in brackets below were culled from the report.

“View 1: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a covenant of works, promising eternal life and/or salvation upon condition of perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience [held by Johann Gerhard (and other Lutherans), Amandus Polanus, John Preston].

“View 2: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a mixed covenant, containing elements of both a covenant of works and a covenant of grace [possibly held by George Walker, a member of the Westminster Assembly].

“View 3: The Mosaic covenant in substance is a subservient covenant, promising temporal life in Canaan upon condition of perfect obedience to the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws [held by John Cameron, Moises Amyraut, Samuel Bolton, Thomas Goodwin].

“View 4: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a covenant of grace, although uniquely administered in a manner appropriate to the situation of God’s people at that time [the majority of the Reformed; ‘arguably affirmed in WCF].”

“Report of the Committee to Study Republication: Presented to the Eighty-third (2016) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church”; accessed 7 March 2023, <http://opc.org/GA/republication.html>. The study committee wrongly placed John Owen under view 1 when he, in fact, belongs under view 3. See Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642-1704)* (Oxford, UK: Regent’s Park College, 2018), 204–7. The men who were elected to this committee are Messrs. Bryan D. Estelle, Benjamin W. Swinburnson (Secretary), Lane G. Tipton, A. Craig Troxel (Chairman), and Chad V. Van Dixhoorn.

⁴⁰ See view 1 in the previous note. Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz articulates this view: “Does the Law not have promises of eternal life? Christ certainly affirms that it does in Luke 10:28 and Matt. 19:17. Does God, then, deceive and mock men with the promises of the Law? Far be it from Him! For He is God, who cannot lie (Titus 1:2). And there remains what Paul says in Rom. 3:4: ‘Let God be true though every man be false.’ Why, then, is an unregenerate man not justified by the works of the Law? Paul answers: ‘Because by the Law is the knowledge of sin,’ that is, the Law causes it that by such obedience as the unregenerate can render through their natural powers it can by no means be satisfied, but such does it accuses of sin before the judgment of God, because, even though they do certain works of the Law, yet they do them imperfectly and corruptly; and besides, they are in many and weighty matters transgressors of the Law.

“Nevertheless, the Law has, indeed, the promise of life, however, under the condition not of any and every kind of fulfillment but of a perfect and complete one, from the whole heart, the whole mind, so that the flesh in no way lusts

Myers denies that the Mosaic Covenant is in any way a covenant of works. First, Myers highlights elements of continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and other covenants: the Mosaic Covenant advanced the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant,⁴¹ was graciously given to continue God's plan of redemption,⁴² clarified commandments previously given,⁴³ advanced the seed, land, and universal blessing promises,⁴⁴ and, in the sacrificial system, taught the seriousness of sin and the need for atonement.⁴⁵ Those who deny the covenant of grace construct need not deny any of these points and could argue that none of them necessitates that the Mosaic Covenant be a part of an overarching covenant of grace.

Second, Myers deals with the NT's negative statements about the Mosaic Covenant. Myers argues that these arise not from any "defect" in the covenant but are responses to a "regression" back to the Mosaic Covenant after the progression forward to the New Covenant. He says that the same critique would have been made of someone under the Mosaic Covenant who insisted on adhering only to the Abrahamic Covenant.⁴⁶

But the NT is not only concerned about covenant regression in its negative statements about the Mosaic Covenant: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second" (Heb 8:7). This is a statement that recognizes the need for a different kind of covenant. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 also argues that a different kind of covenant needed to replace the Mosaic Covenant. Myers addresses this passage, noting "that distinction is not a distinction between the old covenant as monstrous and the new covenant as good. Rather, the distinction is between the old covenant as glorious and the new covenant as possessing a glory that splinters all bounds."⁴⁷ But Paul's argument turns on something different: he specifies that the old covenant was an external law that ministered death and condemnation. The New Covenant is more glorious because in the New Covenant the Spirit gives life and writes the law on the heart. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant required conformity to a law inscribed on stone, while the New Covenant provided the Spirit who transformed hearts of stone into obedient and tender hearts of flesh.⁴⁸

