THE ADAMIC COVENANT: DEFENSE AND IMPLICATIONS

How the biblical covenants relate to one another has long been one of the most debated and contentious issues in Christian theology, and the debate shows no sign of abating any time soon.¹ The debate is important because it concerns some of the most fundamental issues in Christian theology such as: What, if any, of the Mosaic Law applies to us today?² Is it correct to say Gentiles are a part of Israel?³ These and many more questions are fundamental to a proper theology of the covenants.

One of the many issues in examining the biblical covenants is a debate around the existence, or lack thereof, of a covenant between God and Adam in Eden. The question is an important one with implications that will be discussed below. In this essay, we will examine the evidence for an Adamic Covenant while considering opposing arguments, but ultimately, we will seek to prove that the biblical data supports a covenantal relationship in Eden.

Defining “Covenant”

The covenants within the biblical story are one of the most significant topics in Scripture because at the heart of understanding the covenants is seeing how God has chosen to enter into

¹The recent publishing of Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012) and the ensuing reaction is representative of how spirited the debates can become.


³While beyond the scope of this essay, the New Testament suggests that by their union with Christ, the true Israel, both Jew and Gentile constitute the true “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16; Eph 2:11ff; Rom 9:6). For a short synopsis of this line of argumentation, see A. Blake White, What Is New Covenant Theology? An Introduction (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 45-49.
relationships with his creation. The first point that must be addressed is how to define a biblical covenant. Many answers have been given to this question, but for our purposes we will survey two. In *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Gentry and Wellum favor the following modified definition from Daniel C. Lane:

“A covenant is an enduring agreement which defines a relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation(s) specified on the part of at least one of the parties toward the other, made by oath under threat of divine curse, and ratified by a visual ritual.”

Another example of a covenant definition comes from a distillation of Meredith Kline’s thoughts in *Kingdom Prologue*. Kline nowhere gives such a succinct definition. However, the following definition summarizes his longer explanation of the nature of a covenant:

A binding, legal agreement made between God and man made through a process of ratification usually involving the swearing of an oath with a sanctioning curse for disobedience and promise for obedience.

Both of these definitions form a solid foundation from which to examine the biblical data of a possible Adamic Covenant. From these two definitions, we can see the following major elements of a biblical covenant: (1) the covenant relationship is between two parties: God and man, (2) a covenant is a binding agreement, (3) there is some form of a ritual or oath that ratifies the covenant, and (4) the covenant contains curses for covenant disobedience and blessings for

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4 I am not implying, however, that covenants are the center of biblical theology. Gentry and Wellum are correct in pointing out that any attempts to answer this question end in reductionism (*Kingdom Through Covenant*, 21).

5 Ibid., 132.

6 This is my interpretation of his longer definition found in *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 1-6 where he examines the nature of berit.
covenant obedience. The only component to add to these definitions is the existence of a sign that reminds the covenant members of the covenantal arrangement.\footnote{O. Palmer Robertson adds that a covenant is a “bond in blood” (The Christ of the Covenants (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 7ff). For the Adamic Covenant, since it is a prelapsarian covenant, there is no need for death and hence blood.}

It is also crucial to note that any attempt to distinguish any of the divine-human covenants in terms of being “conditional” or “unconditional” is erroneous. Covenants, by their very nature are both conditional and unconditional, particularly the former because of the presence of curses and blessings. Yet Michael Horton, with a similar perspective to the above definitions, does attempt to distinguish between “conditional covenants” (e.g., Adamic, Mosaic) and “unconditional” (Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, New).\footnote{See for example, Michael Scott Horton, God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 182-86. Throughout Horton’s book he unpacks his theology about which covenants are conditional versus unconditional with the suzerain-vassal/royal grant categories for covenants.} The question to be asked is not whether the covenant itself is conditional or not. The question is whether one of the two parties in the covenant is responsible for the covenant stipulations.\footnote{Gentry and Wellum agree with this when they state: “Instead, the Old Testament covenants consist of unconditional (unilateral) and conditional (bilateral) elements blended together. In fact, it is precisely due to this blend that there is a deliberate tension within the covenants—a tension which is heightened as the story line of Scripture and the biblical covenants progress toward their fulfilment in Christ” (Kingdom Through Covenant, 609). Many criticized them for this stance, but this is one of the best contributions of their work.} That is why the Adamic and Mosaic covenants are contingent upon the obedience of Adam and Israel respectively, but a covenant like the Abrahamic or New Covenant is contingent upon God’s faithfulness.\footnote{Ibid., 279.} That is also why the imagery of the Lord himself walking down the middle of the split pieces in Genesis 15:17 is so shocking. Peter, in a similar manner, speaks of the assurance of the New Covenant promises

