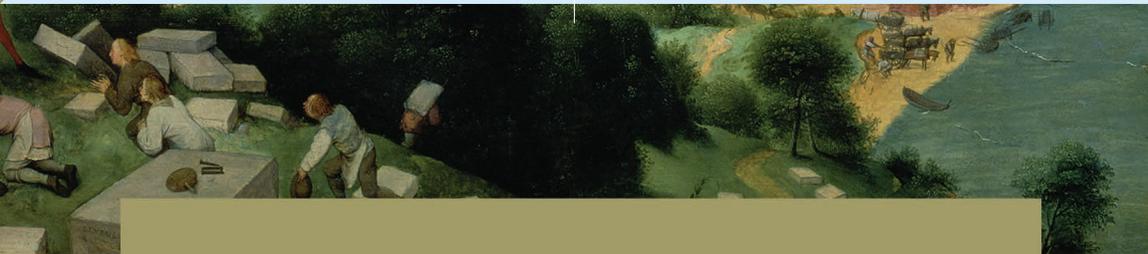A CONCISE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

GOD'S KINGDOM

through

GOD'S COVENANTS

PETER J. GENTRY & STEPHEN J. WELLUM

"Gentry and Wellum offer a third way, a via media, between covenant theology and dispensationalism, arguing that both of these theological systems are not informed sufficiently by biblical theology. Certainly we cannot understand the Scriptures without comprehending 'the whole counsel of God,' and here we find incisive exegesis and biblical theology at its best. This book is a must-read and will be part of the conversation for many years to come."

Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* is hermeneutically sensitive, exegetically rigorous, and theologically rich—a first-rate biblical theology that addresses both the message and the structure of the whole Bible from the ground up. Gentry and Wellum have produced what will become one of the standard texts in the field. For anyone who wishes to tread the path of biblical revelation, this text is a faithful guide."

Miles V. Van Pelt, Alan Belcher Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages and Director, Summer Institute for Biblical Languages, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi

"This is not the first volume that has attempted to mediate the dispensational/covenant theology divide, but it may be the culminating presentation of that discussion—just as Bach was not the first Baroque composer but its highest moment. *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* should be read by all parties, but I won't be surprised to learn in twenty years that this volume provided the foundation for how a generation of anyone who advocates regenerate church membership puts their Bible together."

Jonathan Leeman, Editorial Director, 9Marks; author, *Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love*

"Gentry and Wellum have provided a welcome addition to the current number of books on biblical theology. What makes their contribution unique is the marriage of historical exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* brims with exegetical insights, biblical theological drama, and sound systematic theological conclusions. Particularly important is the viable alternative they offer to the covenantal and dispensational hermeneutical frameworks. I enthusiastically recommend this book!"

Stephen G. Dempster, Professor of Religious Studies, Crandall University

"The relationship between the covenants of Scripture is rightly considered to be central to the interpretation of the Bible. That there is some degree of continuity is obvious, for it is the same God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—who has revealed himself and his will in the covenants. That there is, however, also significant discontinuity also seems patent since Scripture itself talks about a new covenant, with the old one passing away. What has changed and what has not? Utterly vital questions to which this new book by Gentry and Wellum give satisfying and sound answers. Because of the importance of this subject and the exegetical and theological skill of the authors, their answers deserve a wide hearing. Highly recommended!"

Michael A. G. Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"*God's Kingdom through God's Covenants* is directly applicable to a pastor faithfully seeking understanding of God's Word as it reveals the structure that supports the narrative of God's message. The study of the covenants provides a framework for understanding and applying the message of the Bible to life in the new covenant community. I have found this study enriching for pastoral ministry."

Joseph Lumbrix, Pastor, Mount Olivet Baptist Church, Willisburg, Kentucky

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A CONCISE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

PETER J. GENTRY AND
STEPHEN J. WELLUM

CROSSWAY

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

One of the dangers of writing a long and detailed book on the biblical covenants is that it becomes potentially inaccessible to those who are looking for a more succinct treatment of the subject. When we coauthored *Kingdom through Covenant* (Crossway, 2012), it was our intent to write an in-depth treatment of the interrelationship of the biblical covenants. Given our conviction that the progressive unfolding of the biblical covenants is the backbone to the metanarrative of Scripture and, more importantly, that one cannot properly understand God's glorious redemptive plan apart from thinking through the biblical covenants, it was necessary to discuss the biblical covenants in detail.

In addition, it was our goal to demonstrate that our understanding of kingdom through covenant was slightly different from other ways of thinking through the Bible's storyline current in evangelical theology. In evangelicalism, the dominant biblical-theological systems of covenant theology and dispensationalism (and their varieties) are the way that most Christians conceive of the Bible's larger story. It was our conviction that both of these views—as much as we agree with them on most matters related to the gospel—were not quite right in their specific way of rendering the Bible's plotline. Hence, it was necessary for our book to interact with technical details in exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology.

We offer this shortened version of the earlier book for readers who are more interested in a succinct treatment of the subject, who want to be able to see our proposal of "kingdom through covenant" without all of the technical discussion and theological debate. In fact, it was the prodding of many seminary students, pastors, and lay leaders who desired a shorter, more accessible version of our larger work that was the genesis of this book. In this work, we have done our best to summarize our basic proposal, to avoid a lot of the technical discussion and debate, and to simply outline how we understand the unfolding of the biblical covenants and thus, how our triune God's plan has been brought to its wonderful consummation in Christ.

As in the first book, we begin by discussing why the covenants are foundational to the biblical storyline, along with some interpretative observations on how to read Scripture correctly. We then unpack each covenant in its own context before we show the progressive development of how each covenant builds on the previous one and then how all the covenants find their *telos*, terminus, and fulfillment in our Lord Jesus Christ. The last chapter summarizes our findings by succinctly describing exactly what we mean by the expression "kingdom through covenant." To make this work more accessible, we have kept the footnotes to a minimum, have mostly eliminated the discussions of how our view differs from that of dispensational and covenant theology, and have not given a detailed defense of our view. For the most part, the view argued in the previous book is assumed, yet now written in such a way that the reader is able more easily to discern what that overall view is and how the biblical covenants serve as the Bible's own way of unfolding, revealing, and disclosing God's one, eternal plan of redemption. If the reader desires the warrant and bibliographic discussion for the overall argument of this work, all he needs to do is turn to the previous work and find it there.

We have read with great care and interest every review of *Kingdom through Covenant* known to us. Frequently, the reviews have told us more about the metanarrative of our reviewers than the evidence presented in the book. Only rarely have reviewers actually engaged the extensive exegesis. We would like to thank Doug Moo for pointing out problems in my (Peter's) treatment of Ezekiel 16 and the relation of Deuteronomy to the Sinai Covenant. We believe we are developing in our own understanding of the Scriptures and appreciate correction. Further research has resulted in new proposals, which are incorporated into this abridgement.

A number of people have asked about the artwork used for the covers of both the larger work and this abridgement. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, a Flemish Renaissance painter, produced three versions of *The Tower of Babel*; only two of them survive. The painting chosen for the larger work, *Kingdom through Covenant*, was done in 1565 and is in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, in Rotterdam. The painting chosen for this abridgement was done in 1563 and resides in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. *The Tower of Babel* is not only an interpretation of the biblical text but a commentary on the construction going on in Antwerp at the time. These pictures portray an attempt to establish the human kingdom through unified effort.

The result is laughable. The Devil offered Jesus all the broken, tattered kingdoms of this world, but the only kingdom that will stand is the one now laughed at by men: the kingdom of God.

There are many people to thank in seeing this book come to fruition. We especially want to thank Crossway for their ongoing support of our work, and especially Justin Taylor for his encouragement and confidence in us. We also want to thank the administration and our colleagues at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where we both teach and serve. It is a privilege to serve alongside colleagues who love the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and an administration who encourages us to teach, write, and minister as servants of the King of kings. In addition, Peter wants to dedicate this work to his dearest wife, Barb, who for more than thirty-five years has not only been a lover and sweetheart but has served as a close teammate in ministry and has epitomized *ḥesed* and *'ĕmet* in covenant relationship. Stephen gladly dedicates this work to his dearest wife, Karen, who for almost thirty years has served alongside him as a wonderful and faithful wife, mother, and partner in gospel ministry. Without the loving care and devotion of our wives, we would not have been able to write this work or do anything we have done in our marriage, in our family, and in the Christian ministry.