against it. Concerning doers like that Paul says in Rom. 2:13: 'Not the hearers but the doers of the Law will be justified before God'; again: 'he who does these things shall live by them.' Now when someone does certain works of the Law, no matter how he does them, but is in others a transgressor of the Law, the Law does not declare him righteous before God to life eternal but pronounces him guilty and cursed. Because 'he who does not continue in all the things which are written in the book of the Law shall be cursed.' And 'whoever keeps the whole Law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.'" *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1971), 8.1.3.2 (1:480–81).

⁴¹ Myers, 186–87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 187–89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 189–91.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 191–93.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 199–200.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 210. Few of Myers's interlocutors would affirm that the Mosaic Covenant was "monstrous" even as they argue for a greater contrast between the glory of the Mosaic and the New Covenants.

⁴⁸ Garland argues that Paul "wants to contrast the giving of the law that was engraved on stones (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:15–16; 34:1; Deut 9:19) with the promise of the new covenant that will be inscribed on hearts" (Ezek 11:9; 36:26; Jer 31:33). David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 159–60. Charles Hodge says the letter kills because

Myers also deals with NT quotations of Leviticus 18:5, “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.” If this is a promise of eternal life on condition of obedience, then the Mosaic Covenant is a works covenant, and several NT texts seem to understand the verse in that way (Luke 10:28; Gal 3:12; Rom 10:5). Myers proposes a different understanding: the role of works in sanctification is not applicable to the economy of justification. Thus, there is a “righteousness that is of the law” (Rom 10:5) for the believer who is indwelt by the Spirit. According to Myers that is the righteousness of sanctification, not that of justification.⁴⁹

This is a fascinating argument, but it is difficult to sustain when the text is examined in both its original and NT contexts. Leviticus 18:5 in its original context is a soteriological promise.⁵⁰ First, Israel was redeemed from Egypt typologically, but many Israelites were still in need of redemption unto

of the following reasons. (1) “The law demands perfect obedience. . . . As no man renders this perfect obedience, the law condemns him.” (2) “It produces the knowledge or consciousness of sin, and of course of guilt, that is of just exposure to the wrath of God.” (3) “By presenting the perfect standard of duty, which cannot be seen without awakening the sense of obligation to be conformed to it, while it imparts no disposition or power to obey, it exasperates the soul and thus again it brings forth fruit unto death.” By contrast, the Spirit gives life as follows. “1. By revealing a righteousness adequate to our justification, and thus delivering us from the sentence of death. 2. By producing the assurance of God’s love and the hope of his glory in the place of a dread of wrath. 3. By becoming, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, an inward principle or power transforming us into the image of God; instead of a mere outward command.” *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (1857, 1859; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 432, 434. Hodge recognizes that Paul is contrasting the Mosaic and the New Covenants, but he also wishes to maintain the covenant-of-grace construct (430). Nonetheless, Hodge recognizes “the fact that the apostle often speaks of the Mosaic law as a covenant of works; that is, presenting the promise of life on the condition of perfect obedience. He represents it as saying, Do this and live; as requiring works and not faith, as the condition of acceptance. Rom. 10, 5-10. Gal. 3, 10-12.” To square this circle Hodge argues that “the Mosaic economy was designed to accomplish different objects, and is therefore presented in Scripture under different aspects. What, therefore, is true of it under one aspect, is not true under another.” Thus Hodge concludes, “The law of Moses was, in the first place, a re-enactment of the covenant of works. . . . The covenant of works . . . is nothing more than the promise of life suspended upon the condition of perfect obedience.” Hodge then quotes Luke 10:26–28 in which Jesus affirmed that the law promised eternal life to those who kept the law. In addition to being a covenant of works with regard to eternal life, Hodge notes, “The Mosaic economy was also a national covenant; that is, it presented national promises on the condition of national obedience.” But, thirdly, Hodge argues there is another aspect to the Mosaic Covenant: “It presented in its priesthood and sacrifices, as types of the office and work of Christ, the gratuitous method of salvation through a Redeemer. This necessarily supposes that faith and not works was the condition of salvation.” Hodge, 433–34. Several things are important to note here. (1) Interpreters must account for the law aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, thus distinguishing it in kind from some of the other covenants. (2) The law aspect of the Mosaic Covenant creates tensions for those who must fit it into an overarching covenant of grace. (3) Hodge’s solution of considering the law under different aspects does a good job of reckoning with all of the data, but it does not answer the question of the nature of the Mosaic Covenant. Is it a covenant of works in which obedience to the law is the condition of eternal life? Hodge rightly answers in the affirmative to this question. Note, however, that when he highlights the gracious aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, he is highlighting types that point forward to the New Covenant. There are, to be sure, gracious elements to the Mosaic Covenant. It was gracious of God to reveal the gospel of the New Covenant in the OT types. It was gracious of God to reveal his holy law to Israel and to give the nation righteous laws to guide its conduct. But the Mosaic Covenant was not a covenant *of* grace because it promised eternal life on the condition of obedience to the law. The gospel it proclaimed rested on another, future covenant.

