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THE COVENANT



In 1588, a young English woman (seven months pregnant) looked out over the sea, and what she saw—the Spanish Armada, with 130 heavily armed ships planning to invade the island—so frightened her that she went into premature labor, the midwife being *fear*.

Fear, in fact, was an apt image for her child, Thomas Hobbes, who became one of Europe's greatest political theorists. Living at a time when England had been wracked by civil war and endless religious violence, Hobbes wrote that people, without a strong, all-encompassing government, existed in a state of perpetual fear—fear of instability, fear of conquest, and, most of all, fear of death. People lived in what he called “the war of all against all,” and unless something radical was done, he warned that human life would be nothing but “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

What was the solution? Hobbes said that there was only one: the people must place themselves under a single power that would reduce all their wills to a single will and that would exercise complete authority over them. This power, this sovereign—be it a single man or an assembly of men—though wielding absolute hegemony over the nation, would end the terrible conditions that made their lives so fearful and unstable. In other words, in exchange for all their rights, the people would get peace and security instead. This transfer of power, from the people to the sovereign, is what Hobbes called the “covenant.”

The covenant idea, however, did not originate with Hobbes. On the contrary, God made a covenant thousands of years earlier with Israel—a covenant whose roots, in fact, went back even further in time. Unlike Hobbes's covenant, which was initiated and promulgated by the people, this covenant was initiated and promulgated by the true Sovereign, the Creator of heaven and earth. Also, though Hobbes's covenant was motivated solely by fear, God's

covenant is motivated by love—His love for the fallen race, a love that led Him to the cross.

Thus, because of what Christ has done for us, we love God back, and just as in the Hobbesian covenant, where the subjects had to surrender to the sovereign, we surrender, too—our sinful ways, our fears, our twisted notions of right and wrong. We do this not to gain something in return but because we already have been given the best that the Sovereign can give—Jesus Christ and the redemption found only in Him.

How does it all work? It is as simple as an exchange: Christ takes our sins and gives us His righteousness so that, through Him, we are accounted as righteous as God Himself. In this way, sin is no longer attributed to us; it no longer has to keep us separated from Him. Murderers, adulterers, bigots, liars, thieves, and even the incestuous can all be viewed as righteous as God Himself. And this wonderful gift, this accounting of righteousness, comes to them by faith, and faith alone. Hence the phrase, “righteousness by faith.”

But it does not end there, either. Through Jesus, murderers, adulterers, bigots, liars, thieves, and even the incestuous can enter into a relationship with God, because Jesus’ blood brings not only forgiveness but also cleansing, healing, and restoration. Through Christ, we are born again, and through this experience God writes His holy law upon the fleshy tables of our hearts. Thus murderers, adulterers, bigots, liars, thieves, and the incestuous no longer do the things they used to do. From and by this inward law, all of life is shaped for the believer. These people desire to work out what God puts within them, and that desire is matched with the promise of divine power. Here is the essence of what it means to live in covenant relationship with God.

This quarter, we look more closely at what God’s covenant is, what it offers, even what it demands. Though drawn from many sources, the lessons rely heavily on work of the late Gerhard Hasel, whose insights into the Word (where the covenant promises are revealed) will give encouragement, hope, and understanding in order that we can learn something that, perhaps, Hobbes never did: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

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God’s covenant is motivated by love—His love for the fallen race, a love that led Him to the cross.

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What Happened?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 100:3; Acts 17:26; Gen. 2:7, 18–25; Gen. 1:28, 29; Gen. 3:15.*

Memory Text: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. . . .’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Genesis 1:26, 27, NRSV*).

The biblical account of the creation of humanity is one filled with hope, happiness, and perfection. Each day of Creation ended with the divine pronouncement that it was “good.” Certainly that didn’t include typhoons, earthquakes, famine, and diseases. What happened?

The sixth day of Creation ended with the divine pronouncement that it was “very good.” That is because that day the Lord created beings in His own image: humans—something He had not done with anything else in the Genesis account. Of course, these beings were perfect in every way; they’d have to be. After all, they were made in the image of God. Thus, of sheer necessity, they did not include murderers, thieves, liars, swindlers, and the vile in their ranks. What happened?

This week’s lesson looks at the creation, at what God had first made, and then at what happened to that perfect creation. Finally, it touches on the quarter’s theme: what God is doing to make things right again.

The Week at a Glance: What does the Bible teach about origins? What kind of relationship did God want with humanity? What was the purpose of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What hope was given to Adam and Eve immediately after they fell?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 3.

Turtles All the Way Down . . .

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1*).

A scientist had just lectured on the orbits of the planets around the sun, and the orbit of the sun around the center of the galaxy, when an elderly woman in black tennis shoes rose and said that the earth was a flat disc sitting on the back of a turtle. The scientist, jesting, asked what the turtle sat on, and she responded that it sat on another turtle. “Ma’am,” the scientist continued joking, “what then does *that* turtle sit on?”

She answered, “Another turtle,” but before he could ask what that turtle sat on, she wagged her finger in his face and snapped, “Save your breath, sonny; it’s turtles all the way down.”

However cute, that story deals with *the* most crucial issue of human existence—the nature of the universe itself. What is this world that we find ourselves in by no choice of our own? Why are we here? How did we get here? And where are we all finally going?

These are the most basic and fundamental questions people could ask, because our understanding of who we are and how we got here will impact our understanding of how we live and how we act while we are here.

Look up the following texts: Genesis 1:1; Psalm 100:3; Isaiah 40:28; Acts 17:26; Ephesians 3:9; and Hebrews 1:2, 10. How does each one, in its own way, answer some of the above questions? What is the one point that they all have in common?

What is interesting about Genesis 1:1 (or even the other texts) is that the Lord does not attempt to prove that He is the Creator. There are no elaborate arguments to make the point. Instead, it is simply and clearly stated, with no attempt to justify, explain, or prove it. Either we accept it on faith, or we do not. In fact, faith is the *only* way that we can accept it, for one simple reason: none of us were here to see the creation process itself. It would, indeed, have been a logical impossibility for us to have been there at our own creation. Even secularists, whatever view of origins they hold, have to take that view on faith for the same reason that we as creationists have to: none of us were there to view the event.

Nevertheless, even if God has asked us to believe in Him as Creator, He does not ask us to believe without giving us good reasons to believe. Realizing that there is a certain amount of faith required in almost anything we believe, write down reasons why it makes sense to have faith that we are here because a Creator purposely put us here, as opposed to our origins being rooted in nothing but pure chance.

In the Image of the Maker *(Gen. 1:27)*

The Bible states that God created humankind—male and female—“in His own image” *(Gen. 1:27, NKJV)*. Use this idea to answer the following questions:

1. What does it mean that God created us in His own image? In what ways are we “in His own image” *(NKJV)*?

2. According to the Genesis account, did the Lord make anything else “in His own image” *(NKJV)* other than humankind? If not, what does that tell us about our unique status, in contrast to the rest of the earthly creation? What lessons can we draw from this contrast?

3. What else can be found in the account of the creation of humankind that sets the race apart from anything else the Lord had created? *(See Gen. 2:7, 18–25.)*

Although we must speak of God in human terminology, we must not forget that He is a spiritual Being *(John 4:24)*, possessing divine characteristics. All we can say is that in our physical, mental, and spiritual natures, we reflect in some way our divine Creator, however much there remains about Him that, at least for us, is still shrouded in mystery. The Bible emphasizes, however, the spiritual and mental aspects of our mind. These aspects we can develop and improve. It is the uniqueness of the human mind that makes possible a nourishing relationship with God, something the rest of God’s earthly creation seems unable to do.

Notice, too, the unique account of how God made woman. Both men and women share the incredible privilege of being made in the image of God. In their creation, there is no hint of inferiority of one to the other. God Himself made them both from the same material. God made both equal from the start and placed them together in a special relationship with Him. Both had the same opportunity to develop their God-given characters in a way that would bring glory to Him.

“God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided ‘an help meet for him’—a helper corresponding to him—one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

God and Humankind Together *(Gen. 1:28, 29)*

Notice God's first spoken words to humankind, at least as they appear in Scripture. He points them to their ability to procreate, to reproduce more of their own kind. He also points them to the earth itself, to the creation, and He tells them to replenish it, to subdue it, and to have mastery over it. He also points them to the plants they can eat. In short, according to the Bible, God's first words to man and woman deal specifically with their interaction and relationship with the physical world.

What do Genesis 1:28, 29 tell us about how God views the material world? Do they imply that there is something bad in material things and our enjoyment of them? What lessons can we learn from these early scenes in human history about how we should relate to the creation itself?

Also, with these words, God takes the first steps toward a relationship with humankind. He speaks to them, gives them commands, tells them what to do. There's a responsibility implicit in these words too. God has asked them to be masters over this wonderful creation that He Himself has made.

Genesis 1:28 says that God blessed Adam and Eve. What does that mean? What kind of relationship does it imply between them and their Creator?

God addressed Adam and Eve as intelligent beings who could respond to His kindness and enter into communion and fellowship with Him. Also, as creature-children, Adam and Eve were dependent upon the blessing and care of their Creator-Father. He provided all they needed. They did nothing to deserve what He gave them. They were purely recipients of something they did not earn.

When we read about the creation of man and woman, we can see elements, before sin, of the kind of relationship God wants us to have with Him now, after sin. Review the day's study and see what parallels you can find that help us understand how we can relate to Him, even in our fallen condition.

At the Tree

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17).

This test provided Adam and Eve with an opportunity to exercise their free will. It also challenged them to respond positively or negatively to their relationship with the Creator. It also shows that God had made them free moral beings. After all, if they did not have the opportunity to disobey, why would the Lord have even bothered warning them, in the first place, against disobedience?

“Everything preceding in this chapter has paved the way for this climax [Gen. 2:16, 17]. The future of the race centers upon this single prohibition. Man is not to be confused by a multiplicity of issues. Only one divine ordinance must be kept in mind. By thus limiting the number of injunctions to *one*, Yahweh gives tokens of his mercy. Besides, to indicate that this one commandment is not grievous, the Lord sets it against the background of a broad permission: ‘from [every] tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.’ ”—H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1942), vol. 1, p. 127.

By calling Adam and Eve to obey His will, God was saying: I am your Creator, and I have made you in My image. Your life is sustained by Me, for by Me you live and move and have your being. I have provided all things for your well-being and happiness (sustenance, home, human companionship) and have established you as ruler of this world under Me. If you are willing to affirm this relationship with Me because you love Me, then I will be your God, and you will be My children. And you can affirm this relationship and the trust implicit in it by simply obeying this specific command.

In the end, our relationship with God can be effective and lasting only if we freely choose to accept His will. In essence, rejecting His will is to claim independence from Him. It indicates that we believe we do not need Him. That is a choice that results in the knowledge of evil, and evil leads to alienation, loneliness, frustration, and death.

The test God gave Adam and Eve was one of loyalty and faith. Would they be loyal to their Creator, who had given them everything they needed, plus a world of delights, or would they go their own way, independent of His will? Would they have enough faith in Him to take Him at His word? Their loyalty and faith were tested by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In what ways do we face similar tests every day? How does God’s law function as a parallel to the command given in Genesis 2:16, 17?

Breaking the Relationship

We tend to believe people we know and instinctively distrust those whom we do not. Eve naturally would have distrusted Satan. Furthermore, any direct attack against God would have made her defensive. What steps, then, did Satan take to bypass Eve's natural defenses? (*Gen. 3:1–6*).

“Deplorable as was Eve’s transgression and fraught as it was with potential woe for the human family, her choice did not necessarily involve the race in the penalty for her transgression. It was the deliberate choice of Adam, in the full understanding of an express command of God—rather than hers—that made sin and death the inevitable lot of mankind. Eve was deceived; Adam was not.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 231.

As a result of this blatant transgression and disregard of God’s command, the relationship between God and humankind is now broken. It changed from open fellowship with God to fleeing in fear from His presence (*Gen. 3:8–10*). Alienation and separation replace fellowship and communion. Sin appeared, and all its ugly results followed. Unless something was done, humanity was heading for eternal ruin.

In the midst of this tragedy, what words of hope and promise did God speak? (*See Gen. 3:15.*)

God’s surprising word of prophetic hope speaks of a divinely ordained hostility between the serpent and the woman, between her Offspring and his offspring. This climaxes in the victorious appearance of a representative Offspring of the woman’s seed who delivers a deadly blow to the head of Satan, while he would be able only to bruise the Messiah’s heel.

In their utter helplessness, Adam and Eve were to gain hope from this Messianic promise, hope that would transform their existence, because this hope was God-given and God-supported. This promise of the Messiah and of final victory, however vaguely stated at that time, lifted the gloom into which sinning had placed them.

Read Genesis 3:9, where God says to Adam and Eve, “ ‘Where are you?’ ” (*NKJV*). God, of course, knew where they were. His words, instead of being filled with condemnation, were to draw guilt-ridden humankind back to Him. In short, God’s first words to fallen humanity came with the hope of His grace and mercy. Even now, in what ways do we find God seeking to call us to His mercy and grace?

Further Thought: The Bible overflows with calls to sinners and backsliders. Compare Psalm 95:7, 8; Isaiah 55:1, 2, 6, 7; Luke 15:3–7; and Luke 19:10. What others can you find?

Also read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 52–62; and “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 63–70, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“There was a gospel sermon, I think, in those three divine words as they penetrated the dense parts of the thicket, and reached the tingling ears of the fugitives—‘Where art thou?’ Thy God is not willing to lose thee; He is come forth to seek thee, just as by-and-by He means to come forth in the Person of His Son, not only to seek but to save that which now is lost.”—Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the Bible, The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), vol. 1, p. 11.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Because the kind and caring God is the One who seeks humankind, how can we respond to this expression of love by the Father and Jesus Christ even now? How does the Lord expect us to respond?
- ② Contrast the biblical picture of humankind as fallen from a lofty place in God’s creation and in need of redemption with the evolutionary theory of development. Which offers more hope, and why?
- ③ How essential are loving relationships to human happiness? Why is a flourishing connection to God necessary to such relationships? Discuss the influence of healthy human relationships on the persons in those relationships (parent-child, friend-friend, husband-wife, employer-employee, etc.).

Summary: God created us in His own image so that a loving fellowship could exist between Him and us. Although the entrance of sin shattered the original union, God seeks to restore this relationship through the plan of redemption. Life for us as dependent creatures takes on true meaning and clarity only when we enter into union with our Creator.

Covenant Primer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 9:15; Isa. 54:9; Gen. 12:1–3; Gal. 3:6–9, 29; Exod. 6:1–8; Jer. 31:33, 34.*

Memory Text: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine” (*Exodus 19:5*).

Last week left off with the fall of humanity because of our first parents' sin. This week is a quick summary of the whole quarter, as we take one day each to look at the early covenants, the ones that in their own way were all present-truth manifestations of the true covenant, the one ratified at Calvary by the blood of Jesus, the one that we, as Christians, enter into with our Lord.

We begin with the covenant God made with Noah to spare him and his family from destruction. We proceed to the covenant with Abraham, so rich and full of promise for all of us; then to the covenant at Sinai and the importance of what was proclaimed there; and finally we look at the new covenant, the one that all the others pointed toward. All of these, of course, will be studied in more depth over the next several weeks. This week is just a preview.

The Week at a Glance: What does the word *covenant* mean? What elements make up the covenant? What was the covenant that God made with Noah? What hope was found in the covenant with Abraham? What role do faith and works play in the human end of the covenant? Is the covenant just a deal, or does it have relational aspects to it? What is the essence of the “new covenant”?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 10.

Covenant Basics

“And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly” (*Gen. 17:2*).

“The Hebrew word translated as ‘covenant’ (appearing about 287 times in the Old Testament) is *berith*. It can also be translated as ‘testament’ or ‘last will.’ Its origin is unclear, but it has come to mean ‘that which bound two parties together.’ It was used, however, for many different types of ‘bond,’ both between man and man and between man and God. It has a common use where both parties were men, and a distinctively religious use where the covenant was between God and man. The religious use was really a metaphor based on the common use but with a deeper connotation [meaning].”—J. Arthur Thompson, “Covenant (OT),” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), vol. 1, p. 790.

Like the marriage covenant, the biblical covenant defines both a *relationship* and an *arrangement*. As an arrangement, the biblical covenant contains these basic elements:

1. God affirmed the covenant *promises* with an oath (*Gal. 3:16; Heb. 6:13, 17*).
2. The covenant *obligation* was obedience to God’s will as expressed in the Ten Commandments (*Deut. 4:13*).
3. The *means* by which God’s covenant obligation is ultimately fulfilled is through Christ and the plan of salvation (*Isa. 42:1, 6*).

Look at the three elements listed above (God’s promises, our obedience, and the plan of salvation). How can you see those factors at work in your own walk with the Lord? Write down a paragraph describing how they are manifest in your life now.

In the Old Testament, the sacrificial system of types instructed the people regarding the entire plan of salvation. Through its symbols, the patriarchs and Israel learned to exercise faith in the coming Redeemer. Through its rites, the penitent could find forgiveness for sin and release from guilt. The blessings of the covenant could thus be retained, and spiritual growth—restoring the image of God in the life—could thereby continue, even when humankind failed to uphold their end of the bargain.

Though there are covenants made between people, the main use of the word *berith* in the Hebrew Bible deals with the relationship between God and humanity. Considering who God is and who we are in comparison to Him, what kind of relationship would such a covenant depict?

Covenant With Noah

“But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee” (Gen. 6:18).

In the above verse the word *covenant* appears for the first time in the Bible, and, in this context, God has just told Noah about His decision to destroy the earth because of the massive and continuing spread of sin. Though this destruction will come in a worldwide flood, God is not forsaking the world He created. He continues to offer the covenant relationship first set in operation after the Fall. The divine “I” who offers the covenant is Himself the ground of Noah’s security. As the covenant-keeping God, the Lord promised to protect the family members who were willing to live in a committed relationship with Him, one that resulted in obedience.

Was the covenant with Noah just one-sided? Remember that the idea of a covenant implies more than one party. Did Noah have his end of the deal to uphold? What lesson is there for us in the answer to these questions?

God tells Noah that there is going to be a flood and the world will be destroyed. But God makes a deal with him in which He promises to save Noah and his family. Thus, the stakes were quite high, because if God did not uphold His end of the promise, then no matter what Noah did, he would be wiped out with the rest of the world.

God said He would make a “covenant” with Noah. The word itself implies an intention to honor what one says one will do. It is not just some whimsical statement. The word itself comes loaded with commitment. Suppose the Lord had said to Noah, “Look, the world is going to end in a terrible deluge, and I might save you, or I might not. In the meantime, do this and this, and then we’ll see what happens, but I’m not making any guarantees.” Such statements hardly come with the kind of assurance and promise found in the word *covenant* itself.

Some people have argued that Noah’s flood was not worldwide but merely a local deluge. If so, then in the context of what God promises in Genesis 9:15 (see also Isa. 54:9), every time another local flood happens (and they seem to happen all the time), God’s covenant promise is broken. In contrast, the fact that there has not been another worldwide flood proves the validity of God’s covenant promise. In short, what does this tell us about how we can trust His promises?

