

God's Plan for Man— As Shown in His Covenants

***“The secret of the
LORD is with them
that fear him; and
he will shew them
his covenant.”
—Psalm 25:14***

God has a plan for man that will result in the blessing of all the families of the earth, and which, when it is complete, will have restored the race to God. If we were to

study the Bible merely to prove a pre-adopted creed, we would never find the jewels of truth that are hidden in its pages. However, if our sincere effort is to learn the purposes of God, and if we come to the Bible with an open mind and an honest heart, we will find the divine plan for human destiny clearly revealed in its pages.

The covenants of God give a complete outline of his glorious plan of the ages. These covenants, as they are recorded in the Bible, cover the whole

course of human history from paradise lost to paradise regained. This article discusses some of the covenants between God and man as they are recorded in the Bible. Understanding these covenants will help us to appreciate our place in the great divine program for the salvation of the world. As we behold the stately steppingstones of our God in the unfolding of his plan for man, our faith will be increased and our hope for his kingdom will grow greater and more real.

God's covenants as recorded in the Bible are given in various ways. Some are in the form of a unilateral promise or pledge on God's part. Others are structured as bilateral agreements or contracts between God and individuals, nations, or the entire human race. Some of God's covenants include divinely established ordinances with rewards for faithfulness and punishments for unfaithfulness. In all cases, however, God's covenants with his human creation are for the ultimate purpose of their eternal blessing.

The Covenant in Eden

The first covenant between God and man was made in the Garden of Eden. It is recorded in Genesis 2:15-17: "And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. 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."

Life or death depended on the keeping of this covenant. It called for obedience to God's law. Adam

broke this contract through his disobedience. (Gen. 3:6) He lost his covenant relationship with God. He was sentenced to death. The Bible says, "In his favour is life." (Ps. 30:5) No one can live forever without God's favor, regardless of the fact that many believe in the erroneous doctrine of inherent immortality. It is only by being in the favor of God that man has life. Man's eternal existence depends upon his being in covenant relationship with God. Satan said, "Ye shall not surely die." (Gen. 3:4) A modern version of this would be: "You will appear to die, but your soul shall really be alive someplace else."

Speaking of Satan, Jesus said, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44) On the other hand, God told Adam simply and clearly the result of disobedience: "Thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17) From the evidence all about us, God, not Satan, was telling the truth. Certainly, Adam is dead, and the Bible tells us that in Adam, "all die." (Gen. 5:5; I Cor. 15:22) Thus we all must face the decision as to whether it was God or Satan who told the truth in this matter of life and death.

It is evident that not only Adam lost his communion with God, but all of his progeny as well have been born out of covenant relationship with him. It is written, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) After Adam's transgression, however, God did not turn the human race over to Satan for its complete and

utter destruction. This fact was first made clear by the statement in Genesis 3:15, where we are given an assurance that the seed, or offspring, of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. This was a glimmer of hope to our first parents that sometime in the future a restoration of their covenant relationship with God would be made possible.

Covenant with Noah

The next covenant made with man after his expulsion from Eden was given to Noah. This covenant furnishes great assurance that "the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." (Ps. 115:16) This covenant is clearly stated in Genesis 9:11-17: "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. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have

established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.”

In this account God tells us that the rainbow is the token that the covenant will be kept and that the earth will never again be destroyed by a flood of waters. We may ask: Why was a rainbow chosen as the token of guarantee of God’s covenant? To appreciate this simple truth is to have our faith increased. According to the Bible, it had never rained upon the earth before the flood. In Genesis 2:5,6 we are told, “The LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, ... But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.” One of the reasons Noah was perhaps mocked, as he built the ark in preparation for the coming flood of waters, was that those living at that time had never seen rain fall from the clouds.

The reason there was no rain before the flood is scientific as well as scriptural. In Genesis 1:6-10, the record of creation tells us that the “firmament” separated two great bodies of water. We are told that God called the firmament heaven—that is, an expanse of sky. The waters below the heavens were on the earth, and as the dry land appeared, they were separated into great bodies of water called seas, just as we find them now. The waters above the firmament were in the form of a ring of aqueous matter that surrounded the earth before the flood. It is not strange for planets to have rings surrounding them. Saturn has rings that are made mostly of water in the form of ice. Other planets have rings made up of materials other than water. The ring that surrounded the earth before the flood was created during the time that the earth

was being prepared for man's habitation, when the intense heat of the planet threw off in the form of vapor vast quantities of moisture. This moisture surrounded the earth as a veil. It caused a hothouse condition to exist upon the earth.

This theory of earth's creation is held by many scientists and biblical scholars alike. Many have been puzzled as to why the mastodons and other warm-blooded animals were able to live in what is now the Arctic Zone. The hothouse condition that existed upon the earth before the flood made all parts of the earth equally habitable.

In Genesis 7:11,12 we have the record of the breaking of the ring above the earth in these words: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights."

"The windows of heaven were opened." The waters above the firmament came within the gravity pull of earth and were released in the form of a deluge of rain. The hothouse effect, especially at the poles, ended abruptly, and ice caps formed. The flood had come in fulfillment of the word of God given to Noah. The mastodons and other animals were trapped with incompletely digested food in their stomachs and intestines. They are preserved even till this day as a testimony.

