

God's Everlasting Covenant

***“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.”
Psalm 111:9***

GOD HAS REVEALED HIS

loving plan of salvation through covenants that he has made with his people. He has promised to do certain things for them and these promises constitute a “covenant” or an agreement.

If we are to participate in this divine arrangement and receive the blessings promised to those who are faithful coworkers with the Lord, then we must abide by the conditions attached to God's promises.

A covenant implies an agreement and harmony between those who enter into it. The prophet Hosea wrote, “They like men [Adam, *Marginal Translation*] have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.” (Hos. 6:7) Adam was therefore in covenant relationship with the Creator before he transgressed the original divine law. God's people, the Israelites, also transgressed the Law Covenant into which they had entered with God.

The terms of Adam's covenant with God are partially set forth in Genesis 2:15-17. These terms were simple, but exacting. They called for Adam's obedience which was based upon the simple test of not eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus Adam's part in this covenant was to obey. Clearly implied in the record is God's promise to bless Adam with a happy and continuous life. Had Adam remained obedient to God, the beautiful harmony which existed between him and his Creator would have continued, and his understanding of a loving Creator would have been an ever-expanding one.

However, Adam did not remain faithful to his part of that original covenant agreement. As the prophet Hosea wrote, Adam "transgressed the covenant." This meant that instead of continuing in a friendly relationship with God, he was alienated from him. God's disfavor was manifest toward him in that he pronounced the sentence of death upon him. He was cast out of the Garden of Eden into the unfinished earth to die. Adam's transgression affected his entire progeny in that they all came under the same manifestation of disfavor. The Apostle Paul explains this, saying, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Corinthians 15:21,22

COVENANT WITH NOAH

Because of Adam's transgression, God was no longer in covenant relationship with his earthly creatures as a whole. From time to time, however, he made covenants with certain individuals from

among mankind. These individuals, through their faith and obedience, were pleasing to him. The first one of these mentioned in the Bible is Noah. Noah had demonstrated his faith in God by his obedience in building the ark in preparation for the flood. Noah's family held the same faith as their father and later shared in the covenant which God made with him.

God's covenant was made with Noah after the flood. The covenant promised that all flesh would never again be destroyed by the waters of a flood. The covenant reads, "God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."—Gen. 9:8-11

This is a very important covenant in connection with God's ultimate plan for the recovery of the human family from the sentence of sin and death. While the promise assured Noah and his family that the human race would not again be completely destroyed by water, it is a reasonable implication that God did not intend that it would be destroyed in any other way. God's plan for man was that he was to multiply and fill the earth. The command to do this was given to Adam and repeated to Noah and his family. He created the earth to be man's home, and we can be assured that neither the

earth nor the human race will ever be destroyed.—
Isa. 45:18

The fulfillment of God's promises relative to the redemption and recovery of his earthly creatures from the divine penalty for sin and death, is based on the promise of the resurrection of the dead. This means that all the pure Adamic stock which died in the flood did not perish forever. God's covenant with Noah and his family is a wonderful reminder that he created man to live, not to be destroyed. Through his other covenants, God's great love for his human creatures is revealed, a love that has provided an opportunity of salvation from death for all mankind.—John 3:16; 5:28,29

COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

A few hundred years after the flood, God made a covenant with Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham. He told him, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 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. 12:2,3) Two points are mentioned in this promise. One is that the descendants of Abraham would become a great nation. The other is that in him "all families of the earth" would be blessed.

This promise was reiterated to Abraham later, the last reference to it being Genesis 22:1-18. God tested Abraham's faith in connection with his son Isaac, whom he believed was the first of the "seed" which God had promised. Isaac was born when Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old. They

both doubtless recognized that God had performed a miracle to give them this child of promise. When Isaac was grown, however, God asked Abraham to offer this miracle child in sacrifice.