⁴⁹ Myers, 218–28.

⁵⁰ See especially Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12: A Redemptive-Historical Reassessment,” *Themelios* 45, no. 2 (Aug 2020): 247–49; cf. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 332. Myers acknowledges that Jewish interpreters understood the life in Leviticus 18:5 to be eternal life, but he dismisses this as a later development (221n39).

eternal life. Second, the Pentateuch both set out salvation by obedience to the law and told Israel that no one would actually be saved in this way (Deut 30). Jesus spoke in the same way in response to the lawyer's question about how to inherit eternal life, citing Leviticus 18:5 in Luke 10:28. Jesus' usage should be determinative. Third, Paul argues in Galatians and Romans that in the Torah God laid out two possible ways of attaining eternal life: either obey the Mosaic law entirely and perfectly or look forward to the New Covenant's gracious provision of salvation (see especially Gal 3:10–14). The Mosaic Covenant clearly stated that the first path would be impossible for sinners. Finally, Myers rightly recognizes that in the allegory of Galatians 4 Paul is contrasting a covenant of works with a covenant of grace. Note, however, that Paul identifies the covenant of works as "Mount Sinai," the Mosaic Covenant. It simply will not do to say, as Myers does, that "Mount Sinai" refers to "the legalistic abuse of God's law by the Jewish leaders of Paul's day."⁵¹ The point of the allegory is to contrast two types of covenants.

In conclusion, the OT covenants differ in nature. Some are promise covenants, and the Mosaic Covenant was a works covenant. If the Mosaic Covenant was a works covenant, it could not be an administration of the covenant of grace.⁵² In identifying the Mosaic Covenant as a works covenant, I do not deny but affirm that God graciously gave it to forward his plan of redemption. I further affirm that it pointed the way to salvation in Christ through the New Covenant. Nonetheless, as a works covenant, the Mosaic Covenant cannot be viewed as an administration of an overarching covenant of grace.

⁵¹ Myers, 224n49.

