

CAN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN/CREATION BEFORE THE FALL BE CHARACTERIZED AS A COVENANT?

by Pieter de Vries

IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, and especially in Reformed systematic theology, the relationship before the fall between God and mankind, or God and Adam as the representative of mankind, has been characterized as a covenant. Several names have been given to this covenant: the covenant of life, the covenant of creation, but by far the most common name is the covenant of works. However, in Genesis 1–2, or even more broadly in Genesis 1–3, the expression “covenant” (בְּרִית) does not occur. Using the expression “covenant” of the relationship between God and mankind, or more broadly between God and creation, before the fall is an example of what I would call constructive theology.

In a certain sense all theology is constructive theology. Nevertheless the term can be used with a specific intention. By constructive theology, I mean that to formulate the message of a biblical literary unit extrabiblical terms and phrase are used or an equivalent or equivalents of Hebrew or Greek words are used which are found elsewhere in the Bible but not in the unit that is treated.

Is there any exegetical and biblical theological warrant for the construct of designating the original relationship between God and man, and between God and creation, as a covenant? This article uses relevant recent literature as a framework to answer this question. The Hebrew word בְּרִית is typically translated as “covenant.” The translation “treaty” is also used. In the Old Testament, the word בְּרִית functions in different kinds of relationships: religious, political, social, tribal, familial and so on.¹ Essential to a בְּרִית is that it involves relationship. At the same time, בְּרִית has also to do with duty or obligation.² In most cases the relationship and duties can be understood in terms of kinship. An oath, whether expressly mentioned or not, is always at the heart of a בְּרִית.³ So, a בְּרִית can be defined as a consignment sealed by an oath by which

1. Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, Analecta Biblica 88 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 15.

2. Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 212; Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), 28, 42.

3. G.P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 182–184; Paul R.

the duties and/or privileges are extended to another individual or group.⁴ A sacrifice and a sacrificial meal can appertain to a בְּרִית. Sometimes, a token is mentioned which indicates and commemorates the בְּרִית that has been established.

The kinship that is established by a בְּרִית can have the characteristic of a relationship between brothers or between a father and a son.⁵ In the former case, the בְּרִית can be designated as a parity covenant and in the latter case as a vassalage covenant or vassalage treaty where the obligations of the בְּרִית are imposed on the inferior party. When the obligations rest predominantly on the superior party, the בְּרִית has the character of a royal grant covenant. However, it must be added that not a too strict boundary can be drawn between these two types.⁶

In this article, five reasons are presented for giving a positive and affirmative answer to the question of whether the relationship between God and man, or between God and creation, before the fall of man can be called a covenant. The first is the parallel between the account of creation and paradise in Genesis 1-2 and the account of the construction of the Tabernacle or sanctuary in Exodus 25–31.⁷ Certainly the service of the sanctuary in Israel must be understood within the context of the covenant of God with Israel ratified at Sinai. The second reason is the parallels between the purposes of God in creation and the covenants with Noah, Abraham and the people of Israel.

The third is the broad parallelism between God as Creator and man as creature made in his image and the suzerain-vassalage treaty or covenant which within the Old Testament can be found especially in Deuteronomy. The fourth reason is that Jer. 33:20, 25 speak about the covenant of the day and of the night that God made with the creation. The most likely interpretation is to relate this expression to the original creation.

Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's unfolding purpose*, NSBT 23 (Nottingham/Downers Grove: Apollos/InterVarsityPress, 2007), 39-43; Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 28, 50. Kalluveetil (*Declaration and Covenant*, 66, 91) rightly points to the fact that relationships of vassalage and friendship can be traced in the Old Testament where the word בְּרִית is not used. For example: Gen. 50:18; 1 Sam. 22:12; 1 Kgs. 20:32–33; 2 Kgs. 16:7.

4. F.M. Cross, "Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel," in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 8; J.A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood? Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image in Exodus 19:6*, JSOTSup 35 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 177; Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 59.

5. Marriage is designated a בְּרִית (cf. Mal. 2:14). Husband and wife are brought into an intimate relationship and have both duties and privileges towards each other. Legally the wife becomes a sort of sister and the husband a brother (cf. Song of Songs 8:1).

6. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 29, 59. Hahn points to the fact that covenantal duties are formulated in terms of the relationship between a father and his minor child. The fact that a בְּרִית between men can also have the characteristics of a relationship between brothers is somewhat neglected by Hahn. The reason for this is that he concentrates on the covenants between God and man.

7. Jewish medieval exegetes were the first to notice a correspondence between the creation accounts and the directions for the construction of the Tabernacle and the account of its construction.

After a treatment of Jer. 33:20, 25, this article investigates whether the expression $\text{הַקִּיּוֹם בְּרִית}$ can be seen as an indication that a previously-initiated covenant is established, so that $\text{הַקִּיּוֹם בְּרִית}$ must be understood as the *confirmation* of a covenant. In the account of the covenant with Noah, the expression $\text{הַקִּיּוֹם בְּרִית}$ is found (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 17). If it is true that $\text{הַקִּיּוֹם בְּרִית}$ always has to do with a covenant establishing and regulating that relationship already initiated previously, then it can be argued as a fifth reason that God's covenant with Noah is a renewal of his original covenant with creation.

In the rest of the article, attention will be paid to each of these arguments in greater detail. The first two are the most important arguments: they can be grounded not only topically but also linguistically. The latter cannot be said of the subsequent, third, argument. The first three arguments have not only to do with the relation between God and creation but also between God and men. That is not the case with the last two arguments. They have only to do with God's relation to his creation. The article finishes with a short conclusion.⁸

8. Over the course of church history, Hos. 6:7a ($\text{וַיִּבְרְכוּ בְרִית כְּאֲדָם וְהִמָּה}$) has also been used as an argument. However, this text can be understood in more than one way. The Vulgata translates: *ipsi autem sicut Adam transgressi sunt pactum*, but the LXX has: $\alphaὐτοὶ δὲ εἰσὶν ὡς ἄνθρωπος παραβαίνων διαθήκην$. It has also been argued that Adam, just like Gilead in Hos. 6:8, is a city. Quite often when this view is defended, it asserted that we must read not מְאָדָּם but מְאָדָּא . This change is less attractive, because we do not find in מְאָדָּא in any Hebrew manuscript nor in its equivalent in any of the old translations. Now, to hold this view the change of consonants is not actually necessary. One can also read מְאָדָּם and defend it. Given Hosea's propensity for similes and comparisons employing כְּ , the use of כְּ to compare an action at a place is not unexpected. We could paraphrase: "And they transgressed the covenant as they transgressed it in Adam."

In this view, the prophet would be alluding to a location where Israel transgressed the covenant. In defense of this view, attention has been drawn to the Hebrew particle מִשָּׁ in Hos. 6:7b. It is true that according to Josh. 3:16 a city on the east bank of the River Jordan is called מִדְּבָר . However the place מִדְּבָר is never mentioned in the biblical history as a place where Israel was guilty of transgression. Because of the many allusions to old traditions in Hosea, a good case can be made for understanding Adam as the first man. The Hebrew particle מִשָּׁ is not a real problem for those holding this view. Hosea is an author with a very fluid manner of thought and expression. We can understand מִשָּׁ as an implicit expression to designate a location. If we understand מִדְּבָר as the first man, we have to understand it as an allusion to paradise. Cf. C. van Gelderen and W.H. Gispen, *Het boek Hosea*, COT (Kampen; Kok, 1953), 219ff. Although weighty reasons can be given for understanding מִדְּבָר as the first man, it remains true that other explanations are also possible and viable. Moreover, the LXX shows us that the oldest known understanding of Hos. 6:7 was of another persuasion. Duane Garrett (*Hosea, Joel*, NAC 19A [Nashville: Broadman Holman Publishers, 1997], 162-163) combines the three views. He paraphrases Hos. 6:7 as follows: 'Like Adam (the man), they break covenants; they are faithless to me there (in the town of Adam).'

