

God's Covenants

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.”
—Hebrews 10:1

IN PART TWO OF OUR

lesson on the subject of God's covenants, we will consider further comparisons between the old Law Covenant of Israel and the New Covenant. In addition, we will recall Moses, Israel's deliverer, as he points forward to Jesus, the great Deliverer of Israel and all mankind. Finally, we will discuss the important matter

of the shedding of blood, without which there can be “no remission” of sins.—Heb. 9:22

TYPE AND ANTITYPE

The Law, Paul informs us in our opening text, was “a shadow of good things to come.” We may properly think of the Law Covenant as being a picture, or “type,” of the New Covenant. The necessary preparation for, and making of, the typical covenant required a certain amount of time, and its inauguration was a special occasion for the Israelites. (Exod. 24:3-8) The fulfilment, or “antitype,” of Israel's Law Covenant is far grander, even as an antitype is

always greater than a type. God's law was the basis of the typical covenant. His law, as shown through his character and loving plan, will also be the basis of the New Covenant.

In the making of the typical covenant with Israel there were three important features. First, there was Moses, the mediator of the covenant. Second, there was the writing of God's law on tables of stone, and its acceptance by the people. Third, there was the shedding and sprinkling of blood. (Exod. 24:1-12) All these must, and do, have their counterpart in the making of the New Covenant, but on a much grander scale.

In the New Testament, Christ is identified as being the "mediator of the new covenant." (Heb. 12:24) Just as Jesus alone is not the entire promised seed of Abraham, but has his body members associated with him, so these same body members are referred to by Paul as "able ministers of the new testament [Greek: covenant]."—Gal. 3:16,27-29; I Cor. 12:12,27; II Cor. 3:6

The apostle also speaks of a writing of the law, but as should be expected, in a far different and better way. In the antitype, the law is not written in stone, but, as Paul explains, on "tables of the heart." (II Cor. 3:3) Jesus, by virtue of his perfection, already had his Father's law within his heart, but the writing of the law in the hearts of his body members, who together with him will serve as "able ministers" of the New Covenant, is the work of the entire present Gospel Age. Not until this preparatory work is complete will the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 begin to be fulfilled toward Israel and all mankind.

In the Old Testament, Moses was hidden in the clouds surrounding Mount Sinai while the Law was being written on the tables of stone by “the finger of God.” (Exod. 31:18; Deut. 9:10) When he appeared with the Law, his face shone so brightly that the people could not “behold the face of Moses.” (II Cor. 3:7) Paul shows that the fulfilment of this will be under Christ’s glorious “ministration of righteousness.” (vss. 8-11) The promise is that then his body members will be “with him in glory.”—Col. 3:3,4

Paul places great emphasis on the glory phase of the antitype. He concludes this lesson with the expression, “Seeing then that we have such hope.” (II Cor. 3:12) This tells us that the glory feature of the making of the New Covenant is not yet a reality, only a hope, and, as the apostle further wrote, we do not hope for that which is already possessed. (Rom. 8:24,25) However, it is a wonderful hope of the “glory that excelleth.” (II Cor. 3:10) It is a hope of the “eternal weight of glory,” which will become a reality if we endure patiently our present “light affliction, which is but for a moment.” (II Cor. 4:17) It is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—Col. 1:27

Christ, as the “Lamb that was slain,” and together with him the hundred and forty-four thousand who will share the glory of his kingdom, are shown as standing on “mount Sion.” (Rev. 5:12; 14:1) Sion [Hebrew: Zion] is symbolic of the spiritual phase of God’s kingdom, under the rulership of Christ, and the promise is that “the law shall go forth of Zion.” (Micah 4:2) God’s law will be able to “go forth” from Zion because the Zion class has been receiving, learning, and having it written in their hearts throughout the present Gospel Age.

In the type, after the Law was written on the tables of stone and presented to the people, they simply agreed to obey its various precepts. In this, also, the antitype will be much grander than the type. How widely different indeed are the two procedures, and the results. Under the New Covenant arrangement, the law will not be presented to the people on tables of stone by an imperfect human mediator, but by the divine Christ, with the law of God contained in the very being of every one of this glorified company.

In the Old Testament, upon hearing the Law read to them, the people said, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." (Exod. 24:3) However, in the establishing of the New Covenant through the ministry of the Christ class, while there will first be a willingness to receive and obey the law, the making of the covenant will continue until God's law is fully written in the hearts of the people. Simply to say that they will keep the law will not be enough. Before the people will be able to enter into full, individual covenant relationship with God, his law must become a very part of their being. This implies a process of restoration to perfection, which will result in a return to that covenant relationship with God enjoyed by Father Adam prior to his transgression.

SPRINKLING OF BLOOD

Before the Law Covenant could become operative with Israel, blood had to be provided. (Exod. 24:3-8) Paul explains that blood was used to sprinkle "both the book, and all the people." (Heb. 9:19,20) Moses referred to it as the "blood of the covenant." Blood

is also provided prior to the making of the New Covenant. On the night before Jesus was crucified he referred to his own sacrificed life as the “blood of the New Covenant.”—Matt. 26:28, *International Standard Version*

In the type, the blood of the covenant was first used to sprinkle the book of the Law, so also in the antitype. A key feature of the divine law associated with the sprinkling of blood is God’s principle of justice. “Without shedding of blood is no remission” of sins. (Heb. 9:22) When Jesus died as a “ransom for all,” he provided an exact corresponding price for Father Adam before he sinned, and thus satisfied the requirement of God’s justice—Jesus’ perfect human life for Adam’s forfeited life. (I Tim. 2:5,6) This “ransom” feature, having satisfied God’s law of justice, is to be “testified in due time,” Paul says, releasing Adam and all his posterity from the penalty of death. (Rom. 5:12,18; I Cor. 15:21,22) The full benefits of the ransom, represented in Scripture by the blood of Jesus, will be “testified” when the making of the New Covenant begins to take place with the people under its Mediator, the Christ class.—Heb. 9:11,12