⁵² I believe Myers would affirm this sentence, which is why I think he works hard to demonstrate that the Mosaic Covenant is in no way a works covenant. However, as acknowledged above, there are covenant theologians who do emphasize the works element of the Mosaic Covenant. Michael Horton is probably the most prominent contemporary representative of this approach. Horton agrees that the Mosaic Covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace. "Covenant Theology," 44. However, he also argues that there are "clear echoes of the original covenant [of works] in the Sinai covenant" (45). In particular he notes, "'Do this and you shall live' is the formula in both covenants" (45, citing Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1; 5:33; 6:24–25; 8:1; 30:15–18; Neh 9:29; Ezek 18:19; 20:11–21). Horton also observes, "The character of this covenant could not be more vividly portrayed: Israel had made the oath, and it was sealed by Moses' act of dashing the blood on the people, with the ominous warning that this act implied. *The Sinai covenant itself then, is a law-covenant*. The land is given to Israel, but for the purpose of fulfilling its covenantal vocation. Remaining in the land is therefore conditional on Israel's personal performance of the stipulations that the people swore at Sinai. This did not mean that individual Israelites themselves were defined in their relationship to God by law alone rather than by promise, but that the national covenant that Israel made with God was an oath made by the people as a nation, accepting responsibility for their side of the agreement. The conditional language is evident throughout the Torah: 'If you do this, you will live; if you fail to do this, you will die' (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 6:24–25; 8:1; 30:15–18; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 18:19; 20:11–21; etc.)" (14–15; cf. idem, *Justification*, 2:68, 76. Horton finds NT support for seeing the Mosaic Covenant as a kind of covenant of works. Notably, throughout Galatians Paul contrasts the Mosaic Covenant, "with its ceremonial and civil legislation for life in Canaan," from the Abrahamic Covenant, "the covenant of promise." Idem, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 37–38. To be clear, Horton is not arguing that the Mosaic Covenant is simply a republication of the Adamic Covenant; he is not arguing that obedience to the Mosaic Covenant could bring eternal life (44). The Mosaic Covenant is a "national covenant" that requires "relative fidelity" so that the people may "remain in the typological land" (*Introducing Covenant Theology*, 38). In my view, Horton does a better job of accounting for the works elements of the Mosaic Covenant. However, in an attempt to keep the Mosaic Covenant an administration of the covenant of grace, he makes the works and the promises typological, and this is difficult to square with the NT of Leviticus 18:5.

The Davidic Covenant

With the Davidic Covenant, Myers once again seeks to demonstrate that the biblical covenants stand in continuity with one another as administrations of a unified covenant of grace. He notes several links between the Davidic and the Mosaic Covenants. First, though no Israelite kings had been anointed yet, Deuteronomy 17 laid down the law for Israel's kings. Second, the Davidic Covenant required faithfulness to the Mosaic law (1 Kgs 2:3–4).⁵³

Myers claims that the Davidic and Mosaic Covenants are part of the same covenant. But, as established above, the Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant. The Davidic Covenant, by contrast, is unconditional. As Myers himself notes, though disobedience brings chastening for individual disobedient kings, the covenant blessings of the Davidic Covenant will infallibly be brought about.⁵⁴ This stands in contrast to the Mosaic Covenant. Israel came under the covenant curses of the Mosaic Covenant, and a New Covenant was the solution to this problem (Deut 30:6; Jer 31:31–34). The fact that the Mosaic Covenant governed the Davidic kings until the coming of Christ does not necessarily entail that the two are different administrations of the same covenant.

The New Covenant

Because Myers sees the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant as administrations of an overarching covenant of grace, he must maintain continuity between these covenants while also taking into account the biblical language that contrasts them. This is a tall order since, as Myers notes, “Initially Jeremiah’s words can appear to place a very sharp division between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.”⁵⁵

Continuity and Discontinuity

In comparing the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, Myers identifies the following elements of continuity:

1. The New Covenant is made with “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah,” which are established by the Abrahamic Covenant and “given further shape” by the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants.⁵⁶
2. In the New Covenant the law is written on the heart. Myers asserts, “Very clearly, here God is referring to the law given in the Mosaic covenant.”⁵⁷
3. The goal of the New Covenant is the same as the goal of the previous covenants: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33).⁵⁸

⁵³ Myers, 232–33.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 236; cf. Belcher, 102.

⁵⁵ Myers, 245.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 246.