I. The Relationship Between the Creation Accounts and the Account of the Construction of the Tabernacle

In the creation account in Gen. 1:1–3 eight *fiat* commands of God are found (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24 and 26).⁹ In Exodus 25–31 seven divine pronouncements are found (Exod. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1; 31:12) culminating in the Sabbath command (Exod. 31:12–17), as in the seven days of creation. The narrative of the actual building of the Tabernacle in Exodus 35–40 corresponds to the “and it was so” fulfilment in Genesis 1. I would highlight the correspondence between the Sabbath motifs: both the first creation account and the directions for the construction of the Tabernacle end with the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2–3; Exod. 31:12–17). The completion of the construction of the Tabernacle is related in a summary that is redolent of how the account of the first creation ends with the Sabbath (cf. Exod. 40:33 with Gen. 2:2).¹⁰

The consecration of the cult is a process which, like creation, lasts seven days (Exod. 29:37). Likewise, the sevenfold repetition in Exodus 40:17–33 of “as the LORD had commanded Moses” is reminiscent of the divine words of creation. Finally, just as God blessed the Sabbath, so Moses blesses the people once the Tabernacle was finished (cf. Exod. 39:43 with Gen. 2:3).¹¹

There are also several parallels to be pointed out between the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle.¹² YHWH walks in the garden just as he later does among the people of Israel by placing the Tabernacle in their midst (cf. Gen. 2:2 with Lev. 26:11, 12). Both the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle have their entrance on the east side and

9. The most natural division between the two creations accounts is to end the first creation account with Gen. 2:3. In all other instances in Genesis, תולדות is an introduction to what follows and not a concluding remark. In Gen. 2:4, the expression introduces the creation of man. The second תולדות found in Genesis is the תולדות of Adam himself (Gen. 5:10). Genesis 1:1–2:3 must be understood as a kind of prologue followed by eleven accounts of תולדות. Hence, the Book of Genesis is divided into twelve sections. Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, NAC 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 27–28.

10. P. de Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament, with Particular Reference to the Book of Ezekiel*, SSN 65 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 126–127.

11. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994), 78–90; Richard Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 816–817.

12. Cf. G.J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9, 1986, 19–25. L. Michael Morales thinks that paradise can be compared to the Holy of Holies of the sanctuary (*Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book Leviticus*, NSBT 37 [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015], 51). I would prefer to compare paradise to Holy Place of the sanctuary, not least because a parallel is discernible between the Tree of Life and the golden menorah. Like Daniel I. Block, I think that paradise must be distinguished from the Garden of Eden and that paradise is a special place *within* the land of Eden (Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013], 16). If one accepts that, a correspondence can be seen between the Forecourt and wider earth outside paradise.

are guarded by cherubs (cf. Gen. 3:24 with Exod. 25:18–22; 26:31). The Tree of Life probably has its correspondence in the form of the menorah (cf. Gen. 2:9; 3:22 with Exod. 25:31–35).¹³

The verbs used to describe the building (עָבַד) and guarding (שָׁמַר) of the Garden of Eden are only found in that combination elsewhere in the Pentateuch in one other context: the Levites' duties in the Tabernacle (cf. Gen. 2:15 with Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6; see also 1 Chron. 23:32 and Ezek. 44:14).¹⁴ Finally, gold and the gemstone sardonyx, which were distinctively present in the Garden of Eden, are used in the decoration of the Tabernacle and on the high-priestly garment (cf. Gen. 2:11–12 with Exod. 25:7, 11, 17, 31; 28:5, 9, 20).

The Tabernacle is portrayed to us as a microcosmic representation of heaven and earth. In harmony with the identification of the Tabernacle as a microcosmic representation of heaven and earth, heaven and earth themselves are seen as a macrocosmic Temple. The threefold division of the Tabernacle into the Forecourt, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies corresponds to the threefold division of earth, heaven and the heaven of heavens. Also a correspondence can be noted between the paradise or Garden in Eden as the Holy Place, the land of Eden as the Forecourt and the earth outside the land of Eden as the camp of Israel. The cherubs above the ark and the images of them on the innermost curtains give the Tabernacle paradisiacal characteristics.¹⁵