This was a severe test of Abraham's faith, but he demonstrated his willingness to obey. In the New Testament, it is revealed that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead in the event he was sacrificed as a burnt offering. (Heb. 11:17-19) When Abraham demonstrated his faith by placing Isaac on an altar and preparing to slay him, his hand was stayed by an angel who instructed him to use a lamb which God had provided as a substitute. God was very pleased with Abraham because of this marvelous demonstration of faith. He said to him: "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."—Gen. 22:16-18

NEW SEED OF PROMISE

Turning to the New Testament, we read, "The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Gal. 3:8) Furthermore, the apostle explains, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is

Christ.” (vs. 16) Thus, from the scriptural record, it is made clear that when God promised Abraham that his “seed” would bless all the families of the earth, the one whom he would choose to carry out his will was his beloved Son Jesus. Thus Jesus was the Christ of the New Testament and the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament.

The apostle also gives us further information concerning the “seed” of promise. “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—vss. 27-29

This means that the faithful followers of Jesus during this present Gospel Age are the children of the covenant which God made with Abraham. Paul further states, “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise.” (chap. 4:28) The Apostle Paul again associates the followers of Jesus with God’s oath-bound covenant with Abraham. He wrote, “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who

have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” (Heb. 6:13-20) Paul closely associates the Gospel Age church with the Abrahamic Covenant.

THE LAW COVENANT

God entered into a covenant relationship with the natural descendants of Abraham. This is known as the Law Covenant because it was based upon God’s law as shown in the Ten Commandments. Moses served as its mediator between God and the Israelites. During the time of the Early Church, there were some differences of opinion as to whether or not the followers of Jesus were bound by the terms of the Law Covenant.

In connection with this, the Apostle Paul explained that the Law was “added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” (Gal. 3:19) Further, he states, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (vs. 24) It is therefore true that Christians are not under the Law Covenant, although they are in harmony with all its righteous requirements.

For the natural descendants of Abraham, the Law Covenant served a good purpose. First, as Paul explains, “it was added because of transgressions till the [promised] seed should come.” God knew that it would be many centuries before his due time for bringing forth the true faith-seed of Abraham.

It was in his plan that the head of this faith-seed should come from the nation of Israel. Because of the transgressions of the Jewish people, and the time until the Messiah would appear, the nation would wander completely away from God without something to hold it together. As a result, the Israelites would lose their identity as the typical people of God. The Law Covenant served as a deterrent to this trend. While the Israelites were not faithful in keeping the Law, it did hold them in check so that there was a small group of true Israelites among which Jesus was born. It was to these that he presented himself as their Messiah.

Paul further explains that the Law Covenant was a “schoolmaster” to bring us to Christ. It demonstrated the need of a Redeemer. As Paul explained, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” (Rom. 5:14) Adam’s transgression was willful because he could have refrained from partaking of the forbidden fruit and the sentence of death upon himself.

Adam’s progeny came under condemnation to death through him, and not because of any willful sin of their own. As Paul states, these died although they had not “sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” This continued until Moses and the time of giving the Law. It was then that a change took place in the case of the one small nation of Israel.

This change was brought about through the Law Covenant in which God promised the Israelites that if they would keep his law they could live. “He that doeth these things shall live by them.”

(Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12) This meant that any Jew who lived up perfectly to the terms of the Law Covenant would no longer need to die because of Adam's transgression. When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life, Jesus referred him to the law as summed up in the Ten Commandments.—Matt. 19:16-20; Luke 18:18-27

The young man realized that he was not gaining life by keeping the Law although he had been making a sincere effort to do so. The reason for his failure is the fact that no imperfect, fallen human can measure up to the perfect standard of the divine law. He realized that, like all others, his life would end in death. The failure to gain life by keeping the Law caused the young man to go to Jesus.

However, the rich young ruler was not ready to meet the terms of discipleship, and neither did he learn the manner in which he could receive life through Jesus. He did, however, learn that he could not gain life by keeping the Law. As explained by Paul, the Law served as a schoolmaster to emphasize the need of Christ and the provision which God has made through him. Before the plan of God shall have accomplished its full purpose, all will be fully enlightened, and only those who willfully turn against the provisions of grace will fail to gain everlasting life.