4. The blessings of the New Covenant as described in Ezekiel 37:24–28 are the fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants.⁵⁹

Items 1, 3, and 4 could be affirmed even by those who do not affirm an overarching covenant of grace. Dispensationalists, for instance, would heartily approve the first point even as they deny an overarching covenant of grace.⁶⁰ Items 3 and 4 make the same point from different passages: the New Covenant fulfills the promises of previous covenants. This is affirmed by progressive covenantalists: “As one biblical covenant leads to the next, revealing who the triune, covenant God is and his plan for creation, ultimately all the covenants find their fulfillment, terminus and *telos* in the new covenant (see Jer. 31:29-34; cf. Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 9, 10).”⁶¹ Progressive dispensationalists would also affirm this point: “The new covenant will be given precisely to bring the Abrahamic covenant to fulfillment,” and “the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant will take place in a king who embodies the new covenant promise of a new heart and an immortal life.”⁶²

Item 2 seems to gloss over some potential discontinuity. The law written on the heart in the New Covenant does not include circumcision, dietary laws, the sacrificial system, or civil penalties for disobedience. Likely Myers was referring to what is often called the “moral law.” The question remains: why are Christians under the moral aspects of the Mosaic Covenant and not under other laws of the Mosaic Covenant? The best answer is that Christians are not under the Mosaic Covenant but are instead under the New Covenant. The law written on the heart in the New Covenant is not the Mosaic law but rather the law that is universally true for all people in all times and places.⁶³

Given his emphasis on continuity, Myers must also explain why the New Covenant is called “new,” and he does this by first emphasizing continuity in the way the “new” language is interpreted. He argues that the Hebrew word translated “new” has “a wide range of meaning” and that “the new

⁵⁹ Myers, 246–47.

⁶⁰ For instance, Carl Hoch highlights Ephesians 2:11–16’s teaching that the Gentiles were alienated from the covenants (plural) of promise but that now, through Christ’s cross work the covenant promises are now extended to Gentile believers who together with Jewish believers form one new man in Christ. Carl B. Hoch Jr., “The New Man of Ephesians 2,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 109, 113, 125.

⁶¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 644. Elsewhere Wellum clarifies, “progressive covenantalism does not deny the theological concept of ‘the covenant of grace’ if one merely means ‘the one plan of God.’ However, it contends that covenant theology too quickly subsumes the biblical *covenants* under the larger category of ‘the covenant of grace,’ which results in a failure to account for both the *continuity* of God’s plan over time and significant covenantal *differences*, especially in the new covenant.” “Progressive Covenantalism,” 82.

⁶² Blaising and Bock, 158, 170.

⁶³ It is not correct to read the categories of moral, ceremonial, and civil back into the biblical text as though they were categories held by the biblical authors. For instance, it would be wrong to say that Jesus was speaking specifically of the moral law (in distinction from the civil and ceremonial law) in Matthew 5:17. Likewise, it is incorrect to say that Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law, made the civil law obsolete by establishing a multinational church, and allowed the moral law of the Mosaic Covenant to remain in force. This approach misses the transition from the Mosaic to the New Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant as a whole was fulfilled such that Christians are not under the Mosaic law but are under the New Covenant. See D. A. Carson, “The Tripartite Division of the Law: A Review of Philip Ross, *The Finger of God*,” in *From Creation to New Creation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 223–36. Nonetheless, there is a heuristic value in the traditional tripartite distinction as a way of indicating that certain laws in the Mosaic code are universal, that others are applications of the universal law to particular circumstances, and that others are ceremonies that point to Christ.

covenant is new in the sense that each wave of new fruit [that grows on a given tree] is new.”⁶⁴ Myers further argues that the Greek word used to refer to the New Covenant in the NT is not the word for “brand new” but the word for “a new iteration of something previous.”⁶⁵

These points established, Myers describes what factors make the New Covenant new. (1) The law before the New Covenant was “something external, written on tablets of stone.” In the New Covenant, the law will be written on the heart.⁶⁶ (2) The Holy Spirit will be poured out to enable obedience.⁶⁷ (3) The sacrificial system has been fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.⁶⁸

After establishing these three elements of “newness,” Myers immediately qualifies them to further emphasize continuity between the Mosaic and New Covenants. First, Myers observes that there is an already/not yet aspect to the promise of the law written on the heart. Thus, the Christian life “is a life still marked by sin in many ways.”⁶⁹ Second, the Spirit was active in the Old Testament as well as the New. Myers, at one point, seems to reduce the difference between the OT and the NT ministry of the Spirit to the claim that in the NT “the Spirit’s work was more clearly understood (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:16) and His power more clearly felt (Acts 5:1–11; Rev. 1:10) by God’s people.”⁷⁰ Finally, Myers observes that the OT saints were saved by the cross work of Christ.⁷¹ Thus, even Myers’s discussion of the newness of the New Covenant focuses on continuity.