Already directly after the expulsion from paradise, Adam is reinstated in his priestly function. In the Pentateuch, the verb “to clothe” (לָבַשׁ) and the noun ‘tunics’ (כִּתְיֹתָיִם) are used both for the vestments Adam and his wife received after the fall and for priestly apparel. Within the Pentateuch, apart from Gen. 3:21, the combination of the verb לָבַשׁ and the noun כִּתְיֹתָיִם is found only in the case of priests.¹⁶

The cult of the sanctuary is God's remedy to undo the fall. The cult is in fact the reversal of the expulsion from Eden. Eden's eastward orientation corresponds to the eastward entrance of the Tabernacle. When Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise, they went off in an easterly direction. Cherubs made it impossible for them to re-enter paradise. By the cult, the way to communion with God was reopened for fallen men. The cult can be seen as a returning to Eden. Certainly, worshippers under the Old Testament dispensation experienced that sanctuary as a kind of restored paradise.¹⁷

13. De Vries, *Kābôd*, 127.

14. G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 66-67.

15. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 21, 41. The relationship between the cherubs and the paradise can be used as an argument for seeing a correspondence between paradise and the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle.

16. When this argument is accepted, the woman is included in the man as her head and representative. Outside the Pentateuch, this combination is found in 2 Samuel 13:18; Isaiah 22:21 and Song of Songs 5:3. Neither case is an instance involving the garments of priests.

17. Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 137ff., 175ff.

In the Mosaic legislation, the sacrificial system, like all other legislation, is firmly rooted within God's covenant with Israel.¹⁸ Before the directions for the construction of the Tabernacle are given, the covenant made by God with the people of Israel is mentioned (Exod. 24:1-11). The sacrificial legislation and the instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle with its actual building are placed within the framework of the covenant. The correspondences from both this material and the creation accounts to the account of the fall can be used as an argument that God's relationship with man and with creation before the fall had a covenantal character. At the least it must be said that the aim of covenants mentioned in the Old Testament is to restore the original creation demand given to man.

II. The Relationship Between the Account of the Creation and Fall and God's Covenants with Noah, Abraham, and the People of Israel

Having called attention to the correspondence between the creation accounts and the Tabernacle and its service, I now focus on the relationship between the creation accounts and the account of the fall on the one hand and the covenant given by God in the progression of the redemptive history on the other, commencing with God's covenant with Noah and in him with all mankind and proceeding to his covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the covenant with the people of Israel at Sinai.

We have already seen that the purpose of God in creation for man was that he would cultivate and guard the earth. Ultimately, the whole earth was to become a paradise. God established his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and later with Israel as a people to realize his original purpose with creation through the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The land of Canaan ought to become a kind of restored paradise. Canaan is given to the people of Israel that it may enjoy there a special communion with the LORD.¹⁹ The Books of Kings and Chronicles show us how God's intention was in the first instance not realized. As the narrative of creation ends with the narrative of the fall, the narrative of Israel ends with the narrative of the Babylonian exile. The promise of the new covenant in Isaiah 54 and Jeremiah 31 and of a heart of flesh in Ezekiel 36 points to the fact that God will in the end achieve his intentions. His purposes are not frustrated by the unbelief of man and of his chosen people Israel.

Having sketched that, the correspondence between God's original creation account and the Noahic covenant is highlighted. God promised Noah that the earth would never be destroyed by a universal flood again. The command given to man at creation to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth is repeated after the Flood (Gen. 9:1; compare Gen. 1:28). Just as when God gave his blessing to man when he created him, God blesses Noah and his sons after the Flood (Gen. 9:1; compare Gen. 1:22, 28). When God established his covenant with Noah, it was in fact a covenant with the whole of creation.

18. Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 137ff.

