
**CAN I HOLD TO COVENANT THEOLOGY AND PREMILLENNIALISM?**

**Introduction**

A major development in modern biblical study has been the discovery of ancient Near Eastern covenants. Ancient Hittite and Canaanite covenants have shown interesting parallels with the covenants of the Old Testament.

New insights into the meaning and use of biblical covenants have now come to light. Ancient covenant forms have also confirmed the integrity and Mosaic dating of many parts of the Pentateuch—a tremendous boon in answering the attacks of modernism. Contrary to tired old higher criticism that speculated a seventh century b.c. date, Deuteronomy is now recognized as a “treaty document” that could only issue from the time of Moses and Joshua.

**Thesis**

W. J. Dumbrell’s work is an important contribution to the study of the covenants. His book examines the main covenants of the Old Testament along with their deliberate interrelation.

This interrelation of covenants in sacred history, according to his thesis, grows out of God’s plan to bring mankind back to the original design of creation. Thus the title, *Covenant and Creation*. Paradise was lost through man’s rebellion but will be restored through God’s grace.

Dumbrell says there clearly was a covenant relationship between God and Adam in the garden. God promised life for obedience and threatened death for disobedience. When Adam broke the covenant (Hosea 6:7), God purposed to reëstablish his original covenant from creation with select representatives of the race who would be custodians of his truth and grace to mankind.

God unfolded His enduring promise of life in paradise through the covenants—the Noahic, Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Davidic, and New covenants. Dumbrell makes a good case that each of these successive covenants is not an isolated divine scheme, but rather the reëstablishment of the original creation covenant. He bases this on the details of the covenant texts and on the language of covenant making. As early as the days of Noah God speaks in terms of “confirming My covenant” (Gen. 6:18; 9:9). In similar passages (Abraham in Gen. 17:2 and Israel in Ex. 19:5), an already existing covenant is implied; the usual formula for making a fresh covenant is not generally used.

According to Dumbrell, each of the biblical covenants grows out of the previous one. They dove-tail because they are unified in God’s plan to return to the design of creation. It is not
surprising, therefore, to find Edenic images in statements of the covenants. For example, the Sinaitic covenant held out a land flowing with milk and honey (Dt. 6), and the Davidic and New Covenants picture a renewed creation (Is. 55:3,13; 65:17ff.; Hosea 2:18ff.; 3:5; Ezk. 36:35ff.).

**Significance**

Dumbrell’s development of the biblical theology of the covenants has far-reaching implications for enlarging our understanding of God’s revelation in the Bible.

First, this approach helps unlock the message of the Old Testament. God did not intend this part of revelation simply to teach morality or merely to serve as a source of object lessons.

Second, a study of the biblical covenants will always confirm the essence of Reformed theology. With the covenant at its core, Reformed theology has given the key to understanding God’s dealings with mankind. On the other hand, God’s unified plan is contrary to classic dispensational theology. God did not keep bringing abortive plans from the heavenly drawing board to deal with humanity during different eras. On the contrary, God has only one gracious purpose.

Third, Dumbrell’s careful study of the individual covenants and their interrelation affirms a realized, Messianic kingdom. His approach has strong millennial implications. He does not glean a few random proof texts to support his conclusions. Rather, he works through the warp and woof of the covenants to show God’s design—specifically, paradise restored.

**Conclusion**

Reformed, pre-millennial believers have sort of been in a theological “no-man’s land.” They look for Christ to reign upon the earth, but they do not follow the essence of dispensationalism. They see the unity of God’s covenant, but they do not follow the allegorical hermeneutic that Reformed theology historically has employed for eschatology. *Covenant and Creation* bridges the gap by returning to a fresh study of the covenants.

Although it is somewhat technical for a popular audience, pastors and serious Bible students will find that Dumbrell’s up-to-date scholarship provides a valuable resource for all who “... are looking for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (II Peter 3:13).