It is our prayer that this shortened work, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, will be an encouragement to the church by helping Christians know a bit better the "whole counsel of God" as given through the unfolding and progression of the biblical covenants. It is our prayer that this work will help us think through how our great and glorious triune God has acted to redeem us in Christ, and thus has led us to a greater adoration and knowledge of, love for, and obedience to our covenant Lord. To God be all the glory in his church and in the world, until we sit at Jesus' feet, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Written, this time, above the clouds.
Peter J. Gentry
Stephen J. Wellum
November 2014

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF COVENANTS IN GRASPING THE BIBLE'S STORY

> The idea of covenant is fundamental to the Bible's story. At its most basic, covenant presents God's desire to enter into relationship with men and women created in his image. This is reflected in the repeated covenant refrain, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Exodus 6:6–8; Leviticus 26:12 etc.). Covenant is all about relationship between the Creator and his creation. The idea may seem simple; however, the implications of covenant and covenant relationship between God and humankind are vast . . .[1]

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate how central and foundational "covenants" are to the entire narrative plot structure of the Bible. One cannot fully understand Scripture *and* correctly draw theological conclusions from it without grasping how *all* of the biblical covenants unfold across time and find their *telos*, terminus, and fulfillment in Christ. We do *not* assert that the covenants are *the* central theme of Scripture. Instead, we assert that the covenants form the backbone of the Bible's metanarrative and thus it is essential to "put them together" correctly in order to discern accurately the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Michael Horton nicely captures this point when he writes that the biblical covenants are "the architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield. . . . It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God's covenantal dealings in our history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable variety."[2] If this is so, which we contend it is, then apart from properly understanding the nature of the biblical covenants and how they relate to each other, we will not correctly discern the message of the Bible and hence God's self-disclosure which centers on and culminates in Christ.

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[1] Alistair I. Wilson and Jamie A. Grant, "Introduction," in *The God of Covenant: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2005), 12.
[2] Michael S. Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 13.

This is not a new insight, especially for those in the Reformed tradition who have written extensively about the importance of covenants and have structured their entire theology around the concept of covenant. Yet it is not only Reformed theology that acknowledges this point; almost every variety of Christian theology admits that the biblical covenants establish a central framework that holds the Bible's story together. Since the coming of Christ, Christians have wrestled with the relationships between the covenants, especially the old and new covenants. In fact, it is almost impossible to understand many of the early church's struggles apart from covenantal debates. For example, think of the many issues concerning the Jew-Gentile relationship in the New Testament (Matt. 22:1–14, par.; Acts 10–11; Romans 9–11; Eph. 2:11–22; 3:1–13); the claim of the Judaizers, which centers on covenantal debates (Galatians 2–3); the reason that the Jerusalem Council assembled (Acts 15); the divisions between strong and weak in the church (Romans 14–15); and the question of how to live in relation to the old covenant now that Christ has come (Matthew 5–7; 15:1–20, par.; Acts 7; Romans 4; Hebrews 7–10). All of these issues are simply the church wrestling with covenantal shifts—from old covenant to new—and the nature of covenant fulfillment in Christ.

Christians have differed in their understanding of the relationship between the covenants. This is one of the primary reasons that we have different theological systems, which is best exemplified today by the theologies of dispensationalism and by covenant theology. Even though these two views agree on the main issues central to the gospel, at the heart of these two systems there is disagreement on what the biblical covenants are and how they relate one to another. Thus, beyond our basic agreement that the story of Scripture moves from Adam to Abraham to Sinai, ultimately issuing in a promise of a new covenant whose advent is tied with Jesus' cross work (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26), there is disagreement on how the covenants are related. This disagreement inevitably spills over to other issues, especially the question of what applies to us today as new covenant believers. It is at this point, on such matters as the Sabbath, the application of the Old Testament law to our lives, the relationship between Israel and the church, and many more issues, that we discover significant differences among Christians.

For this reason, correctly "putting together" the biblical covenants is central to grasping the Bible's story, drawing correct theological conclusions, and rightly applying Scripture to our daily lives. If we are going to

make progress in resolving disagreements within the church, then how we put together the biblical covenants must be faced head-on and not simply assumed. We are convinced that the current ways of putting together the covenants, especially as represented by covenant or dispensational theology, are not quite right, even though it is important *not* to overplay the differences among us. All Christians seek to do justice to the overall unity of God's plan, and to acknowledge some kind of "progressive revelation," redemptive epochs (or "dispensations"), fulfillment in Christ, change in God's plan across time, and so on. Yet there is disagreement in regard to the specifics of God's plan, the kind of changes that result, and the relationship between Israel and the church, which still requires resolution. What follows is an alternative reading of the covenants, which seeks to build on the insights of both of these theological systems while offering a slightly different way of understanding the unfolding of the covenants and their fulfillment in Christ.

"Kingdom through covenant" or "progressive covenantalism" is our proposal for what is central to the Bible's storyline. *Progressive* underscores the unfolding of God's plan from old to new, while *covenantalism* stresses that God's unified plan unfolds *through* the covenants, ultimately terminating and culminating in Jesus and the new covenant. Our triune God has only *one* plan of redemption, yet we discover what that plan is as we trace his salvation work *through* the biblical covenants. Each and every biblical covenant contributes to that one plan, but in order to grasp the full depth and breadth of that plan, we must understand each covenant in its own redemptive-historical context by locating that covenant in relation to what precedes it and what follows it. When we do this, not only do we unpack God's glorious plan; we also discover how that plan is fulfilled in our majestic Redeemer (see Heb. 1:1–3; 7:1–10:18; cf. Eph. 1:9–10). In addition, given that Christians live in light of the achievement of Christ's glorious work, we can apply Scripture rightly to our lives only if we think through how all of the previous covenants find their fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant he inaugurates.

Before we unpack "kingdom through covenant," in the remainder of this chapter and in preparation for chapters 2–10 we will focus on two issues. First, we will briefly discuss how we conceive of the nature of biblical theology and its relation to systematic theology, since this book is an exercise in both disciplines and, sadly, there is no unanimous agreement in regard to these disciplines. Second, we will outline our hermeneutical approach in this

study and thus describe something of our theological method. Let us now briefly turn to each of these areas.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS RELATION TO SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Any attempt to understand the progressive nature of the biblical covenants is an exercise in "biblical theology." It is also the first step in drawing legitimate theological conclusions from Scripture and thus applying the "whole counsel of God" to our lives, which is the task of "systematic theology." Since people mean different things by "biblical" and "systematic" theology, let us explain how we are using these terms and how we understand the relationship between them.

At the popular level, for most Christians, when the term "biblical theology" is used it is understood as expressing the desire to be "true to the Bible" in our teaching and theology. Obviously, to be "biblical" in this sense is what all Christians ought to desire and strive for, but this is *not* exactly how we are using the term. In fact, in church history, "biblical theology" has been understood in a number of ways.[3]

Generally speaking, before the past few centuries biblical theology was often identified with systematic theology, even though many in church history practiced what we currently call "biblical theology," that is, an attempt to grasp the redemptive-historical unfolding of Scripture.[4] One can think of many examples, such as Irenaeus (c. 115–c. 202), John Calvin (1509–1564), and Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669). In this sense, biblical theology is not entirely new, since the church has always wrestled with how to "put together" Scripture, especially in light of Christ. Any position, then, that seeks to think through the Canon is doing "biblical theology" in some sense. Granting this point, it is still accurate to note that, in the past, there was a tendency to treat Scripture in more logical and atemporal categories rather than to think carefully through the Bible's developing storyline. Even in the post-Reformation era, where there was a renewed emphasis on doing a "whole-Bible theology," biblical theology was mostly identified with systematic theology, and systematics was identified more with "dogmatic" concerns.

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[3] For a history of biblical theology, see C. H. H. Scobie, "History of Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) [hereafter *NDBT*], 11–20.

