

UNFOLDING COVENANT HISTORY, **VOLUME 6: A REVIEW**

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Unfolding Covenant History, Volume 6: From Samuel to Solomon

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Unfolding Covenant History is an ongoing series of books in which the publisher plans to cover the history of God's covenant in the Old Testament. Therefore, it is not a verse-by-verse or even chapter-by-chapter study of the Old Testament Scriptures. An explanation of the series name is in order.

History. While the books do interact with the non-historical parts of the Old Testament, the poetical books and the prophets, for example, the main focus is on the historical narrative of the Old Testament. As a case in point, this sixth volume focuses on various portions of I & II Samuel, I Kings and I & II Chronicles. The previous volumes, the first four by the late Homer Hoeksema and the fifth by David Engelsma, covered Genesis through Ruth, dealing almost exclusively with the historical narratives.

Covenant. The approach to the narrative is thematic, with the overarching theme the glorious covenant of God. Engelsma is concerned to show how the covenant is manifested in God's dealings with Israel and especially in His dealings with Israel's first three kings, Saul, David and Solomon.

Unfolding. Engelsma is concerned to demonstrate how the covenant of God develops in this history. There is one everlasting covenant of grace, not separate covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham and David, for example. Nevertheless, that one everlasting covenant of grace, like a delightful rose, gradually unfolds to reveal the beauty within. There is development, therefore, in every new historical manifestation of the covenant.

The focus in this sixth volume is on the relationship between the covenant and the kingdom. The covenant has—must have—a king. Ultimately, the king

is Jesus Christ but other kings appear in the historical development of the covenant, so that God's people are prepared for King Jesus. The disastrous reign of reprobate Saul shows the people their need for a king "after God's own heart." The godly reign of David reveals a warrior king. The temple-builder Solomon typifies the church-building, peace-giving, perfectly wise Jesus. In addition, King David and King Solomon, the pinnacle of kingship in the old dispensation, show by their moral failures that they are mere types; therefore, they must not be mistaken for the true Messiah.

Engelsma writes,

One man, and one man only, resisted the temptation to presume on God's exaltation of him and to indulge himself in seizing a fame and pleasure that were not his to enjoy, at least at the time (137).

Throughout the book, Engelsma urges the reader to look beyond David and Solomon, and to embrace by faith the true King, Jesus Christ.

Engelsma explains the relationship between the covenant and the kingdom already in the introduction:

Kingdom is the order or structure of the life of the covenant, and covenantal communion is the purpose and nature of the kingdom of God in Christ over the people. For the people of God ... their life is fellowship in submission or obedient communion. God is to them their friendly king or their royal friend (4).

This is a fascinating insight. In the covenant, God is the friend of His people, for the covenant *is* friendship. But God the friend is not a friend of equals: He is the sovereign, almighty, holy friend. We are His friends, His friend-servants, called to obey Him out of love to Him and as an expression of our friendship. Kingdom and covenant are not antithetical concepts, but they are in perfect harmony. Again, Engelsma explains the relationship, "The proper response to kingship is awe and, in this awe, obedience. The response to covenant is love and, in this love, a drawing near to the savior" (48). What a beautiful, rich and eminently practical concept of the life of the child of God in relation to his Friend-Sovereign!

Since God is our Friend-Sovereign, He requires obedience. A friend might turn a blind eye to sin (although if he is a godly friend, he ought not) but our King requires obedience. Jehovah the King is holy. Israel must never be in any doubt of that. Therefore, when Israel walks in sin, which she does repeatedly in this history, she must be chastised in order to bring her to repentance, for only as we walk in the light does God commune with us. Anything less, insists Engelsma, is antinomianism, which Engelsma consistently condemns in this volume. For example, in I Samuel 4 Israel presumes upon God's favour by seeking deliverance in battle *without repentance*, trusting in the ark of the covenant as a mere talisman. Engelsma writes,

Israel's trust in the ark for salvation was the evil of antinomianism. This is the sin of rejecting the law of God as the authoritative guide of the thankful life of the redeemed. Antinomianism supposes that God will save even though the sinner goes on impenitently in his sin (26).

Israel forfeits the ark of the covenant when Jehovah delivers it—delivers *Himself*, in a sense—into the hands of the Philistines in I Samuel 5:

God's intimate covenantal fellowship with his sinful people means the endurance of shame for him. He himself is sovereign in taking this shame upon himself. No one, whether Philistia or the devil, brings shame upon him apart from his will (29).

Engelsma explains God's gracious motivation in so doing:

The judgment upon Israel of the loss of the ark, however severe it may have been, intended and accomplished the repentance of Israel ... Following the judgment at Aphek, there was a definite, widespread, and steadily developing movement of repentance in Israel. The movement culminated in Israel's repentance and their doing the works worthy of repentance (30-31).

