

***On Being Presbyterian***  
**Chapter 3 - “God’s Story, Promise, Reign: Covenant and Kingdom”**

*Covenant* is a key concept for a Presbyterian/Reformed understanding of Scripture.

**Covenant** = “a sovereign administration of grace and promise” (John Murray)

[I]t is a *divine* covenant, that is, it starts with God and his rights as King; it is a sovereign *administration*, and so it suggests God’s rules for relationship, which as King he has the right to set up; this administration displays God’s *grace*, from first to last, in allowing finite human beings to have God ‘as their blessedness and reward’ (WCF 7.1); and it is based on God’s *promise*. (p. 52)

How is the biblical notion of a covenant like a contract? How is it unlike a contract?

**I. God’s Covenant Is a Story of Redemption**

The Bible is a book composed of many stories (narratives). A study of the succession of God’s covenantal dealings with mankind reveals that the Bible tells one overarching story (meta-narrative) – the story of redemption. Thus, the concept of covenant helps us understand the unity of the Bible’s message.

**Highlights of the Story**

**Adam – Before the Fall**

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. (WCF 7.2)

Genesis 2.16-17

**Adam – After the Fall**

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (WCF 7.3)

Genesis 3.15 (*protoevangelium* = first gospel)

Genesis 3.21

**Noah**

Genesis 6.5-8 (spiritual state of the world: two seeds)

“The righteousness of the single head of the family serves as the basis for including the whole of his descendants in the ark. Because Noah is righteous, his entire family experiences deliverance from the flood.” (O.P. Robertson)

Genesis 9.8-13

### **Abraham**

Genesis 12.1-3 (covenant promises)

Genesis 15.5-18 (covenant promises and covenant ratification ceremony)

Genesis 17.6-10 (covenant promises and covenant sign)

Story continues through Abraham's seed: Isaac → Jacob → Judah

What is surprising or unusual about each of these men as carriers of the covenantal blessing?

### **Moses**

Exodus 12.1-13 (Passover)

Exodus 14 (Exodus)

Exodus 20 (Law)

“Historically, the nation of Israel already was in a covenantal relationship with the Lord through Abraham. The Exodus narrative begins when God hears the groaning of Israel, and ‘remembers his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob’ (Exod. 2:24). After God has established himself as Israel’s Lord through the historical fact of the deliverance from Egypt, the law-covenant of Sinai is administered.” (O.P. Robertson)

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old Testament. (WCF 7.5)

### **David**

2 Samuel 7.12-17

Isaiah 11.1-10

“So the [Old Testament] drama concludes with the stage set for a return of David’s son to the throne of Israel. The consummation of God’s covenant purposes has not yet been realized. The prophetic projection concerning a greater David builds on the surety of God’s covenant, and anticipates the ultimate realization of all God’s promises.” (O.P. Robertson)

### **Jesus**

Galatians 4.4-5 (fullness of the time)

Matthew 26.27-28 (new covenant)

“Jesus was the focus of this unfolding story of redemption that God told throughout the Old Testament; it is *one* story focused on *one* people who focused their faith on *the* Redeemer of God’s people ‘by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation’ (LC 34).” (p. 57)

covenantal continuity vs. dispensational discontinuity (pp. 58-59)

## II. God’s Covenant is an Irrevocable Promise

“[T]his story about God’s covenant is all about God’s promise to provide a Redeemer for his people.” (p. 59)

“God’s covenant is his promise of Christ extended to his people, and this promise is the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New.... There are not two ways of salvation – one by the law, the other by faith. There has always been only *one* way of salvation – faith in Jesus, God’s Redeemer. The difference is that the Old Testament believers looked *forward* to the Redeemer, relying on God’s promise, seeing it dimly and from afar (Heb. 11:13-16); we look *back* to Jesus Christ, the one revealed as fulfilling God’s promises about his chosen Redeemer (Heb. 12:1-2).” (pp. 61-62)

## III. God’s Covenant Seeks the Establishment of His Kingdom

“God’s promise about a Redeemer is also tied to the establishment of God’s kingdom.” (p. 62)

Mark 1.14-15

Reign and Realm

Small but Growing

Now and Not Yet

“God’s reign is being extended throughout the world as men and women are being called under God’s reign by Word and Spirit. This is how the story of redemption is playing out in our day.... His reign will be fully realized in time and space, in the new heavens and new earth.” (p.64)

Isaiah 66.22-23 (cf. Revelation 21-22)