



Introduction

The Covenant of Works is one of the foundational covenants found in the bible. This covenant is also known as the Covenant of Creation, Covenant of Nature, Covenant of Law, or the Adamic Covenant. Genesis 2:15-17

Command or Covenant

The doctrine of the Covenant of Works was formally developed in the 16th century.

Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. (WCF 7:2)

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it. (WCF 19:1)

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 20 – What was the providence of God toward man in the estate in which He was created?

Answer – Entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death. (WLC 20)

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Question 12 – What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?

Answer – When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death. (WSC 12)

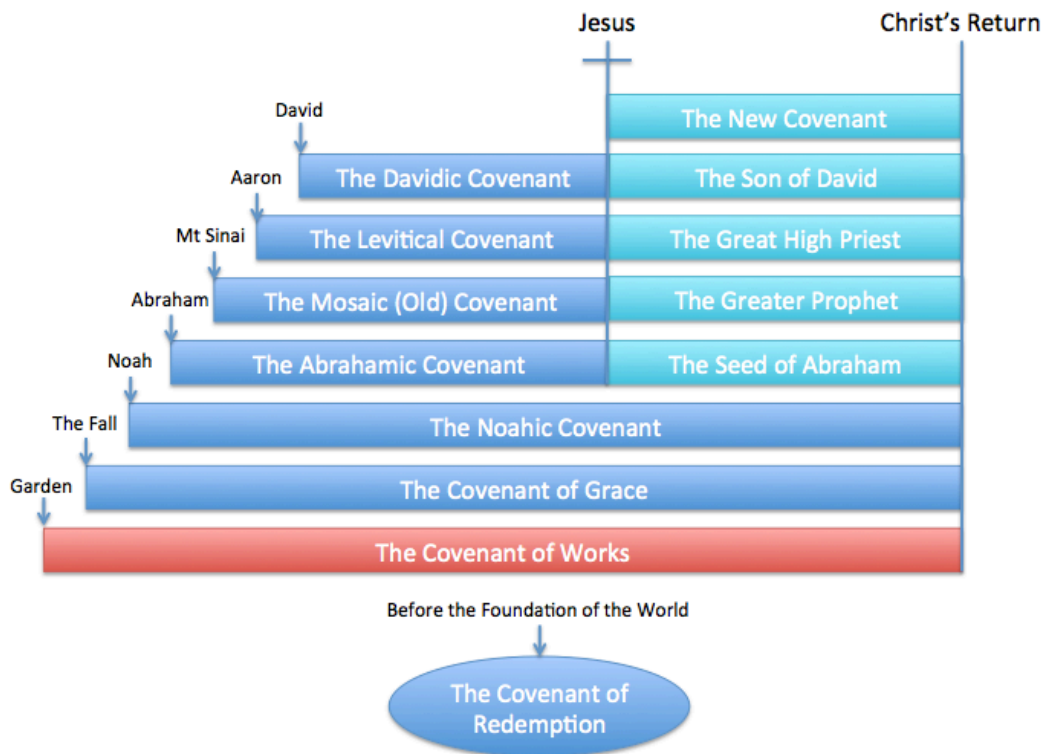
1689 London Baptist Confession

The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance; in this promise the gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners. (LBC 20)

Covenant Parties: God, Adam, and Adam's Descendants

Romans 5:12-14, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

- Adam was our representative
- We are indirectly included in the covenant God made with Adam
- The Covenant of Works applies until Jesus returns



Covenant Penalty: Death

Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:18-19

Covenant Obligation

Adam was obligated to obey God because God created him but, more importantly, because Adam was in covenant relationship with God.

Testimony of Scripture

Isaiah 25:4-6, Hosea 6:7.

Covenant Reward

- *Posse peccare et non posse peccare* (able to sin and able not to sin)
- *Non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin)
- *Non posse peccare* (not able to sin)

Problems

1. No promise of reward was given to Adam, only a promise of punishment. The focus is on what Adam stood to lose, not on what he stood to gain.¹
2. No probation period is mentioned anywhere in Scripture.
3. If we assume a probation period we have no way to know how long the probation period would have lasted.

¹ Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology* (Vestavia Hill, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011), 351.



4. The Scripture does not present Adam's obedience as gaining him or his posterity anything new.
5. Adam was never intended to bring life to mankind.

Other Considerations

1. The promise of punishment implies benefit for obedience.
2. Considering typology, the fact that Adam was a type of Christ, the benefit we receive from Christ's obedience is not just a return to paradise with the added benefit of being granted the state of *non posse peccare* (not able to sin).

Reasons for Covenant Summary

1. There are parties to the covenant, God, Adam, and his descendants.
2. The prohibition to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has the elements of a covenant, such as promise, condition, and penalty.
3. Hosea 6:7 affirms the Covenant of Works.
4. The promise of death implies a promise of eternal life and heavenly reward.
5. The parallel between Adam and Christ supports the Covenant of Works. What Christ actually gained for his people is what Adam could have gained.

Extent of the Covenant

Genesis 1:28-29, Genesis 3:17-19, Romans 8:18-22, Jeremiah 33:19-21, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, Revelation 21:1-4

Conclusion

- Adam did not keep up his end of the bargain so the penalty of the covenant, death, was poured out on man and all of creation. Everything that lives also dies. If it is not alive it erodes, dulls, or wears out. Nothing lasts.
- The Covenant of Works reveals God's justice. God said the price for everlasting life is perfect obedience to his law. The fall did not change that. Because of God's justice heaven must be earned. God can't just overlook sin and let people in.
- The Covenant of Works with Adam as our representative teaches us about Christ as our representative. Just as what Adam earned came to his people, so what Christ earned comes to his people. Christ earns heaven for his people and gives it to them through faith. Adam imputes sin and Christ imputes righteousness (Romans 5:18-19).²

<http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2012/02/07/reasons-to-believe-in-a-historical-adam/>

² Michael G. Brown and Zach Keele, Sacred Bond (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2012), 55-56.