The Covenant With Abram

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (*Gen. 12:3*).

Read Genesis 12:1–3. List the specific promises God made to Abram.

Notice that among these promises God says to Abram that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (*Gen. 12:3*). What does that mean? How were all the families of the earth blessed in Abram? See Galatians 3:6–9. In what ways can you see in this earlier promise the promise of Jesus the Messiah? (*See Gal. 3:29.*)

In this, the first recorded divine revelation to Abram, God promised to enter into a close and lasting relationship with him, even before He used any language that spoke about covenant making. Direct references to the covenant that God would make came later (*Gen. 15:4–21, Gen. 17:1–14*). For the moment, God offered a divine-human relationship of great significance. The repeated “I will” in Genesis 12:1–3 suggests the depth and greatness of God’s offer and promise.

In addition, Abram received a single, but testing, command: “Go forth.” He obeyed by faith (*Heb. 11:8*), but not in order to bring about the promised blessings. His obedience was the response of his faith to the loving relationship, which *God* already had established. In other words, Abram already believed in God, already trusted in God, already had faith in God’s promises. He had to; otherwise, he never would have left his family and ancestral land to begin with and headed into places unknown. His obedience revealed his faith both to men and to angels.

Abram, even back then, revealed the key relationship between faith and works. We are saved by faith—a faith that results in works of obedience. The promise of salvation comes first; the works follow. Although there can be no covenant fellowship and no blessing without obedience, that obedience is faith’s response to what God already has done. Such faith illustrates the principle in 1 John 4:19, “We love him [God], because he first loved us.”

Read Genesis 15:6. In many ways, how does it show the basis of all covenant promises? Why is this blessing the most precious one of all?

The Covenant With Moses

Read Exodus 6:1–8 and then answer these questions:

1. What covenant was God talking about? (See Gen. 12:1–3.)

2. How was the Exodus to be a fulfillment, on His part, of the covenant promises?

3. What parallel can you find between what God promised the people here and what He promised Noah before the Flood?

After the Exodus, the children of Israel received the covenant at Sinai, given in the context of redemption from bondage (*Exod. 20:2*) and containing God's sacrificial provisions for atonement and the forgiveness of sin. It was, therefore, like all of the covenants, a covenant of grace, God's grace extended to His people.

In many ways, this covenant reiterated the major emphases in the covenant with Abraham:

1. It was a special relationship of God to His people (*compare Gen. 17:7, 8 with Exod. 19:5, 6*).

2. They would be a great nation (*compare Gen. 12:2 with Exod. 19:6*).

3. Obedience was required (*compare Gen. 17:9–14 and Gen. 22:16–18 with Exod. 19:5*).

“Note the order here: the Lord first *saves* Israel, then gives them His law to *keep*. The same order is true under the gospel. Christ first saves us from sin (*see John 1:29; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4*), then lives out His law within us (*Gal. 2:20; Rom. 4:25; 8:1–3; 1 Peter 2:24*).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 602.

Read Exodus 6:7. What is the one thing that comes through in the first part, where the Lord says they will be His people and He their God? Notice the dynamics there. They will be something to God, and God will be something to them. Not only does God want to relate to them in a special way; He also wants them to relate to Him in a special way, as well. Does the Lord not seek the same kind of relationship with us today? Does that first part of Exodus 6:7 reflect your relationship with the Lord, or are you just someone whose name is on the church books? If your answer to the first part of the question is yes, give reasons why.

The New Covenant (*Jer. 31:31–33*)

These passages are the first time the Old Testament mentions what is referred to as the “new covenant.” It is lodged in the context of Israel’s return from exile, and it talks about the blessings they will receive from God.

Again, as in all the other instances, it is God who initiates the covenant, and it is God who will fulfill it by His grace.

Notice, also, the language there. God referred to Himself as a husband to them; He talked about writing His law within their hearts; and, using language from the Abrahamic covenant, He says He will be their God, and they will be His people. Thus, as before, the covenant is not just some legal binding agreement, as in courts of law today. It deals with something more.

Read Jeremiah 31:33. Compare it with Exodus 6:7, which details part of the covenant made with Israel. Again, what’s the key element that comes through here? What does God want with His people?

Read Jeremiah 31:34. Compare what is being said there to John 17:3. What is the key thing that the Lord does that builds the foundation for this relationship?

In Jeremiah 31:31–34, one can see the elements of both grace and obedience, just as in the earlier covenants. God will forgive their sins, God will enter into a relationship with them, and God will bestow His grace in their lives. As a result, the people simply obey Him, not in some rote, mechanical way, but purely because they know Him, because they love Him, and because they want to serve Him. This captures the essence of the covenant relationship the Lord seeks with His people.

How do you understand this idea of the law as being written in our hearts? Does it imply that the law becomes subjective and personal, something to be interpreted and applied according to the individual configurations of our hearts? Or does it mean something else? If so, what?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Abraham in Canaan,” pp. 132–138, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Prophets of God Helping Them,” pp. 569–571, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The yoke that binds to service is the law of God. The great law of love revealed in Eden, proclaimed upon Sinai, and in the new covenant written in the heart, is that which binds the human worker to the will of God. If we were left to follow our own inclinations, to go just where our will would lead us, we should fall into Satan’s ranks and become possessors of his attributes. Therefore God confines us to His will, which is high, and noble, and elevating. He desires that we shall patiently and wisely take up the duties of service. The yoke of service Christ Himself has borne in humanity. He said, ‘I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart.’ Ps. 40:8. ‘I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.’ John 6:38. Love for God, zeal for His glory, and love for fallen humanity, brought Jesus to earth to suffer and to die. This was the controlling power of His life. This principle He bids us adopt.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 329, 330.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Was God’s covenant with Noah, Abram, Moses, and us a continuation of His covenant with Adam, or was it something new? (Compare Gen. 3:15; Gen. 22:18; and Gal. 3:8, 16.)
- ② Why is the personal, relational aspect of the covenant so important? In other words, you can have a legally binding deal, a “covenant,” with someone, without any close, personal interaction. That kind of arrangement is not, however, what the Lord is seeking in His covenant relationship with His people. Why is that so? Discuss.
- ③ In what ways is marriage a good analogy for the covenant? In what ways does the analogy of marriage fall short in describing the covenant?

Summary: The entrance of sin ruptured the relationship the Creator had originally established with the human family through our first parents. Now God seeks to reestablish that same loving relationship by means of a covenant. This covenant signifies both a committed relationship between God and us (like a marriage bond) and an arrangement for saving us and bringing us into harmony with its Maker. God Himself, motivated by His great love for us, is the Initiator of the covenant relationship. By gracious promises and gracious acts, He woos us to come into union with Him.

“All Future Generations”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:6; Gen. 6:5, 11; Gen. 6:18; Gen. 9:12–17; Isa. 4:3; Rev. 12:17.*

Memory Text: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (*Genesis 6:8*).

Bacteria are plant organisms too small to see without a microscope. Even after being magnified 1,000 times, a single, common round bacterium appears no larger than a pencil point. Given favorable conditions for growth—sufficient warmth, moisture, and food—bacteria multiply at an extremely rapid rate. For example, some bacteria reproduce by simple fission: a mature cell simply splits into two daughter cells. When fission takes place every hour, one bacterium can produce more than 16 million new bacteria in 24 hours. At the end of 48 hours, hundreds of billions of bacteria will have appeared.

This microscopic phenomenon in the natural world illustrates the rapid growth of evil after the Fall. Gifted with giant intellects, robust health, and longevity, this virile race forsook God and prostituted their rare powers to the pursuit of iniquity in all forms. While bacteria may be exterminated by sunlight, chemicals, or high temperatures, God chose to check this rampant rebellion by a universal flood.

The Week at a Glance: What did sin do to God's creation? What were some of the characteristics of Noah? What elements were involved in the covenant with Noah? In what ways is God's grace revealed in the covenant with Noah before the Flood? What does the covenant God made with humanity after the Flood teach us about His universal love for us?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 17.

The Sin Principle *(Gen. 6:5)*

The divine opinion at the end of God's creation was that all "was very good" (*Gen. 1:31*). Then sin entered, and the paradigm shifted. Things weren't "very good" anymore. God's orderly creation was marred by sin and all its loathsome results. Rebellion had reached terrible proportions by Noah's day; evil consumed the race. Though the Bible does not give us many details (see Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 90–92, for more), the transgressions and rebellion were clearly something that even a loving, patient, and forgiving God couldn't tolerate.

How could things get so bad so quickly? The answer is, perhaps, not that hard to find. How many people today, looking at their own sins, have not asked the same thing: How did things get so bad so quickly?

Look up the texts listed below. Write down the points they make. Notice the steady progression of sin:

Gen. 3:6 _____

Gen. 3:11–13 _____

Gen. 4:5 _____

Gen. 4:8 _____

Gen. 4:19 _____

Gen. 4:23 _____

Gen. 6:2 _____

Gen. 6:5, 11 _____

Genesis 6:5 and 11 did not arise in a vacuum. There was a history before them. This terrible result had a cause. Sin progressively got worse. It tends to do that. Sin is not like a cut or a wound, with some automatic, built-in process that brings healing. On the contrary, if left unchecked, sin multiplies, never satisfied until it leads to ruin and death. One does not have to imagine life before the Flood to see this principle operating. It exists all around us, even now.

No wonder God hates sin; no wonder, sooner or later, sin will be eradicated. A just, loving God could do nothing else with it.

The good news, of course, is that though He wants to get rid of sin, He wants to save sinners. That's what the covenant is all about.

The Man Noah *(Gen. 6:9)*

Amid all the texts about the evil of the antediluvian (pre-Flood) world, the man Noah stands out in contrast to those around him. Look at the above text and the three particular points that the Bible makes about Noah. To the best of your ability, write down what you think each of these points means:

1. He was “a righteous man” (NRSV). _____

2. He was “blameless” (NRSV). _____

3. He “walked with God.” _____

There is no question, Noah was someone who had a saving relationship with the Lord. He was someone whom God could work with, someone who would listen to Him, obey Him, and trust in Him. That is why the Lord was able to use Noah to fulfill His purposes and why Peter, in the New Testament, called him “a preacher of righteousness” (*2 Pet. 2:5*).

Read Genesis 6:8. How does this text help us understand the relationship between Noah and the Lord?

The word *grace* occurs here for the first time in Scripture and clearly has the same meaning as in the New Testament references, where the merciful, unmerited favor of God, exercised toward undeserving sinners, is described. Thus, we need to understand that however “blameless” and “righteous” Noah was, he was still a sinner who needed the unmerited favor of his God. In that sense, Noah is no different from any of us who seek earnestly to follow the Lord.

Understanding that Noah needed God’s grace, as do the rest of us, look at your own life and ask yourself this question: Could it be said of me that I am, like Noah, “righteous,” “blameless,” and that I “walk with God”? Write down your reasons for whatever position you take, and (if you feel comfortable) share it with the class on Sabbath.

Covenant With Noah

“**But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you’**” (*Gen. 6:18, RSV*).

In this one verse we have the basics of the biblical covenant that God makes with humanity: God and humankind enter into an agreement. Very simple.

Yet, there are more elements than first meet the eye.

To begin, there is the element of obedience on humanity’s part. God says to Noah that he and his family shall go into the ark. They have their part to do, and if they do not do it, the covenant is broken. If the covenant is broken, they are the ultimate losers, for in the end they are the beneficiaries of the covenant. After all, if Noah said no to God and did not want to abide by the covenant or said yes but then changed his mind, what would have been the results for him and his family?

God says that it is “my covenant.” What does that tell us about the basic nature of the covenant? What difference would there be in our concept of the covenant if the Lord had called it “our covenant”?

However unique this particular situation, we see here the basic God-human dynamic found in the covenant. By establishing “my covenant” with Noah, God here again displays His grace. He shows that He is willing to take the initiative in order to save human beings from the results of their sins. In short, this covenant must not be seen as some sort of union of equals in which each “partner” in the covenant is dependent upon the other. We could say that God “benefits” from the covenant, but only in a radically different sense from the way humans do. He benefits in that those whom He loves will be given eternal life—no small satisfaction for the Lord (*Isa. 53:11*). But that is not to say that He benefits in the same way we, on the receiving end of the same covenant, benefit.

Try this analogy: a man has fallen overboard from a boat in the midst of a storm. Someone on the deck says that he will throw a life preserver over to haul him in. The one in the water, however, has to agree to his end of the “deal,” and that is to grab on and to hold on to what has been provided him. That, in many ways, is what the covenant between God and humanity is all about.

How does the analogy above help you to understand the concept of grace that exists in the covenant? How does it help you understand what your relationship to God even now needs to be based on?

Sign of the Rainbow

“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth’ ” (Gen. 9:12, 13, RSV).

Few natural phenomena are more beautiful than the rainbow. Who does not remember as a child one’s first fascination and wonder as those amazing bars of light bent across the sky like some sort of beckoning, mystical portal into the heavens? Even as adults, our breath can be taken away by the sight of those outrageous colors in the clouds. No wonder that even today the rainbow is used as a symbol for so many things: from political organizations to cults to rock bands to travel agencies (look up the word *rainbow* on the internet and see). Obviously, those beautiful bands of color still touch chords in our hearts and minds.

Of course, that was God’s whole point.

What did the Lord say the rainbow would symbolize? (See Gen. 9:12–17.)

The Lord said He would use the rainbow as a sign of “my covenant” (Gen. 9:15). How interesting that He would use the word “covenant” here, for, in this case, the covenant differs from how it is used elsewhere. In contrast to the covenant with Abraham or the Sinai covenant, there is no specific obligation expressed on the part of those who would benefit from the covenant (even Noah). God’s words here are to all people, to “ ‘every living creature of all flesh’ ” (Gen. 9:15, RSV) for “ ‘all future generations’ ” (Gen. 9:12, RSV). God’s words are universal, all-encompassing, regardless of whether anyone chooses to obey the Lord or not. In this sense, the concept of *covenant* here is not used as it is elsewhere in the Bible when talking about the relationship between God and humans.

In what sense does this covenant also reveal God’s grace? Who initiated this covenant? Who is the ultimate benefactor?

Though the covenant, as expressed here, does not come with specific obligations on our part (God’s part, of course, is never to destroy the world with a flood), how could our knowledge of what the rainbow symbolizes influence us to live in obedience to the Lord? In short, are there some implied obligations on our part when we look up into the sky and see the rainbow? Think of the whole context in which the rainbow came and the lessons we can learn from that account.

“Only Noah Was Left”

“He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark” (*Gen. 7:23, RSV*).

In this text one finds the first mention of the concept of “the remnant” in the Scriptures. The word translated as “was left” comes from another word whose root forms are used many times in the Old Testament where the idea of a *remnant* is conveyed.

“‘And God sent me before you to preserve for you a *remnant* on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors’ ” (*Gen. 45:7, RSV; emphasis supplied*).

“And he *who is left* in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem” (*Isa. 4:3, RSV; emphasis supplied*).

“In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover *the remnant which is left* of his people” (*Isa. 11:11, RSV; emphasis supplied*).

In all these cases, the italicized words are linked to the similar words “was left” found in Genesis 7:23, RSV.

Look at Genesis 7:23 and the other examples. How do you understand the concept of a remnant here? What are the surrounding conditions that led to a remnant? How does the covenant fit in with the idea of a remnant?

At the time of the Flood, the Creator of the world became the Judge of the world. The nearing worldwide judgment raised the question whether all life on earth—even human life—would be destroyed. If not, who would be the survivors? Who would be the remnant?

In this case, it was Noah and his family. Yet, Noah’s salvation was linked to God’s covenant with him (*Gen. 6:18*)—a covenant that originated and was executed by a God of mercy and grace. They survived only because of what God did for them, however important their cooperation was. Whatever Noah’s covenant obligations were, and no matter how faithfully he executed them, his only hope was in God’s mercy.

Based upon our understanding of last-day events, which includes a time when God will have a remnant (see Rev. 12:17), what parallels can we learn from the story of Noah that will help us prepare to be part of the remnant? In what ways are we making decisions every day that could impact just where we finally stand at that time?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Flood,” pp. 90–104 and “After the Flood,” pp. 105–110, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The rainbow, a natural physical phenomenon, was a fitting symbol of God’s promise never to destroy the earth again by a flood. Inasmuch as the climatic conditions of the earth would be completely different after the Flood, and rains would in most parts of the world take the place of the former beneficent dew to moisten the soil, something was needed to quiet men’s fears each time rain began to fall. The spiritual mind can see in natural phenomena God’s revelations of Himself (see Rom. 1:20). Thus the rainbow is evidence to the believer that the rain will bring blessing and not universal destruction.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 265.

Discussion Questions:

① “In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, ‘The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel.’ So the gods agreed to exterminate man.”—“The Story of the Flood” in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. N. K. Sanders (London: The Penguin Group, 1972), p. 108. Compare this reason for the Flood to the reason given in the Bible.

② Noah did more than warn his generation of God’s approaching judgment. The purpose of his warning was to help the people sense their need of salvation. Why are the truths of salvation generally unpopular? List and discuss some things that hinder many persons from accepting God’s plan for their salvation. (See John 3:19; John 7:47, 48; John 12:42, 43; and James 4:4.)

Summary: In this week’s study, we have noted that the covenants God made with Noah are the first to be discussed explicitly in the Bible. They display His gracious interest in the human family and His desire to enter into a saving relationship with them. God reaffirmed His covenant with Noah, and it was Noah’s commitment to God that shielded him from the prevailing apostasy and eventually saved him and his family from the devastating judgment of the Flood.

“This symbol [the rainbow] in the clouds is to confirm the belief of all, and establish their confidence in God, for it is a token of divine mercy and goodness to man; that although God has been provoked to destroy the earth by the Flood, yet His mercy still encompasseth the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 71.

An Everlasting Covenant



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 3:14; Gen. 17:1–6; Gen. 41:45; Dan. 1:7; Gen. 15:7–18; Gen. 17:1–14; Rev. 14:6, 7.*

Memory Text: “ ‘I [God] will establish my covenant between me and you [Abraham] and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you’ ” (*Genesis 17:7, RSV*).

How many remember distinctly in childhood a sickness or a touch of pneumonia that made us very ill, with the potential for something even worse? In the long, feverish night, we would awaken from a half sleep to see our mother or father sitting in a chair beside our bed in the soft glow of the night-light.

Just so, in a figurative, human sense, God sat by the bedside of a sin-sick world as moral darkness began to deepen in the centuries after the Flood. For this reason, He called out Abram and planned to establish through His faithful servant a people to whom He could entrust a knowledge of Himself and give salvation.

Therefore, God entered into a covenant with Abram and his posterity that emphasized in more detail the divine plan to save humankind from the results of sin. The Lord was not going to leave His world unattended, not with it in such dire need. This week, we will look at the unfolding of more covenant promises.

