God’s Covenant with man

What is a covenant?
Before we launch into a summer-long study of covenants, it would be good to map out the territory a bit. We can always resort to a dictionary definition, but what does the Bible have to say about covenants, specifically those between God and man?

As a means to come up with a Bible-based definition of covenant, it would be helpful to do a short word study:
- Find the instances of the word covenant in the Old and New Testaments, using a concordance, and/or dictionary like Vine’s. If you’ve not got access to paper copies of such tools, you may want to try a very useful website, http://www.biblestudytools.net
- What seem to be the similarities in usage? Differences? What are the general characteristics of covenants as presented before you?

Once you have done the above, read through the introduction and first chapter of Covenants. Your answers to the above questions will be useful in considering our discussion points presented next.

An aside on our discussion format:

The usual format we will be using is a set of questions which are given at the end of each chapter, or derived from these. Each week, I will also pose other questions and put forward a bit of additional reading for your consideration. God willing, each week I will have questions & reading for the next week ready for you.
I hope and pray that this discussion of covenant will be useful and comforting for each of us. God our Father has made certain promises to His people, and we can be certain that He will hold Himself to those promises, forever. Our faith can rest on the certainty that God does not change... and that His promises are eternal.

The Puritan Thomas Shepherd wrote: “The Covenant is the midst between both God’s purposes and performances... For in God’s Covenant we see with open face God’s secret purposes for times past – God’s purpose toward His people being, as it were, nothing else but promises concealed, and God’s promises in the Covenant being nothing else but His purposes revealed. As also, in the same Covenant and promises we see performances for the future, as if they were accomplishments, at present. Where then is a Christian’s comfort but in that Covenant, wherein two eternities (as it were) meet together, and whereby he may see accomplishments (made sure to him) of eternal glory, arising from blessed purposes of eternal grace.”

In the same article, he adds, “What is a Christian’s comfort, and where doth it chiefly lie, but in this, That the Lord hath made with him an everlasting Covenant, in all things established in sure.”

Another little-known Puritan, Edward Pearse, wrote, “Oh, study this Covenant of God, and all the unchangeableness of it, and you will find it an unchangeable spring of comfort to you!”

It is my hope that we can, from the study of Covenant throughout the Scriptures, derive a great measure of comfort in the turbulent world in which we live. The promises of our infinite and holy God are for us and for our children after us. Let’s dive in, then, and see what the Bible has to say to us about covenant and the covenant community of Christ’s body. Let’s take hold of the comfort that these pastors of old saw in the Covenant between Him and His people.
Introduction and Chapter 1:

General Definitions & Characteristics of Covenants in Scripture

1. How is the word *covenant* defined, a la Noah Webster?

2. Where in Scripture do we find the word “covenant”? Briefly scan over some of them, in both the Old and New Testaments, just to get a feel for how God uses the word.

   From these examples, think about the general characteristics of covenants? Who are the parties involved, and what are their roles? What are the conditions? How are they enacted? Just sketch out some notes ...
More specifically, take a look at a few key examples of the covenantal dealings of God with man. Summarize the covenant according to the categories below:

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<th>Parties</th>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Symbols? Signs? Ceremony?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Genesis 9:9-17</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Genesis 15:8-18, 17:1-14</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Exodus 24:4-8</strong></td>
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4. In your survey of the Bible for the use of *covenant*, You may have found examples of covenantal dealings among men, or enacted by men with relation to God, and those enacted by God with men. The example of King Tho and the missionaries contains (though it’s a pagan people) some of the key elements of covenantal dealings. The difference is, however, that example is one of a covenant between (among) men.

    When a covenant is enacted between men and God, though,

    a) Who is the active party? Who dictates terms?

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<td>Psalm 89</td>
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b) In these examples of covenant relationships between God and men, what are the general characteristics?

c) Given the answers to these questions, how do you react to people trying to define their relationship to God in their own terms?

5. Final point of reflection... Read Ps. 105. How does David react to the Covenantal relationship God has with his people? What does it bring to your mind?
Wrapping up

There have been various administrations of what some have called the Covenant of Grace between God and man. Each of these covenants\textsuperscript{1} differs somewhat – in form, specific promises involved and in the ceremonies or signs & seals that are used. Each, though, is demonstrative of the unfolding revelation of God for man – and points toward the one true mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Robertson, in his book \textbf{The Christ of the Covenants}, (from which the book we’re studying from derives) categorizes the major covenant administrations as:

- Adam: the covenant of commencement
- Noah: the covenant of preservation
- Abraham: the covenant of promise
- Moses: the covenant of law
- David: the covenant of the kingdom
- Christ: the covenant of consummation

\textsuperscript{1}I will throughout use a “small c” covenant to indicate the individual administration, instead of “big C”, which I will use to denote the overall Covenant of Grace.
Robertson points out the following, which we will touch on in the weeks to come:

1. Ultimately, the purpose of the covenant of creation is fulfilled in the covenant of redemption. Creation would have been pointless without redemption – and through it, the full glory of creation may be revealed.

2. These administrations of the covenant relate organically to one another. Each successive covenant builds on previous administrations.

3. Each of the prophetic administrations (Adam through David) finds its fulfillment only in Christ, the personal embodiment of the new covenant. In Him alone is found the fulfillment of God’s Covenant purposes.

Book Recommendations:

For further study, if you wish to look at the issue of Covenants in greater depth (beyond the purposes of our group), you may wish to look for:


_and for the very stout of heart_, there is the monumental Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man, by Herman Witsius, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990.