Nevertheless, Engelsma is careful to explain God's *requirement* of repentance of His people within the covenant without thereby making repentance a *condition* in the covenant. Repentance is a requirement. Repentance is neces-

sary. But repentance is *not* a condition. *Unfolding Covenant History* unfolds the unconditional covenant, a covenant conceived, maintained and preserved by God alone. Commenting on I Samuel 7, Engelsma writes,

The way to this complete deliverance was Israel's repentance. It is significant that repentance occurred before the completion of Israel's deliverance from the Philistines. There was no repentance during the judgeship of Samson. Repentance was necessary for complete deliverance (38).

Does that make repentance a condition for complete deliverance? Engelsma denies it:

This necessity was not, even as it is not today, the condition required of Israel to render herself worthy of deliverance. The worthiness of Israel to be delivered was the sacrifice of the lamb that Samuel "offered ... for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD" (1 Sam. 7:9). Rather, the necessity of repentance was the necessity of the way in which it pleases God to deliver his people. Indeed, it is always the necessity of an aspect of the God-worked deliverance itself. Bringing his people to repentance is an aspect—and not the least—of the deliverance (38).

After Israel foolishly and wickedly demands a king, Samuel confronts the people in I Samuel 12. God chastises His people by destroying their harvest, whereupon the people repent in the fear of God and then Samuel proclaims the comfort of the gospel of God's "merciful faithfulness." Engelsma remarks,

Completing the salvation order of misery (repentance), mercy (forgiveness), and holiness of life, Samuel then calls Israel to reverence and to obey God in the covenant ... To the exhortation to serve the Lord, the prophet adds a sharp warning (62).

Engelsma explains the necessity of the warning from the *Canons of Dordt*: "Grace is conferred by means of admonitions" (62).

That God requires obedience is something that Saul, Israel's first king, never learned. Saul is set forth in Scripture as a warning of one who is in the sphere of the covenant (a member—even a prominent member—of the

nation of Israel) but who is not personally a friend of God. Saul is reprobate in the sphere of the covenant. He is the people's choice but not God's choice. God's choice, waiting in the wings while Saul's tragic reign implodes, is David, who is a type of the great King Jesus. Saul is revealed as reprobate through his disobedience, in which disobedience Saul develops and is hardened. "The disobedience rises out of and reveals a heart that is not set on doing the will of Jehovah, because it does not love Jehovah nor seek his glory in Israel" (66).

David, although far from perfect, is the antithesis of ungodly Saul. David is one of the most delightful saints in the Old Testament and (perhaps even because) he is a type of the Lord Jesus. Engelsma develops the godly character of David, giving glory to God whose grace worked in David, and beautifully describes the typology behind "the man after God's own heart." David, unlike Saul, is personally elect, which makes all the difference. "David's name indicates that he has been chosen in divine love" (88).

David has a godly heart but he has such a heart only because the Lord gave him the godly heart, according to divine election—election unto salvation. Jehovah has appointed David unto salvation in the eternal decree of election and the Spirit qualifies David to live the life of holiness unto the Lord (89).

David has many other qualities by God's grace: zeal, wisdom, humility, obedience, eloquence, compassion and courage. David was also prepared for his position as king. Outstanding in David's preparation was the persecution that he patiently endured. "Jehovah disciplined and trained David ... David was a type of Jesus Christ in a striking, unmistakable manner" (97). David learned by his suffering. "He learned obedience to God ... David learned to trust in God" (104). "David's patience is remarkable. Again he waits for God to exalt him, with endurance under extreme provocation. He takes no action to seize the throne" (113). Patience, humility, trust—these are lessons that wicked Saul, who persecuted David, never learned.

God exalted David to a very high position. From that dizzying height David fell, miserably, lamentably but not finally. The account of David's sin with Bathsheba and the consequent chastisement is sobering. Engelsma expounds the history, doing full justice to the seriousness of the sin, the bitterness of the chastisement, the depth of the repentance and the richness of God's grace. Such adultery, writes Engelsma, "brings down upon the adulterer the

fierce anger and heaviest judgment of God, even though the transgressor is the beloved David, the man after God's own heart, the outstanding type in the Old Testament of the Messiah" (138). "God made the rest of David's life miserable, bitterly, almost unendurably, miserable" (138-139). In this connection, Engelsma explains the difference between punishment and chastisement:

[Punishment] is the just wrath of God inflicting upon the sinner the wages of his sin, which is death, thus destroying him in time and in eternity. In punishment the sinner pays the debt he owes to the justice of God. [Chastisement] is an anger of God that is tempered with mercy. It inflicts painful suffering not as payment, but as the means to impress upon the sinner the seriousness of his wrongdoing; to sanctify him regarding the specific lust and possible future committing of the transgression; and to draw him to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ for forgiveness. Punishment is damning. Chastisement is saving (140).

God saved David by bringing him to repentance. God wrought repentance in David. God forgave David.

Jehovah brought David to repentance by his word through the prophet Nathan. There must be repentance! There is no pardon except in the way of repentance. God prepared David for the word of rebuke, "Thou art the man," that brought David to repentance by the working of the Spirit that for almost a year made David miserable on account of his sin ... But the word worked heartfelt repentance including the required confession of sin (142).