The Week at a Glance: What is the name of God? What does it mean? What was the significance of the names God used to identify Himself to Abram? What names did He use to identify Himself? Why did God change Abram's name to Abraham? Why are names important? What conditions, or obligations, were attached to the covenant?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 24.

Yahweh and the Abrahamic Covenant

“And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it” (Gen. 15:7).

Names can sometimes be like trademarks. They become so closely associated in our minds with certain characteristics that when we hear the name we immediately recall these traits. What traits come to mind, for instance, when you think of these names: Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, or Dorcas? Each one is associated with certain characteristics and ideals.

During Bible times, people of the Near East attached great importance to the meaning of names. “The Hebrews always thought of a name as indicating either the personal characteristics of the one named, or the thoughts and emotions of the one giving the name, or attendant circumstances at the time the name was given.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 523.

When God first entered into a covenant relationship with Abram, He made Himself known to the patriarch under the name YHWH (pronounced Yahweh and translated as LORD, in capitals, in the King James Version [*Gen. 15:7*]). Thus, Genesis 15:7 reads literally, “I am YHWH who brought thee out of . . .”

The name YHWH, though appearing 6,828 times in the Old Testament, is somewhat shrouded in mystery. It seems to be a form of the verb *hayah*, ‘to be,’ in which case it would mean “the Eternal One,” “the Existent One,” “the Self-Existing One,” “the Self-Sufficient One,” or “the One who lives eternally.” The divine attributes that seem to be emphasized by this title are those of self-existence and faithfulness. They point to the Lord as the living God, the Source of life, in contrast with the gods of the heathen, which had no existence apart from the imagination of their worshipers.

God Himself explains the meaning of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14: “‘I AM WHO I AM’ ” (*RSV, NASB*). This meaning expresses the reality of God’s unconditioned existence, while it also suggests His rule over past, present, and future.

Yahweh also is God’s personal name. The identification of Yahweh as the One who brought Abram out of Ur refers to the announcement of God’s covenant with him in Genesis 12:1–3. God wants Abram to know His name, because that name reveals aspects of His identity, personal nature, and character—and from this knowledge we can learn to trust in His promises (*Ps. 9:10, Ps. 91:14*).

When you think of or hear the name Yahweh, what traits or characteristics automatically come to mind? Those of love, kindness, and care, or those of fear, strictness, and discipline? What thoughts automatically come to mind when you think of the name Jesus?

'El-Shaddai

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1).

Yahweh had appeared to Abram several times before (*Gen. 12:1, 7; Gen. 13:14; Gen. 15:1, 7, 18*). Now, in the above text, Yahweh again appears to Abram (“the LORD appeared to Abram”), presenting Himself as “Almighty God”—a name that is used with two exceptions only in the books of Genesis and Job. The name “Almighty God” consists first of *'El*, the basic name for God used among the Semites. Though the exact meaning of *Shaddai* is not entirely certain, the translation “Almighty” seems the most accurate. (*Compare Isa. 13:6 and Joel 1:15.*) The crucial idea in the use of this name seems to be that of contrasting the might and power of God with the weakness and frailty of humanity.

Read Genesis 17:1–6, which helps place everything in the larger context. Why would the Lord at this time want to stress to Abram His might and power? What was God saying that would require Abram to trust in that might and power? Look particularly at Genesis 17:6.

A literal translation of Genesis 17:1–6 would be: “Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said, ‘I am *'El-Shaddai*; walk before Me, and be thou perfect; and I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . . And thou shalt be a father of a multitude of nations, . . . and I will make thee exceedingly fruitful.’ ” This same name also appears in Genesis 28:3, where Isaac says that *'El-Shaddai* will bless Jacob, make him fruitful, and multiply him.

A similar promise of *'El-Shaddai* is found in Genesis 35:11, Genesis 43:14, and Genesis 49:25, passages that suggest the bountifulness exercised by God: *'El*, the God of power and authority, and *Shaddai*, the God of inexhaustible riches, riches that He is willing to bestow upon those who seek Him in faith and obedience.

It has been said that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, the idea being that the name does not matter. Yet, how much comfort and hope would you have if the Lord’s name was “The Frail God” or “The Weak God”? Look at the text for today. Replace “Almighty God” with these two other names. What would it do for your faith and trust in Him if the Lord were to present Himself to us in that manner? At the same time, how does the name *'El-Shaddai* give us comfort?

From Abram to Abraham (*Gen. 17:4, 5*)

Though the names of God come with spiritual and theological significance, such usage does not end with God alone. Names of people in the ancient Near East were not just meaningless forms of identification, as often they are to us. To name a girl *Mary* or *Susy* does not make much of a difference today. For the ancient Semites, however, human names came heavy-laden with spiritual significance. All Semitic names of people have meaning and usually consist of a phrase or short sentence comprised of a wish or an expression of gratitude on the part of the parent. For example, *Daniel* means “God is my judge”; *Joel* means “Yahweh is God”; *Nathan* means “Gift of God.”

Because of the significance attached to names, names would often be changed to reflect a radical change in someone’s life and circumstances.

Look up the following texts. What situations are they addressing, and why were the names changed in these situations?

Gen. 32:28 _____

Gen. 41:45 _____

Dan. 1:7 _____

In one sense, however, it is not that hard, even for modern minds, to understand the significance of what a person is called. There are subtle and, at times, not-so-subtle effects. If someone is constantly called “stupid” or “ugly,” and if those are the appellations used for them all the time by a lot of people—sooner or later those names could have an impact on how the person views himself or herself. In the same way, by giving people certain names or changing their names, it seems possible to influence how they would view themselves and thus influence how they would act.

With this in mind, it is not so hard to understand why God would want to change Abram to Abraham. Abram means “Father is exalted”; God changed it to Abraham, which means “Father of a multitude.” When you look at the covenant promise in which God says “ ‘I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you’ ” (*Gen. 17:6, RSV*), the name change makes more sense. Perhaps it was God’s way of helping Abraham trust in the covenant promise, which was being made to a 99-year-old man married to an old woman who had up until this time been barren. In short, God did it to help increase Abraham’s faith in God’s promises to him.

Covenant Stages *(Gen. 12:1, 2)*

In those two verses, the first stage of God's covenant promise to Abram (there are three) is revealed. God approached Abram, gave him a command and then made him a promise. The *approach* expresses God's gracious election of Abram to be the first major figure of His special covenant of grace. The *command* involves the test of total trust in God (*Heb. 11:8*). The *promise* (*Gen. 12:1–3, 7*), though made specifically to Abram's descendants, ultimately includes a promise to the whole human race (*Gen. 12:3, Gal. 3:6–9*).

The second stage of God's covenant with Abram appears in Genesis 15:7–18. In what verses do we find some of the same steps that appeared in the first stage?

The approach of God to man—verses? _____

The call to human obedience—verses? _____

The divine promise—verses? _____

In the solemn ritual of the second stage, the Lord appeared to Abram and passed between the carefully arranged pieces of animals. Each of the three animals was slaughtered and divided, and the two halves were placed one against the other, with a space between. The birds were killed but not divided. Those entering into the covenant were to walk between the divided pieces, symbolically vowing perpetual obedience to the provisions thus solemnly agreed upon.

Describe what took place during the third and final stage of divine covenant making with Abraham. (*See Gen. 17:1–14.*)

The meaning of the name Abraham underscores God's desire and design to save all peoples. The "many nations" would include *both* Jews and Gentiles. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that the true descendants of Abraham are those who have the faith of Abraham and who trust in the merits of the promised Messiah. (*See Gal. 3:7, 29.*) Thus, as far back as Abraham, the Lord's intention was to save as many human beings as He could, whatever nations they lived in. No doubt, it's no different today.

Read Revelation 14:6, 7, the first angel's message. What parallels can you find between what the angel is saying and what happened in the Abrahamic covenant? In what ways are the issues the same?

Covenant Obligations

“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).

As we have seen so far, the covenant is always a covenant of grace, of God doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. There is no exception in the covenant with Abraham.

In His grace, God had chosen Abraham as His instrument to assist in proclaiming the plan of salvation to the world. God’s fulfillment of His covenant promises was, however, linked to Abraham’s willingness to do righteously and to obey Him by faith. Without that obedience on Abraham’s part, God could not use him.

Genesis 18:19 demonstrates how grace and law are related. It opens with *grace* (“I know him”) and is followed by the fact that Abraham is someone who will obey the Lord and have his family obey, as well. Faith and works, then, appear here in a close union, as they must. (*See James 2:17.*)

Notice, however, the phrasing of Genesis 18:19, particularly the last clause. What is it saying here about Abraham’s obedience? Though obedience is not the means of salvation, what importance is it given here? According to this text, could the covenant be fulfilled without it? Explain your answer.

The blessings of the covenant could not be enjoyed or maintained unless certain conditions were met by the beneficiaries. Though the conditions were not needed to establish the covenant, meeting them was to be the response of love, faith, and obedience. It was to be the manifestation of a relationship between humankind and God. Obedience was the means by which God could fulfill His covenant promises to the people.

Covenant breaking, through disobedience, is unfaithfulness to an established relationship. When the covenant is broken, what is broken is not the condition of bestowal but the condition of fulfillment.

In your own experience with the Lord, can you see why obedience is so important? Can you think of any examples, either from the Bible or from your own experience, where disobedience makes the fulfillment of covenant promises impossible? If so, what are they, and, more important, what is the remedy?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Call of Abraham,” pp. 125–131, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Jew and Gentile,” pp. 188–200, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The rainbow is a sign of God’s covenant with Noah. Read Genesis 17:10 to discover what was the sign of God’s covenant with Abraham. Circumcision “was destined: (1) to distinguish the seed of Abraham from the Gentiles (*Eph. 2:11*), (2) to perpetuate the memory of Jehovah’s covenant (*Gen. 17:11*), (3) to foster the cultivation of moral purity (*Deut. 10:16*), (4) to represent righteousness by faith (*Rom. 4:11*), (5) to symbolize circumcision of the heart (*Rom. 2:29*), and (6) to foreshadow the Christian rite of baptism (*Col. 2:11, 12*).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, pp. 322, 323.

The rainbow will remain as a sign of God’s promise until the end of the world, but the sign of circumcision will not. According to the apostle Paul, circumcision was received by Abraham as a token of the righteousness he had received by faith in God (*Rom. 4:11*). However, through the centuries, circumcision came to signify salvation by obedience to the law. By New Testament times, circumcision had lost its biblical significance. Instead, the essential element is faith in Jesus Christ, which leads to an obedient, transformed life. Read Galatians 5:6; Galatians 6:15; and 1 Corinthians 7:18, 19.

Discussion Questions:

① Discuss the relationship between faith and works. Can there be one without the other? If not, why not?

② “Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His Word and the events of His providence. They may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations, and separate from kindred, to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. God has a work for them to do; but a life of ease and the influence of friends and kindred would hinder the development of the very traits essential for its accomplishment. He calls them away from human influences and aid, and leads them to feel the need of His help, and to depend upon Him alone, that He may reveal Himself to them. Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations?”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 126, 127. Discuss any contemporary examples of those you know who heeded this same call.

Summary: God called Abraham into a special relationship with Him, one that would reveal the plan of salvation to the world.

Children of the Promise



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:1–3, Isa. 25:8, 1 Cor. 2:9, Rev. 22:1–5, 1 Pet. 2:9, Gen. 11:4, Gen. 12:2.*

Memory Text: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (*Matthew 28:20*).

A father and his 10-year-old daughter were spending their holiday at the seashore. One day they went out to enjoy a swim in the ocean, and although they were both good swimmers, some distance out from the shore they became separated. The father, realizing that they were being carried out to sea by the tide, called to his child: ‘Mary, I’m going to shore for help. If you get tired, turn on your back. You can float all day that way. I’ll come back for you.’

“Before long, many searchers and boats were scurrying over the face of the water hunting for one small girl. Hundreds of people on the shore had heard the news and were waiting anxiously. It was four hours before they found her, far from land, but she was calmly floating on her back and not at all frightened. Cheers and tears of joy and relief greeted the rescuers when they came back to land with their precious burden, but the child took it all calmly. She seemed to think it was strange the way they acted. She said, ‘Father said I could float all day on my back and that he would come for me, so I just swam and floated, because I knew he’d come.’”—H. M. S. Richards, “When Jesus Comes Back,” *Voice of Prophecy News*, March 1949, p. 5.

The Week at a Glance: Why did the Lord refer to Himself as Abram’s Shield? How were “all the families of the earth” to be blessed through Abraham? What is the greatest of all the covenant promises?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 1.

Thy Shield

“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (*Gen. 15:1*).

Read Genesis 15:1–3. Think of the context in which this message was given. Why would the first thing the Lord says to Abram be “Fear not”? What would Abram have to fear?

What’s particularly interesting here is that the Lord says to Abram, “I am thy shield.” The use of the personal pronouns shows the personal nature of the relationship. God will relate to him one-on-one, the way He will to all of us.

The designation of God as a “Shield” appears here for the first time in the Bible and is the only time God uses it to reveal Himself, even if other Bible passages use the term to speak *about* God (*Deut. 33:29, Ps. 18:30, Ps. 84:11, Ps. 144:2*).

When God calls Himself someone’s shield, what does that mean? Did it mean something to Abram that it might not mean to us now? Can we claim that promise for ourselves? Does it mean no physical harm will come? In what ways is God a shield? How do you understand that image?

“Christ has not a casual interest in us but an interest stronger than a mother for her child. . . . Our Saviour has purchased us by human suffering and sorrow, by insult, reproach, abuse, mockery, rejection and death. He is watching over you, trembling child of God. He will make you secure under His protection. . . . Our weakness in human nature will not bar our access to the heavenly Father, for He [Christ] died to make intercession for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 77.

From all outward appearances, Rolando had been a faithful follower of the Lord. Then, suddenly, he died unexpectedly. What happened to God as his shield? Or must we understand the idea of God as our shield in a different manner? Explain. What does God always promise to shield us from? (*See 1 Cor. 10:13.*)

The Messianic Promise: Part 1

“In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (*Gen. 28:14*).

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (*Gal. 3:29*).

More than once the Lord said to Abraham that in his seed, his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (*see also Gen. 12:3, Gen. 18:18, Gen. 22:18*). This wonderful covenant promise is repeated because, of all of the promises, this is the most important one, the most enduring one, the one that makes all the others worthwhile. In one sense, this was a promise of the rise of the Jewish nation, through whom the Lord wanted to teach “all the families of the earth” about the true God and His plan of salvation. Yet, the promise reaches complete fulfillment only in Jesus Christ, who came from the seed of Abraham, the One who would at the cross pay for the sins of “all the families of the earth.”

Think about the covenant promise made after the Flood in which the Lord promised not to destroy the world with water again. What ultimate good would this be without the promise of redemption found in Jesus? What ultimate good would any of God’s promises be without the promise of eternal life found in Christ?

How do you understand the notion that in Abraham, through Jesus, “all the families of the earth” would be blessed? What does that mean?

No question, the covenant promise of the world’s Savior is the greatest of all God’s promises. The Redeemer Himself becomes the *means* by which the obligations of the covenant arrangement are met and all of its other promises are realized. All, Jew or Gentile, who enter into union with Him are accounted as Abraham’s true family and inheritors of the promise (*Gal. 3:8, 9, 27–29*)—that is, the promise of eternal life in a sinless environment where evil, pain, and suffering will never again arise. Can you think of a better promise than that?

What is it about the promise of eternal life in a world without sin and suffering that has such an attraction for us? Could it be that we long for it because that’s what we were originally created for and that by longing for it we are longing for something that is basic to our nature?

The Messianic Promise: Part 2

“To enjoy true happiness we must travel into a very far country, and even out of ourselves.”—Thomas Browne.

Look at that above quote, written in the 1600s. Do you agree or disagree? Read it in the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and of Revelation 3:12.

Augustine wrote of the human condition: “This life of ours—if a life so full of such great ills can properly be called a life—bears witness to the fact that, from its very start, the race of mortal men has been a race condemned. Think, first, of the dreadful abyss of ignorance from which all error flows and so engulfs the sons of Adam in a darksome pool that no one can escape without the toll of toils and tears and fears. Then, take our very love for all those things that prove so vain and poisonous and breed so many heartaches, troubles, griefs, and fears; such insane joys in discord, strife, and wars; such fraud and theft and robbery; such perfidy and pride, envy and ambition, homicide and murder, cruelty and savagery, lawlessness and lust; all the shameless passions of the impure—fornication and adultery, incest and unnatural sins, rape and countless other uncleannesses too nasty to be mentioned; the sins against religion—sacrilege and heresy, blasphemy and perjury; the iniquities against our neighbors—calumnies and cheating, lies and false witness, violence to persons and property; the injustices of the courts and the innumerable other miseries and maladies that fill the world, yet escape attention.”—Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1958), p. 519.

Augustine’s quote could apply to most modern cities today; yet, he wrote it more than fifteen hundred years ago. Little about humanity has changed, which is why people want an escape.

Fortunately, however tough our situation now, the future is bright—but only because of what God did for us through the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ—the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promise made to Abraham that, in his seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Look at the quote from Augustine. Write something in your own words to describe the sad situation in the world today. At the same time, look up whatever Bible texts you can find that talk about what God has promised us in Jesus Christ (for example, Isa. 25:8, 1 Cor. 2:9, and Rev. 22:2–5). Dwell on those promises. Make them your own. Only then can you truly grasp what the covenant is all about.

A Great and Mighty Nation . . .

Not only did God promise Abraham that in him would all the families of the earth be blessed, but the Lord also said that He would make of him a “great and mighty nation” (*Gen. 18:18; see also Gen. 12:2, Gen. 46:3*)—quite a promise to a man married to a woman past child-bearing age. Thus, when Abraham was without descendants, much less a son, God promised him both.

Yet, this promise was not completely fulfilled while Abraham was alive; in fact, neither Isaac nor Jacob saw it come to pass. God repeated it to Jacob, with the added information that the promise would be fulfilled in Egypt (*Gen. 46:3*), though Jacob did not see it. Eventually, of course, that promise was fulfilled.

Why did the Lord want to make a special nation out of Abraham’s seed? Did the Lord just want another country of a certain ethnic origin? What purposes was this nation to fulfill? Read Exodus 19:5, 6; Isaiah 60:1–3; and Deuteronomy 4:6–8. On the lines below, write out your answer:

It seems evident from Scripture that God purposed to attract the nations of the world to Himself through the witness of Israel, which would be, under His blessing, a happy, healthy, and holy people. Such a nation would demonstrate the blessing that attends obedience to the will of the Creator. The multitudes of earth would be drawn to worship the true God (*Isa. 56:7*). Thus, the attention of humanity would be drawn toward Israel, their God, and the Messiah who was to appear in their midst, the Savior of the world.

“The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed. But it was God’s purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 290.

Can you see any parallels between what the Lord wanted to do through Israel and what He wants to do through our church? If so, what are those parallels? Read 1 Peter 2:9.

“Make Your Name Great”

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing” (*Gen. 12:2*).