[4] For an example of this approach to biblical theology see Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

With the rise of the Enlightenment, however, biblical theology began to emerge as a distinct discipline. But it is crucial to distinguish the emergence of biblical theology in the Enlightenment along two different paths—one, an illegitimate path tied to Enlightenment presuppositions, and the other, a legitimate one that developed previous insights in church history but now in a more precise, detailed, and historically conscious manner, dependent upon the Bible's own internal presentation.

In regard to the illegitimate Enlightenment approach to biblical theology, there was a growing tendency to read Scripture *critically* and uncoupled from historic Christian theology. This resulted in approaching Scripture "as any other book," rooted in history but also open to historical-critical methods which viewed the Bible within the confines of *methodological* naturalism.[5] This meant that the Bible was not approached on its own terms, i.e., as God's Word written. Instead, the idea that Scripture is God-breathed through human authors—a text that authoritatively and accurately unfolds God's redemptive plan centered in Christ—was rejected. The end result of this approach was not only a denial of a high view of Scripture but also an increasingly fragmented reading of Scripture, given the fact that the practitioners of this view did not believe Scripture to be a unified, God-given revelation. Biblical theology as a discipline became merely "descriptive," governed by critical methods and non-Christian worldview assumptions. "Diversity" was emphasized more than "unity" in Scripture, and ultimately, as a discipline seeking to grasp God's unified plan, it failed. In the twentieth century, there were some attempts to overcome the Enlightenment straitjacket on Scripture, but none of these attempts produced a "whole Bible theology," given their low view of Scripture.

Contrary to the Enlightenment approach, there is a legitimate way to do biblical theology. In the history of the church, specifically in the post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment era, this path also emphasized a renewed attempt to root the Bible in history by stressing the "literal sense" (*sensus literalis*) tied to the intention(s) of the divine and human author(s). Yet, it was rooted in a larger Christian worldview and, as such, it operated self-consciously within Christian theological presuppositions, as illustrated in such people as Johannes Cocceius and the post-Reformation Reformed

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[5] "Methodological naturalism" is the view that approaches the study of history (including study of the Bible) and science without considering God's involvement in the world, and divine action as represented by divine revelation and miracles. *Methodological* naturalism does *not* necessarily entail atheism, since it is also consistent with deism and panentheism (both Enlightenment views), which also deny God's action in an effectual sense.

Protestant scholastics who came after him.[6] Probably the best-known twentieth-century pioneer of biblical theology, who sought to follow a path distinct from that of the Enlightenment, was Geerhardus Vos, who developed biblical theology at Princeton Seminary in the early twentieth century.[7] Vos, who was birthed out of Dutch Calvinism, along with such figures as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, sought to do biblical theology with a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture. Vos defined biblical theology as "that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible."[8] In contrast to the Enlightenment view, Vos argued that biblical theology, as an exegetical discipline, not only begins with the biblical text; it must also embrace Scripture as God's own self-attesting Word, fully authoritative and reliable. Furthermore, Vos argued, in exegeting Scripture, biblical theology seeks to trace out the Bible's unity and diversity and find its consummation in Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant era. Biblical theology must follow a method that reads the Bible *on its own terms*, following the Bible's own internal contours and shape, in order to discover God's unified plan as it is disclosed to us over time. The path that Vos blazed was foundational for much of the resurgence of biblical theology within evangelicalism, in the twentieth and now twenty-first century.

Following this evangelical view, we define "biblical theology" by employing Brian Rosner's helpful definition: "Biblical theology" is "theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus."[9] In this definition, Rosner emphasizes some important points crucial to the nature and task of biblical theology. Biblical theology is concerned with the overall message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole. As an exegetical method, it is sensitive to the liter-

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[6] For a detailed treatment of the post-Reformation Protestant scholastics, see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003). See also the application of some of the insights of the Protestant scholastics for biblical and systematic theology in Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002); Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993).

[7] See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004); Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

[8] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 5.

[9] Brian Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *NDBT*, 10 (italics removed from original).

ary, historical, and theological dimensions of Scripture, as well as to the interrelationships between earlier and later texts in Scripture. Furthermore, biblical theology is interested not merely in words and word studies but also in concepts and themes as it traces out the Bible's own storyline, on the Bible's own terms, as the plotline reaches its culmination in Christ. In a similar way, D. A. Carson speaks of biblical theology as an inductive, exegetical discipline which works from biblical texts, in all of their literary diversity, to the entire Canon—hence the notion of *intertextuality*. In making connections between texts, biblical theology also attempts to let the biblical text set the agenda. This is what we mean by saying that we are to read Scripture *on its own terms*, i.e., *intratextually*. Scripture is to be interpreted in light of its own categories and presentation, since Scripture comes to us as divinely given, coherent, and unified.[10] In fact, it is our contention that if one asks the most basic questions—How has God given Scripture to us? What are the Bible's own internal structures? How ought those structures shape our doing of biblical theology?—working through the biblical covenants is the Bible's own way of presenting its internal structures and learning how to read Scripture as God intended it to be read.

With these ideas in mind, let us now summarize what we believe biblical theology is. Simply stated, it is the *hermeneutical* discipline that seeks to do justice to what Scripture claims to be and what it actually is. In regard to its *claim*, Scripture claims to be *God's* Word written, and as such, it is a *unified* revelation of his gracious plan of redemption. In regard to what Scripture actually *is*, it is a *progressive* unfolding of God's plan, rooted in history and developed along a specific storyline primarily demarcated by the biblical covenants. Biblical theology as a hermeneutical discipline attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the entire Canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God's plan and carefully think through the relationship between *before* and *after* in that plan, which culminates in Christ.[11] In so doing, biblical theology provides the basis for understanding

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[10] On these points see D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *NDBT*, 89–104.

[11] Two words that describe how biblical theology seeks to interpret texts first in their immediate and then in their canonical context are *synchronic* and *diachronic*. *Synchronic* refers to viewing events occurring at a given time, hence to read texts synchronically means reading them in their immediate context. As we exegete texts, we place them in their redemptive-historical context, we interpret them according to the grammatical-historical method, and we inquire about the theology of a particular prophet, book, or corpus. Biblical exegesis begins at this level as it involves an analytical examination of the "parts." Our interpretation of Scripture, however, does not end here. The unity of Scripture drives us to say more, which introduces the notion of diachronic. *Diachronic* refers to viewing events over time. Texts must be read not only in terms of their immediate context but also in terms of the "whole." Scripture is both unified and progressive. Thus biblical theology is concerned to read the "parts" in terms of the "whole" and to trace out how God's plan develops *throughout* redemptive-history, leading us to Christ.

how texts in one part of the Bible relate to all other texts, according to God's intention, which is discovered through human authors but ultimately at the canonical level. In the end, biblical theology is the attempt to think through the "whole counsel of God," and it provides the basis and underpinning for all theologizing.

If this is what biblical theology is, then what is systematic theology? As with "biblical theology," there are various ideas as to what "systematic theology" is. It is not necessary to delve into all of these diverse views; rather, we will simply state how we conceive of the discipline. For our purposes, we will employ the definition given by John Frame: systematic theology is "the application of God's Word by persons to all areas of life."[12] In our view, this entails at least two key components.

First, in order to *apply* Scripture properly, we must first interpret Scripture correctly, which requires the doing of biblical theology, as just described. This is why we contend that biblical theology is the basis for all theologizing, since we are not doing theology unless we correctly understand how the entire canon of Scripture fits together.

Second, systematic theology goes further than biblical theology, since it involves the *application* of Scripture *to all areas of life*. Systematic theology, then, inevitably involves theological construction and doctrinal formulation, grounded in biblical theology and done in light of historical theology, but it also involves interacting with all areas of life—history, science, psychology, ethics, and so on. In so doing, systematic theology leads to worldview formation as we seek to set the biblical-theological framework of Scripture over against all other worldviews and learn "to think God's thoughts after him," even in areas that the Bible does not directly address. In this important way, systematic theology presents a well-thought-out worldview, over against all of its competitors, as it seeks to apply biblical truth to every domain of life. As a discipline it is also *critical* in seeking to evaluate ideas within and outside the church. *Outside* the church, systematic theology takes on an apologetic function as it first sets forth the faith to be believed and defended, and then critiques and evaluates views that reject the truth of God's Word. In this way, apologetics is properly a subset of systematic theology. *Within* the church, theology is critical by analyzing theological proposals first in terms of their fit with Scripture and secondly in terms of their implications for other doctrines. In all these ways, systematic theology is the discipline that

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[12] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 76.

attempts "to bring our entire thought captive to Christ" (see 2 Cor. 10:1–5), for our good as the church and ultimately for God's glory.

