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Covenants: God's Claims (Book Review)

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have had to wait many millions of years for the gases to thin sufficiently for the first gleams of light to penetrate to the liquid surface. But God does not see things as men see them. To him, remember, the fiats are real: once the word is spoken, the deed is certain to follow. He commanded and at once he saw—in his mind's eye, so to speak—the light of day, followed by darkness. "And there was evening and there was morning, one day." For ever after, in God's own eternal framework of heavenly glory (which is so different from the petty continuum of space-time in which we dwell) the endless succession of day and night continued—even though, to our imaginary observer, the dawn of the first material day was yet to come. In each of the next five of those "divinely-real" days, God spoke. And on the seventh day he rested, for all the work was

then as good as done (pp. 174-5).

Hayward links these ideas to the rest of the biblical revelation. Thus, a second fulfillment of the command that light should appear was the coming of Christ. He concludes his discussion of the fiat theory as follows:

Thus it is possible to view all the rest of the Bible as one giant parenthesis, describing in fine detail the outworking of God's last and greatest fiat. And God's eternal kingdom is the sabbath rest which will follow (p. 178).

Hayward's analysis of both the natural scientific and theological aspects of the origins question deserves consideration and discussion. It is quite possible that years from now we will look back and realize that this was a landmark book, one that changed the debate.

Covenants: God's Claims, John M. Zinkand, Dordt College Press, Sioux Center, Iowa, 1984, \$5.95. Reviewed by Charles Veenstra, Professor of Communication.

In a very readable little book, Professor Zinkand explains the critical place that covenant has in Scripture. He succeeds in his purpose of writing for the lay person rather than theologians. While the term "covenant" may be familiar, many people apparently fail to see this thread all the way through the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps the plural term in the title, as well as the various chapter titles, gives the impression that several covenants existed in the Bible, but the author clearly shows that the various forms of covenants are essentially part of one covenant. He even demonstrates that we ought not talk about the Covenant of Works over against the Covenant of Grace since each form of covenant involves grace rather than works.

In 17 short chapters, one quickly sees that the essence of covenant lies in the subtitle of the book: God tells his people over and over again that he will be their God and asks them to be his people. God always comes to his people *first*. Furthermore, the reader is soon impressed with the fact that God *keeps coming back* to his people when they fail to obey his laws. God, of course, has the right to set the demands of the covenant because he originated it in the same way that rulers made treaties in the time of the Old Testament.

After a brief explanation of the historical meaning of the term "covenant," the author begins with a description of the Mosaic covenant in Deuteronomy because, he says, concepts of covenant are most clearly laid out here. From there he moves to the covenants with Abraham, David and Levi, Noah, and Adam. While I would have preferred a chronological treatment, I did not find his method confusing. In the second half of the book, he traces out clearly how these Old Testament covenants are fulfilled in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. Because Christ kept the demands

of the covenant, God cannot break his promises with those who are his own: "By having been cursed in his death, Christ cancelled the curse which applied to all who broke the covenant" (p. 88). Nevertheless, by its very nature, covenant has two sides—promises from God and required obedience by his people. Nowhere is the required obedience abrogated by Christ's redemption. Covenant obedience is needed to show thankfulness rather than to redeem oneself from the demands of God's law: "This is the way that Israel is to keep the holiness that God imparts to it by being his nation, his peculiar treasure" (p. 27).

At least two things impress the reader as the author reveals covenant in Scripture. First, *all* people have been covenant-breakers. When we begin to sense this, we more fully appreciate what God has done in Christ. Second, God does it *all*: not only does God make the covenant, but he also provides the required redemption for us covenant-breakers. How often God would not let his people go when they wandered away; and when the people came back, God renewed his promises! This same God calls to us today. Yet, the warning is there also for those who persist in turning their backs on God, and this element should have been given fuller treatment by the author.

The book deserves a wide reading. While there is not much new here for the person who has been educated in covenant theology, this book helps one to appreciate more fully how covenant is deeply grounded in Scripture. For those less familiar with covenant, this book should provide much solid material for study of how covenant was instituted and fulfilled. I am convinced that this central theme is necessary to a correct understanding of Scripture.