In Genesis 12:2, God promises to make Abram’s name great—that is, to make him famous. Why would the Lord want to do that for any sinner, no matter how obedient and faithful? Who deserves a “great” name? (*See Rom. 4:1–5 and James 2:21–24.*) Did God bestow greatness on Abram for his own personal benefit, or did it represent something more? Explain.

Compare Genesis 11:4 with Genesis 12:2. What is the big difference between the ideas presented in these two texts? In what ways does one represent “salvation by works” and the other “salvation by faith”?

However much the plan of salvation rests only upon the work of Christ in our behalf, we—as recipients of God’s grace—are, nevertheless, still involved. We have a role to play; our free choice comes into prominence. The drama of the ages, the battle between Christ and Satan, is still being played out in and through us. Both humanity and angels are watching what is happening with us in the conflict (*1 Cor. 4:9*). Thus, who we are, what we say, what we do, far from having no importance beyond our own immediate sphere, has implications that can, in a sense, reverberate across the universe. By our words, our actions, even our attitudes, we can help bring glory to the Lord, who has done so much for us, or we can bring shame upon Him and His name. Thus, when the Lord said to Abraham that He would make his name great, He surely was not talking about it in the same way the world talks about someone as having a great name. What makes a name great in the eyes of God is character, faith, obedience, humility, and love for others, traits that might often be respected in the world but are not usually the factors the world would deem as making someone’s name great.

Look at some of the men and women who have “great” names in the world today, be it actors, politicians, artists, the wealthy, or whoever. What is it about these people that has made them famous? Contrast that with the greatness of Abraham. What does that tell us about how perverted the world’s concept of greatness is? How much of that worldly attitude impacts our view of greatness, as well?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Abraham in Canaan,” pp. 132–144, and “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. . . . But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the land of promise. . . . God has spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.

When Abram entered Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and made it clear that he was to sojourn in the land that would be given to his descendants (*Gen. 12:7*). God repeated this promise several times (*see Gen. 13:14, 15, 17; Gen. 15:13, 16, 18; Gen. 17:8; Gen. 28:13, 15; Gen. 35:12*). Some four hundred years later, in fulfillment of the promise (*Gen. 15:13, 16*), the Lord announced to Moses that He would bring Israel out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey (*Exod. 3:8, 17; Exod. 6:8*). God repeated the promise to Joshua (*Josh. 1:3*), and in David’s day it was largely, but not completely, fulfilled (*Gen. 15:18–21, 2 Sam. 8:1–14, 1 Kings 4:21, 1 Chron. 19:1–19*).

Now read Hebrews 11:9, 10, 13–16. These verses make it clear that Abraham and the other faithful patriarchs viewed Canaan as a symbol, or a foreshadowing, of the ultimate settled home of God’s redeemed people. In the sin situation, no permanent home is possible. Life is fleeting, like “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (*James 4:14, RSV*). As the spiritual descendants of Abraham, we, too, must realize that “here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (*Heb. 13:14, NIV*). The certainty of the future life with Christ keeps us steady in this present world of change and decay.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What effect should God’s promise of a new earth have on our personal Christian experience? (*Compare Matt. 5:5; 2 Cor. 4:17, 18; Rev. 21:9, 10; and Rev. 22:17.*)
- ② “True greatness was to result from compliance with God’s commands and cooperation with His divine purpose.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 293. What does this statement mean?

Summary: Promises! How precious they are to the believer! Will they be fulfilled? Faith answers yes.

Abraham's Seed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ezek. 16:8; Deut. 28:1, 15; Jer. 11:8; Gen. 6:5; John 10:27, 28; Gal. 3:26–29; Rom. 4:16, 17.*

Memory Text: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

In a small town, the clock in the jeweler's window stopped one day at a quarter to nine. Many of the citizens had been depending on this clock to know the time. On this particular morning, business men and women glanced in the window and noticed it was only fifteen minutes to nine; children on their way to school were surprised to find they still had plenty of time to loiter. Many persons were late that morning because one small clock in the jeweler's window had stopped.”—C. L. Paddock, *God's Minutes* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1965), p. 244, adapted.

How accurate a representation of ancient Israel's failure! The Lord placed Israel “in the midst of the nations” (*Ezek. 5:5*)—in the strategic bridge-land between three continents (Africa, Europe, and Asia). They were to be the spiritual “clock” of the world.

Israel, however, stopped in a sense like the clock in the jeweler's window. Yet, it was not a total failure; for then, as today, God has His faithful remnant. Our study this week focuses on the identity and role of God's true Israel in every age, including our own.

The Week at a Glance: What covenant promises did the Lord make to Israel? What conditions came with them? How well did the nation abide by those promises? What happened when they disobeyed?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 8.

“Above All People . . .”

“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (*Deut. 7:6*).

There is no question about it: the Lord specifically had chosen the Hebrew people to be His special representatives upon the earth. The word translated as “special” in the above verse, *segullah*, can mean “valued property” or “peculiar treasure.” The crucial point to remember, too, is that this choice was totally the act of God, an expression of His grace. There was nothing found in the people themselves that made them deserve this grace. There couldn’t be, because grace is something that comes undeserved.

Read Ezekiel 16:8. How does it help explain the Lord’s choosing of Israel?

“Why was Israel chosen by Yahweh? That was inscrutable. She was a small group of people without great culture or prestige. She possessed no special personal qualities which would warrant such a choice. The election was the act of God alone. . . . The ultimate cause for that choice lay in the mystery of divine love. Yet the fact is that God *did* love Israel and *did* choose her, thereby honouring His promise to the fathers. . . . She had been chosen in virtue of Yahweh’s love for her. She had been liberated from slavery in Egypt by a display of Yahweh’s power. Let her once grasp these great facts and she would realize that she was indeed a holy and a specially treasured people. Any tendency on her part, therefore, to surrender such a noble status was reprehensible in the extreme.”—J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), pp. 130, 131.

According to the divine plan, the Israelites were to be both a royal and a priestly race. In an evil world they were to be kings, moral and spiritual, in that they were to prevail over the realm of sin. As priests, they were to draw near to the Lord in prayer, in praise, and in sacrifice. As intermediaries between God and the heathen, they were to serve as instructors, preachers, and prophets and were to be examples of holy living—Heaven’s exponents of true religion.

Look at the phrase in the verse for today in which the Lord says that they were to be “above all people . . . of the earth.” Considering all that the Word has taught about the virtue of humility and the danger of pride, what do you think that verse means? In what ways were they to be “above” all the people? Should we apply that idea to ourselves, as a church, as well? If so, how?

Land Deal (*Gen. 35:12*)

The promise that a land would be given to God's people, Israel, was first given to Abraham and then repeated to Isaac and Jacob. Joseph's deathbed words repeated this promise (*Gen. 50:24*). God informed Abraham, however, that "four hundred years" would pass before the seed of Abraham would take possession of the land (*Gen. 15:13, 16*). Fulfillment of the promise began in the days of Moses and Joshua. Moses repeated the promise in the divine command: " 'Behold, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land' ' " (*Deut. 1:8, RSV*).

Read Deuteronomy 28:1, 15. What is implied in these words? In short, the land would be given to Israel as part of the covenant. A covenant implies obligations. What obligations did Israel have?

The first part of Deuteronomy 28 outlines the blessings Israel would receive if they followed God's will. The other section of the chapter deals with the curses that would befall them if they did not. These curses were "largely, though not wholly, brought about by simply giving sin scope to work out its own evil results. . . . 'He that soweth to [his] flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption' (Gal. [6]:8). Like water, which, left to itself, will not cease running till it has found its level; like a clock, which, left to itself, will not cease going till it has run itself completely down; like a tree, which, left to grow, cannot but bring forth its appropriate fruit—so sin has a level to seek, a course to run, a fruit to mature, and 'the end of those things is death' (Rom. [6:]21)."—*The Pulpit Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed., H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), vol. 3, p. 439.

Despite all the promises of land, those promises were not unconditional. They came as part of a covenant. Israel had to fulfill her end of the bargain; if not, the promises could be nullified. The Lord made it very clear, more than once, that if they disobeyed, the land would be taken from them. Read Leviticus 26:27–33. It's hard to imagine how the Lord could have been more explicit with His words.

As Christians, we look forward to receiving and keeping the Promised Lands of heaven and the earth made new. They have been promised to us, just as the earthly Promised Land was to the Hebrews. The difference, however, is that once we get there, there is no chance of our ever losing it (*Dan. 7:18*). At the same time, there are conditions for getting there. How do you understand what these conditions are, especially in the context of salvation by faith alone?

Israel and the Covenant

“Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart: therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do: but they did them not” (Jer. 11:8).

Look at the above text. The Lord says that He will bring upon them “all the words of this covenant.” *Yet, He is talking about something bad!* Though we tend to think of the covenant as offering us only something good, there’s the flip side. This principle was seen with Noah. God offered Noah something wonderful—preservation from destruction—but Noah had to obey in order to receive the blessings of God’s grace. If he did not, the other side of the covenant would follow.

Compare the above text with **Genesis 6:5** regarding the pre-Flood world. **What’s the parallel? What do these verses say about how important it is for us to control our thoughts?**

Unfortunately, for the most part, the history of national Israel was a repeated pattern of apostasy followed by divine judgments, repentance, and a period of obedience. Only briefly, under David and Solomon, did Israel control the full extent of the promised territory.

Look at these texts from Jeremiah regarding Israel’s apostasy. “They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man’s, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD. . . . Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD” (*Jer. 3:1, 20*).

This brings up something touched upon earlier: The covenant God wants with us is not merely some cold legal agreement made between businesspeople looking to cut the best deal for themselves. The covenant relationship is a commitment, one as serious and sacred as marriage, which is why the Lord uses the imagery that He does.

The point is that Israel’s apostasy did not have its root in disobedience but in a broken personal relationship with the Lord, a break that resulted in disobedience that finally brought punishment upon them.

Why is the personal, relational aspect so crucial in the Christian life? Why, if our relationship with God isn’t right, are we so prone to fall into sin and disobedience? Also, what would you say to someone who asked this question: “How can I develop a deep, loving relationship with God?”

The Remnant

Despite Israel's repeated cycle of apostasy, divine judgments, and repentance, what hope is found in these texts?

Isa. 4:3 _____

Mic. 4:6, 7 _____

Zeph. 3:12, 13 _____

Although God's plan for ancient Israel was spoiled by disobedience, it was never completely frustrated. Among the weeds, a few flowers still grew. Many of the Old Testament prophets speak of this faithful remnant, whom God would gather unto Himself as a lovely bouquet.

The purpose of God in creating and preserving a faithful remnant was the same as it had been for all of Israel—to use them as His divinely appointed instruments for declaring “ ‘my glory among the nations’ ” (*Isa. 66:19, RSV*). By this means, others would join the faithful to “worship the King, the LORD of hosts” (*Zech. 14:16, RSV*).

Thus, no matter how bad the situation became, God always had some faithful people who, despite apostasy within the ranks of God's chosen people, kept their own calling and election sure (*2 Pet. 1:10*). In short, whatever the failings of the nation as a whole, there were still those who tried to keep, as best they could, their end of the covenant (*see, for instance, 1 Kings 19:14–18*). And though, perhaps, they suffered with their nation as a whole (such as when exiled from the land), the final and ultimate covenant promise will be theirs—that of eternal life.

Read John 10:27, 28. What is Jesus saying there? Apply His words, and the promises in them, to the situation regarding apostasy in ancient Israel. How do these words help explain the existence of a faithful remnant?

A few years ago, a young woman gave up her Christian faith entirely, mostly because she was discouraged by the sin, apostasy, and hypocrisy she saw in her local church. “Those people weren’t really Christians,” she said, using that as an excuse to give up everything. Why is her excuse not valid? Base your answer on the principles of today’s study.

Spiritual Israel

Whatever the mistakes and failings of ancient Israel, the Lord was not finished with the plan of creating a faithful people to serve Him. In fact, the Old Testament looked forward to a time when the Lord would create a spiritual Israel, a faithful body of believers, Jews and Gentiles, who would carry on the work of preaching the gospel to the world. Welcome to the early church!

Read Galatians 3:26–29.

1. What promise is Paul talking about in Gal. 3:29? _____

2. What is the key element that makes a person an heir to these promises? (See Gal. 3:26.) _____

3. Why is Paul breaking down distinctions of gender, nationality, and social status? _____

4. What does it mean to be “one in Christ”? _____

5. Read Romans 4:16, 17. How do these verses help us understand what Paul is saying in Galatians 3:26–29? _____

As a son of Abraham, Christ became, in a special sense, heir to the covenant promises. By baptism we acquire kinship to Christ and through Him acquire the right to participate in the promises made to Abraham. Thus, all that God promised Abraham is found in Christ, and the promises become ours, not because of nationality, race, or gender, but through grace, which God bestows upon us through faith.

“The gift to Abraham and his seed included not merely the land of Canaan, but the whole earth. So says the apostle, ‘The promise, that he should be the *heir of the world*, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.’ Romans 4:13. And the Bible plainly teaches that the promises made to Abraham are to be fulfilled through Christ. . . . [Believers become] heirs to ‘an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away’ [1 Peter 1:4]—the earth freed from the curse of sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 170. This promise will be fulfilled literally when the saints live on the new earth forever and ever with Christ (*Dan. 7:27*).

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Vineyard of the Lord,” pp. 15–22; “Hope for the Heathen,” pp. 367–378; and “The House of Israel,” pp. 703–721, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 369, 370.

Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10 to discover the four titles Peter applies to the church. Most of these titles are reflected in the following Old Testament texts that refer to Israel: Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 43:20. What does each of these titles emphasize about the church’s relationship to God? (For example, the title “chosen nation” emphasizes the fact that God chose the church and has a specific destiny for it.)

Discussion Questions:

- ① In ancient Israel, the priests made animal sacrifices that pointed to the Messiah. As members of a royal priesthood, what types of “sacrifices” are church members to make? (*See 1 Pet. 2:5.*)
- ② God separated Israel from the world so it could be a holy nation. It also was to share salvation truths with the world. The same is true for the church today. How is it possible to be separate from the world while at the same time to be in a position to share the gospel with the world? How do Israel’s experience and Jesus’ example help us to answer this question?
- ③ God always maintained a remnant within ancient Israel. Consider Elijah and the remnant that existed during his time (*1 Kings 19; note especially verse 18*). Why is it often easier to be true to God in the midst of worldly people than in the midst of backsliding members of one’s own church family?

Summary: God’s true Israel (whether before or after the Cross) is the Israel of faith, persons who live in a spiritual, covenant relationship with Him. Such people function as His representatives, holding out to the world the gospel of His saving grace.

Covenant *at* Sinai



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 1:29–31; Hos. 11:1; Rev. 5:9; Deut. 29:10–13; Exod. 19:5, 6; Rom. 6:1, 2; Rev. 14:12; Rom. 10:3.*

Memory Text: “‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’ ” (*Exodus 19:4, RSV*).

A little boy, one of seven children, met with an accident and was taken to the hospital. In his home there was seldom enough of anything. He never had more than just a part of a glass of milk. If the glass was full, it was shared by two of the children, and whoever drank first had to be careful not to drink too far. After the little fellow was made comfortable in the hospital, the nurse brought him a large glass of milk. He looked at it longingly for a moment and then, with the memory of privations at home, asked, ‘How deep shall I drink?’ The nurse, with her eyes shining and a lump in her throat, said, ‘Drink it all, child, drink it all!’ ”—H.M.S. Richards, “Free Grace,” *Voice of Prophecy News*, June 1950, p. 4.

Like this boy, it was the privilege of ancient Israel, as it is our own, to drink deeply from the wells of salvation. Israel’s deliverance from centuries of slavery and oppression was a marvelous exhibition of divine grace. Likewise, divine grace is involved in our own emancipation from sin.

The Week at a Glance: What imagery did the Lord use to describe His relationship with Israel? In what ways do the stories of the Exodus and Sinai parallel personal salvation? What was the role of the law in the Sinai covenant?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 15.

On Eagles' Wings

As a people, Israel had been immersed in Egyptian paganism for many long, hard centuries, an experience that no doubt dimmed their knowledge of God, His will, and His goodness.

How could the Lord win them back to Himself?

For starters, He would demonstrate the genuineness of His love for Israel, and He did this through His mighty acts of deliverance. He would begin to woo the nation into a loving response to His covenant proposal. At Sinai, God first reminded the nation of His gracious acts in their behalf.

What two illustrations describe the manner in which the Lord brought Israel from Egypt to Sinai?

Exod. 19:4, Deut. 32:10–12 _____

Deut. 1:29–31, Hos. 11:1 _____

What would these illustrations teach Israel (and us) about the nature of God's attitude toward His people?

These illustrations indicate that our God is very much aware of our helplessness. Read Psalm 103:13, 14. In both the figures of the eagle and the parent carrying his child we sense God's concern for our well-being. Tender, supportive, protective, encouraging, He desires to bring us to full maturity.

“The eagle was known for its unusual devotions to its young. It too lived on mountain tops. In teaching its young to fly it carried them upon its back to those great heights that overlook the plains of Sinai, then it dropped them down into the depths. If the baby was still too young and too bewildered to fly, father-eagle would swoop down beneath it, catch it on his back, and fly up again with it to the eyrie on the crags above. And that, says the divine voice, is ‘how I brought you out of Egypt to myself.’ ”—George A. F. Knight, *Theology of Narration* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 128.

Contrast God's interest in us with our interest in one another. How should His concern for us affect our concern for others?

Based on your personal experience, what illustrations can you think of to describe God's unselfish interest in us? Make up a few images on your own, from your own experiences; draw also from whatever culture you live in. Share them with the class.

The Pattern of Salvation

“Say therefore to the people of Israel, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” ’ ” (*Exod. 6:6, 7, RSV*).

Look at the above verses: What principle do we see in them, as before, regarding the role of God toward humanity in the covenant relationship? (Focus on how often the word *I* appears in those verses.)

The deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery and the deliverance of Noah and his family from the Flood are the two prominent salvific events in the writings of Moses. Both provide insights into the science of salvation. But it is the Exodus event in particular that provides the basic pattern.

When God says to Israel (through Moses), “I will *redeem* you” (*Exod. 6:6, emphasis supplied*), He literally says, “I will act as the *kinsman redeemer*,” or *go’el*.

“The word *redeem* in verse 6 [of Exodus 6] refers to a member of a family buying back or ransoming another member of the family, especially when that member was in slavery for debt or about to go into slavery. Israel apparently had no earthly relative to redeem her, but God was now Israel’s relative, her kinsman redeemer.”—Bernard L. Ramm, *His Way Out* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books Division, G/L Publications, 1974), p. 50.

How do you understand the idea of God’s “ransoming,” or buying back, His people from slavery? What was the price that had to be paid? What does that tell us about our worth? (*See Mark 10:45, 1 Tim. 2:6, and Rev. 5:9*.)

In Exodus 3:8 God says that He has “come down” to rescue Israel. This is a common Hebrew verb for God’s interaction with humanity. God is in heaven, and we are on earth, and only as God “comes down” to earth can He redeem us. In the truest sense of the idea, only when Jesus came down, lived, suffered, died, and was resurrected for us could we be redeemed. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14, RSV*) is another way of saying that God *came down* in order to save us.