How, then, should we think of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology? In our view, biblical theology is primarily a *hermeneutical* discipline, since it seeks to rightly divide God's Word (2 Tim. 2:14–15). This is why the conclusions of systematic theology must first be grounded in the exegetical conclusions of biblical theology. But then systematic theology goes further: on the basis of biblical theology it attempts to construct what we ought to believe from Scripture for today, to critique other theological proposals within the church, and also the false ideas of non-Christian worldviews, so that we learn anew to live under the Lordship of Christ.

How does this discussion apply to what we are doing in this book? In this book we are setting forth a proposal for understanding the nature and interrelationships of the biblical covenants. In truth, we are *doing* systematic theology by first grounding it in biblical theology. In order to make our case, we will expound the biblical covenants before we turn to systematic reflection. But before we do this, let us outline the basic hermeneutical approach we will follow.

HERMENEUTICAL BASICS: BEING "BIBLICAL" IN OUR READING OF SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

What does it mean to be "biblical"? How do we rightly exegete biblical texts and draw proper theological conclusions from them? At the heart of Christian theology is the attempt to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5, ESV). But how does one know that one's theological proposals are biblically warranted? Obviously these questions are not new; they have been with us since Scripture was first given and interpreted. And, it must be admitted, these questions are not as easy and straightforward to answer as many assume. We have all experienced diversity of opinion within the church, even among those of us who affirm Scripture's full authority. This has apparently led some to treat the Bible like a wax nose, i.e., twisting and shaping it at will to fit a variety of viewpoints, with the conclusion that it is not possible to demonstrate one interpretation as more biblical than another.

How, then, do we approach Scripture, interpret it, and draw our theological conclusions? In theological debates, adjudication between viewpoints is often complicated. As most admit, theological positions involve more than merely appealing to one or two texts; entire positions involve a discussion of

how texts are understood in their context, how those texts are interrelated to other texts, and ultimately how the entire canon of Scripture is put together. Before we develop our proposal, "kingdom through covenant," we will first outline our basic hermeneutical commitments. Obviously, in this regard, much could be said; we can only scratch the surface. In addition, most of what follows is in agreement with a majority of approaches to evangelical hermeneutics, but regardless, it is important to describe how we approach the task of reading and applying Scripture and thus how we move from text to theological conclusions.

Let us describe our hermeneutical approach by developing the following statement: In order to be *biblical* in our theology, our interpretation and application of Scripture must (1) take seriously what Scripture claims to be; and (2) interpret Scripture in light of what it actually is as God's unfolding revelation across time. Let us develop these two points a bit more.

The Scriptural Claim for Itself: Scripture's Self-Attestation

In order to be *biblical* in our theology we must take seriously what Scripture claims to be. What, then, does Scripture claim for itself? We cannot give a full-blown explication and defense of the doctrine of Scripture; many books have undertaken that task and have done it well.[13] In agreement with historic Christianity, we affirm that Scripture is God's Word written, the product of God's mighty action through the Word and by the Holy Spirit whereby human authors freely wrote exactly what God intended to be written and without error.

Why has the church throughout the ages affirmed this about Scripture? The answer is straightforward: Scripture makes this claim about itself. The church does not confer authority upon this book because she desires it to be God's Word; rather, Scripture itself testifies that it is God's authoritative Word, written through the agency of human authors, and that it is the product of the sovereign-personal "God who is there" and from "the God who is not silent."[14] As such, Scripture both attests to and bears the marks of its divine origin and is thus completely authoritative, sufficient, and reliable. Certainly some biblical scholars and theologians have challenged this claim, but when Scripture is read on its own terms, it can be shown repeatedly to make this

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[13] See, for example, John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010).
[14] The expressions "the God who is there" and "the God who is not silent" are taken from two works of Francis A. Schaeffer: *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968) and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1972).

claim. In what follows, we assume this view of Scripture in our interpretation of it.

How, then, does this view of Scripture impact our interpretation of it? Two answers may be given. First, given that Scripture is *God's* Word, from the triune, sovereign, and all-knowing God of the universe, we expect *an overall unity and coherenc*e between the Testaments, despite its diversity, that together declares God's unfailing plan and purposes in this fallen world. As we think through the biblical covenants, given our view of Scripture, we will not view the covenants as independent and isolated from each other but as together, in all of their diversity, unfolding the one plan of God centered in our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:9–10).

Second, given that Scripture is God's Word *through human authors*, we discover God's intent by reading what the biblical authors say; hence the expression, what God says, Scripture says (i.e., the biblical authors), and vice versa. Ultimately, this point leads us to a canonical reading of Scripture in order to discover how to interpret the meaning of specific texts. It is not enough to read Scripture in a "thin" manner, i.e., as isolated texts apart from the whole. Instead we must read texts in a "thick" way, i.e., texts read in light of the entire canon of Scripture.[15] We discover God's intent through the writing(s) of the biblical authors, but given the diversity of authors throughout time, we must interpret biblical authors in light of the entire Canon. It is only by reading Scripture "thickly" that we discover the true meaning of Scripture, i.e., what God's intent is, and how Scripture applies to us today. This observation is simply another way of stating the important Reformation principle that "Scripture must interpret Scripture."

It is also another way of speaking about the "fuller meaning" of Scripture or what has been labeled *sensus plenior*. This expression is understood in diverse ways, so it requires careful definition. We agree with Greg Beale's understanding of the term when he argues that, for example, "the Old Testament authors did not exhaustively understand the meaning, implications, and possible applications of all that they wrote."[16] As authors who wrote under divine inspiration, what they wrote was God-given, true, and authoritative. However, they might not, and probably did not, understand where the entire revelation was going, given the fact that God had

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[15] See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *NDBT*, 61–62.

[16] G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?" in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 393.

not yet disclosed all of the details of his eternal plan. Thus, as more revelation is given through later authors, we discover more of God's plan and where that plan is going. It is for this reason that the New Testament's interpretation of the Old Testament becomes definitive, since later texts bring with them greater clarity and understanding. In other words, we must carefully allow the New Testament to show us how the Old Testament is brought to fulfillment in Christ. In this way, as Beale rightly acknowledges, the New Testament's interpretation of the Old may expand the Old Testament author's meaning in the sense of seeing new implications and applications. However, given that we discover God's intent through the human authors, later texts do *not* contravene the integrity of the earlier texts, "but rather [develop] them in a way which is consistent with the Old Testament author's understanding of the way in which God interacts with his people"[17] in previous eras of redemptive-history.[18] Thus, Scripture as an entire canon must interpret Scripture; the later parts must "draw out and explain more clearly the earlier parts,"[19] and theological conclusions must be exegetically derived from the entire Canon.

On this point, it is also important to stress that, given what Scripture is, a canonical reading is not an optional way to interpret Scripture. In fact, to read the Bible canonically is demanded by the very nature of Scripture and its claim regarding itself. Thus, *not* to read Scripture in this way is to fail to interpret it correctly and is to be less than "biblical." Grammatical-historical exegesis, then, needs to be set in the larger context of a canonical reading; the parts must be read in terms of the whole. Let us now turn to the second point, i.e., in order to be "biblical" we must interpret Scripture in light of what it actually is as God's unfolding revelation across time.

Interpreting Scripture According to What It Is

What *is* Scripture? Here we are not thinking in terms of what Scripture says about itself but more in terms of the actual phenomena of Scripture, or better, how God has chosen to give us his Word and disclose himself to us through human authors. Let us discuss the phenomena of the Bible by focusing on two points: Scripture is a word-act revelation and a progressive revelation.

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[17] Ibid.