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10. Ibid., 279.
“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:3-4).11

The Adamic Covenant: The Biblical Data

We will now turn to examining the biblical data to determine whether Genesis 1-3 allows for a covenant between God and Adam. The aforementioned components of a covenant will be the rubric for this examination. In addition to applying the definition of a covenant to Genesis 1-3, other arguments for an Adamic Covenant will also be considered. During each section, relevant arguments against this covenant will also be considered and addressed.

Analysis of Genesis 1-3

In our consideration of the nature of the biblical covenants above, there were five principles involved in our definition. Genesis 1-3 includes each of them. First, the foundational aspect of our definition is that a covenant is a relationship between God and man. It is clear from the first words in the creation account that God is the main character: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). Through each subsequent verse the power and majesty of God in creation is emphasized, and “verses 26–28 are intended to be viewed as the climax and crown of God’s creative work.”12 The narrative then moves from a macro view of creation to a focus on the God’s creation of man,13 and here we see further corroboration that this relationship

11Unless otherwise noted, all English translations come from the English Standard Version (ESV).

12Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant, 181.

13This is an important critique of the Documentary Hypothesis that seeks to argue that Genesis 1-2 contain two creation accounts by two different authors. For a painstaking rebuttal of these claims, see Gleason L. Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2007), 89ff. The other striking component of Genesis 1-2 is how the name of the Lord changes from Elohim to Yahweh, which is the Lord’s
is between God and man by God’s commands to Adam in 2:16. These commands relate to the second part of our definition about a curse for covenant disobedience and blessings for obedience. 

Genesis 2:16–17 states, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." The command is clear: Adam is not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and doing so will transgress God’s command and bring the curse of (immediate) spiritual and (future) physical death. What about the promise of blessings for obedience? This is a situation where we must not let our definition cause us to misinterpret the text within its place in the biblical storyline. Adam in the garden already had the blessings: fellowship with God as God’s son in God’s holy land. Thus, in the case of Adam, he only had something to lose not something to gain. The tree of life also functions as the symbol of this covenantal arrangement. Adam had true “life” by his unblemished moral nature and as a result full communion with God. That is why the theme of postlapsarian history of God’s returning a holy people to a holy land becomes covenantal designation (Exod 3:14). John Frame states, “For the name Yahweh, as we have seen, itself comprehends all that God reveals of himself. All that God does reveals his lordship, and, as we shall see, all these attributes and self-disclosures also proclaim what he is to us, the Lord of the covenant.” (The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&R, 2002), 347-48).

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14Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant, 179.

15This point will be discussed more when considering the “covenants of works.”

16Wayne A. Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 516. Also, Gentry and Wellum’s state regarding the expulsion of Adam from the garden: “God blocks the way to the tree of life, signifying that we are no longer in life-giving fellowship with the Lord, living in his presence in terms of blessing, privilege, and relationship” (Kingdom Through Covenant, 622).
a driving theme throughout the Scriptures.\(^{17}\) In the new creation of Revelation the imagery of the Tree of Life returns to signify that the New Creation is a greater Eden (Rev 2:7, 22:1-2).\(^{18}\)