The Sinai Covenant

The book of Exodus draws the reader's attention to three major events. Like three mountains, the Exodus itself, the establishment of the covenant, and the building of the tabernacle sanctuary rise above the foothills of lesser happenings. The establishment of the covenant, recorded in Exodus 19 through 24, was the Mount Everest of the three. A brief outline of Exodus 19 through 24 shows the sequence and the relationship of events.

Even if you do not have the time to look up all the verses listed below, focus on the sequence of events:

1. Israel's arrival and encampment at Sinai after being delivered by the Lord (*Exod. 19:1, 2*)
2. God's proposal of a covenant with Israel (*Exod. 19:3–6*)
3. Israel's response in acceptance of the covenant (*Exod. 19:7, 8*)
4. Preparations for formally receiving the covenant (*Exod. 19:9–25*)
5. Proclamation of the Ten Commandments (*Exod. 20:1–17*)
6. Moses as covenant mediator (*Exod. 20:18–21*)
7. Covenant principles spelled out (*Exod. 20:22–23:22*)
8. Ratification of the covenant (*Exod. 24:1–18*)

This covenant plays a vital role in the plan of salvation. It is the fourth covenant listed in the Bible (preceded by the ones with Adam, Noah, and Abraham), and in it God reveals Himself more fully than before, particularly as the entire sanctuary ritual is established. Thus, the sanctuary becomes the means by which He shows the people the plan of salvation that they were to reveal to the world.

Though the Lord had redeemed Israel from the bondage of Egypt, He wanted them to understand that redemption had a greater, more significant meaning than merely freedom from physical bondage. He wanted to redeem them from sin, the ultimate slavery, and this could happen only through the sacrifice of the Messiah, as taught in the types and symbols of the sanctuary service. It is no wonder, then, that not long after they were redeemed from bondage and given the law, the Israelites were instructed to build the sanctuary and establish its services, for in these things God revealed to them the plan of redemption—which is the true meaning and purpose of the covenant. For the covenant is nothing if not a covenant of salvation that the Lord offers to fallen humanity. That is what it was in Eden, and that is what it was at Sinai.

Why was a covenant between God and the people of Israel a necessity? (See *Deut. 29:10–13*; notice, again, the relational aspect of the covenant.)

God and Israel

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (*Exod. 19:5, 6*).

In these verses the Lord was proposing His covenant with the children of Israel. Though in one sense the Lord had called them, that calling was not automatically bestowed upon them without their choice. They had to cooperate. Even their deliverance from Egypt involved their cooperation: if they had not done what the Lord had said (such as putting the blood on the doorposts), they would not have been delivered. It was that simple.

Here, too, the Lord does not say to them, “Whether you like it or don’t like it, you will be a peculiar treasure unto Me and a nation of priests.” That is not how it works, and that is not what the text says.

Read Exodus 19:5, 6, quoted above. How do you understand what the Lord is saying in the context of salvation by faith? Does the command included there to obey the Lord somehow nullify the concept of salvation by grace? How do the following texts help you to understand the answer? Rom. 3:19–24; Rom. 6:1, 2; Rom. 7:7; Rev. 14:12.

“We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the free gift of God, to be received by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 61.

Think of what the Lord was willing to do for the nation of Israel: not only did He miraculously deliver them from Egyptian bondage, but He also wanted to make them His own treasured possession, a nation of priests. Basing their relationship with Him upon His salvation (both temporal, as from Egyptian slavery, and eternal), the Lord sought to elevate them to a spiritual, intellectual, and moral level that would make them the wonder of the ancient world, all for the purpose of using them to preach the gospel to the nations. All they had to do, in response, was obey.

In what ways should our personal, one-on-one experience with the Lord reflect that same principle we see here in today’s study?

Promises, Promises . . . (*Exod. 19:8*)

At first sight, all seems well. The Lord delivers His people, offers them the covenant promises, and they agree: they will do *all* that the Lord asks them to do. It is a deal “made in heaven,” right?

Read the following texts. What insight do they give us regarding Israel’s response to the covenant?

Rom. 9:31, 32 _____

Rom. 10:3 _____

Heb. 4:1, 2 _____

Whatever God asks us to do, our relationship with Him must be founded upon faith. Faith provides the basis upon which works follow. Works, in and of themselves, no matter how purely motivated, no matter how sincere, no matter how numerous, can’t make us acceptable in the sight of a holy God. They could not do it either in Israel’s time, and they cannot in our time, as well.

If, however, the Bible again and again stresses works, why can’t works make us acceptable in God’s sight? (*See Isa. 53:6; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:23.*)

Unfortunately, the Hebrew people believed that their obedience became the means of their salvation, not the result of salvation. They sought righteousness in their obedience to the law, not the *righteousness of God*, which comes by faith. The Sinai covenant—though coming with a much more detailed set of instructions and law—was designed a covenant of grace as much as all the preceding covenants, as well. This grace, freely bestowed, brings about a change of heart that leads to obedience. The problem, of course, was not their attempt to obey (the covenant demanded that they obey); the problem was the kind of “obedience” they rendered, which wasn’t really obedience at all, as the subsequent history of the nation showed.

Read carefully Romans 10:3, particularly the last part. What point is Paul making there? What happens to people who seek to establish their own righteousness? Why does that attempt inevitably lead to sin, unrighteousness, and rebellion? Look at our own lives. Are we not in danger of doing the same thing?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Exodus,” pp. 281–290; “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 291–302; “The Law Given to Israel,” pp. 303–314, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The spirit of bondage is engendered by seeking to live in accordance with legal religion, through striving to fulfill the claims of the law in our own strength. There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus. The gospel preached to Abraham, through which he had hope, was the same gospel that is preached to us today, through which we have hope. Abraham looked unto Jesus, who is also the Author and the Finisher of our faith.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1077.

“During the bondage in Egypt many of the Israelites had, to a great extent, lost the knowledge of God’s law, and had mingled its precepts with heathen customs and traditions. God brought them to Sinai, and there with His own voice declared His law.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 334.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In what ways was the covenant relationship designed to maintain Israel’s physical and spiritual freedoms? (See *Lev. 26:3–13*; compare *Deut. 28:1–15*.)
- ② Read again Exodus 19:5, 6. Notice that the Lord makes this statement: “All the earth is mine.” Why would He say that, particularly in this context, one of seeking to establish a covenant with these people? How does our understanding of the Sabbath, and what it means, fit in here?
- ③ We understand that we are forgiven our sins only through God’s grace. How do we understand the role of God’s grace in enabling us to live a life of faith and obedience?

Summary: The covenant God formed with Israel at Sinai was a covenant of grace. Having given abundant evidence of His gracious love and care by an extraordinary deliverance from Egyptian slavery, God invited the nation into a covenant with Him that would maintain and promote their freedoms. Although Israel responded in the affirmative, they lacked a true faith motivated by love. Their later history indicates that, for the most part, they failed to understand the true nature of the covenant and corrupted it into a salvation-by-works system. We need not follow Israel’s failure and ignore the marvelous grace that has been extended to sinners.

Covenant Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 19:6, Isa. 56:7, Heb. 2:9, Deut. 4:13, Deut. 10:13, Amos 3:3, Gen. 18:19.*

Memory Text: “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments” (*Deuteronomy 7:9, NIV*).

One of the important phrases in Psalm 23 indicates *where* God desires to lead us. “He leadeth me *in the paths of righteousness* for his name’s sake,” David declares in verse 3 (emphasis supplied). Because of His own moral uprightness, God will never lead us astray. He will provide safe paths for our spiritual walk through life.

What are the safe “paths of righteousness”? A writer of another psalm answers this question through a prayer request: “Make me to go *in the path of thy commandments*; for therein do I delight” (*Ps. 119:35, emphasis supplied*). “All thy commandments are righteousness” (*Ps. 119:172*). God’s law is a safe, firm path through the treacherous swamp of human existence.

Our study this week centers on God’s law and its place in the Sinai covenant.

The Week at a Glance: What did Israel’s election mean? How does Israel’s election parallel our own? How important was the law in the covenant? Does the covenant come unconditionally? Why is obedience such an integral part of the covenant relationship?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 22.

The Election of Israel *(Deut. 7:7)*

Jewish tradition has taught that God made the covenant with Israel only because other nations rejected it first. Though there is no biblical evidence for that position, it does, however, help bring home the point that for whatever reasons the Lord chose the Hebrew nation, it was not because they were deserving of the high honor and privilege the Lord bestowed upon them. They had no merit of their own that would make them worthy of God's love and His choice of them as His people. They were few in number, a group of enslaved tribes, and politically and militarily weak. Plus, in terms of culture and religion, they were mixed, bland, and without much influence. The basic cause, then, for Israel's election lay in the mystery of God's love and grace.

At the same time, however, we need to be careful as we look at this idea of election, because it is fraught with the potential for theological misunderstanding. What did God choose Israel for? Was it to be redeemed, while everyone else was chosen to be rejected and lost? Or were they chosen to be vehicles who would offer the world what they had been offered? How do the following verses help us understand the answers to these questions?

Exod. 19:6 _____

Isa. 56:7 _____

Heb. 2:9 _____

As Seventh-day Adventists, we like to view ourselves as the modern-day counterpart of Israel, called by the Lord, not to be the only ones redeemed but to proclaim the message of redemption to the world, in the context of the three angels' messages. In short, we believe we have something to say that no one else is saying. This was basically the situation with ancient Israel, as well. The purpose of Israel's election was not to turn the Hebrew nation into some exclusive club, hoarding the promise of salvation and redemption for themselves. On the contrary, if we believe that Christ died for all humanity (*Heb. 2:9*), then the redemption the Lord offered Israel was offered to the whole world, as well. Israel was supposed to be the vehicle by which this redemption was to be made known. Our church has been called to do the same thing.

Look at your own role in the church. What can you do to help promote the work that we have been called to do? Remember, if you are not actively helping, more than likely you are, to some degree, standing in the way.

Ties That Bind

“And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone” (Deut. 4:13).

However much we have been stressing that the covenant is always a covenant of grace, that it is only the result of God’s bestowing unmerited favor upon those who enter into a saving relationship with Him, grace is not a license to disobey. On the contrary, covenant and law belong together; they are, in fact, inseparable.

Look at the text quoted above. How tightly does it link the covenant and the law? How does it show how basic the law is to the covenant?

When you think about what a covenant is, the concept of law as an integral part makes sense. If we understand the covenant as, among other things, a relationship, then some sort of rules and boundaries need to be drawn. How long would a marriage or a friendship or a business partnership last if there were no boundaries or rules, either specifically expressed or tacitly understood? The husband decides to take a girlfriend or the friend decides to help himself to the other’s wallet, or one business partner without telling the other invites another person to join their venture. These acts would be a violation of rules, laws, and principles. How long would these relationships last under such lawless circumstances? That is why there have to be boundaries, lines drawn, and rules established. Only through these can the relationship be maintained.

In fact, various expressions such as “law” (*Ps. 78:10*), “statutes” (*Ps. 50:16*), “testimonies” (*Ps. 25:10*), “commandments” (*Ps. 103:18*), and “word” of the Lord (*Deut. 33:9*) are found parallel to or in closest association with (if not having almost the same meaning as) the word “covenant.” Evidently “the words of this covenant” (*Jer. 11:3, 6, 8*) are the words of God’s law, statutes, testimonies, and commandments.

The covenant of God with His people Israel contained various requirements that would be crucial for maintaining the special relationship He sought with His people. Is it any different today?

Think of someone you have a close relationship with. Now, imagine what would happen to that relationship if you didn’t feel bound by any rules, norms, or laws, but believed you had total freedom to do whatever you wanted. Even if you say that you love this person and that love alone will decide how you relate to him or her, why is there still a need for rules? Discuss.

Law Within the Covenant *(Deut. 10:12, 13)*

What are your first thoughts when you think of law? Police officers, traffic tickets, judges, and jail? Or do you think of restrictions, rules, authoritarian parents, and punishment? Or, perhaps, do you think of order, harmony, stability? Or maybe even . . . love?

The Hebrew word *Torah*, translated as “law” in our Bibles, means “teaching” or “instruction.” The term can be used to refer to all God’s instructions, whether moral, civil, social, or religious. It implies all the wise counsels God has graciously given His people, so they may experience an abundant life both physically and spiritually. No wonder the psalmist could call the man blessed whose “delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (*Ps. 1:2*).

As we read the *law*, or *Torah*—the instructions and teachings recorded in the books of Moses that became a part of Israel’s covenant—we are impressed with the wide range of instruction. The law touches upon every part of Israel’s lifestyle—agriculture, civil government, social relationships, and worship.

Why do you suppose God provided so much instruction for Israel? (*See Deut. 10:13.*) **In what ways were these instructions for their “good”?**

The work of the “law” within the covenant was to provide guidelines to the new life of the human covenant partner. The law introduces the member of the covenant to the will of God, whom one comes to know in the fullest sense through obedience by faith to His commandments and other expressions of His will.

The part played by the law within the living reality of the covenant relationship showed that Israel could not follow the ways of other nations. They could not live by natural law, human needs, desires, or even social, political, and economic necessities alone. They could continue as God’s holy nation, priestly kingdom, and special treasure only through uncompromising obedience to the revealed will of the covenant-making God in all areas of life.

Like ancient Israel, Seventh-day Adventists have received a wide range of counsels pertaining to every phase of Christian living through a modern manifestation of the prophetic gift. Why should we view these counsels as a gift from God rather than a detriment to independent thought and action? At the same time, what dangers do we face of turning that gift into something legalistic, as the Israelites did with their gifts? (*See Rom. 9:32.*)

The Stability of God's Law

What truth about God does the presence of God's law in the covenant relationship teach us about His essential nature? (See *Mal. 3:6*, *James 1:17*.)

God's *law* is an oral or written expression of His *will* (see *Ps. 40:8*). Because it is a transcript of His character, its presence in the covenant assures us of the permanence and dependability of God. Although we may not always be able to discern the outworkings of His providence, we know He is trustworthy. His universe is under unvarying moral and physical laws. It is this fact that gives us true freedom and security.

The "assurance that God is reliable and dependable lies in the truth that He is a God of law. His will and His law are one. God says that right is right because it describes the best possible relationships. Therefore God's law is never arbitrary or subject to whim and fancy. It is the most stable thing in the universe."—Walter R. Beach, *Dimensions in Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1963), p. 143.

If God's law cannot save a person from sin, why did He make it a part of the covenant? (Hint: see *Amos 3:3*.)

A relationship requires agreement and harmony. Because God is not only the Creator of the world but also its moral Governor, law is essential for the happiness of His created, intelligent beings to live in harmony with Him. His law, the expression of His will, is thus the constitution of His government. It is naturally the norm or obligation of the covenant arrangement and relationship. Its purpose is not to save but to define our duty to God (commandments 1–4) and our duty to our fellow human beings (commandments 5–10). In other words, it sets forth the manner of life that God designs for His covenant children to live, for their own happiness and well-being. It prevented Israel from substituting some other philosophy as a way of life. It was and is the purpose of the covenant relationship to bring the believer through God's transforming grace into harmony with His will and character.

Look around. Can you not see the devastating effects of lawlessness? Even in your own life, can you not see some damage done by breaking God's law? In what ways do these realities help to affirm the goodness of God's law and why law should be a crucial part of our relationship with Him?

If . . .

Look up the following verses. What is the one point they have in common, and what does it teach about the nature of the covenant?

Gen. 18:19 _____

Gen. 26:4, 5 _____

Exod. 19:5 _____

Lev. 26:3 _____

God openly acknowledges Abraham’s faithful obedience to “my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (*Gen. 26:5*). It is implied that God expects such a lifestyle from His human partner in the covenant. The full statement of the biblical covenant at Sinai makes it abundantly evident that conditions of obedience are one of the basic aspects of the covenant.

Exodus 19:5 makes it clear: “*If* ye will obey . . .”. The conditional aspect of the covenant is undeniable; though bestowed by grace, though unearned, though a gift to them, the covenant promises were not unconditional. The people could reject the gift, deny the grace, and turn away from the promises. The covenant, as with salvation, never negates free will. The Lord does not force people into a saving relationship with Him; He doesn’t impose a covenant upon them. He freely offers it to everyone; everyone is invited to accept it. When a person does accept it, obligations follow, not as a means of earning the covenant blessing but as an outward manifestation of having received the covenant blessings. Israel should obey, not in order to earn the promises, but so that the promises could be fulfilled in her. Her obedience was an expression of what it is like to be blessed by the Lord. Obedience does not earn the blessings, in that God is obligated to bring them; obedience, instead, creates an environment in which the blessing of faith can be made manifest.

“Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess” (*Deut. 5:33*). Is the Lord saying here to Israel that if they obey, they will earn these blessings, that these blessings are what the people are owed? Or is He saying: If you obey, these blessings can result because obedience opens the way for Me to be able to bring the blessings upon you? What is the difference between the two ideas?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Controversy,” pp. 607, 608, in *The Desire of Ages*; and “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 363–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

How does Matthew 22:34–40 help us better understand (1) the place and meaning of God’s law within His covenant and (2) the concept that covenant is synonymous with relationship?

“There must first be love in the heart before a person can, in the strength and by the grace of Christ, begin to observe the precepts of God’s law (*cf. Rom. 8:3, 4*). Obedience without love is as impossible as it is worthless. But where love is present a person will automatically set out to order his life in harmony with the will of God as expressed in His commandments.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 484.

“In the precepts of His holy law, God has given a perfect rule of life; and He has declared that until the close of time this law, unchanged in a single jot or tittle, is to maintain its claim upon human beings. Christ came to magnify the law and make it honorable. He showed that it is based upon the broad foundation of love to God and love to man, and that obedience to its precepts comprises the whole duty of man. In His own life He gave an example of obedience to the law of God. In the Sermon on the Mount He showed how its requirements extend beyond the outward acts and take cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 505.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why does the thread of love exert a stronger pull than the rope of fear to draw human beings to God?
- ❷ Why is the command to “ ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ ” (*Matt. 22:37, NIV*) the first and greatest commandment?
- ❸ Simone Weil once wrote that “ ‘order is the first need of all.’ ” —Quoted in Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1992), p. 3. How do you understand her words in the context of the week’s study, particularly in relation to the idea of law?

Summary: God’s law was an integral part of the covenant. Yet, it was a true covenant of grace. Grace, however, never nullifies the need for law. On the contrary, law is a means by which grace is manifested and expressed in the lives of those who receive grace.

Covenant Sign



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:11; Exodus 16; Heb. 4:1–4; Exod. 31:12–17; Deut. 5:14.*

Memory Text: “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (*Exodus 31:16*).

The seventh-day Sabbath is like a nail that—*Thwack!*—with unbroken regularity returns us each week to the foundation of all that we are or could be. We are so busy, running to and fro, spending money, making money, going here, going there, going everywhere, and then—*Thwack!*—Sabbath comes and reattaches us to our foundation, the starting point of everything that follows, because everything that is anything to us becomes that only because God created it and us to begin with.