[18] It is customary among biblical scholars and theologians to refer to the history of God's plan of redemption with the hyphenated phrase "redemptive-history."

[19] Ibid.

SCRIPTURE IS A WORD-ACT REVELATION

A helpful way of describing the phenomena of Scripture is by viewing it as a word-act revelation. What does this mean? Simply stated, it means that Scripture is God's own authoritative interpretation of his redemptive acts through the agency of human authors. Let us think about this in three steps.

First, we affirm that all of God's redemptive acts are revelatory of him, his plan, and his purposes. God has disclosed himself in history through his mighty acts, what we often identify as special revelation in contrast to God's revelation in the natural world. For example, in the Old Testament, the greatest revelatory redemptive act of God was his deliverance of Israel from their slavery in Egypt (cf. Ex. 6:6–7). In the New Testament, the proclamation of the gospel involves the recitation of God's acts in history (cf. Acts 2:22ff.; 3:13ff.; 10:36ff.; 13:26ff.; 1 Cor. 15:3f.). In fact, supremely, the focal point of Scripture is what God has done in Christ. The New Testament continually proclaims that what God had promised in ages past, what the Old Testament prophets anticipated, God has now brought to fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus—the greatest display of God's mighty acts (cf. Mark 1:15; Luke 4:21; Gal. 4:4).

Second, as important as it is to affirm that God acts in order to reveal himself and to redeem his people, God's redemptive acts are never left to speak for themselves, and they never appear separated from God's verbal communications of truth. Word *and* act always accompany each other. Furthermore, just as redemption is historically successive, so also is revelation, for God's revelatory word interprets God's redemptive acts. For example, Exodus 15:1–18 interprets the events of the Red Sea crossing; they are never left as self-interpreting. In fact, word and act often follow a general order in Scripture: first there is a preparatory word, then the divine act, followed by the interpretive word. For example, in the giving of the old covenant we first see a preparatory word (Exodus 19), then the divine act of giving the law (Exodus 20), followed up by an interpretative explanation of the law (Exodus 21ff.). This same order may be observed of the Bible as a whole. The Old Testament reveals the predictive word and anticipates greater realities tied to the coming of our Lord; the Gospels give the account of the redemptive-revelatory fact of the coming of the Son; and the remainder of the New Testament supplies, along with the Gospels, the final interpretation of not only who the Son is but the full implications of what he has achieved in the inauguration of the new covenant era and the fulfillment of the prophetic word.

Third, as a word-act revelation, Scripture is the product of God's own mighty actions. Scripture not only chronicles the activities of God's redemption in history; it not only is a word that interprets God's redeeming acts; it is itself a product of God's own redemptive acts for the purpose of teaching, edification, instruction, and as such is fully authoritative and sufficient for our thinking and lives. Scripture, then, as a written text, is in its final form God's own divine interpretation, through human authors, of his own redemptive acts that carries with it a true and authoritative interpretation of his redemptive plan. Though it is not an exhaustive revelation, nonetheless it is a true, objective, and first-order text that requires us to read it as a complete canonical text on its own terms, according to its own structure and categories, in order to discern correctly God's intent and redemptive plan. Once again, this reminds us that Scripture must be read as an entire revelation in order to discern God's overall plan. This point is further underscored by viewing Scripture as a *progressive* revelation.

SCRIPTURE IS A PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

Scripture as a word-act revelation also involves historical progression, since, just as God's plan of redemption and mighty acts did not happen all at once, so the word-interpretation of those acts unfolds over time.[20] Revelation, alongside redemption, unfolds in a progressive manner by unique twists and turns in separate but related epochs, largely demarcated by the biblical covenants, which ultimately find their terminus in the person and work of Christ.

Hebrews 1:1–3 beautifully describes this point. "Long ago," the author reminds us, "God spoke to our fathers by the prophets," and he did so "at many times and in many ways" (ESV). God's word-act revelation took place over a period of time, and as it was given it pointed beyond itself to something more to come. In fact, this is the precise point that the author makes by his use of "at many times and in many ways," i.e., not only was the Old Testament revelation repetitive, it was also incomplete. In the progress of revelation, more and more of God's plan was disclosed to us, pointing forward to and culminating in the coming of Christ. But now, with the coming of the Son, the last days have dawned; the last days that the Old Testament revelation anticipated have now come to fulfillment literally "in Son" (*en huiō*; v. 2), underscoring that in Christ the final, definitive, complete revela-

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[20] "Progressive" is used in the sense of the unfolding plan of God, not in the sense that an earlier era was inferior and the later era has progressed or has reached a superior stage.

tion has now come. In this way, the author of Hebrews, along with the entire New Testament, places the Son in a qualitatively different category than the prophets who preceded him. The effect of this is not to downplay the authority of the Old Testament prophetic revelation; rather, the point is that the previous revelation was incomplete and, by its very nature, was intended by God to point beyond itself to God's full self-disclosure in his Son. This is why the Son is more than a mere prophet (though he is the fulfillment of the prophetic institution): he is the one about whom the prophets spoke; he is the one who fulfills the previous incomplete Word. Even more: in the Son, all of God's revelation and redemptive purposes culminate.

All of this is to say that Scripture as a word-act revelation is also a *progressive* revelation. Hermeneutically speaking, this has important implications for how we read and apply Scripture and thus draw conclusions from Scripture and warrant our theological proposals. Our reading of Scripture must trace out how Scripture unfolds God's plan of redemption, which is the task of "biblical theology." Biblical theology attempts to give a theological reading of Scripture, grounded in exegesis, that grasps "the whole counsel of God" in terms of its redemptive-historical progression. Scripture consists of many literary forms which all must be interpreted carefully, but underneath all of these literary forms is a storyline, beginning in creation and moving to the new creation, which unfolds God's redemptive plan. And it is crucial that we read Scripture in such a way that we do justice to the Bible's own presentation and within its own categories, which is precisely why the biblical covenants are so important.

Michael Horton stresses these exact points as he thinks through theological method.[21] Given what Scripture is, Horton contends that the most "biblical" theological method is one that is "redemptive-historical-eschatological." By these terms he is saying what we have just described. Given the authority of Scripture and how it has come to us, we are to interpret Scripture according to its own intrasystematic categories, i.e., on its own terms, which Horton contends are captured by the terms "eschatological" and "redemptive-historical."

By "eschatological" Horton means more than a mere doctrinal topic. Rather, it is a lens by which we read Scripture and do our theology. Scripture itself comes to us as a redemptive revelation, rooted in history, unfolding God's eternal plan worked out in time, and as such the very "form" and

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[21] See Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 1–19, 147–276.

"shape" of Scripture is eschatological. Scripture is more than a storehouse of facts or propositions; Scripture unfolds for us a *plot*, a divine interpretation of the drama of redemption, that is eschatological at heart and Christological in focus, and as such, our reading of Scripture and our drawing of theological conclusions must reflect this. By "redemptive-historical," Horton is referring to Scripture's own presentation of itself as "the organic unfolding of the divine plan in its execution through word (announcement), act (accomplishment), and word (interpretation)."[22] Given that redemption is progressive and unfolding, so is revelation, as it is God's own interpretation of his action and human response in actual historical contexts.

Given this understanding, for Horton there are a number of important implications for our interpretation of Scripture and for the doing of theology. We will focus on one of them. Our reading of Scripture and our doing of theology must attend to the historical unfolding of redemptive history that is *organically* related and ultimately centered on Jesus Christ. The very "form" and "shape" of Scripture reminds us that God did not disclose himself in one exhaustive act but in an organic, progressive manner, and in fact, it is this organic quality of revelation that serves to explain the diversity of Scripture. Theology, as a result, must be very careful not to proof-text without considering the redemptive-historical structure and progression in Scripture and reading Scripture as a canonical text.[23]

"Putting Together" the Canon: The Three Horizons of Biblical Interpretation

What does this discussion have to do with biblical covenants? The simple answer is, *everything*. As we think through the biblical covenants, since God has not disclosed himself in one exhaustive act but progressively, we must carefully think through every covenant first in its own immediate context, then ask what has preceded that covenant, and then relate that particular covenant to that which comes after it and how it is fulfilled in Christ's new covenant. It is only when we do this that we begin to understand how each covenant relates to previous and later covenants, and how *all* the biblical covenants relate to Christ. We must also be careful as we trace out the historical unfolding of God's plan as demarcated by the biblical covenants and their covenant heads—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and then our

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[22] Ibid., 5.
[23] Ibid., 1–19, 147–276.

