



Abstract from Article

THE COVENANT CONCEPT IN SCOTTISH THEOLOGY AND POLITICS AND ITS LEGACY

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Abstract

One of the most significant words of the Bible is the word "covenant". We read about God making a covenant with Abraham, renewing that covenant at Sinai, about David making a covenant with Jonathan, and again with the elders at Hebron when he became king. Jeremiah speaks of a day when God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and in the New Testament, Jesus is presented to us as the Mediator of the New Covenant: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood". On the one hand God binds himself to men like Abraham and David with solemn promises. On the other hand he binds Israel to himself under solemn obligations – proleptic of the day when he will bind himself to mankind and mankind to himself in Jesus Christ in covenant love. Again we read about men like Joshua, Hezekiah, Josiah binding themselves and the nation in loyalty to God in covenant. In Scottish history, in the upheavals of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the break up of feudalism and the emergence of the late post-renaissance doctrine of the divine right of kings and the resultant struggles for liberty, we read about men making "bands", "pacts", "covenants", "contracts", "political leagues" to defend their freedom, to preserve the rights of a people vis-à-vis their sovereign and the rights of a sovereign vis-à-vis his subjects. The important thing is that in the Bible, God's dealings with men in Creation and Redemption – in grace – are those of a covenant and not of a contract, and the word always used is *diatheke* and never *suntheke* in Greek. This was the heart of the Pauline theology of grace, expounded in Romans and Galatians, and this was the central affirmation of the Reformation. The God of the Bible is a Covenant-God and not a contract-god. God's covenant dealings with men have their source in the divine initiative, in the loving heart of God, and the form of the covenant is the indicative statement, the promise, "I will be your God and you shall be my people." The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God who has made a covenant for us in Christ, binding himself to man and man to himself in Christ, and who summons us to respond in faith and love to what he has done so freely for us in Christ.

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