

A thick black L-shaped frame surrounds the text. The top-left corner is a horizontal bar extending to the right, then a vertical bar extending downwards. The bottom-right corner is a horizontal bar extending to the left, then a vertical bar extending upwards.

THE RELIABILITY AND USABILITY OF SCRIPTURE IN OUR PRESENT AGE

**Session 4: Scripture Interpreting Scripture
and the Redemptive Historical Method**

The Infallible Rule of Biblical Interpretation:

Scripture
Interpreting
Scripture

Michelangelo Buonarroti
1475 – 1564 The
Conversion of Saul



The Vital Role of Scripture in Interpreting Scripture

The only infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

WCF 1:9

- **The Issue of Redemptive-Historical vs. “Proof-texting” in Interpretation:**

WCF1.1 “therefore it pleased God at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal himself and to declare...”

The Role of Scripture in Interpreting Scripture

A Covenantal Way of Reading the Scripture vs. proof-texting—

- *There are many “texts” but one context—The redemptive history of God*
- *NT relation to OT—not a new religion, but a progressive revelation of redemption wherein the Old is developmentally mature in the New....*

c.f. Emmaus Road: Luke 24: 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

c.f. Heb. 1:1-3 Heb. 1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,

A redemptive historical orientation is not some kind of dispensable exegetical luxury. At stake is nothing less than the right way of interpreting Scripture. At issue here is simply the fundamental principle that the text is to be interpreted in the light of its context. In the case of Scripture, the redemptive-historical structure or framework established by Scripture itself is the contextual factor having the broadest bearing on a given text. (

Richard Gaffin, p.xxii)

Advantages of Covenantal (Redemptive-Historical) Method: The Preservation of Objectifying Grace!

- 1. Guards against moralizing certain passages through the use of false analogies between the biblical narrative and contemporary life even to the detriment of the fuller theological significance.*
- 2. Guards against a theology of "proof-texting."*
- 3. Can recognize both the significance of certain passages within its own redemptive context and in the present redemptive context whereby the biblical-theological understanding of scripture is made relevant to us.*
- 4. Guards against emotionalism and subjectivistic interpretations whereby the normative (governing) value of Biblical revelation is retained to the interpreter in any practical sense. (We are still the listeners.)*
- 5. Provides a proper hermeneutic from which to derived "biblical*

Example 1:

How Do We Reconcile?

1) Should we expect the spiritual gift of prophecy today? (Special gifts of discerning God's word in a given context for example).

Compare:

- *YES- Rom. 12:6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith (also 1 Cor.12:10*
- *NO- Rev. 22:18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

Question: Same Redemptive "Era" as NT History, or Not?

Example 2:

How Do We Reconcile?

2) Are we engaged in a Holy War Today (e.g. Jahweh's war 1 San 25:28). If so, shouldn't the church have a military and to be engaged in geo-political warfare?

Compare:

- **YES- Deut. 20:1** “When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. **2** And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall speak to the people... “the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.’
- **NO- Matt. 5:39** But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
 - *Matt. 26:52* Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

Question: Is the OT the same religion as the NT? (note 2nd AD Marcion Controversy)

EXAMPLE 3

How Do We Reconcile?

3) Are Christians held accountable to obeying the OT law of God?

Compare:

- YES- Rom 7:6 we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.
- NO- Tim. 1:8. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully (c.f. James 2:8ff, 4:11)

Question: Is the OT all about law/judgement, and the NT all about gospel/grace?

How Many Books Are In The Bible?

- One? Two (39 in 1st, 27 in 2nd) ? Sixty-Six?

One Book, One Author, Two Parts

- Like a good novel, we must learn to read the Bible both forwards and backwards as to allow the more developed portions to inform the under developed portions, even if the embryonic portions give meaning to the mature portions. Thus, there is a single Biblical Theology of the bible that must inform the way we interpret a given passage.
- **A Redemptive-Historical Understanding**
 - *Revelation is the interpretation of redemption HISTORY; it must, therefore, unfold itself in installments as redemption does. Usual Order-*
Promissory Word–Historical Event– Instructional Word
 - *The facts of history themselves acquire a revealing significance.*
 - *A developmental history or the Gospel (From Acorn to Oak Tree)*

R/H interpretation "deals with the process of God's self-revelation deposited in the Bible throughout redemptive history." G. Vos