Lord—noting how the entire plan is *organically* related while at the same time preserving its diversity, thus maintaining a proper balance between the continuity and discontinuity of God's plan as it culminates in Jesus.

In this regard, the work of Richard Lints is helpful. Lints, in laying out an evangelical theological method, stresses the same points we have stressed, especially in regard to how we must interpret any text of Scripture. He rightly contends that biblical theology is foundational to the doing of systematic theology. He also proposes, given what Scripture is, that we interpret biblical texts according to three horizons: textual, epochal, and canonical.[24] By emphasizing these three horizons, Lints helps us think about how to interpret Scripture properly—in light of what Scripture is—while also enabling us to avoid "proof-texting." He also reminds us that, in biblical interpretation and theological formulation, "context" is king and, in fact, three contexts are crucial in "putting together" the entire Bible, including the biblical covenants. Let us briefly discuss each of these "contexts" for a proper biblical-theological interpretation of Scripture.

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Our interpretation of Scripture begins with a specific text, what Lints calls the *textual horizon* or the immediate context. In terms of this context, biblical hermeneutics has sought to interpret texts according to the grammatical-historical method, seeking to discern God's intent through the human author's intent by putting the text in its historical setting, understanding the rules of language the author is using, analyzing the syntax, textual variants, word meanings, figures of speech, and the literary structure, including the genre of the text. By paying careful attention to the text, a reader discovers what authors are seeking to communicate. Standard books in hermeneutics work through these areas, and we assume all of this in our exegesis of individual passages of Scripture. Yet it is important to note that our interpretation of texts does not terminate here, which leads to the second horizon of biblical interpretation.

The *epochal horizon* is the second context by which we interpret texts. Here we seek to read texts in light of where they are located in God's unfolding plan. Since Scripture is a progressive revelation, texts do not come to us in a vacuum; rather, they are embedded in a larger context of what has come *before* them. As God communicates through biblical authors, these same

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[24] See Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 259–311.

authors write in light of what has preceded them. When Lints labels this context the "epochal horizon," he does not intend to convey, nor do we, that the "epochs" embody different plans of God; rather, they simply remind us that God's revelation of redemption occurs over time. There is a unity within this development, given that it is God's plan, but this fundamental unity should not lead us to minimize the differences among epochs, hence the balance between continuity *and* discontinuity in Scripture.

Furthermore, locating texts in redemptive-history also helps illuminate *intertextual* links between earlier and later revelation. As later authors refer to earlier texts, they build upon what is given, but not only in terms of greater understanding of where God's plan is going: they also begin to identify God-given patterns between earlier and later events, persons, and institutions within the unfolding of God's plan—what is rightly labeled "typology." It is by this means, but not limited to it, that God's plan moves forward and ultimately reaches its *telos* in Christ. As later authors draw out these God-given patterns (types), they do not arbitrarily make connections; rather, they develop these patterns in ways that God intends and in ways that do not contravene earlier texts. It is only by reading texts first in their immediate context and then in relation to where these texts are in God's unfolding plan that we begin to grasp God's overall plan and purposes. Individual texts do not become fragmented, and the road from "text" to "reader" is not merely a matter of one's intuition, preference, or prejudice.

Is it necessary to be precise as to what the epochal differences are in Scripture? Probably not; people may disagree on these differences. The important point is to always read texts in light of what has preceded them in reference to God's redemptive actions and plan. Most agree that the most significant epochal division is between the Old Testament era and the fulfillment of God's plan in the coming of Christ. But there are also other divisions that are crucial, and Scripture does divide up redemptive-history in a number of ways. For example, in Romans 5:12–21 Paul divides all of human history under two heads: Adam and Christ. Under these two heads, Paul further subdivides redemptive-history by the following epochs: Adam (vv. 12–13), from Adam to Moses (vv. 14–17), and from Moses and the giving of the law-covenant to Christ (vv. 18–21). Or, in Acts 7:1–53, Stephen identifies three distinct periods: the age of the patriarchs (vv. 2–16), the Mosaic age, which included the time of the exodus and conquest of the Promised Land (vv. 17–45a), and the age of the monarchy (vv. 45b-53). Or, in the geneal-

ogy in Matthew 1, Matthew divides up redemptive-history into three distinct periods: Abraham to David (vv. 2–6a); Solomon to the exile (vv. 6b-11); and the exile to Christ (vv. 12–17).

It is Matthew's structuring of redemptive-history that Graeme Goldsworthy follows. However, in addition to the three epochs from Matthew, Goldsworthy adds a prior epoch that includes creation (Genesis 1–2), the impact of the historic fall (Genesis 3), and primeval history (Genesis 4–11), thus speaking of the era of Genesis 1–11, prior to Abraham. Concerning this first epoch—creation, fall, primeval history—Goldsworthy argues that it provides the main theological presuppositions to all of redemptive-history, which are then worked out as God's plan unfolds and ultimately culminates in Christ.[25]

For our purposes, what is most significant to note is that most of these epochal divisions follow the unfolding of the biblical covenants, which we contend is *the Bible's own way of making these epochal divisions*. For many like Goldsworthy, the unfolding of the "kingdom" is the backbone to the storyline of Scripture, yet if we follow the Bible's own "intrasystematic" categories, it is "kingdom through covenant" that captures the Bible's own *internal* structure, and thus better grasps the various epochal divisions in God's plan of redemption.

At this point it is important to ask whether these epochal differences, tied to *before* and *after* categories in Scripture, are really that hermeneutically significant? Or, better, is this how Scripture, on its own terms, "puts itself together"? Does thinking through where various texts are located in God's plan impact the conclusions we draw from Scripture, especially in how we understand the biblical covenants? The answer is *yes*. For example, let us think about Paul's argument in Romans 4. In Romans 4, Paul argues that Abraham serves as the paradigm, for Jews *and* Gentiles, of one who was justified by grace through faith apart from works. Warrant for this assertion is found in Genesis 15:6, where God declares Abraham righteous on the basis of his believing the promises of God. But in order to demonstrate that God's declaration of justification is for both the Jew and the Gentile, Paul then argues that in the life of Abraham this declaration took place *before* he was circumcised (which took place in Genesis 17, which comes *after* Genesis 15), thus demonstrating that Abraham's justification was *not* tied to circumcision but was solely on the basis of his faith in the promises of God. It is for this reason that Abraham can serve as the paradigm of faith for

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[25] See Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 80–234.

Jews *and* Gentiles. This is not to say that circumcision was not significant in the Old Testament; it certainly was. But it is to affirm that one cannot draw the conclusion, which the Judaizers sadly did, that Gentiles had first to be circumcised in order to enter into covenant relationship with Yahweh. In the life of Abraham, not only was this *not* the case, but now that Christ has come, that covenant sign is no longer in force (1 Cor. 7:19), due to the fact that, in the plotline of Scripture, God was teaching us that salvation was always by grace through faith. Paul's argument works, however, only if circumcision is instituted *after* Genesis 15, thus illustrating the point that texts must carefully be interpreted in terms of what comes *before* and *after* them, in order to draw correct "biblical" conclusions.

Galatians 3 is another example of this point and is a very significant text in thinking through covenantal relationships. In Galatians 3, Paul is countering the Judaizers who, like many conservative Jews, "saw in the law given at Sinai not only a body of instruction but a hermeneutical key to the rest of Scripture."[26] In this way these individuals viewed the old covenant as an end in itself and not as a means to a larger end found in Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant. That is why, in order for a Gentile to become a Christian, these Judaizers argued that Gentiles had to come under the Mosaic law-covenant. Conversely, Paul's argument is that, now that Christ has come, Christians are not bound by the Mosaic law-covenant; rather, we come to Christ by faith apart from the law (vv. 1–6). How does Paul warrant his point? He first appeals to Genesis 15 to demonstrate that Abraham was justified by grace through faith (vv. 6–9) and then argues that God's declaration of justification in Abraham's life took place long *before* the giving of the Mosaic law (vv. 15–29). In light of this, Paul wrestles with the obvious question of why the law was given, but his conclusion is the same: since Abraham was declared just *before* the old covenant was given, the old covenant cannot set aside the previous covenant.