19. T.D. Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 140.

The verbs בָּרַךְ (Piel: bless), פָּרָה (Qal: be fruitful), and רָבָה (Qal and Hiphil: multiply) connects the narratives of the patriarchs with the first account of the creation (Gen. 1:22, 28; cf. Gen. 12:1–3; 14:19–20; 17:16; 25:11; 27:30; 28:3, 14; 32:27, 30). The same can be said of the noun אֶרֶץ. God calls Abraham to fulfill in his seed God's original intent for creation. The land of Canaan is the place given to Abraham's seed to realize this purpose. In the second account of God's covenant with Abraham, God's blessing of Abraham and his seed is explicitly given in the context of the covenant (Gen. 17:16). After the Exodus, God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was given a national status at Sinai (Exod. 19:5; 24:7–8).

In the Book of Deuteronomy, in the context of God's covenant at Sinai renewed in the Plains of Moab, curses and blessings are found in Deuteronomy 27–28. The curses can be related to the cursing of the earth on man's account after the fall (Gen. 3:17) and the blessings to the blessing of man in the first creation account. When Israel transgresses the covenant, the curses of the covenant will be its portion, just as Adam was cursed after the fall. When Israel walks in the way of the covenant, it will be blessed in accordance with God's original intent with man. God's purpose for the land of Canaan was meant as a kind of restoration of paradise. Israel's exile from the land corresponds with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. In this context, I also point to Leviticus 26, the conclusion of the Holiness Code. There, God promises: "I will turn to you and make you fruitful (וְהַפְרִיתִי) and multiply (וְהִרְבִּיתִי) you and will confirm my covenant with you" (Lev. 26:9).²⁰

Through the covenants with Noah, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and with Israel, God realizes his original purpose with creation. God's covenant with Noah is the guarantee of the continued existence of the earth. In this regard, the covenant with Noah is subservient to God's covenant with Abraham and Israel. Once this is grasped, it is a short step to characterize the original relationship also between God on the one hand and man and creation on the other as a covenant relationship.

III. The Parallels between the Creation Accounts and a Vassalage Covenant or Vassalage Treaty

In the first creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3 God claims to be, as its Creator, the King and Suzerain of the whole creation. He is the source of all authority. Man has been given privileges, and man has duties towards him. God can be seen as the suzerain king, and man, made in his image, as the vassal king.²¹ It is man's task to multiply and be fruitful and to replenish and subdue the earth (Gen. 1:28). It is man's privilege that he is made in the image of God. Man is God's vice-regent on earth. Psalm 8:6–7 states: "You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet."

The second creation account in Genesis 2:4–25 is a detailed account of some aspects already present embryonically in the first account. Of course, in the first

20. Quotations of Scripture are from the ESV.

21. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *The Common Grace Covenants*, vol. 1 of *Biblical Theology* (Wooster: Weaver Book, 2014), 46.

creation account man is seen as the crown of God's creative work among his creatures. But while the first creation account narrates generally God's creative acts, the second focuses on the creation of man. It is not without reason that while in the first creation account the word "God" (אֱלֹהִים) is used for the Creator in the second the expression "LORD God" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) is found. The name LORD is God's covenantal name and the second creation account tells in detail how God acts when he creates man in a loving relationship with him.

Also in the second creation account, the duty of man is stated. Man is given the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. Man is forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life is given as a token that if man remains obedient to God life, eternal life will be given to him. Here is a parallel with the conditionality of the Deuteronomic covenant; a covenant that can be characterized as a vassal covenant. The characteristics of promise, duty, sanction and reward both in the Deuteronomic covenant and in the second creation account are an important argument that the word covenant is suitable for the relationship between the Lord God and man in the paradise.

IV. The Testimony of Jeremiah 33:20, 25

Jeremiah 33:20, 25 mentions God's covenant with day and night. Does this refer to God's covenant with Noah or to the original creation? The regular succession of day and night was established at creation,²² so it seems that this covenant with day and night goes back to creation itself and not just to God's covenant with Noah. If this interpretation is right, then here the explicit use of 'covenant' (בְּרִית) is found in regard to God's relation with his creation.

It is true that the position is defensible that Jeremiah refers to God's covenant with Noah. If so, then Isaiah 54 is a more exact parallel. In Isaiah 54:9-10, it is stated: "This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you." It therein resembles God's covenant with Noah. Never will the earth be destroyed again by water. In Jeremiah 33, attention is drawn to the never-ending regularity of day and night as a guarantee that the LORD will keep his covenants with David and Levi. This is an indication that the view that Jeremiah refers to the original creation must be preferred.