- *It is God who is ultimately speaking such that we must work hard at JUST being the listeners lest we impose our own voice/narrative into the text.*
- *Truth is from God alone as relevant to God's redemptive historical purposes and is therefore not many voices but one ultimate voice with non-contradicting meaning assigned to a passage in relation to the whole.*
- *The Meaning is developing within a revelation process consistent with a history of redemption that culminates in climax.*
- *Revelation is the interpretation of redemption; it must, therefore, unfold itself in installments as redemption does. (Vos. p.6))*
- *If there may be multiple significances in relation to multiple historical/covenantal/cultural contexts, there is never multiple meanings within a singular text since it is ultimate derived from the one mind of its single divine author—God!*

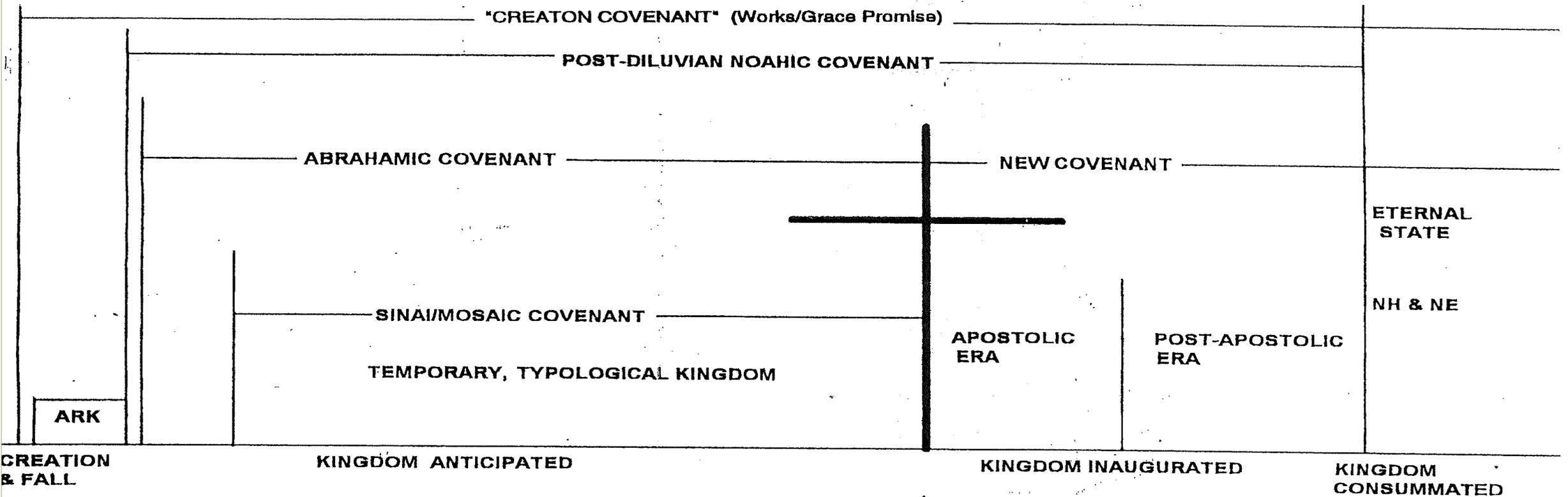
The actual embodiment of revelation in history.

- "the facts of history themselves acquire a revealing significance."(Vos. 6)
 - *"The usual order is: first word, then the fact, then again the interpretive word."*
 - *Example: "The Old Testament brings the predictive preparatory word, the Gospels record the redemptive-revelatory fact, the Epistles supply the subsequent, final interpretation." (p.7)*
- The organic nature of the historic process is observable in revelation.
 - *I.e. From seed form to full growth, qualitatively, the seed is not less perfect than the tree. We should therefore read the Bible as within an expectation that there is not multiple theologies presented within it, but rather one theology as becoming more and more clear as redemptive history progresses. We have license then to understand the "theological vision" of an earlier portion by it's relevant to a later portion*

How?