Hermeneutically and theologically speaking, then, in order to grasp how God's plan fits together, and, for our purposes, how the biblical covenants fit together, one must locate each covenant in its proper place in redemptive-history and discern how it relates to what preceded it and what follows it. Unless we read Scripture this way, we will misread it and fail to understand how the parts of God's plan fit with the whole.[27] In fact, this was one of the

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[26] Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 98.
[27] Other examples could be multiplied, specifically from the book of Hebrews. In chapters 7–8, the author makes the same argument that Paul makes in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, namely that one must read texts in terms of their

key failures of a Jewish reading of Scripture. Old Testament Jews, along with the Judaizers, did not interpret the law-covenant in relation to its place in redemptive-history. If they had done so, they would have drawn the same conclusion that the New Testament draws: in God's overall plan, the Mosaic law-covenant is temporary, leading us to what that old covenant was ultimately pointing forward to, namely, Christ and the new covenant. Yet, we must not end our reading of Scripture here: texts must also be read in terms of what comes *after* them, namely, the canonical horizon.

The third and final context that must be considered in our interpretation of any biblical text is, therefore, the *canonical horizon*. Given the fact that Scripture is *God's* Word and is a *unified* revelation, texts must be understood in relation to the entire Canon. As Kevin Vanhoozer notes, it is only when Scripture is read canonically that we are interpreting it in a truly "biblical" manner—"according to its truest, fullest, *divine* intention."[28] In fact, to read the Bible canonically corresponds to what the Bible actually *is*. That is why, "To read the Bible as unified Scripture is not just one interpretative interest among others, but the interpretative strategy that best corresponds to the nature of the text itself, given its divine inspiration."[29] As texts are placed along the storyline of Scripture and ultimately interpreted in light of the culmination of God's plan in Christ, we begin to read Scripture the way God intended and thus "biblically."

What, then, does it mean to be "biblical?" If we take seriously Scripture's claim for itself and what Scripture actually is, a three-horizon reading of the Canon is the place to start—a *theological* reading, which may be summarized as a grammatical/literary-historical-canonical method of interpretation. In this way, we are letting Scripture interpret Scripture; we are seeking to unfold how the Bible itself is given to us, in its own intrasystematic categories and storyline, so in the end, we read, apply, and draw theological conclusions from Scripture "biblically."

At this point it is legitimate to ask, in what ways does Scripture itself link the Canon together in terms of its own intrasystematic categories? Much could be said here, but Lints is on track when he notes that, in the big

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placement in the Bible's storyline. For example, in Hebrews 7, the author concludes that the Old Testament did not view the Levitical priesthood as an end in itself but something that was temporary, given God's announcement of another priest, in a different order, in Psalm 110, *which came after the establishment of the Levitical priesthood* (Heb. 7:11, 28). Also in Hebrews 8, building on his argument in chapter 7, the author concludes that since the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 comes *after* the establishment of the old covenant, this is proof that in God's plan the old covenant was temporary and anticipatory of something greater.

[28] Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 61 (emphasis his).

[29] Ibid.

scheme of things, "essential to the canonical horizon of biblical interpretation is the continuity between the promises of God and his fulfillment of those promises."[30] That is why one of the important ways that God has glued the diverse epochs of redemptive-history together is the *promise-fulfillment* motif. But note: it is almost impossible to think of God's promises apart from unpacking the biblical covenants, since the triune God who makes promises to his creatures, in terms of both creation and redemption, does so by entering into covenant relations with them. In truth, unpacking the "promise-fulfillment" motif is another way of unfolding the biblical covenants across time, and this is why the covenants serve as the backbone to the Bible's metanarrative. By unfolding the covenants, the biblical authors are able to grasp both the continuity of God's plan (tied to his promises) and its discontinuity (how fulfillment in Christ brings with it God-intended changes). Thus, as we trace out the storyline of Scripture, as we move from promise to fulfillment and unfold the biblical covenants across time, we are better able to see how Scripture hangs together and reaches its consummation in Christ. We begin to appreciate even more that the diverse stories of Scripture are not randomly thrown together but are part of a larger tapestry that finds its terminus in Christ.

In addition, Lints suggests that closely associated with the "promise-fulfillment" theme is biblical typology. In fact, one of the crucial means by which God's plan unfolds—indeed, how the "promise-fulfillment" motif is developed—is the use of God-given "typology." Typology, no doubt, is a hotly disputed topic in biblical and theological studies, and it means different things to different people. In this work, we will not fully enter that debate. Instead, we will outline how we understand typology and how it relates to our proposal of "kingdom through covenant."

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF TYPOLOGY

It is first crucial to distinguish typology from "allegory." The major difference is that typology is grounded in *history*, the *text*, and *intertextual* development, where various "persons, events, and institutions" are intended by God to correspond to each other, while allegory assumes none of these things. In addition, since allegories are not grounded in authorial intent, which is (inter)textually warranted, "allegorical interpretation" depends on some kind of extratextual grid to warrant its explanation. As Vanhoozer

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[30] Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 303.

notes, allegorical interpretation is represented by the interpretive strategy for declaring "*This* (word) means *that* (concept),"[31] with *that* being determined by an extratextual framework. This is not what typology is and how typology functions in Scripture. In fact, when one investigates the six explicit New Testament typological texts (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; Heb. 8:5; 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:21), a consistent picture emerges that distinguishes it from allegory. What exactly is that pattern? Let us describe it by first defining typology and then explaining its key features.[32]

We will employ Richard Davidson's definition of typology. Typology is the study of the Old Testament salvation-historical realities or "types" (persons, events, institutions) which God has specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated and consummated) in New Testament salvation history.[33] There are two explanatory points to note from this definition.

First, typology is symbolism rooted in *historical* and *textual* realities. As such, it involves an *organic* relation between "persons, events, and institutions" in one epoch and their counterparts in later epochs. The early "person, event, and institution" is called the "type," while the later one is the "antitype." As Lints reminds us, "The typological relation is a central means by which particular epochal and textual horizons are linked to later horizons in redemptive revelation. It links the present to the future, and it retroactively links the present with the past. It is founded on the organic connection of God's promises with his fulfillment of those promises."[34]

Second, typology is *prophetic* and *predictive* and thus divinely given and intended. In other words, God intended for the "type" to point beyond itself to its fulfillment or "antitype" in a later epoch of redemptive-history. Typology ought to be viewed as a subset of predictive prophecy, not in the sense of verbal predictions but in the sense of predictions built on models/patterns that God himself has established, that become known gradually as later texts reinforce those patterns, with the goal of anticipating what comes later in Christ. In this way, typology is a more "indirect" kind of prophecy which corresponds well with the Pauline emphasis on "mystery" (see, e.g.,

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[31] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 119.

[32] Our discussion of typology is indebted to Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TUPOS Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981).

[33] This definition is compiled from the summary discussion in Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, 397–408.

[34] Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 304.

Eph. 1:9–10; 3:1–10). In a number of places, Paul states that the gospel was hidden in the past, but now, in light of the coming of Christ, is made known and disclosed publicly for all to see. Simultaneously, then, Scripture says that the gospel was *promised* beforehand and was *clearly* revealed through the prophets (e.g., Rom. 3:21), while it was *hidden* in ages past and *not* fully known until the coming of Christ (e.g., Rom. 16:25–27). A crucial way to reconcile this tension is through typology. Given the indirect nature of it, not only does typology require careful discernment; it also requires the passing of time in order to determine how the "type" is fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

It is also important to note that typology depends on a high view of divine providence and knowledge. How so? While the type has significance for its own time, its greater significance is directed toward the future; it testifies to something greater than itself that is still to come. But the future antitype *will* surely come, not only because God completely knows that it will, according to his eternal plan, but also because God sovereignly *guarantees* that the prophetic fulfillment of the original type will occur in Christ. The relationship between type and antitype is not arbitrary—a construction by the reader; it is an organic relationship ordained by God so that specific types do in fact point beyond themselves to their fulfillment in Christ. Apart from this high view of God, our view of typology makes no sense. This is not to say that everyone associated with the Old Testament type understood and knew the pattern to be pointing forward. Rather, it is to say that when the type is *discovered* to be a type (at some point along the trajectory of its repeated pattern), it is then viewed as such and as God-intended.