With unceasing regularity, and with no exceptions, the Sabbath silently hurls over the horizon and into every crack and cranny of our lives. It reminds us that every crack and cranny belongs to our Maker, the One who put us here, the One who “in the beginning” created the heavens and the earth, an act that remains the irrefutable foundation of all Christian belief and of which the seventh-day Sabbath—*Thwack!*—is the irrefutable, unobtrusive, and unyielding sign.

This week we look at this sign in the context of the Sinai covenant.

The Week at a Glance: Where does the Sabbath have its origins? What evidence proves that the Sabbath existed before Sinai? What makes the Sabbath such an appropriate covenant sign?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 29.

Origins

How often we hear the phrase, the “old Jewish Sabbath.” Yet, Scripture is clear that the Sabbath existed long before there were any Jewish people. Its origin is found in the Creation week itself.

Look up Genesis 2:2, 3 and Exodus 20:11. Where do they clearly, and unambiguously, place the origin of the Sabbath?

Although Genesis 2:2, 3 does not identify the “seventh day” as the Sabbath (this identification comes first in Exodus 16:26, 29), it is clearly suggested in the phrase “he rested on the seventh day” (*Gen. 2:2*). The word *rested* (Hebrew, *shabat*) is closely related to the noun *Sabbath* (Hebrew, *shabbat*). “The word ‘sabbath’ is not employed [in *Gen. 2:2, 3*], but it is certain that the author meant to assert that God blessed and hallowed the seventh day as the Sabbath.”—G. F. Waterman, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), vol. 5, p. 183. Evidently, Genesis 2:2, 3 teaches the divine origin and institution of the Sabbath as a day of blessing for all humanity.

Read Mark 2:27. Jesus says that Sabbath was made for, literally, “man,” meaning humanity as a whole, as opposed to the Jews alone.

Why would God Himself rest on the seventh day? Did He need it? What other purpose might His resting have served?

Although some commentators have suggested that God needed physical rest after Creation, the true purpose of God in resting was to provide a divine example for humanity. Humankind also is to work for six days and then to rest on the seventh-day Sabbath. Theologian Karl Barth suggested that God’s resting at the end of Creation was a part of the “covenant of grace,” in which humankind was invited “to rest with Him . . . to participate in [God’s] rest.”—*Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, Ltd., 1958), vol. 3, p. 98.

God in His love called the man and the woman on the day after their creation to fellowship in rest, to establish intimate communion with Him in whose image they had been made. That fellowship and communion was to last forever. Since the fall of humankind, the Sabbath has offered a weekly high point in one’s life with the Savior.

If someone were to ask you, “How has keeping the Sabbath benefited your relationship with the Lord,” how would you respond?

Sabbath Before Sinai

“And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning” (*Exod. 16:23*).

Skim through Exodus 16, the story of the manna provided to Israel, in the desert, before Sinai. Notice what this account reveals:

1. Only a regular portion of manna could be used each day; but on the sixth day a double portion was to be gathered.
2. No manna was given on the Sabbath.
3. The extra portion needed for the Sabbath was preserved from the sixth day unspoiled, while the manna would not keep on any other day.

What does this story reveal about the sanctity of the Sabbath before the giving of the law at Sinai? (*See Exod. 16:23–28.*)

“In fact, the equation of the Sabbath with the seventh day, the statement that the Lord gave the Israelites the Sabbath, and the record that the people, at God’s command, rested on the seventh day, all point unmistakably to the primeval [at Creation] institution of the Sabbath.”—G. F. Waterman, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), vol. 5, p. 184.

There is a lot more about the Sabbath in Exodus 16 than first meets the eye. Look at the questions this passage answers for us:

1. Which day is the preparation day for the Sabbath?
2. Which day of the week is the Sabbath?
3. Where did the Sabbath come from?
4. What kind of day should the Sabbath be?
5. Is the Sabbath a day of fasting?
6. Is the Sabbath a test of loyalty to God?

How does your understanding of the Sabbath today match with what is taught about the Sabbath in Exodus 16?

Covenant Sign

“ ‘ “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed” ’ ” (*Exod. 31:16, 17, NIV*).

Four times in Scripture the Sabbath is designated as a “sign” (*Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20*). A “sign” is not a “symbol” in the sense of a thing that naturally typifies, represents, or recalls something else, because both share similar qualities (for example, a symbol of a fist often denotes “might” or “power”). In the Bible, the Sabbath as a “sign” functioned as an outward mark or object or condition intended to convey a distinctive message. Nothing in the sign *itself* particularly linked it to the covenant. The Sabbath was a covenant sign “ ‘ “between me and you throughout your generations” ’ ” (*Exod. 31:13, RSV*) only because God said it was.

Why would the Lord use the Sabbath as a covenant sign? What is it about the Sabbath that would make it so appropriate as a symbol of the saving relationship with God? As we remember that a crucial aspect of the covenant is that we are saved by grace and that works cannot save us, what is it about the Sabbath itself that makes it such a good symbol of that relationship? (*See Gen. 2:3, Heb. 4:1–4.*)

What is fascinating about the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant of grace is that for centuries the Jews have understood the Sabbath to be the sign of Messianic redemption. They saw in the Sabbath a foretaste of salvation in the Messiah. Because we understand redemption as coming only from grace, and because we understand the covenant to be a covenant of grace, the link between the Sabbath, redemption, and the covenant is made clear (*see Deut. 5:13–15*). Thus, contrary to common opinion, the Sabbath is a sign of God’s saving grace; it’s not a sign of salvation by works.

How do you understand what it means to “rest” on the Sabbath? How do you rest on the Sabbath? What do you do differently on that day that makes it a “sign”? Could someone who knows you look at your life and see that the Sabbath really is a special day for you?

Sign of Sanctification

“ “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you” ’ ” (*Exod. 31:13, RSV*).

An exceptionally rich Sabbath passage is Exodus 31:12–17, which follows the Lord’s directions for the building of the sanctuary and the establishment of its services (*Exod. 25:1–31:11*).

The concept of the Sabbath as a “sign”—a visible, external, and *eternal* sign between God and His people—is expressed here in this manner for the first time. The text itself contains some fascinating concepts worthy of our study. Two new ideas are joined together in this text:

1. The Sabbath as a *sign of knowledge*.
2. The Sabbath as a *sign of sanctification*.

Consider the sign aspect related to knowledge. The Hebrew understanding of knowledge includes intellectual, relational, and emotional aspects. “To know” did not simply mean to know a fact, particularly when a person was involved. It also meant to have a meaningful relationship with the one known. Thus *to know the Lord* meant to be in a right relationship with Him—to “serve” Him (*1 Chron. 28:9*), to “fear” Him (*Isa. 11:2*), to “believe” Him (*Isa. 43:10*), to “trust” Him and “seek” Him (*Pss. 9:10*), and to “call on” His name (*Jer. 10:25*).

Look up each of the texts in the above paragraph. In what ways do these texts help us to understand what it means to “know” the Lord?

In addition, the Sabbath has significance as a sign of sanctification. It signifies that the Lord “sanctifies” His people (*compare Lev. 20:8*) by making them “holy” (*Deut. 7:6*).

The sanctification process is as much the work of God’s redemptive love as is the saving and redeeming work of God. Righteousness (justification) and sanctification are both activities of God: “ ‘I . . . the LORD . . . sanctify you’ ” (*Lev. 20:8, RSV*). Thus, the Sabbath is a sign that imparts the knowledge of God as Sanctifier. “The Sabbath given to the world as the sign of God as the Creator is also the sign of Him as the Sanctifier.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 350.

Consider the Sabbath day and the process of sanctification, that of *being made holy*. What role does Sabbath keeping have in this process? How can the Lord use our experience of keeping the Sabbath to help sanctify us?

Remembering the Sabbath

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (*Exod. 20:8*).

The Sabbath was and is a sign for humanity to “remember.” The use of the word *remember* can serve various functions. First, *to remember* something implies looking backward, looking to the past. In this case, the Sabbath points us to the fiat Creation, which climaxed in the institution of the Sabbath as a weekly day of rest and special communion with God.

The injunction to remember also has implications for the present. We are not only to “remember” the Sabbath (*Exod. 20:8*); we also are to “observe” and “keep” it (*see Deut. 5:12, RSV*). Thus, the Sabbath has important implications for us now, in the present.

Finally, remembering the Sabbath also points us forward. The person who remembers the keeping of the Sabbath has a promising, rich, and meaningful future with the Lord of the Sabbath. He or she remains in the covenant relationship, because he or she remains in the Lord. Again, when we understand the covenant to be a relationship between God and humankind, the Sabbath, which greatly can help strengthen that relationship, comes into specific prominence.

Indeed, in remembering Creation and its Creator, God’s people also remember God’s gracious acts of salvation (*see Deuteronomy 5:14, where the Sabbath is seen, in this context, as a sign of deliverance from Egypt, a symbol of the ultimate salvation found in God*). Creation and re-creation belong together. The former makes the latter possible. The Sabbath is a sign that communicates that God is the Creator of the world and the Creator of our salvation.

“By keeping His Sabbath holy we are to show that we are His people. His Word declares the Sabbath to be a sign by which to distinguish the commandment-keeping people. . . . Those who keep the law of God will be one with Him in the great controversy commenced in heaven between Satan and God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 160.

Look at this statement from the Lord’s servant. What is it about the Sabbath that makes it something that can distinguish us as “the commandment-keeping people,” perhaps more so than any of the other commandments?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, pp. 968–970, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7; “The Observance of the Sabbath,” pp. 349–351, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6; “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 295–297, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

The Ten Commandments define comprehensively and fundamentally the divine-human and human-human relationships. The commandment at the center of the Decalogue is the Sabbath commandment. It identifies the Lord of the Sabbath in a special way and indicates His sphere of authority and ownership. Note these two aspects: (1) the identity of the Deity: Yahweh (LORD), who is the Creator (*Exod. 20:11, Exod. 31:17*) and who thus holds a unique place; (2) the sphere of His ownership and authority—“the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” (*Exod. 20:11, NASB; compare Exod. 31:17*). In these two aspects, the Sabbath commandment has the characteristics that are typical of seals of international, ancient Near Eastern treaty documents. These seals are typically in the center of the treaty documents and also contain (1) the identity of a deity (usually a pagan god) and (2) the sphere of ownership and authority (usually a limited geographical area).

“The sanctification of the Spirit signalizes the difference between those who have the seal of God and those who keep a spurious rest day.

“When the test comes, it will be clearly shown what the mark of the beast is. It is the keeping of Sunday. . . .

“God has designated the seventh day as His Sabbath [Ex. 31:13, 17, 16 quoted].

“Thus the distinction is drawn between the loyal and the disloyal. Those who desire to have the seal of God in their foreheads must keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 980, 981.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Read Leviticus 19:30. Notice how it links the sanctuary and the Sabbath. Considering what we have learned so far about what the Sabbath is a sign of, why does that linkage make so much sense?
- ② Ask yourself this question: Has Sabbath keeping helped strengthen my walk with the Lord? If not, what changes can you make?

Summary: The Sabbath is a covenant sign that reaches forward to the time when the plan of salvation will be consummated. It points back to Creation, and as a sign of the covenant of grace, it points us to the final re-creation, when God makes all things new.

The New Covenant



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jer. 31:31–34; Matt. 5:17–28; Hos. 2:18–20; Isa. 56:6, 7; Heb. 8:7, 8; Heb. 10:4; Matt. 27:51.*

Memory Text: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (*Jeremiah 31:31, RSV*).

A cartoon in a magazine years ago showed a business executive in an office standing before other executives. He was holding a box of detergent in his hands, showing it to the other men and women. He proudly pointed to the word “New” that was displayed in large red letters on the box, the implication being, of course, that the product was new. The executive then said, “It’s the ‘New’ on the box that is new.” In other words, all that changed, all that was new, was simply the word *New* on the box. Everything else was the same.

In a sense, one could say that the new covenant is like that. The basis of the covenant, the basic hope that it has for us, its basic conditions, are the same as what was found in the old covenant. It has always been a covenant of God’s grace and mercy, a covenant based on a love that transcends human foibles and defeats.

The Week at a Glance: What parallels exist between the old and new covenants? What role does the law play in the covenant? With whom were the covenants made? What does the book of Hebrews mean by a “better covenant”? (*See Heb. 8:6.*) What relation is there between the covenant and the heavenly sanctuary?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 5.

“Behold, the Days Are Coming . . .”

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34 and answer the following questions:

1. Who instigates the covenant?

2. Whose law is being talked about here? What law is this?

3. Which verses stress the relational aspect that God wants with His people?

4. What act of God in behalf of His people forms the basis of that covenant relationship?

It is clear: the *new covenant* is not so different from the *old covenant* made with Israel on Mount Sinai. In fact, the problem with the Sinai covenant was not that it was old or outmoded. The problem, instead, was that it was broken (*see Jer. 31:32*).

The answers to the above questions, all found in those four verses, prove that many facets of the “old covenant” remain in the new one. The “new covenant” is, in a sense, a “renewed covenant.” It is the completion, or the fulfillment, of the first one.

Focus on the last part of Jeremiah 31:34, in which the Lord says that He will forgive their iniquity and the sin of His people. Even though the Lord says that He will write the law on our hearts and place it within us, He still stresses that He will forgive our sin and iniquity, which violates the law written in our hearts. Do you see any contradiction or tension between these ideas? If not, why not? What does it mean, as Romans 2:15 puts it, to have the law written within our hearts? (*See Matt. 5:17–28.*)

Looking at the verses for today, how could you use them to answer the argument that somehow the Ten Commandments (or, specifically, the Sabbath) are now made void under the new covenant? Is there anything at all in those texts that makes that point? On the contrary, how could one use those texts to prove the perpetuity of the law?

Heart Work

At the time when the southern kingdom of Judah was about to end and the people were to be taken into Babylonian captivity, God announced through His prophet Jeremiah the “new covenant.” This is the first time this notion is expressed in the Bible. However, when the 10-tribe northern kingdom of Israel was about to be destroyed (some one hundred fifty years before the time of Jeremiah), the *idea* of another covenant was mentioned again, this time by Hosea (*Hos. 2:18–20*).

Read Hosea 2:18–20. Notice the parallel between what the Lord said there to His people and what He said in Jeremiah 31:31–34. What common imagery is used, and, again, what does it say about the basic meaning and nature of the covenant?

At moments in history when God’s plans for His covenant people were hampered by their rebellion and unbelief, He sent prophets to proclaim that the covenant history with His faithful had not come to an end. No matter how unfaithful the people might have been, no matter the apostasy, rebellion, and disobedience among them, the Lord still proclaims His willingness to enter into a covenant relationship with all who are willing to repent, to obey, and to claim His promises.

Look up the following texts. Though they do not specifically mention a new covenant, what elements are found in them that reflect the principles behind the new covenant?

Ezek. 11:19 _____

Ezek. 18:31 _____

Ezek. 36:26 _____

The Lord will provide “ ‘a heart to know that I am the LORD’ ” (*Jer. 24:7, RSV*). He will “ ‘take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh’ ” (*Ezek. 11:19, RSV*), and will give “ ‘a new heart’ ” and “ ‘a new spirit’ ” (*Ezek. 36:26, RSV*). He also says, “ ‘I will put My Spirit within you’ ” (*Ezek. 36:27, NASB*). This work of God is the foundation of the new covenant.

If someone came to you and said, “I want a new heart, I want the law written in my heart, I want a heart to know the Lord—but I don’t know how to get it,” what would you say to this person?

Old and New Covenants

“ ‘And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’ ” (*Isa. 56:6, 7, RSV*).

Jeremiah states that the new covenant is to be made with “ ‘the house of Israel’ ” (*Jer. 31:33*). Does this mean, then, that only the literal seed of Abraham, Jews by blood and birth, are to receive the covenant promises?

No! In fact, that was not even true in Old Testament times. That the Hebrew nation as a whole had been given the covenant promises is, of course, correct. Yet, it was not done to the exclusion of anyone else. On the contrary, all, Jew or Gentile, were invited to partake of the promises, but they had to agree to enter into that covenant. It is certainly no different today.

Read the above texts in Isaiah. What conditions do they place on those who want to serve the Lord? Is there really any difference in what God asked of them and what He asks of us today? Explain your answer.

Though the new covenant is called “better” (see Wednesday’s study), there really is no difference in the basic elements that make up both the old and new covenants. It is the same God who offers salvation the same way, by grace (*Exod. 34:6, Rom. 3:24*); it is the same God who seeks a people who by faith will claim His promises of forgiveness (*Jer. 31:34, Heb. 8:12*); it is the same God who seeks to write the law into the hearts of those who will follow Him in a faith relationship (*Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10*), whether they be Jew or Gentile.

In the New Testament, the Jews, responding to the election of grace, received Jesus Christ and His gospel. For a time they were the heart of the church, the “remnant, chosen by grace” (*Rom. 11:5, RSV*), in contrast to those who were “hardened” (*Rom. 11:7, RSV*). At the same time, the Gentiles, who formerly did not believe, accepted the gospel and were grafted into God’s true people, made up of believers, no matter the people or race to which they belonged (*Rom. 11:13–24*). So the Gentiles, “at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise” (*Eph. 2:12, RSV*), were brought near in the blood of Christ. Christ is mediating the “new covenant” (*Heb. 9:15, RSV*) for all believers, regardless of nationality or race.

“A Better Covenant” (*Heb. 8:6*)

Yesterday we saw that regarding the basic elements, the old and new covenants were the same. The bottom line is salvation by faith in a God who will forgive our sins, not because of anything worthy in us but only because of His grace. As a result of this forgiveness, we enter into a relationship with Him in which we surrender to Him in faith and obedience.

Nevertheless, the book of Hebrews does call the new covenant “a better covenant.” How do we understand what that means? How is one covenant better than the other?

Where did the fault lie with the “failure” of the old covenant? (*Heb. 8:7, 8*).

The problem with the old covenant was not with the covenant itself but with the failure of the people to grasp it in faith (*Heb. 4:2*). The superiority of the new to the old lies in the fact that Jesus—instead of being revealed only through the animal sacrifices (as in the old covenant)—now appears in the reality of His death and high-priestly ministry. In other words, the salvation offered in the old covenant is the same offered in the new. In the new, however, a greater, more complete revelation of the God of the covenant and the love that He has for fallen humanity has been revealed. It is better in that everything that had been taught through symbols and types in the Old Testament has found its fulfillment in Jesus, whose sinless life, His death, and high-priestly ministry were symbolized by the earthly sanctuary service (*Heb. 9:8–14*).

Now, though, instead of symbols, types, and examples, we have Jesus Himself, not only as the slain Lamb who shed His blood for our sin (*Heb. 9:12*) but also as the One who stands as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary ministering on our behalf (*Heb. 7:25*). Though the salvation He offers is the same, this fuller revelation of Himself and the salvation found in Him, as revealed in the new covenant, make it superior to the old.