The nature of God’s word in Gen 2:16-17 also establishes the component of our definition that views this as a binding agreement. God alone creates Adam and gives him the stipulations of this covenant agreement. The oath ratifying the ceremony is implied by Adam’s willingness to live within Eden and carry out his dominion, and the curses of Genesis 3 corroborate that Adam understood and accepted the covenant consequences.\(^{19}\) Lastly, it is important to note that Reformed scholars from Augustine to the present day have seen these characteristics in Genesis 1-3 and held to some form of a covenant with Adam.\(^{20}\)

But we must ask, “Why does the Hebrew noun berit not appear within the text of Genesis 1-3?” This has led some scholars to dispute the existence of a covenant since the word does not appear until Genesis 6:18. This is one of the most prominent arguments against an Adamic Covenant. Those who deny an Adamic Covenant can be found in Dispensational theology or the recently dubbed “New Covenant Theology.”\(^{21}\) One example of this line of

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\(^{17}\) For an interesting, yet at times clearly Roman Catholic examination of this theme, see Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Holy People, Holy Land: A Theological Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI Brazos Press, 2005).

\(^{18}\) See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 667. The presence of Edenic imagery in the new creation, which is the culmination of all of God’s redemptive work through covenants, may suggest that John is contrasting the Adamic covenant with the new covenant.

\(^{19}\) I recognize the difficulty in allowing this to be implied. Anthony Hoekema in arguing against an Adamic Covenant cites the lack of a specific oath or ceremony as a reason to dismiss an Adamic covenant (Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* [Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1994], 120).

\(^{20}\) Michael Horton gives a brief yet helpful historical overview supporting this all the way back to Augustine in *God of Promise*, 84-85.

\(^{21}\) It is important to note that “New Covenant Theology” is an eclectic movement. Even though most deny an Adamic Covenant that does not mean that all do. In fact, despite Gentry and Wellum’s insistence on calling their position “progressive covenantalism” (*Kingdom Through Covenant*, 25) they are very much in the New Covenant Theology stream, and they uphold an Adamic Covenant (and they seem to acknowledge this).
argumentation is found in Steve Lehrer’s book *New Covenant Theology*: “There might have been a probation period and there might have been a covenant, but if Scripture does not tell us this, then we must not speculate about these things.”\(^{22}\) Even though it seems on the surface to be persuasive, this argumentation lacks theological precision and reflection. Gentry and Wellum state in response to this argument: “The absence of the word for “covenant” (*berit*) in Genesis 1–3, then, is no argument at all against the notion that a divine-human covenant is established at creation, if exegesis can demonstrate that the idea is there.”\(^{23}\) Gentry and Wellum are correct on this point, and as it has been demonstrated, the necessary components of a biblical covenant between God and Adam come out of the text of Genesis 1-2.\(^{24}\)

**Upholding the Adamic Covenant in the Noahic**

The next major argument for the presence of an Adamic Covenant is the relationship between this covenant and the Noahic Covenant, which is the next divine-human covenant in redemptive history. The first time we encounter *berit* in the Scriptures is in Genesis 6:18: “But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.” This verse follows God’s decision to judge the earth via a global flood (v. 13).

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\(^{23}\) *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 178.

\(^{24}\) In fact, there is not only one covenant in Eden but two—one in the “vertical” dimension and another “horizontally.” The language of marriage between Adam and Eve is also covenantal in nature. For a defense of marriage as a covenant, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 73ff. This is one reason why divorce is so heinous to God: it is the breaking of a solemn, binding oath made before God that is meant to last.
The main theological question in this passage is whether the Lord is “upholding” a covenant already in place, or if this covenant is something “cut” or “new” from what transpires in the Edenic narratives. William Dumbrell has been instrumental in defending the view that the covenant mentioned in Genesis 6 is an “upholding” of the Adamic Covenant.25 Gentry and Wellum provide a helpful synopsis of this position that is worthy of quoting at length:

“Therefore the construction הֵきっと bĕrît in Genesis 6 and 9 indicates that God is not initiating a covenant with Noah but rather is upholding for Noah and his descendants a commitment initiated previously. This language clearly indicates a covenant established earlier between God and creation or God and humans at creation. When God says that he is confirming or upholding his covenant with Noah, he is saying that his commitment to his creation, the care of the creator to preserve, provide for, and rule over all that he has made, including the blessings and ordinances that he initiated through and with Adam and Eve and their family, are now to be with Noah and his descendants.”26