Given this basic description of typology, how, then, does it work in Scripture? Typology exhibits a twofold character. First, typology involves a *repetition* of the "promise-fulfillment" pattern of redemptive-history so that various types find their fulfillment in later persons, events, or institutions, but ultimately *all types first find their fulfillment in Christ before they have application to us*. So, for example, Scripture presents Adam as a type of Christ (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–49). As redemptive-history unfolds, other "Adams" (the idea of repetition) show up on the stage of human history and take on the role of the first Adam (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Israel, David), but these "other Adams" are not the ultimate fulfillment. Instead, it is only in Christ that we have the "last Adam"—the one whom all these other persons point to and anticipate. In this way, God intends the first Adam

to point beyond himself to Christ, and we come to know God's intention as the Adamic pattern *intertextually develops* and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. This is why types are viewed as both predictive and hidden. They are *predictive* since God intends for them to anticipate Christ in a variety of ways. They are *hidden* not only due to their indirectness but also because we come to know them as types only as God's redemptive plan unfolds and later texts pick up the recurring pattern.

Or, for example, think of the nation of Israel. Israel not only is presented in Scripture as "another Adam" who, as the son (Ex. 4:22–23), takes on Adam's role in the world; Israel also anticipates the coming of the true Son, the true Israel, the true servant, the true vine, namely, Christ (see, e.g., Isa. 5:1–7; Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15; John 15:1–17). Furthermore, since types find their fulfillment first in Christ and not in us, we as God's people participate in the typological pattern only by virtue of our relationship to Christ. Thus, in the case of Israel, Christ is first its fulfillment and we, as the church, are viewed as the "Israel of God" only because of our relation to Christ. We, as the church, are not the antitypical fulfillment of Israel in the first sense; Christ alone fills that role. Yet in union with Christ, we are the beneficiaries of his work. In relationship to Christ, the true Son/Israel, we become adopted sons (Gal. 3:26–4:7), the "Israel of God" (6:16), Abraham's spiritual offspring (3:29), restored to what God created us to be (Eph. 4:20–24). It is in this way that the new covenant promise given to the "house of Israel/Judah" (Jer. 31:31) is applied to the church. Christ, as the antitypical fulfillment of Israel, takes on the role of Israel, and by our faith union in him, his work becomes ours as his new covenant people.

A second characteristic of typology is its *a fortiori* (lesser to greater) quality, or the fact that it exhibits *escalation* as the type is fulfilled in the antitype. For example, as one moves from Adam or David to the prophets, priests, and kings, and through the covenants to the last Adam, the true Davidic King, the great High Priest, and so on, the antitype is *always* greater than the previous types. Yet it is important to note that escalation across time does not occur incrementally from the original type to each "little" installment and then to Christ, as if there were a straight line of increase. Rather, escalation occurs fully only with the coming of Christ. The previous typological patterns point forward to the greater one to come (Rom. 5:14), but the *greater* aspect is realized only in Christ. So, for example, Adam serves as a type of Christ, and "little Adams" arise across time, yet all of these "other

Adams" (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Israel, David) fail in their obedience and faith; there is *not* an increase in them. Yet, all of them anticipate the coming of a greater Adam—the last Adam—who will *not* fail in his obedience. Or, think of David and his sons. Rooted in the Davidic covenant, they serve as types of Christ. As one moves from David to Solomon there is a minimal escalation, but it does not last long. During his life, Solomon horribly fails. In fact, all of the Davidic kings fail, including David, and as such they are not able to usher in God's saving rule and reign (kingdom) and fulfill their God-appointed purpose. It is only in the coming of David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that we have escalation as he brings the Davidic pattern to its antitypical fulfillment.

This observation is important for a number of reasons. Not only does the *a fortiori* quality of typology serve as the crucial means by which Scripture unpacks the unique identity of Christ; it is also how Scripture grounds the uniqueness of the new covenant era. When fulfillment arrives, legitimate *discontinuity* between the old and new in God's unified plan is established. When the antitype arrives in history, or better, when it is inaugurated, not only are the previous types brought to their *telos* but the entire era introduced entails massive changes. This is why the era of fulfillment inaugurated by Christ (the "already"), even though it still awaits the consummation (the "not yet"), has introduced greater realities—realities that are directly linked to the inauguration of the new covenant era and the dawning of the new creation.[35]

One last point is crucial to note before this section is concluded. In Scripture, typology and covenants are intimately related. Try to think of any biblical types and patterns that are *not* tied to the biblical covenants! In fact, to reflect upon typological patterns and their development is simultaneously to walk through the biblical covenants. For example, Adam and the "other Adams" who follow him are all associated with the covenants of creation, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David. In all these covenant heads, the role of Adam is continued in the world, and each one of them points forward to the coming of the last Adam, who through his obedience accomplishes our redemption.[36] Or, think of the promise to Abraham regarding his "seed." As the seed promise unfolds, it does so in Isaac, later in the nation of Israel, in the Davidic king, and ultimately in Christ, and then by extension to the

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[35] For a discussion of inaugurated eschatology see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 41–116.

[36] See texts such as Genesis 1–3; 5:1–2; 9:1–17; 12:1–3; Exodus 4:22–23; 2 Samuel 7:5–16; Psalm 8; Romans 5:12–21; Hebrews 2:5–18.

church as Abraham's spiritual offspring.[37] Or, think of how Moses, who is foundational for the entire institution of prophets and who inaugurates the entire priestly role under the old covenant, is developed in terms of an entire institution of prophets and priests that ultimately culminates in Christ.[38] Many more examples could be given in relation to David and his sons, the entire tabernacle-temple structure, the event of the exodus (which anticipates a greater exodus to come), and so on. *All* of these types are organically related to the covenants. One cannot properly think of them apart from wrestling with how the covenants relate to each other and how the covenants as a whole point forward to the coming of Christ and the new covenant age. In this way, all of biblical history is prophetic, not merely in terms of verbal predictions but in types/patterns associated with the covenants, which anticipate and predict the dawning of the end of the ages in the coming of Christ. This is why the entire New Testament is Christological in focus, since Jesus is the one whom the covenants and prophets anticipate (e.g., Matt. 5:17–18; 11:11–15; Rom. 3:21, 31). This is another reason why "putting together" the biblical covenants is the means by which we grasp the "parts" of God's plan in light of the "whole" and thus understand Scripture.

With these points in place, let us now turn to the exposition of the biblical covenants. In doing so, we will follow the hermeneutical method as outlined above. Each biblical covenant will first be placed in its own immediate context, then understood in terms of what comes *before* it, and then finally in terms of what comes *after* it, in God's plan. Ultimately we will seek to understand how *all* of the biblical covenants find their *telos*, terminus, and fulfillment in Christ, as we see the unfolding of God's glorious plan under the rubric of "kingdom through covenant."

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[37] See texts such as Genesis 12:1–3; 17:1–22; Exodus 1:1–7; 2 Samuel 7:5–16; Galatians 3:16, 29. On the development of this theme, see T. D. Alexander, "Seed," in *NDBT*, 769–773.
[38] See Exodus 19–20, 24, 32–34; Leviticus 8–9; Deuteronomy 18:14–22; 34:10–12; John 1:14–18; Hebrews 1:1–3; 3:1–6.

king·dom (kĭng′dəm):
God's saving rule and reign

cov·e·nant (kŭv′ə-nənt):
A relationship between parties characterized by faithfulness and loyalty in love

In this abridgement of the groundbreaking book *Kingdom through Covenant*, a biblical scholar and a theologian offer readers an accessible overview of the overarching structure of the Bible. Tracing the significance of the concept of "covenant" through both the Old and New Testaments, this book charts a middle way between covenant theology and dispensationalism— exploring the covenantal framework undergirding the history of redemption.

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