AN ALLEGORY

Paul presents a further aspect of the covenant that God made with Abraham, and the Law Covenant into which he entered with Israel. He said, "It is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by

a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” (Gal. 4:22-26) The Jerusalem which is the “mother of us all” was represented by Sarah, the freewoman. Thus Paul refuted the argument of those who desired to be in bondage to the Law Covenant.

THE NEW COVENANT

Another of God’s promises is brought to our attention in Jeremiah’s prophecy. It is referred to as a New Covenant and that it will be made with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:31-34

At the time this promise was made, the Hebrew people were divided. One segment was known as the house of Israel, and the other as the house of Judah. God included both to emphasize that his promise applied to all the natural descendants of Abraham. The promise to Abraham was that all families, or nations, of the earth are to be blessed, and will also have an opportunity to receive the blessings of the promised New Covenant.

The Lord explains that the New Covenant will not be made according to the covenant which he made with ancient Israel. It will be different because the law of the New Covenant will not be written on tables of stone as was the original Law Covenant. It will be written in the inward parts of the people, in their hearts.

The Law written on stone and read to the people did not bring about a change in their inward selves. They remained imperfect and sinful, and little real effort was made by the people to keep the Law. There were noble exceptions to this by a small class who, upon the basis of their faith and sacrifice, looked for “a better resurrection.”—Heb. 11:35

Adam was created in the image of God, and God’s law was a part of his being. A test of obedience was given to him that he had the ability to pass had he not willfully yielded to other influences. So it will be with those with whom God enters into full covenant relationship under the promised

New Covenant. That future Law will be written in the inward parts and in the hearts, as man was originally created.

BLESSINGS FOR ALL

The restoration blessings that will be made available under the terms of the New Covenant will be worldwide. "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD." When the law of the New Covenant is fully written in the inward parts of men, there will be no more need for the services of teachers to instruct people in the ways of the Lord, nor to call upon any to obey and serve him. All those who will have passed those tests will obey and serve the Lord from their hearts.

The Heavenly Father's promises are enlightening as recorded by the Prophet Jeremiah. "It shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD." (Jer. 31:28) This is one of the promises of the restoration of Israel and a sign of the nearness of the establishment of the New Covenant over the earth.

Then, we read, "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." (vss. 29, 30) Then will come to pass God's promise of the New Covenant and its blessings, emphasizing that when the time comes for its fulfillment there will be a complete change in the position of the human

family so far as its relationship to sin and its consequences are concerned.

Figuratively speaking, it was Adam who ate the sour grape of disobedience to divine law many centuries ago. Not only were his own teeth set on edge, but the result of his disobedience was passed on to the entire human creation—his children's teeth have also been set on edge. In preparation for the making and ultimate establishment of the New Covenant, Christ gave his life to redeem Adam and all mankind from death. That provision will grant all men an individual opportunity to obey the divine law. This opportunity will reach the Israelites and the people of all nations in connection with the making of the New Covenant.

Jesus spoke of his shed blood as a symbol of his sacrificed human life. "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28) It is his blood that ratifies God's promise of the New Covenant, and makes possible its fulfillment. The New Covenant will give life to all of those with whom it is made. All mankind are members of the condemned and dying race. It is only through Jesus and his sacrificial death on behalf of Adam and his children, that they will have an opportunity to gain everlasting life under the arrangements of God's everlasting covenant.

As followers of our dear Lord Jesus, we surely enjoy this wonderful hope. It is the hope of sharing with Jesus as the promised seed of Abraham in the future work of blessing all the families of the earth. It is the hope of sharing with him in the work of mediating the New Covenant over all of earth's

people. The knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth and reach the people through "The Christ."

Let us rejoice in the hope of glory and in the future work of sharing in reconciling the sin-sick and dying human family to God. "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name."—Ps. 111:9 ■

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.—Isa. 2:2,3