Myers is correct that the New Covenant is new because it is internal rather than external, because the Spirit is poured out to enable obedience, and because it is founded on the sacrifice of Christ. None of these statements need to be relativized. The benefits of the New Covenant were not benefits offered by the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Heb 8:6–7). Individuals in the OT could, by faith, experience some of the benefits of the New Covenant proleptically (cf. Deut 30:11–14; Rom 10:6–9). In addition, while the Spirit was active in the OT, and while he played an essential role in regenerating OT saints, the Spirit did not indwell OT believers as he now indwells members of the New Covenant.⁷² Thus, there are substantive differences in the benefits that Old and New Testament saints experience.

The substantive differences between the New Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant (“not like the covenant that I made with their fathers”) call into question the claim that “new” in the label “new covenant” simply refers to “a new iteration of something previous.” Contrary to Myers, the Hebrew word **שִׁדְּוָה** can refer to something that is “brand new,”⁷³ and the contrast (“not like the [Mosaic] covenant”) points to something new in kind rather than a mere “new iteration of something previous.”

⁶⁴ Myers, 247–48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁷² This is a substantial claim that is beyond the scope of this paper to defend. For exegetical support, see James M. Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville, B&H, 2006).

⁷³ Deut 22:8; 32:17; Josh 9:13; Judg 15:13; 1 Sam 6:7.

Regarding *καινός*, the word used in the NT, BDAG lists New Covenant passages under the following sense: **“pert. to that which is recent in contrast to someth. old, *new* . . . in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by that which is new.”**⁷⁴ It is best to take seriously the Bible’s contrast between the Mosaic and New Covenants and to see the New Covenant as a truly new covenant, rather than a renewal of a previous covenant.

The Problem of Exile

Myers sees the exile as a potential threat to his version of covenant theology: “To state the matter strongly, the exile can appear to be the strongest argument for rejecting the suggestion that there is one, eternal covenant of grace, for in that exile God seems to take away the embodiment of His promises only to begin afresh later with Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵ Myers is concerned that the exile of Israel, especially as it is expounded in Hosea 1, could be read as an “annulment” of the Old Covenant, thus creating the need for an entirely new covenant.⁷⁶ Significantly, God declared Israel “not my people” in Hosea 1, which seems to be an “undoing” of the covenant with Israel. Myers asks, “Does the exile represent a revocation of, or alteration in, the covenant of grace, as Israel goes from being ‘My people’ to being ‘not My people?’” He answers, “Quite simply, the answer to the last question is no.”⁷⁷

Myers reasons that since the exile was a reversal of the land promise, the Abrahamic Covenant (which promised the land) was the covenant Hosea had in view in 1:9. However, since the validity of the Abrahamic Covenant is immediately affirmed in Hosea 1:10, God could not be revoking his covenant.⁷⁸

Myers further claims that in 1:9 God was declaring the Northern Kingdom as not his people, in distinction from Judah, which was his people (cf. 1:7). He qualifies this by noting that there were Israelites in the Northern Kingdom who were God’s people and people in the Southern Kingdom who were not.⁷⁹ Thus, Myers refines the message of Hosea 1:9: “God is making clear that ‘national Israel’ is not shorthand for ‘the people of God.’ National Israel can be scattered to the winds and God’s covenant with His people remain untouched.”⁸⁰ In fact, rather than seeing the exile negatively, Myers argues that it was a step forward toward the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.