Gentry and Wellum are helpful in clarifying the position and language of Dumbrell against arguments from Paul Williamson who does not hold to an Adamic Covenant.27 The quote above comes after they demonstrate how the covenant is “upheld” in the narrative about the Abrahamic Covenant, and this happens in Genesis 17.28 Dumbrell states that nowhere else in the Old Testament (in a covenantal context) does the wording in Genesis 6:18 refer to initiating a covenant.29

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26 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 156 (emphasis original).

27 This inability to see the difference between to “cut” and “uphold” a covenant gets Williamson into more theological trouble. For instance, he sees two different covenants with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17 (*Sealed with an Oath*, 89-91).


There are other important aspects of the Noahic Covenant to corroborate the position that this covenant is an “upholding” of an Adamic Covenant. Clearly in the Noahic narrative, God by his judgment of all creation in the flood, is ushering in a new creation. Gentry and Wellum survey Bruce Waltke’s thesis that the “recreation” of the Noahic account parallels the Genesis creation account.\(^{30}\) Noah is then presented as a “new Adam” because after the judgment he alone stands as the head of the human race. He is also given the same command to “be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it” (9:7).\(^{31}\)

**Later Biblical Data**

It is also necessary that we ask if anything else in the canon demands an Adamic Covenant. It would be wholly appropriate to use this as supporting argumentation since a later covenant like the Davidic Covenant did not use the word “covenant” to describe that relationship until later on as well.\(^{32}\) The verses that we will examine come from Hosea 6, Jeremiah 33 and Isaiah 24.

Hosea 6:7 states: “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.” This verse encapsulates the book’s focus on the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah. Furthermore, in one of the most provocative passages of Scripture, the Lord says to Hosea in chapter 1 verse 2: “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children

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\(^{30}\)Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 162.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., 163. For some more similarities and dissimilarities between these two covenants, see Chris Woodall, *Covenant, the Basis of God's Self-Disclosure: A Comprehensive Guide to the Essentaility of Covenant as the Foundation for Christians in Their Relating to God and to Each Other* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 9.

\(^{32}\)It’s also important to note that the covenant with David (2 Samuel 7) is only described as a covenant long after the event (2 Samuel 23 v 5). This proves beyond question that a covenant can be agreed without the term itself being used.” Howard B. N., *The Book of the Covenant: The Bible's Unfolding Story of Relationship with God* (Surrey, England: Good Book Co., 2013), 164.
of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord” (Hos 1:2). It is not surprising then given the context of covenant unfaithfulness, why the vast majority of English translations (including the NIV, KJV, NASV, ESV, and HCSB) have all chosen language comparing Israel’s and Judah’s unfaithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant with an Adamic Covenant.33

However, not everyone is convinced of this translation. Anthony Hoekema posed the objection that the first phrase could be translated “But like men” or “But in Adam.”34 Paul Williamson also agrees with this translation and argues it should be translated “in Adam” because it is “referring to the first town Israel reached after crossing into the Promised Land.”35 Gentry and Wellum counter by surveying the work of John Davies that puts forth the thesis that this passage alludes to Hosea 4:4-6, and God has rejected Israel in their royal role as Adam.36 The Adam/Israel connection is important to understand why the translation “like Adam” is preferred.37

Jeremiah 33:19-22 is in some ways even more persuasive than the Hosea passage. Verse 20 states, “Thus says the Lord: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time.” This is a clear allusion to

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33There are of course some subtle differences between them. For instance the NIV chooses to translate the first phrase as “As at Adam” and provides a footnote that it could be translated “like Adam.” The KJV chooses to translate it as “But they like men,” and this is also appropriate given the truth that all men are by nature covenant breakers “in Adam.”

34Created in God’s Image, 119-120.

35Sealed with an Oath, 55.

36Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant, 218.

37Much has been said on the theological parallels between Adam and Israel. For a sampling see Dumbrell, Covenant and Creation, 42-44 and Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom Through Covenant, 226-28.
the creation narrative, and in this allusion there are references to the “covenant” that existed at that time.\(^{38}\)

The final verse to consider comes from Isaiah 24:5-6. Verse 5 states, the “whole earth” has “transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.” It is a worthy question to ask: What covenant could the “whole earth” have broken? As we have seen earlier, only the Adamic Covenant could have such a worldwide consequence of covenant disobedience.\(^{39}\)

**New Testament Data: Romans 5 and Federal Theology**

The last positive argument for the existence of an Adamic Covenant focuses on a passage from Romans 5:12-17. In this passage we see support for what reformed scholars refer to as “Federal Theology.” This is the doctrine that all men exist in one of two states correlating to one of two spiritual states. Either man is “in Adam” fallen and completely depraved, or man is “in Christ” and regenerate being restored to the image of Christ. This passage is also important because it forms the foundation for the Christian doctrine of original sin where we have inherited both guilt and pollution from Adam’s transgression with the guilt putting us all under the just condemnation of God (5:16b).

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\(^{38}\)Gentry and Wellum also deal with Williamson’s argument that this alludes to the Noahic narrative (*Kingdom Through Covenant*, 220-21). O. Palmer Robertson points out that the parallel passage in Jer 31:35 refers to the “stars,” which is only in the creation narrative and not the Noahic (*The Christ of the Covenants*, 21).

\(^{39}\)Gentry and Wellum posit that the covenant in view is the Noahic (*Kingdom Through Covenant*, 172), and Roberston argues it is the Mosaic (*The Christ of the Covenants*, 277). It is far more likely to refer to the Mosaic than the Noahic, since the Noahic is “unbreakable” by God’s guarantee (Gen 9:11) even though the Noahic has a wider scope than the Mosaic (“all flesh”). Gentry and Wellum do not provide anything substantial to argue for their interpretation.
This passage also teaches one other important truth: Adam was a covenant breaker, but Christ is a covenant keeper. Whoever we are “in” spiritually we also inherit that status before God. In fact, the passage becomes insensible without an understanding of Paul contrasting two covenant heads. How can we affirm, on the one hand, that Christ is clearly the head of the New Covenant (Lk 22:20) but on the other hand deny a corollary covenant to Adam? This is not lost on John Frame who proclaims, “So, with Adam, we are part of the Edenic covenant, as covenant breakers, condemned to death.” We will discuss more soon the implications of denying this important theological truth.

A Covenant of Works?

The question that also must be addressed is whether this covenant with Adam should be known as a “covenant of works.” What this means, at its core, is that Adam could have confirmed himself in righteousness and left the probationary period instituted by God within Eden. Several scholars, even in the tradition of classical covenant theology, have expressed a reservation about this doctrine. O. Palmer Robertson objects that this language might imply that grace did not exist in Eden. John Frame agrees with this reservation. Frame also strongly disagrees with the thesis that Adam was under a temporary probationary period.

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41 By “classical covenant theology” I mean the theological system present in many historic reformed creeds. This system includes the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. For an introduction to this system see Michael Horton, *God of Promise*, 78ff. Stephen Wellum also gives a helpful overview of this system and its ecclesiastical implications for Presbyterians in *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 71ff. He also has a similar essay in Thomas R. Schreiner, Shawn D. Wright, eds., *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006).