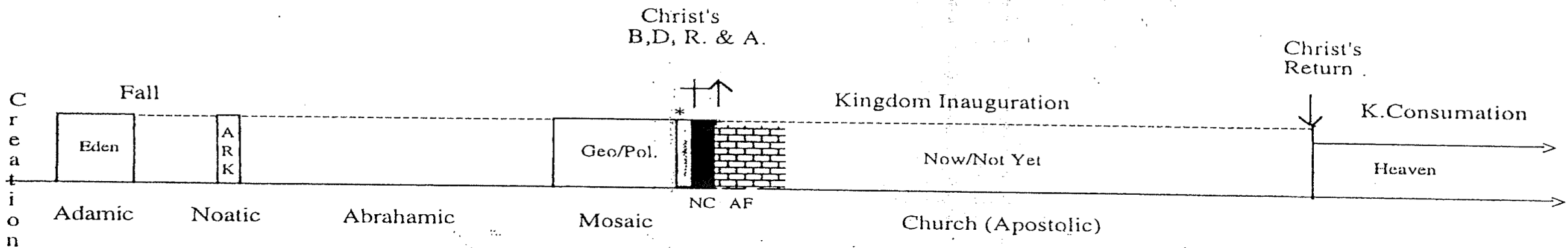
- *We must learn to read the Bible backwards and forwards looking to locate each text into the trajectory or context of the whole of redemptive history and the working out of God's covenant with Adam ultimately...*
 1. *Step One: To relate the text to its immediate covenantal context*
 2. *Step Two: To understand the text in light of God's total revelation especially as ultimately revealed in the New Covenant*

AN OVERVIEW OF REDEMPTIVE HISTORY



- Cross represents complex of events including birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit, as well as the abolishment of the Sinai Covenant, the establishment of the New Covenant (in continuity with the Abrahamic Covenant), and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom.
- Both the ark and the Sinai Covenant were temporary kingdom models, anticipating and foreshadowing the Messianic Kingdom.
- The Old Testament was written (directly) to those living under the Sinai Covenant, *recalling* redemptive history prior to the Sinai Covenant and *anticipating* redemptive history subsequent to it.
- The New Testament was written to those living under the apostolic era of the New Covenant, anticipating the developments of the post-apostolic era and the consummation of the Kingdom.

Redemptive Historical Chart



General Observations

Continuity and Discontinuity in Administrations

Source: *Changing* circumstances of human history from states of innocence, to the fall and redemption (partial and entire). *Non changing* promise of redemption through second Adam and the preservation of a covenant people albeit through various administrations.

- Innocence: *Imago Dei and Imitatio Dei.*** No edenic existence of a highly informed legislation. A comprehensive mandate to cultivate created order and prohibition regarding the tree. (Cultic and Culture mandate)
- Fallen state: *Imago Dei (Loss of Imitatio Dei)*** The institution of sacrifice, the publication of law, the promise of redemption. Bereft of blessings of the immediate presence of God, the creature must now labor to fulfill his creaturely mandate. In relation to God, sacrifice is necessitated, an external code of divinely-sanctioned behavior in revealed laws.
- Redeemed state: Law continues yet there is also a revival of the principle of *Imitatio Dei.*** (Partial) External legislation continues as administrated through Church upon Apostolic foundation. Still await glorified state.

Ethics and Covenant History

- All Biblical laws are covenantally conditioned.
- The stipulations of some covenants are not required in other covenants, they are "covenant specific." (Example: Circumcision)
- Biblical ethics is not restricted to biblical laws. Value judgments are revealed in various covenants which indicate that which God approves. (So the term "moral law")

- Considerations to determine whether or not covenant obliges us.
 - Is a given law re-iterated in another covenant administration?
 - Is a given law re-iterated in the NC?
 - Is a given law given prior to Fall? (Will for creature *per se*)
 - Is a behavior recorded as descriptive of the redeemed state?

Some Features which Distinguish Sinai From New Covenant

- Sinai covenant made with one ethnic and geo-political people, NC made with all peoples.
- Sinai Covenant contains many typological ordinances, prefiguring Christ, the New based solely upon Christ's work accomplished.
- Sinai covenant has a "works" principle regarding conditional prosperity in land, NC has neither a holy land or conditional works.
- Sinai grants power of the sword to covenant people, NC grants only the power of "sword of the Spirit." (Lev.20:11, 1 Cor. 5)

Ethics of Jesus and Apostles

- Jesus' humiliated state (together with his teaching) takes place within Sinai Adm. (Gal.4:4) Ethics of Kingdom are taught within the Sinai Covenant: Christ and disciples followed entire body of legislation within Mosaic economy. (Mt. 23:1-3; Mt.5:17-19) Christ only prophetically speaks of the NC realities to come after his own death and resurrection.
- Apostles taught ethics of Kingdom within the New Covenant under the Apostolic administration of the Church. Apostles teachings are Christ's in NC.