22. J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 603. Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers opt for the view that Jeremiah 33 points back to God's covenant with Noah which secured the constant alternation of day and night by divine covenant (*Jeremiah 26–52*, WBC 27 [Dallas: Word Books, 1995], 174, 175).

V. Can the Expression *הַקִּים בְּרִית* Be Seen as an Indication that an Already Existing Covenant is Established and Renewed?

Independently of each other, William Dumbrell and Jacob Milgrom have argued that when a covenant is entered into for the first time, the verb *בָּרַת* is used, and when an already existing covenant is confirmed, the Hiphil of the verb *קוּם* (*הַקִּים*).²³ In the account of God's covenant with Noah, the expression *הַקִּים בְּרִית* is used. If Dumbrell and Milgrom are right, this could be seen as an indication that the existing covenant with creation was upheld and confirmed when God established his covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 17).

An exhaustive analysis of all instances of *בְּרִית* in the Old Testament reveals that almost all cases can be explained in this way.²⁴ However, there are two difficult cases that seem to contradict the view that *בְּרַת בְּרִית* always refers to the initiation of a covenant and *הַקִּים בְּרִית* to the establishment of an already-existing covenant. Let us first take Ezekiel 16:60, 62. Ezekiel 16:60 states: "Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant," and Ezekiel 16:62: "I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

In view of Ezekiel's repeated emphasis upon the radical discontinuity between the past and the future, it can be argued that he is referring here to a totally new covenant. Nevertheless, even for Ezekiel — as for all Old Testament prophets — it is ultimately inconceivable, although the prophet's anguish could be very severe (cf. Ezek. 9:8; 11:13), that God should abandon his people totally and forever. The eternal, new covenant is intrinsically connected to the covenant at Sinai. So, ultimately, Ezekiel 16:60, 62 does not contradict the view of Dumbrell and Milgrom.²⁵ Perhaps Ezekiel wished to emphasize both sides of the new and eternal covenant of peace. In Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26, he uses the expression *בְּרַת בְּרִית*.

Much more challenging to the defense of the distinction between *בְּרַת בְּרִית* and *הַקִּים בְּרִית* is Exodus 6:3-4 (MT 6:4-5), where it is stated that God, seeing the oppression of Israel in Egypt, will remember his covenant which he established/confirmed (*וַיִּגַּם הַקְּמָתִי*) with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It seems that *הַקִּים בְּרִית* is being used here for the institution of God's covenant with the patriarchs.

23. Jacob Milgrom, "Covenants: The Sinaitic and Patriarchal Covenants in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-27)," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, ed. C. Cohen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 91-101; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 13-15.

24. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenant* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 155-161, 718-736.

25. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 476. As a second possibility, Gentry and Wellum suggest that *הַקִּים בְּרִית* in Ezek. 16:60, 62 has to be understood as the initiating of the covenant. They prefer this view, because the eternal covenant is not something that existed before. They suggest that the distinction between *בְּרַת בְּרִית* and *הַקִּים בְּרִית* does not hold for later texts and point to the fact that the language of Ezekiel represents a transition between Classical Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew.

To summarize the investigation of the material, hesitancy is called for in finding the use of *הַקָּיִים בְּרִית* in the Flood narrative to be an indication that this is a case of the confirmation of a covenant made at creation.

VI. Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this article, a covenant relationship was a relationship confirmed with an oath. A sacrifice was usually offered in the context of the initiating or confirming of a covenant. This may be the reason why the author of Genesis did not use the word *בְּרִית* in the first chapters of his book. An oath is used to overcome lying and unfaithfulness. Yet lying and unfaithfulness presuppose the fall. The same must be said of the sacrificial service. This is why it will have seemed less appropriate to deploy the word *בְּרִית* in relation to the original accounts of creation. Nevertheless, it was already seen that *בְּרִית* is used in Jeremiah 33:20, 25 with regard to original creation. Still, it remains true that in the Old Testament *בְּרִית* is almost exclusively used in a *redemptive*-historical context.

