

Daniel I. Block. *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 704 pages. \$38.49.

In *Covenant: The Framework for God's Grand Plan of Redemption*, biblical scholar Daniel I. Block contends that "covenant" brings coherence and cohesion to the larger message of the Bible. It offers an overarching narrative that surrounds and frames other themes and motifs. "After five decades of marinating in the Scriptures," he writes, "I have found, among those themes, that the notion of 'covenant' represents the heart of all biblical revelation, and the 'covenants' themselves provide the framework for that revelation" (1). Block is the Gunther H. Knoedler Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, where he taught from 2005–2017. A much sought after lecturer and preacher in the United States and around the world, he also served as a senior translator for the New Living Translation (NLT).

Covenant represents Block's post-retirement "Here I stand" declaration in biblical theology (xiv, 7), a veritable magnum opus written to the church rather than the academy (xiv). His prose reflects a commitment to reaching church leaders, with the expressed hope that some laypeople, too, will benefit from the book (xiv). To structure his argument, Block divides *Covenant* into four parts: the cosmic and Adamic covenants (Chapters 1–2), the Israelite covenant, which he claims goes through four separate stages (Chapters 3–9), the Davidic covenant (Chapters 10–12), and the New Testament covenant (Chapters 13–20).

According to the traditional view, covenants can be separated into two subcategories: covenants of grant that are unconditional, such as those made with Abraham and David, and covenants of obligation that are conditional, such as the Deuteronomic covenant. Block refutes this view. Such a binary is false, he claims: different types of covenants "all exhibit both signs of irrevocability and contingency" (2). All covenants share a fundamental commonality in that they are divinely initiated suzerain-vassal pacts that have unconditional and conditional aspects. God functions as the principal Suzerain who makes covenant promises and expects covenant obligations to be fulfilled. Humanity can either accept or reject the relationship that has been offered by God (2). They may not negotiate terms.

Those who read *Covenant* will be able to identify more than a few strengths. For the purposes of this review, I will identify just two. First, readers who think they know a good deal about biblical covenants will be surprised by how much they learn. In my case, this book closed gaps regarding the particularities of the Levitical covenant and the critical "afterlife" of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants in the Old Testament and the New Testament (105, 331). Second, *Covenant* pushes back against a common tendency, as old as the church itself, to "perceive the relationship between the two Testaments of our Bible as radically discontinuous" (394). Block argues instead for a New Testament message that "records and celebrates the climax of God's covenantal agenda" (394). If Block is right that "we have invested too much time into digging the ditch between the Testaments," then the claim he makes for continuity will require a sizeable number of preachers to rethink their theological constructs and rework their homiletical claims (10).

The main weakness of this book is found in the mode in which it comes to us and not in its primary claim. A book that purports to be exhaustive in its account of a doctrine or a theme can become so comprehensive that it loses some of its rhetorical force and power along the way. *Covenant* weighs in at 704 pages. Block did not need to develop or expand on every sub-argument to be persuasive; neither did he have to follow every road that led to an excursus.

Covenant can be a good resource in the hands of Christian leaders and scholars who are interested in a comprehensive biblical theology of covenant written in popular prose. Scholars who want a heavily footnoted academic tome on the subject should look elsewhere. Block says as much when he writes: “This is, after all, intended as a *biblical theology*, not as a theology of biblical interpreters” (xv; emphasis original). In the hands of homileticians and preaching practitioners, *Covenant*’s insistence on continuity can offer a much-needed theological corrective by challenging false dichotomies and problematizing reductive frameworks. To borrow imagery from Block, it can assist preachers in “filling the ditch” they have created between the two Testaments (10).

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