42 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 56. Horton tries to distinguish between divine “goodness” in Eden with grace because grace “presupposes a state of sin” (*God of Promise*, 100). This distinction is artificial and unhelpful. Adam did not merit his creation or covenantal standing with God. Frame answers this line of
Some theologians have thought that the covenant blessing is even more detailed than a general promise of life. They refer to a life in confirmed righteousness, a life in which Adam is no longer able to sin. But the text does not say this. The idea of a blessing of confirmed righteousness comes not from Genesis 1-2, but from the blessings associated with redemption: life in the new heavens and new earth. But the history of Genesis 1-3 is distinct from the history of redemption.\footnote{Ibid.}

Frame’s apprehension is well founded. Nowhere in the Genesis narrative do we see anything implied or explicitly stated that Adam would have left the probationary period and been given access to the tree of life.\footnote{Ibid., 64.} As mentioned earlier, Adam only had something to lose not something to gain. Many reformed scholars hold to this position because they believe that Jesus as the typological fulfillment of Adam succeeded in a probationary period through his active obedience. However, one can still affirm the active obedience of Christ without resorting to a theology of a temporary Edenic probationary period. The typological importance, particularly in the early chapters of Matthew, is intended to demonstrate Jesus is the true Israel \textit{not} that he fulfilled a “covenant of works.”\footnote{Geerhardus Vos is representative of this type of argumentation that the tree of life was something to be consumed after the probation: “It appears from Gen. 3.22, that man before his fall had not eaten of it, while yet nothing is recorded concerning any prohibition which seems to point to the understanding that the use of the tree was reserved for the future, quite in agreement with the eschatological significance attributed to it later. The tree was associated with the higher, the unchangeable, the eternal life to be secured by obedience throughout his probation.” \textit{(Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments} (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 28).} The typological fulfillment from Adam, to Israel, to Jesus is an important biblical theme. Like Adam, Israel and Jesus are called “God’s son” (Luke 3:38; Ex 4:22; Matt 3:17). All three are supposed to maintain God’s Sabbath rest for his people in perpetuity, but only Jesus succeeds in this task (Heb 4:1-11). Further, as under the Adamic thinking in \textit{Systematic Theology}, 65.

\footnote{For a helpful introduction to various typological fulfillments in Christ see David E. Holwerda, \textit{Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).}
Covenant, Israel was only in a position to lose something not gain anything, namely their expulsion from the land and eventually exile.\textsuperscript{47} The Adamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant are meant to be instructive to God’s people that unless God himself secures the eternal covenant blessings than man is ultimately without hope (Gal 3:24-25).

The classical conception of a covenant of works also leads to a fundamental misunderstanding of the law and gospel dichotomy so pervasive in the New Testament. Michael Horton reflects this line of thinking when he defends the position that this New Testament dichotomy refers to the covenant of works (law) and the covenant of grace.\textsuperscript{48} Pascal Denault in his historical theology survey of Baptist covenant theology states, “Contrarily to the Presbyterians, the Baptists understood the New Testament law/grace contrast as a contrast between the Old and New Covenants.”\textsuperscript{49} This is another example of where a theological system can cloud our ability to let the text speak for itself in its historical and canonical context.

For these reasons, using the terminology “covenant of works” raises some problematic issues. It includes with it an unhelpful hypothetical position that postulates Adam could have left the probationary period. If one uses the language only to mean that Adam was not in need of redemptive grace and that the fulfillment of the covenant obligations were contingent on Adam’s

\textsuperscript{47}That is why I must reject Doug Moo’s thesis that the Mosaic Law had in it a “hypothetical offer of salvation” (\textit{Five Views on Law and Gospel}, 324-25). Contra Moo, Mark Karlberg gives us a much more satisfactory explanation that the commands of Israel to “do this and live” of Leviticus 18:5 (cf. Exo 19:5) are related to Israel’s maintenance of the covenant blessings (particularly the land); see Mark W. Karlberg, \textit{Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology} (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 235-36.

\textsuperscript{48}Horton, \textit{God of Promise}, 86-88.

obedience, then I feel safer using this terminology.\textsuperscript{50} It is ultimately best to speak of a covenant with Adam.

**Implications of Denying an Adamic Covenant**

After a brief survey of the arguments for an Adamic Covenant and answering relevant objections, it is worthwhile asking if there are any important theological implications from denying an Adamic Covenant. That is, does a denial of this covenant impact how we understand any other important doctrines?