There are cogent arguments against Myers’s interpretation of Hosea 1. First, exile is one of the sanctions of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev 26:33–39; Deut 28:37, 64–65). Thus, the Mosaic Covenant, not the Abrahamic, is the covenant in view in Hosea 1:9.

Second, the name of Hosea’s daughter, “No Mercy,” alludes to Exodus 33:19 and 34:7, where God showed mercy toward Israel and established the Mosaic Covenant with them despite their

⁷⁴ BDAG, s.v., *καινός*, sense 3b.

⁷⁵ Myers, 237.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 255.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 256.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 256–58.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 258.

rebellion in the golden calf incident. The name of Hosea's second son, "Not My People," and his statement, "And I am not I AM to you,"⁸¹ is also a reversal of the Mosaic Covenant's promises (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 27:9).

Third, in breaking the Mosaic Covenant, Israel made itself like the Gentiles: not God's people. However, Hosea 1:10 contrasts the broken Mosaic Covenant with the future hope that Israel (and the Gentiles) has via the Abrahamic Covenant (1:10 alludes to Genesis 22:17).

Fourth, while Myers is correct that in Hosea 1:7 the Lord distinguishes between Israel and Judah, in the end the judgment of exile will fall on both kingdoms, and both will be restored under the rule of the Messiah (1:11). The point in 1:7 is simply that God will have mercy on Judah for a while longer.

Read rightly, Hosea 1 presents the Mosaic Covenant as a bilateral covenant that Israel violated such that it came under the covenant curses. The Abrahamic Covenant, by contrast, is presented as a unilateral covenant which provides hope for restoration.

Hebrews 9 and the Unity of the Covenant of Grace

Myers argues that Hebrews 9 teaches the unity of the covenant of grace. He sees here an affirmation that the sacrifices of the OT were effective because the blood of Christ shed in the New Covenant was in "organic connection" to them. Indeed, he thinks that the covenant spoken of in 9:20 is the covenant of grace that encompasses all the other covenants.⁸² However, the covenant mentioned in Hebrews 9:20 is clearly the Mosaic Covenant (Hebrews is here quoting Exodus 24:8). The whole passage draws comparisons and contrasts between two different covenants.

An Over-Realized New Covenant?

Baptists argue that the New Covenant teaches that all the members of that covenant will be regenerate. This presses certain Baptists, if they make use of covenant of grace terminology, to identify the New Covenant as the covenant of grace.⁸³ Those who adhere to the covenant theology of the Westminster standards, on the other hand, seek to qualify the promises of the New Covenant in the present era.

Myers is nuanced regarding membership in the covenant of grace. He states, "The covenant of grace includes only the specific number of the elect given to the Son in the counsel of peace, but in

⁸¹ For justification for this translation, see J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 99–100; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC (Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 33.

⁸² Myers, 260–62.

⁸³ "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 [Confession] 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. . . . This distinction (revealed/concluded) summarized the difference between the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament and the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament. In the Old, it was revealed, in the New, it was concluded." Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison Between Seventeenth Century Particular Baptists and Paedobaptist Federalism* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 62–64.

its administration it affects far more men and women.”⁸⁴ On the other hand, membership in the visible church “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children” (WCF 25.2).⁸⁵ Thus the external administration of the covenant of grace in the visible church will have a membership that is broader than the internal reality of the covenant of grace. Myers finds justification for this understanding in the preceding covenants:

The Noahic administration of the covenant of grace affected Ham as well as Shem. The Abrahamic administration of the covenant of grace affected Ishmael as well as Isaac, Esau as well as Jacob. Both faithful Samuel and rebellious Saul came under the auspices of the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace. Both upright Josiah and wicked Manasseh were covered by the umbrella of the Davidic administration of the covenant of grace.⁸⁶

This argument faces its own difficulties, however. Ham was truly a member of the Noahic Covenant. Samuel and Saul were both members of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. Josiah and Manasseh were both members of the Davidic Covenant. In other words, the New Covenant stands in distinction from these earlier covenants by its insistence on regenerate covenant membership.