Was David's repentance necessary? Could David have known and experienced God's grace, if he had continued his walk in impenitence? Engelsma answers emphatically in the negative: "David could know and experience God's forgiveness only in the way of his repentance and confession" (142). And David is not an isolated, obscure example from the Old Testament with no relevance to the modern Christian who is not under the law, but under grace: "This history is the gospel of the mercy of God toward all his sinful children, which mercy includes chastisement as well as forgiveness" (144). Although freely pardoned,

David does not escape the consequences of his sin. “Jehovah,” writes Engelsma, “does not scourge David lightly, even though he loves David greatly. Indeed, his love for David is the reason why he chastises David severely” (148).

That painful chastisement consisted in a sword in David’s family so that David saw his sin mirrored in the sinful conduct of his children. As a result of David’s great transgression, his kingship was in decline for the rest of his life. And yet, although the outcome was personally tragic for David, there is no defeat.

David’s sin was no defeat of the kingdom of God, for by means of the sin Jehovah showed that David was merely the typical Messiah, not the reality. The type failed miserably and that in the sphere that is essential to the covenant, namely holiness, justice, the humble obedience to Jehovah, the honoring of Jehovah’s name. The hope of the Old Testament saints, accordingly, is directed to David’s seed, that “holy thing” (Luke 1:35), who would do the will of Jehovah even when Jehovah is pouring out the vials of his wrath upon him. David fell so that Christ Jesus would stand alone, prominently (145).

Saul was the people’s disastrous choice. David was the man after God’s own heart. Solomon was the philosopher-king, a “lover of wisdom.” Wisdom characterized Solomon, and peace and prosperity characterized his reign. Explaining the typology of Solomon, Engelsma writes,

... it must not be overlooked that the full type of Christ and his reign is David *and* Solomon. David is the battling king who lays the groundwork for the kingdom of peace. The necessary way to peace is war (173-174; italics mine).

Solomon enjoyed peace through the subjugation of his foes, so that they brought tribute to him. “The calling of the church in history [is] to guard spiritual peace with the fortifications of creeds, polemics, and discipline” (180). Solomon’s crowning work was his construction of the temple of Jehovah, which was really God’s “gracious work.” God appointed the site. God gave the blueprint. God put it into David’s and then into Solomon’s heart to prepare such a glorious structure to be His house among His people. The reality, how-

ever, is not a grandiose cathedral in the New Testament age but the church, the people of God. “The truly massive and beautiful fulfillment of Solomon’s temple can be, and often is, found in a shabby, wooden, ramshackle building, in which only a handful of believers and their children worship in spirit and in truth” (186).

Solomon too, like David before him, fell lamentably into sin. What a warning to us today: even the most prominent member of the church is prone to many temptations and falls. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (I Cor. 10:12). Solomon, than whom no wiser man except Jesus ever lived; Solomon who built and dedicated the temple; Solomon who was given riches and honour; fell. Solomon fell despite the warning that he received from God after the dedication of the temple (I Kings 9:3-9). God’s people, even Solomon the wise, need warnings. Engelsma explains,

The covenant of grace includes both an unconditional promise (which is repetition, since grace *means* unconditional) and a solemn warning regarding disobedience. The unconditional promise does not rule out the warning, and the warning does not compromise the unconditional promise. This is the truth with which the church of the New Testament struggles to this very day, supposing that doing justice to the warning implies a conditional covenant promise and that confession of the unconditional promise rules out or weakens the warning. The unconditional promise realizes itself in the elect in Jesus Christ by means of the warning (190-191).

Solomon’s sin was idolatry, connected to his other sin, the taking of many wives. Solomon’s sin was religious syncretism and conformity to the world. Upon Solomon in his sin God brings severe judgment. God rends the kingdom from Solomon, which rending occurs in the days of Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, and which rending is tempered with mercy, for not the whole kingdom but only part is rent from Solomon. “Unlike his father David, Solomon did not die in peace, but with his kingdom under attack and coming apart” (197). Nevertheless, although disaster came upon the kingdom and upon Solomon personally, Solomon knew the forgiveness of God in the way of repentance, as the book of Ecclesiastes abundantly testifies.

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Unfolding Covenant History, volume 6, is a fascinating account of the lives of Samuel, Saul, David and Solomon. It includes sound exegesis, sober typology, penetrating applications and is Christ-centred throughout. In every chapter, the reader is led from the types in their weaknesses and sins to the reality, even to the Lord Jesus and His cross where alone we find our salvation. This book comes highly recommended. Readers are also encouraged to devour the other five volumes in this superb series.¹

¹ Volume 6 of *Unfolding Covenant History* is available from the RFPa in the US (www.rfpa.org) and the CPRC Bookstore (www.cprc.co.uk), 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, BT42 3NR, N. Ireland (028 25 891851). The cost is £15.00 (plus 10% P&P in the UK). Volumes 1-3 cost £18 each, volume 4 is £20 and volume 5 is £15. Make cheques payable to "Covenant Protestant Reformed Church."