Read Hebrews 8:5 and Hebrews 10:1. What word does the author use to describe the old covenant sanctuary services? How does the use of that word help us to understand the superiority of the new covenant?

Think about this: Why would knowing about Christ’s life, death, and high-priestly ministry on our behalf give us a better understanding of God than one would get merely from the earthly sanctuary service ritual of animal sacrifices?

The New Covenant Priest

The book of Hebrews places a heavy emphasis on Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. In fact, the clearest exposition of the new covenant found in the New Testament appears in the book of Hebrews with its emphasis on Christ as High Priest. This is no coincidence. Christ's heavenly ministry is intricately tied to the promises of the new covenant.

The Old Testament sanctuary service was the means by which the old covenant truths were taught. It centered on sacrifice and mediation. Animals were slain, and their blood was mediated by the priests. These, of course, were all symbols of the salvation found only in Jesus. There was no salvation found in them in and of themselves.

Read Hebrews 10:4. Why is there no salvation found in the death of these animals? Why is the death of an animal not sufficient to bring salvation?

All these sacrifices and the priestly mediation that accompanied them met their fulfillment in Christ. Jesus became the Sacrifice upon which the blood of the new covenant is based. Christ's blood ratified the new covenant, making the Sinaitic covenant and its sacrifices "old," or void. The true sacrifice had been made, once and for all (*Heb. 9:26*). Once Christ died, there was no more need for any animals to be slain. The earthly sanctuary services had fulfilled their function.

Read Matthew 27:51, which tells how the veil in the earthly sanctuary was torn when Jesus died. How does that event help us to understand that the earthly sanctuary had been superseded?

Tied, of course, to these animal sacrifices was the priestly ministry, those Levites who offered and mediated the sacrifices in the earthly sanctuary on behalf of the people. Once the sacrifices ended, the need for their ministry ended, as well. Everything had been fulfilled in Jesus, who now ministers His own blood in the sanctuary in heaven (*see Heb. 8:1–5*). Hebrews stresses Christ as High Priest in heaven, having entered by shedding His own blood (*Heb. 9:12*), mediating on our behalf. This is the foundation of the hope and promise we have in the new covenant.

How does it make you feel, understanding that, even now, Jesus is ministering His blood in heaven on your behalf? How much confidence and assurance does that give you regarding salvation?

Further Thought: “In partaking with His disciples of the bread and wine, Christ pledged Himself to them as their Redeemer. He committed to them the new covenant, by which all who receive Him become children of God, and joint heirs with Christ. By this covenant every blessing that heaven could bestow for this life and the life to come was theirs. This covenant deed was to be ratified with the blood of Christ. And the administration of the Sacrament was to keep before the disciples the infinite sacrifice made for each of them individually as a part of the great whole of fallen humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 659.

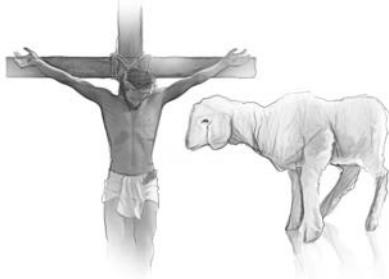
“The most striking feature of this covenant of peace is the exceeding richness of the pardoning mercy expressed to the sinner if he repents and turns from his sin. The Holy Spirit describes the gospel as salvation through the tender mercies of our God. ‘I will be merciful to their unrighteousness,’ the Lord declares of those who repent, ‘and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more’ (*Heb. 8:12*). Does God turn from justice in showing mercy to the sinner? No; God cannot dishonor His law by suffering it to be transgressed with impunity. Under the new covenant, perfect obedience is the condition of life. If the sinner repents and confesses his sins, he will find pardon. By Christ’s sacrifice in his behalf, forgiveness is secured for him. Christ has satisfied the demands of the law for every repentant, believing sinner.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 138.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the advantage of having the law written in the heart rather than on tablets of stone alone? Which is easier to forget, the law written on stones or the law written in the heart?
- 2 Ever since the fall of humanity, salvation has been found only through Jesus, even if the revelation of that truth varied in different epochs of history. Do not the covenants work the same way?
- 3 Look at the second Ellen G. White quote in today’s study. What does she mean by “perfect obedience” as the requirement for a covenant relationship? Who is the only One who has rendered “perfect obedience”? How does that obedience answer the demands of the law for us?

Summary: The new covenant is a greater, more complete, and better revelation of the plan of redemption. We who partake of it partake of it by faith, a faith that will manifest itself in obedience to a law written in our hearts.

New Covenant Sanctuary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Exod. 25:8; Isa. 53:4–12; Heb. 10:4; Heb. 9:14; Heb. 8:1–6; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6.*

Memory Text: “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (*Hebrews 9:15, RSV*).

A moonless evening, the sky, black like spilled ink, covered Frank in shadow as he walked the empty urban streets. After a while, he heard footsteps behind him, someone following in the darkness. Then the person caught up with him and said, “Frank, the printer?”

“Yes, I am he. But how did you know?”

“Well,” answered the stranger, “I don’t know you. But I know your brother very well, and even in the darkness, your mannerisms, your way of walking, your figure, all reminded me so much of him I just assumed that you were his brother, because he told me that he had one.”

This story reveals a powerful truth regarding the Israelite sanctuary service. It was, the Bible says, a shadow of the real. Nevertheless, there was enough in the shadows and images of the earthly sanctuary to clearly foreshadow and reveal the truths they were supposed to represent: the death and high-priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.

The Week at a Glance: Why did God want the Israelites to build a sanctuary? What does the sanctuary teach us about Christ as our Substitute? What does Jesus do in heaven as our Representative?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 12.

Relationships

“And I set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Lev. 26:11, 12).

One point should be clear by now: whether in the *old* covenant or *new* covenant, the Lord seeks a close, loving relationship with His people. In fact, the covenants basically help form (for lack of a better word) the “rules” for that relationship.

Relationship is crucial to the covenant, in whatever time or context. Yet, for a relationship to exist, there needs to be interaction, communication, and contact, particularly for sinful, fallible, doubting humans. The Lord, of course, knowing this, took the initiative to be sure that He would manifest Himself to us so that—within the confines of fallen humanity—we could relate to Him in a meaningful way.

Read Exodus 25:8, the Lord’s command to Israel to build a sanctuary. What reasons does the Lord give for wanting them to do this?

The answer to this question, of course, brings up another question, and that is *Why*? Why does the Lord want to dwell in the midst of His people?

Perhaps, the truth could be found in the two verses for today, listed above. Notice, the Lord will “tabernacle” (or “dwell”) among them; He then says that He will not “abhor” them. He also says that He will “walk” among them and will be their God, and they will be His people (Lev. 26:11, 12). Look at the elements found in these verses. Again, the relational aspect comes through very clearly.

Take a few minutes: analyze Leviticus 26:11, 12 and Exodus 25:8. Write down how the various elements all fit in with the notion that the Lord seeks a relationship with His people.

Focus specifically on the words, “my soul shall not abhor you.” What is it about the sanctuary itself that provides the means by which fallen, sinful people can be accepted by the Lord, and why is that so important for the process of forming a covenant?

Sin, Sacrifice, and Acceptance *(Heb. 9:22)*

The divinely appointed way for the Old Testament sinners to rid themselves of sin and guilt was through animal sacrifices. The Israelite sacrificial offerings are detailed in Leviticus 1 through 7. Careful attention was paid to the use and disposal of the blood in the various kinds of sacrifices. Indeed, the role of blood in sacrificial rituals is one of the unifying features in the Israelite sacrifices.

The person who had sinned—and thus had broken the covenant relationship and the law that regulated it—could be restored to full fellowship with God and humanity by bringing an animal sacrifice as a substitute. Sacrifices, with their rites, were the God-appointed means to bring about cleansing from sin and guilt. They were instituted to cleanse the sinner, transferring individual sin and guilt to the sanctuary by sprinkling blood and reinstating communion and full covenantal fellowship of the penitent with the personal God who is the saving Lord.

How do these concepts expressed above help us to understand the questions at the end of yesterday's study?

What prophetic significance was there in the animal sacrifice? *(See Isa. 53:4–12, Heb. 10:4.)*

The Old Testament animal sacrifices were the divinely ordained means for ridding the sinner of sin and guilt. They changed the sinner's status from that of guilty and worthy of death to that of forgiven and reestablished in the covenantal God-human relationship. But there was a sense in which the animal sacrifices were prophetic in nature. After all, no animal was an adequate substitute in atoning for humanity's sin and guilt. Paul states it in his own language: "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (*Heb. 10:4, RSV*). Thus, an animal sacrifice was meant to foreshadow the coming of the divine-human Servant of God, who would die a substitutionary death for the sins of the world. It is through this process that the sinner is forgiven and accepted by the Lord, and the basis of the covenant relationship is established.

Put yourself in the position of someone who lived in Old Testament times, when animals were sacrificed at the sanctuary. Remembering, too, just how important livestock were to their economy, culture, and whole way of life, what lesson were these sacrifices supposed to teach them about the cost of sin?

The Substitution

“Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal. 1:4).

There is no question: one of the key themes (if not *the* key theme) of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ died as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. This truth is the foundation of the entire plan of salvation. Any theology that denies the blood atonement of Christ denies the heart and soul of Christianity. A bloodless cross can save no one.

Meditate upon the text for today, and then answer these questions: **Did Jesus volunteer to die? For whom did He die? What would His death accomplish?**

Substitution is the key to the entire plan of salvation. Because of our sins, we deserve to die. Out of His love for us, Christ “gave himself for our sins” (Gal. 1:4). He died the death that we deserve. The death of Christ as the Substitute for sinners is the great truth from which all other truth flows. Our hope, that of restoration, of freedom, of forgiveness, of eternal life in Paradise, rests upon the work that Jesus did, that of giving Himself for our sins. Without that, our faith would be meaningless. We might as well place our hope and trust in a statue of a fish. Salvation comes only through the blood, the blood of Christ.

Look up the following texts: **Matthew 26:28, Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 9:14, and 1 Peter 1:19.** **What do they tell us about the blood? What role, then, does blood play in the plan of salvation?**

“It is not God’s will that you should be distrustful, and torture your soul with the fear that God will not accept you because you are sinful and unworthy. . . . You can say: ‘I know I am a sinner, and that is the reason I need a Saviour. . . . I have no merit or goodness whereby I may claim salvation, but I present before God the all-atoning blood of the spotless Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is my only plea.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 100.

Dwell upon the Ellen White statement given above. Rewrite it in your own words. Make it personal. Put your own fears and pain in there, and then write down what the promises contained there give to you. What hope do you have because of the blood of the new covenant?

The New Covenant High Priest

The earthly sanctuary, where God chose to dwell with His people, centered on the sacrifice of the animals. Yet, the service did not end with the death of these creatures. The priest ministered the blood in the sanctuary on behalf of the sinner *after the sacrifice itself was killed*.

This whole service, however, was only a shadow, a symbol, of what Christ would do for the world. Thus, just as the symbols (the sanctuary service) did not end with the death of the animal, Christ's work for us did not end with His death on the cross, either.

Study for today Hebrews 8:1–6. Pray over the verses. Ask the Lord to help you understand what is being said here and why it is important for us to know it. After you are done, write down in your own words what you think the Lord's message is to us in these verses. Ask yourself: How do these texts help us understand the new covenant?

Just as there was an earthly sanctuary, priesthood, and ministry under the old covenant, so there is a heavenly sanctuary, a heavenly priesthood, and heavenly ministry under the new covenant. However, what were only symbols, images, and a shadow (*Heb. 8:5*) in the old covenant became a reality in the new.

Also, rather than an amoral animal as our substitute, we have the sinless Jesus; rather than animal blood, we have the blood of Christ; rather than a man-made sanctuary, we have the "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (*Heb. 8:2*); and rather than a sinful, erring human priest, we have Jesus as our High Priest ministering in our behalf. With all this in mind, think about Paul's words: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great [a] salvation . . . ?" (*Heb. 2:3*).

Think about it: Jesus lived a sinless life on your behalf, died on your behalf, and is now in heaven, ministering in the sanctuary on your behalf. All this was done in order to save you from the terrible, final results of sin. Plan in the next day or so to talk to someone about this wonderful news, someone who you think needs to hear it. Work out beforehand, based on today's study, what you will say.

Heavenly Ministry *(Heb. 9:24)*

Study Hebrews 9:24, particularly the context in which it is given, that of explaining Christ's ministry in heaven for us after His sacrificial death on our behalf. Though much can be said, we want to focus on one point: the phrase at the end, which says that Christ now appears in the presence of God for us.

Think about what that means. We, sinful, fallen humanity; we, who would be consumed by the brightness of God's glory if we faced it now; we, no matter how bad we have been or how blatantly we have violated God's holy law, have Someone who appears in the presence of God *for us*. We have a Representative standing before the Father on our behalf. Think of how loving, forgiving, and accepting Christ was when here on earth. *This same Person is now our Mediator in heaven!*

This is the other part of the good news. Not only did Jesus pay the penalty for our sins, having taken them upon Himself at the cross (*1 Pet. 2:24*), but now He also stands in the presence of God, a Mediator between heaven and earth, between humanity and Divinity.

This makes perfect sense. Jesus, as both God and Man (a sinless, perfect Man) is the only One who could bridge the gap caused by sin between humanity and God. The crucial point to remember in all this (though there are many) is that there is now a Man, a human being, who can relate to all our trials, pains, and temptations (*Heb. 4:14, 15*), representing us before the Father.

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (*1 Tim. 2:5, 6*).

What two roles does this text put Jesus in, and how were these roles prefigured in the earthly sanctuary service?

The great news of the new covenant is that now, because of Jesus, repentant sinners have Someone representing them in heaven before the Father, Someone who earned for them what they could never earn for themselves, and that is perfect righteousness, the only righteousness that can stand in the presence of God. Jesus, with that perfect righteousness wrought out in His life through suffering (*Heb. 2:10*), stands before God, claiming for us forgiveness from sin and power over sin, because without these we would have no hope, not now and certainly not in the judgment.

Pray and meditate over the idea of a human being, Someone who has experienced temptation to sin, standing before God in heaven. What does that mean to you personally? What kind of hope and encouragement does that bring?

Further Thought: “The highest angel in heaven had not the power to pay the ransom for one lost soul. Cherubim and seraphim have only the glory with which they are endowed by the Creator as His creatures, and the reconciliation of man to God could be accomplished only through a mediator who was equal with God, possessed of attributes that would dignify, and declare him worthy to treat with the infinite God in man’s behalf, and also represent God to a fallen world. Man’s substitute and surety must have man’s nature, a connection with the human family whom he was to represent, and, as God’s ambassador, he must partake of the divine nature, have a connection with the Infinite, in order to manifest God to the world, and be a mediator between God and man.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 257.

“Jesus continues: As you confess Me before men, so I will confess you before God and the holy angels. You are to be My witnesses upon earth, channels through which My grace can flow for the healing of the world. So I will be your representative in heaven. The Father beholds not your faulty character, but He sees you as clothed in My perfection. I am the medium through which Heaven’s blessings shall come to you. And everyone who confesses Me by sharing My sacrifice for the lost shall be confessed as a sharer in the glory and joy of the redeemed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 357.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read Romans 5:2, Ephesians 2:18, and Ephesians 3:12. What are they saying that helps us understand our access to the Father through Jesus?
- 2 Look at the second Ellen G. White statement given above. Notice how she explains the role of mediator. When the Father looks at us, He does not see our faulty character but Christ’s perfection instead. Dwell on what that means, and discuss it with the class.
- 3 Looking at what we have studied this week, ask yourself how you would answer this question: “OK, so Christ is in the sanctuary in heaven. So what? What does that mean on a daily, practical level?”

Summary: The old covenant sacrificial system was replaced by the new; instead of animals being sacrificed by sinful priests in an earthly sanctuary, we now have Jesus, our perfect Sacrifice. He represents us before the Father in the sanctuary in heaven, which forms the basis of the new covenant and its promises.

Covenant Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 6:14; Rom. 6:23; 1 John 5:11, 13; Rom. 4:1–7; Lev. 7:18; Lev. 17:1–4; Rom. 5:1.*

Memory Text: “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (*Galatians 3:11*).

About seven centuries before Christ, the poet Homer wrote *The Odyssey*, the story of Odysseus, the great warrior who—after sacking the city of Troy in the Trojan war—began a 10-year voyage to try to return to his native Ithaca. The voyage took so long because he faced shipwrecks, mutinies, storms, monsters, and other obstacles that kept him from reaching his goal. Finally, after deciding that Odysseus had suffered enough, the gods agreed to allow the weary warrior to return to his home and family. His trials were, they agreed, enough atonement for his mistakes.

In one sense, we are like Odysseus, on a long journey home. The crucial difference, however, is that unlike Odysseus, we can never “suffer enough” to earn our way back. The distance between heaven and earth is too great for us to atone for our mistakes. If we get home, it will have to be only by the grace of God.

The Week at a Glance: Why must salvation be a gift? Why could only Someone equal with God ransom our souls? What makes Abraham such a good representative of faith? What does it mean that righteousness is “imputed,” or “credited,” to us? How can we make the promises and hope found in the Cross our own?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 19.

Reflections of Calvary

The Old Testament way of salvation under the Mosaic covenant is no different from the New Testament way of salvation under the new covenant. Whether in the Old or New Testament, old or new covenant, salvation is by faith alone. If it were by anything else, such as works, salvation would be something that was owed us, something the Creator was obligated to give us. Only those who do not understand the seriousness of sin could believe that God was under some obligation to save us. On the contrary, if anything, there was only one obligation, and that was what we owed to the violated law. We, of course, could not meet that obligation; fortunately, Jesus met it for us.

“When men and women can more fully comprehend the magnitude of the great sacrifice which was made by the Majesty of heaven in dying in man’s stead, then will the plan of salvation be magnified, and reflections of Calvary will awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christian’s heart. Praises to God and the Lamb will be in their hearts and upon their lips. Pride and self-esteem cannot flourish in the hearts that keep fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary. . . . All the riches of the world are not of sufficient value to redeem one perishing soul. Who can measure the love Christ felt for a lost world as He hung upon the cross, suffering for the sins of guilty men? This love was immeasurable, infinite.

“Christ has shown that His love was stronger than death. He was accomplishing man’s salvation; and although He had the most fearful conflict with the powers of darkness, yet, amid it all, His love grew stronger and stronger. He endured the hiding of His Father’s countenance, until He was led to exclaim in the bitterness of His soul: ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ His arm brought salvation. The price was paid to purchase the redemption of man, when, in the last soul struggle, the blessed words were uttered which seemed to resound through creation: ‘It is finished.’

“The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our thoughts and imaginations can never fully comprehend. The length, the breadth, the height, the depth, of such amazing love we cannot fathom. The contemplation of the matchless depths of a Saviour’s love should fill the mind, touch and melt the soul, refine and elevate the affections, and completely transform the whole character.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 213.

Pray over what Ellen G. White wrote here. Keeping these lines in mind, read Galatians 6:14 and then ask yourself, In what ways can I glory in the cross of Christ?