**Sin and Covenant Transgression**

The first implication is how we understand the theological relationship between sin and the covenants. While a larger discussion on the definition and nature of sin is beyond this essay, asking whether sin may be understood a covenant transgression is important.

One of the most prominent theological insights from Romans 5 relates to the connection this passage establishes between sin and covenant transgression. Earlier, we examined how Romans 5:12-17 clearly teaches that there are two main covenant heads in the biblical storyline: Adam and Jesus Christ. In verse 14 Paul states, “Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.” The implication from this is that even though the Mosaic Law was not yet in

\textsuperscript{50}Some scholars like Horton who affirm a limited probationary period (\textit{God of Promise}, 83-84), and even those who do not such as Gentry and Wellum (\textit{Kingdom Through Covenant}, 613) have chosen to talk about this covenant as a “covenant with creation.” While it is true that creation itself was a recipient of the covenant curses (Gen 3:18), the covenant from Genesis 2 is clearly made only with Adam. The Noahic covenant, on the other hand, does name the creation as a covenant member (Gen 9:8-11). Even though the Noahic covenant is an upholding of the Adamic as mentioned earlier, this is an area of distinction. The new covenant likewise has obvious cosmic implications, even though creation is technically not a covenant member (Rom 8:20-21; Col 1:20).
effect, humankind was still guilty “in Adam” due to Adam’s transgression.\textsuperscript{51} Are we supposed to assume Paul believes that before the giving of the Mosaic Law all of creation was not in a covenant breach? In the prophets we see the theme of Israel’s disobedience to the Mosaic stipulations over and over again and by doing this they broke the Mosaic Covenant, which is similar in principle to the Adamic Covenant (as we saw in Hos 6:7). So to deny an Adamic Covenant means one has to be comfortable with divorcing the nature of sin from the covenants, which are the primary means in which God relates to his creation and gives his word.

The Nature of Creation’s Relationship to God

It is natural to ask the question: if God did not enter into a covenant relationship with Adam, how do we understand the nature of the relationship? The problem is exacerbated based on how one understands the very relationship of the Trinity. The Scriptures seem to support the idea of a covenantal arrangement between the members of the Trinity. Reformed soteriology has long recognized the Trinity’s unity of purpose monergistically in the \textit{historia salutis}: the Father elects a people, the Son atones for the elect and the Spirit regenerates and seals the elect. Michael Horton states, “If we hold simultaneously to the doctrine of the Trinity and unconditional election, it is unclear what objection could be raised in principle to describing this divine decree in terms of the concept of an eternal covenant between the persons of the Godhead.”\textsuperscript{52}

It is also hard to conceive of how a Triune God who relates among the persons covenantally, would then create and engage his creation in any way apart from a covenant. This


\textsuperscript{52}Horton, \textit{God of Promise}, 79. He also discusses how holding too tightly to a specific definition of “covenant” can lead one to deny this doctrine (pg. 81-82).
is an important implication that must not be dismissed quickly. God, as Yahweh the covenant Lord, has always related to his creation by a covenantal relationship. Further, the very nature of the *imago dei* necessitates this covenantal relationship for man as the creature. Horton states on this, “We were not just created and then given a covenant; we were created as covenant creatures—partners not in deity, to be sure, but in the drama that was about to unfold in history.”

**Conclusion**

After surveying the biblical data, scholars on both sides of the debate, and necessary implications of denying the Adamic Covenant, it is clear that we must affirm a covenantal relationship between Adam and God in Eden. Denying this covenant not only makes understanding the biblical storyline vastly more complex, but it fails to do justice to the work of the final Adam, Jesus Christ. Thankfully, where Adam failed in his commands in Eden, the Lord Jesus Christ has succeeded in procuring our eternal salvation. All of God’s new covenant people can look forward to the day when Eden is restored in a more permanent, majestic way where we can enjoy forever the presence of God.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Rev 22:1-5)

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53Ibid., 10 (emphasis original). While not surveyed in this essay due to brevity, this is the main argument put forth by Gentry and Wellum. See *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 181ff.


Köstenberger, Andreas J., and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the