We now know why God chose a rainbow as a token of his covenant. As long as there were waters above the firmament, the earth could not enjoy the sun's direct rays. It requires the direct rays of the sun to cause a rainbow, for a rainbow is the reflection

and refraction of the direct rays of the sun shining upon moisture-laden air that breaks the light into the different prismatic colors. The existence of a visible rainbow proves that there is no more a ring of waters above the earth. It also assures that there never can be another globe-covering flood. God chose the rainbow as the token of his covenant to man because it is an absolute guarantee that another flood of such magnitude is an impossibility.

Covenants with Abraham and Israel

God made his next covenant with Abraham. This covenant affects every family upon the earth. It is simply stated in these words, "In thee [thy seed] shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) Various details of this covenant were repeated to Abraham on several other occasions, also to his son Isaac, and to Isaac's son Jacob. (Gen. 26:4; 28:14) Here is a wonderful assurance to all men, for the covenant called for two things: First, that Abraham would have a seed or offspring, and second, through the seed of Abraham, blessings would come to all the families of the earth.

A little more than four centuries after making his covenant with Abraham, God entered into a covenant with the children of Israel, the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. It is known as the Law Covenant. It was entered into at Mount Sinai. After being given the statutes of God's law, Israel was told, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, ... which if a man do, he shall live in them." With one accord they said, "All that the LORD hath spoken will we do." (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5; Exod. 19:8) The children of Israel accepted the terms of the Law

Covenant. In this covenant they thought that they had found the way to everlasting life, and all that was necessary for them to do was to keep the terms of this covenant.

God made a picture of these two covenants—the one with Abraham, and the other with the nation of Israel—in the wives of Abraham as recorded in Galatians 4:21-28: “Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For 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. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.”

Why was the Law Covenant made? It has held the nation of Israel in bondage. As yet no Jew except Jesus has ever kept it perfectly. It has been beyond the reach of their ability. The Law Covenant was made for several reasons, but the primary one is that mentioned by Paul in Galatians 3:24, which states, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.” The Law Covenant was perfect. However, no Jew, with the exception of Jesus, has ever kept the law given to Israel. An

imperfect man cannot keep a perfect law. Similarly, no son of Adam can keep God's perfect law because all are "shapen in iniquity" and conceived in sin. (Ps. 51:5) All are imperfect. The law that the Jewish people thought was unto life, they found was unto death. It condemned them under sin. (Rom. 7:10; Gal. 3:22) It showed them that they were imperfect and that God's perfect law was beyond their ability.

The Law Covenant proved that imperfect humans, whether Jew or Gentile, cannot keep God's law. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) Therefore the Law Covenant was, as previously noted, a "schoolmaster" leading to Christ as mankind's Savior and Redeemer. Our Lord Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26) He kept the law of God. This demonstrated his perfection as a man and therefore proved his ability to die as a ransom for Adam and his race.

God's law of justice required a perfect life to be given for a perfect life lost. (Exod. 21:23) Adam lost perfect life due to sin. He died and the whole race has died in him. Christ, a perfect man, was obedient to the law of God. He died, not as a sinner, but in place of the sinner, Adam. Christ's resurrection by the mighty power of God gives us assurance that the whole race will live in him. (Acts 17:31) "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive," and be given an opportunity to be restored back to human perfection lost in Eden. (I Cor. 15:22) The Law Covenant was given to show the need of a Savior and Redeemer. Through Christ

Jesus, all mankind will once again have the privilege of life and communion with God.

Development of a Seed

The covenant with Abraham spoke of a “seed” through which all the families of the earth would be blessed. The events recorded in the Old Testament show that neither Isaac nor Jacob was the seed referred to that could bring about the blessing of all mankind. The New Testament tells us that the seed was Christ: “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.” (Gal. 3:16) Christ, the seed of Abraham, is to bless all the families of the earth according to the covenant. He, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, and brought the fulfillment of the promised blessings closer. (Heb. 2:9) The plan of God is not haphazard. It is based upon the principles of justice, wisdom, love, and power, for all the attributes of God unite in the harmonious fulfillment of his plan for man.

When the Master was born the angel said, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” Then the heavenly host declared, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:10,11,14) Nearly two-thousand years have passed since Christ died on Calvary, and the promised blessings have not yet come to earth. There is a reason for this. It is found in the covenant that makes the Gospel church a joint-heir with Christ as the “seed” that

will bless the world. This great truth, overlooked by many, should thrill the Christian with the prospect that it brings: "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."—Gal. 3:28,29

The work of the present age since Pentecost has not been the conversion of the world. The world has not been reconciled to God. Rather, this age has seen the development of the "seed" of Abraham, which includes Christ and those who belong to him. It is the privilege of the true Christian today to "shew forth the praises of him" who has called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light."—I Pet. 2:9

A New Covenant

In due time the faithful church will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4,6) That will begin the work of blessing all the families of the earth in accordance with the promise of God. This will be the work of a New Covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:8-12 foretell this covenant and its blessed results for all the families of the earth: "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, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Here is an assurance that man will be brought back into covenant relationship with God. The promise will be fulfilled, and God's law will be put

again in the minds and in the hearts of the people during that thousand-year reign. All enemies will be put under Christ's feet, and the last enemy, Death, will be destroyed. (I Cor. 15:25,26) Only the willfully disobedient will be cut off in death.—Acts 3:23

All the willing and obedient of earth will bend their knees in worship and every tongue will “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:11) We rejoice that God has a plan for the recovery of the race—yea, for the blessing of all the families of the earth under the New Covenant! This plan will reach its culmination in what the apostle describes as “the dispensation of the fulness of times” when God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”—Eph 1:10 ■