The Covenant and the Sacrifice

“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, RSV).

What does Peter mean here when he says that we were ransomed?

When Peter speaks about Christ’s atoning death on the cross, the “ransom” or price idea to which he refers brings to mind the ancient practice of a slave’s being freed from bondage after a price had been paid (often by a relative). In contrast, Christ ransomed us from the slavery of sin and its final fruit, which is death, but He did it with His “precious blood,” His substitutionary and voluntary death on Calvary. Again, this is the foundation of all the covenants: without it, the covenant becomes null and void, because God could not have justly fulfilled His end of the deal, which is the gift of eternal life bestowed upon all who believe.

Look up the following verses: Romans 6:23 and 1 John 5:11, 13. What message do they share?

We have this promise of eternal life, because Jesus alone could repair the breach that first caused us to lose that eternal life. How? Because the righteousness and infinite value of the Creator alone could cancel the debt we owed to the broken law—that is how wide the breach caused by sin was. After all, what would it say about the seriousness of God’s eternal moral law if some finite, temporal, and created being could pay the penalty for violating it? Only Someone who is equal to God Himself, in whom life exists unborrowed and underived and eternal, could have paid the ransom required to free us from the debt owed to the law. This is how all the covenant promises are fulfilled; this is how we have the promise of eternal life, even now; this is how we have been ransomed from sin and death.

Imagine that in an art museum, someone’s child throws a balloon filled with ink at a Rembrandt painting and ruins it completely. The painting is worth millions; the parents could not come close to paying the debt owed, even if they sold everything they owned. In what sense does this image help us understand just how serious a breach sin has caused, how helpless we are to fix it, and why only the Lord Himself could pay the debt?

The Faith of Abraham: Part 1

“He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (*Gen. 15:6*).

This verse remains one of the most profound statements in all Scripture. It helps establish the crucial truth of biblical religion, that of justification by faith alone, and it does this long centuries before Paul wrote about it in Romans—all of which helps prove the point that from Eden onward, salvation always came the same way.

The immediate context of the verse helps us understand just how great Abram’s faith was, believing in God’s promise of a son despite all the physical evidence that would seem to make that promise impossible. It is the kind of faith that realizes its own utter helplessness, the kind of faith that demands a complete surrender of self, the kind of faith that requires a total submission to the Lord, the kind of faith that results in obedience. This was the faith of Abram, and it was counted to him “as righteousness.”

Why does the Bible say that it was “counted to” him, or “credited to” him, as righteousness? Was Abram himself “righteous” in the sense of God’s righteousness? What did he do, not long after God declared him righteous, that helps us understand why this righteousness was credited to him, as opposed to what he himself actually was?

However much Abram’s life was a life of faith and obedience, it was not a life of perfect faith and perfect obedience. At times he displayed weakness in both areas. (Does that sound like anyone you know?) All of which leads to the crucial point, and that is: the righteousness that saves us is a righteousness that is credited to us, a righteousness that is (to use a fancy theological term) *imputed* to us. This means that we are declared righteous in the sight of God, despite our faults; it means that the God of heaven views us as righteous even if we are not. This is how He saw Abram, and this is how He will see all who come to Him in “the faith of Abraham” (*Rom. 4:16*).

Read Romans 4:1–7. Look at the context in which Paul uses Genesis 15:6. Pray over those verses, and write out in your own words what you believe they are saying to you.

The Faith of Abraham: Part 2

Looking again at Genesis 15:6, we can see that various translations have rendered the term as “counted” (Hebrew, *chashab*) or “reckoned” or “credited” (*RSV, NIV*) or “accounted.”

The same term is employed in other texts in the books of Moses. A person or a thing is “reckoned,” or “regarded,” as something that person or thing is not. For instance, in Genesis 31:15, Rachel and Leah affirm that their father “reckons” (“regards” or “counts”) them as strangers, although they are his daughters. The title of the Levite is “reckoned” (“regarded” or “counted”) as if it were the corn of the threshing floor, although it is obviously not the corn (*Num. 18:27, 30, NIV*).

How is the idea of reckoning expressed in the context of sacrifices? (*Lev. 7:18, Lev. 17:1–4*).

The King James Version uses the word “imputed” to translate *chashab*. If a particular sacrifice (“peace offering”) is not eaten by the third day, its value is lost, and it shall not be “reckoned” (*Lev. 7:18, NASB*; Hebrew, *chashab*) to the benefit of the offerer. Leviticus 7:18 speaks of a situation in which a sacrifice is “reckoned” to the benefit of the sinner (*compare Lev. 17:1–4, NASB*), who then stands before God in righteousness. God is accounting the sinner as righteous, although the individual is actually unrighteous.

Take some time to dwell on this wonderful truth that despite our faults, we can be accounted, or credited, as righteous in the sight of God. Write out in your own words your understanding of what this means.

This great truth, that of being declared righteous, not because of any act that we can do but only because of faith in what Christ has done for us, is the essence of the phrase “righteousness by faith.” Yet, it is not that our faith itself makes us righteous; rather, faith is the vehicle by which we obtain the gift of righteousness. This, in essence, is the beauty, the mystery, and the glory of Christianity. All that we believe as Christians, as followers of Christ, finds an important root in this wonderful concept. Through faith, we are accounted righteous in the sight of God. All else that follows—obedience, sanctification, holiness, character development, love—stems from this crucial truth.

How do you respond to someone who seeks to be a Christian yet says, “But I don’t feel righteous”?

Resting on the Promises

There is a story told about the famous Cardinal Bellarmine, the great Catholic apologist who all his life fought the message of justification by an imputed righteousness alone. As he lay dying, he was brought the crucifixes and the merits of the saints to help give him assurance before death. But Bellarmine said, "Take it away. I think it's safer to trust in the merits of Christ."

As they near the end of their lives, many people look back and see how vain, how futile, how useless, their deeds and their works are for earning salvation with a holy God, and thus how much they need the righteousness of Christ.

Yet, the good news is that we don't have to wait for the approach of death to have security in the Lord. The whole covenant is based on the secure promises of God now, promises for us now, promises that can make our lives better now.

Look up the following verses, and answer the question asked with each one in the context of developing, keeping, and strengthening your covenant relationship with God:

Ps. 34:8 (How can you taste God's goodness?)

Matt. 11:30 (What has Christ done for us that makes this yoke easy?)

Rom 5:1 (What does justification have to do with peace?)

Phil. 2:7, 8 (What have you gained from Christ's experience?)

Prayerfully examine your life, and ask yourself, What things am I doing that are strengthening my relationship with God, and what things are hurting it? What changes do I need to make?

Further Thought: “The only way in which he [the sinner] can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness; and the pardoned soul goes on from grace to grace, from light to greater light.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 367.

“When through repentance and faith we accept Christ as our Savior, the Lord pardons our sins, and remits the penalty prescribed for the transgression of the law. The sinner then stands before God as a just person; he is taken into favor with Heaven and through the Spirit has fellowship with the Father and the Son.

“Then there is yet another work to be accomplished, and this is of a progressive nature. The soul is to be sanctified through the truth. And this also is accomplished through faith. For it is only by the grace of Christ, which we receive through faith, that the character can be transformed.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 191.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What distinction is made between a living and a dead faith (*James 2:17, 18*)? How does Paul describe a living faith (*Rom. 16:26*)? What is the key word that helps reveal what faith entails?
- ② How do you respond to the argument (which comes with a certain logical consistency) that if we are saved only by a credited righteousness, not a righteousness that exists within us, then it does not matter what we do or how we act?
- ③ “Our acceptance with God is sure only through His beloved Son, and good works are but the result of the working of His sin-pardoning love. They are no credit to us, and we have nothing accorded to us for our good works by which we may claim a part in the salvation of our souls. . . . He [the believer] cannot present his good works as a plea for the salvation of his soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 199. Keeping this statement by Ellen G. White in mind, why, then, are good works such a crucial part of the Christian experience?

Summary: Old covenant, new covenant: Jesus paid the debt owed to the law, so that we can stand righteous in the sight of God.

The New Covenant Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 John 1:4; John 5:24; Rom. 3:24, 25; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 4:16; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 20:6, 14; Rev. 21:8.*

Memory Text: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (*John 10:10*).

This quarter has been a study on the covenant, which (to pare it down to its simplest, purest form) is, basically, God saying, *This is how I will save you from sin, period.*

Though the outcome, the grand finale, of the covenant promise is, of course, eternal life in a world made new, we do not have to wait until that time to enjoy the covenant blessings today. The Lord cares about our lives *now*; He wants the best for us *now*. The covenant is not some deal where you do this and this and this and then, a long way off, you will get your reward. The rewards, the gifts—they are blessings that those who by faith enter into the covenant relation can enjoy here and now.

This week's lesson, the final in our series on the covenant, looks at some of these immediate blessings, some of the promises that come from God's grace shed into our hearts because, having heard Him knock, we have opened the door. Of course, there are more blessings than what we can touch on this week. It is just a start, the start of something that will, indeed, never end.

The Week at a Glance: Why should we feel joy? On what basis can we claim that promise? What is it about the covenant that should free us from the burden of guilt? What does it mean to have a new heart?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 26.

Joy

“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full”
(1 John 1:4).

Look at what John wrote here. In a few simple words, he expresses what should be one of the great advantages we, as covenant people, have—and that is the promise of joy.

As Christians, we are often told not to go by feeling, that faith is not feeling, and that we need to get beyond our feelings, all of which is true. But at the same time, we would not be human beings if we were not creatures of feelings, emotions, and moods. We cannot deny our feelings; what we need to do is understand them, give them their proper role, and, as much as possible, keep them under control. But to deny them is to deny what it means to be human (we might as well tell a circle not to be round). Indeed, as this verse says, not only should we have feelings (in this case joy), but they also should be full. It hardly sounds as if feelings are to be denied, does it?

Read the context of the above verse, starting at the beginning of the chapter. What was John writing to the early Christians that he hoped would make their joy full? And why should it give them joy?

John was one of the original Twelve. He was there, almost from the start of Christ’s three-and-a-half-year ministry, a witness to some of the most amazing events of Jesus’ life. (John was there at the cross, at Gethsemane, and at the Transfiguration, as well). Thus, as an eyewitness, he was certainly well-qualified to talk about this subject.

Yet, notice, too, that the emphasis is not on himself; it is on what Jesus had done for the disciples so they can now have fellowship not only with each other but also with God Himself. Jesus has opened the way for us to enter into this close relationship with the Lord; and one result of this fellowship—this relationship—is joy. John wants them to know that what they have heard about Jesus is true (he saw, touched, felt, and heard Him), and thus they, too, can enter in a joyful relationship with their heavenly Father, who loves them and gave Himself through His Son for them.

In a certain sense, John is giving his own personal testimony. What is your own testimony regarding your relationship with Jesus? What could you say that could help increase someone’s joy in the Lord, as John sought to do here?

Guilt Free

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”
(Rom. 8:1).

A young woman had been brutally murdered, her killer unknown. The police, setting a trap, placed a hidden microphone in her grave. One evening, many months after her death, a young man approached the grave and, kneeling and weeping, begged the woman for forgiveness. The police, of course, monitoring his words, nabbed him for the crime.

What drove the man to the grave? It was guilt.

Of course, though none of us (we hope) has ever done anything as bad as what that young man did, we all are guilty; we all have done things we are ashamed of, things that we wish we could undo but cannot.

Thanks to Jesus and the blood of the new covenant, none of us has to live under the stigma of guilt. According to the text for today, there is no condemnation against us. The ultimate Judge counts us as not guilty, counts us as if we have not done the things we feel guilty about.

How do these verses help us understand Romans 8:1? *John 5:24; Rom. 3:24, 25; 2 Cor. 5:21.*

One of the great promises of living in a covenant relationship with the Lord is that we no longer have to live under the burden of guilt. Because of the blood of the covenant, we—who choose to enter into that covenant relationship with God, who choose to abide by the conditions of faith, repentance, obedience—can have the burden of guilt lifted. When Satan seeks to whisper in our ears that we are evil, that we are bad, that we are too sinful to be accepted by God, we can do what Jesus did when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness: we can quote Scripture, and one of the best of all verses to quote is Romans 8:1. This does not mean denying the reality of sin in our lives; it means, instead, because of the covenant relationship we have with the Lord, we no longer live under the condemnation of that sin. Jesus paid the penalty for us, and He now stands in the presence of the Father pleading His own blood on our behalf, presenting His own righteousness instead of our sins.

What difference does it make in your life that the Lord has forgiven you for whatever sins you might have committed? How does that reality help you in dealing with others who have sinned against you? How should it impact the way you deal with those people?

New Covenant and New Heart

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:17–19).

As earlier studies this quarter showed, the new covenant is one in which the Lord puts the law in our hearts (*Jer. 31:31–33*). Not only is the law there, but also according to the texts for today, Christ is as well, which, of course, makes good sense, for Christ and His law are closely connected. Thus, with Christ’s law in our hearts, and with Christ dwelling there too (the Greek word translated in the above text as *dwell* also means “to settle in,” giving the idea of permanency), we come to another one of the great covenant benefits—a new heart.

Why do we need a new heart? What changes will be manifested in those who have a new heart?

Read again the text for today. Notice that Paul stresses the element of love, saying that we must be “rooted and grounded” in it. These words imply stability, firmness, and permanency in the foundation of love. Our faith means nothing if it is not rooted in love for God and love for others (*Matt. 22:37–39, 1 Corinthians 13*). This love does not come in a vacuum. On the contrary, it comes because we get a glimpse of God’s love for us (a love that “passeth understanding”) as manifested through Jesus. As a result, by Him working in us, our lives are changed, our hearts are changed, and we become new people with new thoughts, new desires, and new goals. Our reaction to God’s love for us enables Him to change our hearts and instill in us love for others. Perhaps this is what Paul means, at least partially, when he talks about us being filled with “the fulness of God.”

Read 1 John 4:16. How does this text relate to what Paul has written in Ephesians 3:17–19?

Look at the texts we have studied today. What can you do that will allow the promises of these texts to be fulfilled in you? Are there things you need to change, things that are perhaps hampering you from experiencing the “fulness of God” (Eph. 3:19)? Make a list of what changes you need to make in your life. Make one for yourself and, if you are comfortable, make one that you could share with the class. How can you help each other make necessary changes?

New Covenant and Eternal Life

“**I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die**” (*John 11:25, 26, NASB*).

There are two dimensions to eternal life. The *present* dimension brings to the believer an experience of the abundant life now (*John 10:10*), which includes the many promises that we have been given for our lives now.

The *future* dimension is, of course, eternal life—the promise of the resurrection of the body (*John 5:28, 29; John 6:39*). Though still in the future, that is the one event that makes everything else worth it, the one event that caps all our hopes as Christians.

Study the verse for today. What is Jesus saying here? Where is eternal life found? How do we understand His words that those who live and believe in Him, even if they die, will never die? (*See Rev. 2:11; Rev. 20:6, 14; and Rev. 21:8.*)

Of course, we all die, but according to Jesus, this death is only a sleep, a temporary hiatus that—for those who believe in Him—will end in the resurrection of life. When Christ returns, the dead in Christ will rise immortal, and the living followers of Christ will, in the twinkling of an eye, be changed into immortality. Both the dead and the living who are Christ’s will possess the same kind of resurrection body. Immortality begins at that time for God’s people.

What a great joy to know now that our end is not in the grave but that there is no end, that we will have a new life that lasts forever.

“Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. It is by virtue of this union that we are to come forth from the grave—not merely as a manifestation of the power of Christ, but because, through faith, His life has become ours. Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 388.

In what ways can we now enjoy the benefits of eternal life? In other words, what does this promise do for us now? Write down some of the benefits this promise of eternal life gives to you, personally, in your day-to-day life. How could you take this hope and promise and share it with someone who is struggling, perhaps with the death of a loved one?

New Covenant and Mission

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world’ ” (Matt. 28:19, 20).

All over the world, people often struggle with what South African writer Laurens Van Der Post called “the burden of meaninglessness.” People find themselves with the gift of life, yet they do not know what to do with it, do not know what the purpose of this gift is, and do not know how to use it. It is like giving someone a library filled with rare books, only to have the person not read the books but use them to build fires. What a terrible waste of something so precious!

For the new covenant Christian, however, that problem is not one they need to struggle with. On the contrary, those who know (and have personally experienced) the wonderful news of a crucified and risen Savior, who died for the sins of every human being everywhere that they all might have eternal life, know joy. Considering the unequivocal call in Matthew 28:19, 20, the believer certainly has a mission and purpose in life, and that is to spread to the world the wonderful truth he or she has personally experienced in Christ Jesus. What a privilege! Almost anything else we do in this world will end when this world does. But spreading the gospel to others is a work that will make an imprint on eternity. Talk about a sense of mission and purpose!

Break down the verses for today into their various elements. What are the specific things Jesus is telling us to do, and what is involved in each one? What promise do we have that should give us the faith and courage to do what Christ commands?

As new covenant Christians, we have been given a clear mandate by the Lord Himself. Whoever we are, whatever our station in life, whatever our limits, we can all play a role. Have you been doing anything? Can you do more? What can your class do, together, to have a greater role in this work?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635–645, in *The Great Controversy*; “Rejoicing in the Lord,” pp. 115–126, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The holy Son of God had no sins or griefs of his own to bear: he was bearing the griefs of others; for on him was laid the iniquity of us all. Through divine sympathy he connects himself with man, and as the representative of the race he submits to be treated as a transgressor. He looks into the abyss of woe opened for us by our sins, and proposes to bridge the gulf of man’s separation from God.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, August 1, 1892.

“Come, my brother, come just as you are, sinful and polluted. Lay your burden of guilt on Jesus, and by faith claim His merits. Come now, while mercy lingers; come with confession, come with contrition of soul, and God will abundantly pardon. Do not dare to slight another opportunity. Listen to the voice of mercy that now pleads with you to arise from the dead that Christ may give you light. Every moment now seems to connect itself directly with the destinies of the unseen world. Then let not your pride and unbelief lead you to still further reject offered mercy. If you do you will be left to lament at the last: ‘The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 353.

Discussion Questions:

- ① “We see ourselves in relation to the cosmos,” wrote Francisco José Moreno, “and we are aware of our ignorance and final powerlessness; hence our insecurity. As a result, we fear.”—*Between Faith and Reason: Basic Fear and the Human Condition* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), p. 7. Compare this statement with what you studied this week in Ephesians 3:17–19. Discuss the differences between the two sentiments.
- ② God promises us joy as believers in Jesus. Is joy the same as happiness? Should we always be happy? If we are not, is there something wrong with our Christian experience? What can the life of Jesus reveal that will help us understand the answers to these questions?
- ③ Discuss further this idea of being filled with “the fulness of God” (*Eph. 3:19*). What does that mean? How can we experience this in our lives?

Summary: The covenant is not just some deep theological concept; instead, it defines the parameters of our saving relationship with Christ, a relationship that reaps us wonderful benefits now and at His return.