With the satisfaction of God’s law of justice fully complete in his “due time,” the symbolic sprinkling of “all the people” will begin, and thus make operative all the divine promises to give life under the terms of the New Covenant. To those who abide under those terms, God has promised, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:34

One of the promises given in connection with the original Law Covenant was that if Israel was

faithful it would become a priestly nation, representing God as teachers of the people. (Exod. 19:5,6) However, this is not one of the provisions of the antitypical covenant. When the New Covenant has been fully made with the people, and they have been proven faithful to it, all will have a complete knowledge of God, his laws, and his character. Concerning this glorious time, the prophet says, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." —Jer. 31:34

THE DELIVERER

From Exodus 24:12 we learn that the tables of the Law were provided for Moses in order that he might teach the people. Similarly, Jesus and his joint-heirs, the Zion class, will be the source of the law to Israel and all nations under the New Covenant arrangement. One of the results of this is mentioned by Paul, when he wrote, "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." (Rom. 11:26) This is to take place, Paul indicates, after "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," when the last member of the church class will have been found faithful unto death.—vs. 25

In this chapter, Paul explains that many of the nation of Israel, as "natural branches," were broken off from the tree of promise, and that the Gentile branches are "grafted in" to take their places. (vss. 17-24) Thus the opportunity to qualify as the faithful seed of Abraham, which is to be the source of blessing to all mankind, has belonged to Gentiles as well as

to Jews, all those who are proven to be “one in Christ.”—Gal. 3:28

With the full number of this seed selected and proved faithful, there will begin the work of the next age, that of making a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, and eventually with all mankind. This is the work described by Paul’s further statements: “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob [God had changed Jacob’s name to Israel. See Gen. 32:24-28]: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.” (vss. 26,27) What more definite identification could we have for the beginning of the blessings promised under the New Covenant, as first prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34?

After presenting God’s glorious program for blessing Israel under the New Covenant, Paul adds, “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance”—that is, they are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:29) At the same time, however, it is to be remembered that God’s “gifts and calling” are not unconditional. For example, God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants, but in the final reckoning the only ones among them who will dwell in it forever are those who will qualify under the New Covenant terms.

God promised the Israelites that if they would obey his law they would become a “holy nation” unto him, but as a nation they failed to keep the Law Covenant. God, however, in his great love and mercy, promised to make a New Covenant with them. This promise also stands sure. If, when the time comes, there are any who do not yield to the

beneficent terms of the New Covenant, as they will be available to Israel and all mankind, they will not receive its blessings.

CLEANSING THROUGH THE BLOOD

The great objective of God's plan is the reconciliation of the fallen and dying race to harmony with the Creator. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, is essential to the carrying out of every aspect of this plan. Those of the faith seed of Abraham, called from the world and prepared to be the future source of blessing to all mankind, need the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ will also be needed to sprinkle all the people so that they might be brought into heart harmony with God's law under the New Covenant.

Paul brings these two uses of the blood together for us in Hebrews 9:14,15. Referring back to the typical "blood" sacrifices under the Law Covenant, the apostle says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Furthermore, Paul continues, Christ is the "mediator of the new testament [covenant], that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament [the Law Covenant], they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

Certainly Gentile believers were not transgressors of the Law Covenant, so Paul is simply telling us that in addition to what the blood of Christ accomplishes for the faith seed of the present age, it will also be used by Christ, as Mediator of the New

Covenant, for the benefit of those who transgressed the Law Covenant.

In a reference to God's promises to Israel, Paul says, as we have noted, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Israel was a called people. Wonderful promises were given to them. In due time, they will receive these promises, chief of which will be that of perfect, unending life upon the earth, with God's law written in the hearts of all. What a glorious prospect for Israel, as well as for the whole world of mankind, who will be blessed with Israel by also coming into this New Covenant arrangement.

AN ALLEGORY

Vines Expository Dictionary of biblical words defines an "allegory" as a statement of certain facts which are then used to illustrate principles or lessons. Paul, speaking in an "allegory" recorded in Galatians 4:22-31, indicates that Sarah, Abraham's wife and a "freewoman," represents the covenant arrangement under which the faith seed is brought forth, just as Sarah brought forth Isaac, which had been promised by God. Hagar, a "bond-maid" of Sarah, foreshadowed the Law Covenant. She also brought forth a son by Abraham, named Ishmael, who represented the nation of Israel. Thus is shown that the Law Covenant [Hagar in the allegory] brought forth the typical nation of Israel [Ishmael]. After the death of Sarah, Abraham married again. The name of this wife was Keturah, and several children resulted from this marriage. (Gen. 25:1,2) While the Scriptures do not so state, we may think of these numerous children of

Abraham, mothered by Keturah, as representing all who will ultimately receive the blessings promised under the New Covenant.

Thus we understand that the promised blessings of the covenant God first made with Abraham were expanded upon by Israel's Law Covenant, and also by the covenant represented in Sarah, under which the faith seed is developed. Finally is the promise of the New Covenant. Taken together, all of these arrangements and their related promises imply the restoration "in due time" of all the willing and obedient among mankind to perfection of human life here on the earth, and the restoration of that original covenant relationship with God under which Adam lived before falling into sin. No wonder the Apostle Paul, contemplating these wonderful arrangements of the divine plan of reconciliation through Christ, wrote, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—Rom. 11:33 ■

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