The Covenantal Nature of the Bible

There was never a time in all of Redemption history when salvation was transacted apart from the forensic oriented Covenant of God.

- The use of the words “old” and “new” covenant respectively throughout the Bible*
- Jeremiah in the old covenant context anticipates the coming of a “new covenant” (Jer.31: 31. c.f Malachi 3:1)*
- Paul in the new covenant context references the “veil” of the old covenant that was lifted by Christ in the new covenant (c.f. 2Cor 3:14).*
- Paul’s use of “law” (nomos) for “covenant” after the same use of “law” after the prophets reference to the “book of the covenant” (Josh 24:26, Neh. 8:8, 18; Rom. 7:22, 25, 1Cor.9: 21).*

The Covenantal Nature of the Bible

- OT: The Hebrew word for “covenant” (berith) is used at least 289 times.
 - *The word covenant is explicitly used to summarize the whole of the Genesis history in Exodus 2:24*
 - *The Old Covenant “Bible” itself was called the “book of the covenant” in Exodus 24:7.*
- NT: The fulfillment motif
 - *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. “(Matthew 5:17-18)*
 - *Christ the “mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15, 12:15)*

What is a Covenant?

■ It is a gracious condescension by God in order to establish a meaningful and flourishing relationship with humanity that is based on objective terms order to preserve the gracious nature of human redemption in relationship with God. (WCF 7.1) Think “Wedding Covenant”

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

■ Contractual- Ancient Treaty Form– Preamble, Historical Prologue, Requirements, Sanctions (Curse/Promises), Renewal Instructions, Oath of Covenant

■ Forensic-Legal– Righteousness as before the law– one emerges as either Justified or Condemned by ones “righteous” standing under the law

The Two Covenants Clarified: The priority of works unto grace

As Discerned from the vantage point of Creation I-0 Two Covenants, One Works Based and The Other Grace Promising

■ Covenant of Works (WCF 7.2) “Pre-Redemptive”

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.

■ Covenant of Grace (WCF 7.3-4) “Redemptive”

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (c.f. Gen 3ff)

The Difference Clarified:

The difference between the pre-redemptive and redemptive covenant is not then that the latter substitutes promise for law. The difference is rather that redemptive covenant adds promise to law. Redemptive covenant is simultaneously a promise administration of guaranteed blessings and a law administration of blessing dependent on obedience, with the latter foundational.

The weakness of the traditional designation, "Covenant of Works" for the pre-redemptive covenant is that it fails to take account of the continuity of the law principle in redemptive revelation.

The principles of "works" continues into redemptive covenant administration, such that the blessings of redemption are secured by the works of a federal head who must satisfy the law's demands,

Coherence can be achieved in Covenant Theology only by the subordination of grace to law."

Meredith Kline, "Law Covenant)

The Dual Function of the Covenant In OT:

- To Direct Us Back to the Covenant of Works– Geo-Political
- To Direct Us Forward to the Covenant of Grace
- The Determining Distinction: *"It is this swearing of the ratificatory oath that provides an identification mark by which we can readily distinguish in the divine covenants of Scripture between a law covenant and one of grace promise.*
 - *Adamic:*
 - Adam's Broken Vow and resulting curse of Death
 - Adam's acting as Federal Executor such as to establish the principle that anticipating a 2nd executor to fulfill what Adam didn't. c.f. Rom 5 (Adam), Rom 7 – *Marriage Federal headship as Covenant Executor- the metaphor of no longer being federally bound to the 1st who dies such as to be wed to another".)
 - *Noahic-*
 - Noah was saved by grace through faith–
 - his temporal salvation was conditioned upon his obedience.

The Dual Function of the Covenant In OT:

- *Abrahamic: Directing Us Forward albeit in a geo-political typology*
 - Gen 15–
 - Grace “reckoned unto him as righteous
 - Works– Abraham never entered the promised “land” (temporally)
- *Mosaic:*
 - Sinai: Exodus 24;7- Israel’s pledge of performance
 - Temple: God’s provision of a substitutionary sacrifice without pledge of obedience but confession of disobedience and faith in God’s mercy revealed