Having said that, it must be noted also that in creating the world as a kind of temple and designating man to serve as priest, God was making clear that his original relationship with creation and with man as his image is the foundation of the later covenants. Then it is a little step to say that this relationship itself has a covenantal character. The relationship between God and man was a relationship of love. The duties of man towards God as his creator stood in the context of this relationship of love. It is here that a very close parallel is apparent between the original relationship between God and man and God's covenant with Israel. The essence of God's covenant with Israel was that he would be their God and Israel would be his people.²⁶

Although the ground was cursed after the fall and the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles, God did not destroy his creation (Gen. 3:17, 18). When considering the aspect of the relationship between God and creation, it must be emphasized that God continued to be faithful to his creation, a faithfulness confirmed after the Flood. Although creation is marred by the fall, it still bears a covenantal character and in this way it displays God's glory (cf. Pss. 8 and 19).

The same cannot be said when the focus turns to God's relationship with man. It is true that even after the fall, man enjoys a unique place in God's creation. In Psalm 8, the psalmist sings about this reality. But it must also be borne in mind that after the fall, Adam and Eve themselves showed that the relationship of love between God and them had been broken. When given garments, they were redesignated as priests. This is the context in which the Protevangelium or "mother promise" was given: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The word "seed" (*זָרַע*) connects the narrative of the fall with the narratives of the patriarchs. It is an indication that the blessings and redemption promised to the patriarchs is a further

26. In Old Testament scholarship, the formula *וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי לְעָם* is called the covenant formula. This expression is found, with some variations in formulation, around twenty times in the Old Testament. Its first occurrence is in Exodus 6:6 (MT 6:7), which reads: *וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים*.

outworking of what God said to the serpent after the fall. That is where God's redemptive activity in time starts; a redemptive activity that in a later stage of redemptive history is expressed in the form of a covenant.

In God's gracious treatment of Adam and Eve after the fall, a foreshadowing is seen of God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and with Israel. These covenants had as their aim the reopening of man's forfeited relationship with God for Abraham's seed and the regaining of the reality lost by the expulsion from paradise in the land of Canaan.

We can understand Genesis 1–11 as the prologue to Israel's history and God's gracious dealings with Abraham's seed. But the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can just as well be understood as directed to all nations of the earth. While these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, ultimately the latter must be chosen. For God's original purpose in creation is fulfilled in a redeemed humanity from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages that will dwell for all eternity in the new Jerusalem. Thus, it must also be pointed out that this final realization of God's original purpose also far surpasses the original. Never will the love-relationship between God and the redeemed in the new Jerusalem be marred in any way whatsoever.

Adam and his progeny were intended to serve as kings and priests in God's creation. Far surpassing the relationship between God and Adam as the representative of mankind in paradise is God's relationship with them that are saved by Jesus Christ and believe in him. They are kings and priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5). They have access to God in Christ and reign with him. This is already true in the present dispensation. In Christ, believers are even now more than conquerors. That believers are kings and priests will be manifested in all its glory in the new Jerusalem. There, they will eternally be in the presence of the Lamb who bought them, and they will reign with him over the new creation.

Because of the numerous connections between the original relationship between God and man, or God and creation, and God's redemptive relationship with his people, it is understandable, although not necessary that the word "covenant" is used in systematic theology for the original relationship between God and man or between God and creation. Even if the word "covenant" is not used in this context, it must be grasped that it is not possible to have a right view of God's redemptive activity in Christ if one fails to see that it has God's original relationship with man in creation as its background.

God's original relationship with man had to do both with privileges He gave to man as well as with duties He required of him. The broken relationship of God and man, resulting in the curse because of the transgression of God's command, is restored and surpassed by God's redemptive activity in Jesus Christ. While the original relationship between God and man was capable of being broken, the final form of God's covenant with his people is eternal, irrevocable and unchangeable. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law; a curse that cannot be understood apart from the breach between God and man that happened at the fall.