Myers finds further exegetical support for the mixed nature of the external administration of the New Covenant by pointing to the inclusion of Judas at the Last Supper and to various NT passages that indicate the presence of false professors within the church (Acts 20:29; Col 2:1–10; 1 Tim 1:3–7; 2 Tim 4:10; Heb 6:4–6; 1 John 2:18–19; 2 John).⁸⁷ However, it does not follow that the presence of false professors in the church argues for intentionally permitting a mixed membership in the external administration of the New Covenant. When church members manifest that they are not regenerate, they are disciplined out of the church.

Myers acknowledges the importance of church discipline,⁸⁸ but he argues that several passages explicitly speak to the “intergenerational implications” of the New Covenant and the reality that the New Covenant “affected, at least in some way, not only believers, but also their children” (Isa 59:21; Jer 32:38–39; Ezek 37:25).⁸⁹ The context of these passages must be taken into account when evaluating Myers’s claim. Jeremiah 32:39 is a millennial promise. The Israelites referred to in Jeremiah 32:39 are gathered back not simply from Babylon or Persia but from “all the countries,” and they are made to “dwell in safety.” Furthermore, they will be given “one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever.” Thus, the children would be Israelite children born during the reign of Christ after his return, and this verse would refer to all Israel being saved. Likewise, Ezekiel 37:15–28 refers to a time when Israel and Judah are reunited in the land under the Davidic King. The children referred to are those who multiply in the land during this period. Once again, this is a reference to the future salvation of

⁸⁴ Myers, 285.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 299–300.

the nation Israel. Notably, Isaiah 59:20–21 is one of the passages Paul quotes in Romans 11 as support for the claim, “All Israel will be saved.” In other words, these children are themselves all regenerate.

Significantly, the nature of the New Covenant itself lies at the foundation of the church discipline passages. The New Covenant is distinguished from the Mosaic Covenant in three relevant ways: God’s law is written on the hearts of New Covenant members, all who are in the New Covenant know YHWH, and New Covenant members have their sins forgiven (Jer 31:31–34). Everyone in the New Covenant will have new hearts and will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:26–27). In other words, everyone in the New Covenant will be regenerated (cf. John 3:5). Thus, when someone professing to be part of the New Covenant community, the Church, gives evidence of being unregenerate, that person is removed from the New Covenant community.

Conclusion

The debate over the covenant of grace might seem pedantic,⁹⁰ but it does have real implications for church life. Myers’s final chapter focuses on the practical entailments of his covenant theology, which includes a defense of paedobaptism and the inclusion of the children of believers within the New Covenant. Not all advocates of infant baptism hold to this version of covenant theology (Lutherans do not), and not all Baptists reject this version of covenant theology. Nonetheless, a covenant theology that emphasizes continuity between the biblical covenants is more likely to see baptism as the New Covenant equivalent of circumcision and thus have covenant children included in baptism.

Even apart from immediate applicatory relevance, there is also value in rightly understanding the major structures of God’s plan of redemption and how they unfold. This paper has argued against an overarching covenant of grace of which the biblical covenants are administrations. It has argued that the phrase *הַקִּים בְּרִית* is not *always* used for establishing an *existing* covenant. Therefore, the use of this phrase in Genesis 6:18 cannot be used as evidence for a covenant of grace prior to the Noachic Covenant. The covenant-of-grace concept also leads covenant theologians to emphasize continuity between the covenants at the expense of the distinctiveness that the biblical texts give to them. Most notably, the covenant of grace undermines the distinction between the Noachic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants as the covenants of promise and the Mosaic Covenant (along with the Adamic) as a covenant of works. Likewise, it undermines the distinction between the Mosaic Covenant as a covenant including both the regenerate and unregenerate and the New Covenant as a covenant promising regeneration for all its members.

⁹⁰ One of the strengths of Myers’s book is a consistent devotional emphasis throughout. Myers, far from being pedantic, is continually moving the reader from theology to worship.