

Sabbath School Lesson #2 – Covenant Primer – 3-9 April 2021

Christ would have us believe the promise of God. Long before Sinai, God had made a covenant with Abraham. It promised righteousness as a free gift of God through faith. Giving the law at Sinai, with “thunders, and lightings,” earthquake, fire, and the death boundary, the Lord tried to re-establish the same new covenant with Abraham’s descendants: “Now therefore, if ye will obey [to hear *intelligently*, Strong’s Hebrew] My voice indeed, and keep My covenant [His new covenant/promise to Abraham], then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5). Of all nations in the world, they were to be “the head, and not the tail” (Deuteronomy 28:13). But Sinai was the turning point in the nation’s destiny, for they refused the Lord’s new covenant of justification by faith. Instead of humbly saying “Amen” to God’s promise as Abraham did (the Hebrew word for “believe” is *Amen*), the people promised a works obedience, “All that the LORD hath spoke we will do” (Exodus 19:8). That was the old covenant. They bound themselves to a detour that would finally lead them to the terrible deed of Christ’s crucifixion.

Sunday: Covenant Basics – There are essentially two covenants: the “New Covenant” (also called “second”) and the “Old covenant” (also called “first”). The New was before the Old. The New Covenant is God’s one-sided promise to write His holy law on human hearts – the Old covenant is the vain promise of the people at Mt Sinai to obey perfectly. The two covenants are not matters of dispensation or time: they run side-by-side all through history since the fall of man. The two covenants are matters of heart conviction. It was possible for people living in Old Testament times to be under the New Covenant if they had true faith in Christ; it is possible for us living today to be under the Old Covenant if we do not understand the gospel that was preached to Abraham. Abraham was under the New Covenant when “he believed in the Lord,” and his faith “was counted unto him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). But Abraham’s descendants, coming out of Egypt 430 years later, fell into the Old Covenant when they made a promise to the Lord, “all that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). God did not ask them to make that promise; they broke it soon afterwards. In the New Testament, Peter’s promise never to deny the Lord was an Old Covenant (Mark 14:29-31).

The other basics to keep in mind is that God’s promise is the same as God’s covenant. That the covenant and promise of God are one and the same thing, is clearly seen from Galatians 3:17, where it appears that to disannul the covenant would be to make void the promise. In Genesis 17 we read that God made a covenant with Abraham to give him the land of Canaan – and with it the whole world – for an everlasting possession; but Galatians 3:18 says, “God gave it to Abraham by promise.” God’s covenants with men can be nothing else than promises to them: “Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things” (Romans 11:35-36). It should also be kept in mind that God’s promise is one-sided, He does not ask us to promise. After the flood God made a covenant with every beast of the earth, and with every fowl; but the beasts and the birds did not promise anything in return (Genesis 9:9-16), as they simply received the favour at the hand of God so do we. And that is all we can do. We give Him ourselves, that is, nothing, and He gives us Himself, that is, everything. But whoever deals with God must deal with Him on His own terms, that is, on a basis of fact – that we have nothing and are nothing, and He has everything and is everything, and gives everything.

Monday: 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” (Genesis 6:18). None should allow themselves to be confused by the term ‘covenant with Noah’ or any other covenant involving God and any person. It is either the promise of God or the promise of the people. From Adam to us today, God has made a one-sided promise to save us. God’s promise is “The Covenant” – the New Covenant, whether given to Adam or to Noah or to us. That God promised to save Noah from the flood is still a one-sided promise of God just as His one-sided promise to bless Abraham. God made a covenant with Abraham, before that He also made a covenant with Noah, and a covenant with Adam.

Tuesday: The Covenant With Abram – “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis

12:3). Paul writes: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham" (Galatians 3:8-9). From this we learn that when God said that in Abraham all the families of the earth should be blessed, He was preaching the gospel to him. The blessing that was to come upon the people of the earth through him could be enjoyed only through faith. All promises of God are by Christ. The preaching of the gospel is the cross of Christ. Thus Paul says that Christ sent him "not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect;" and then he adds that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:17-18). Now since the preaching of the gospel is the preaching of the cross of Christ (and there is no salvation by any other means), and God preached the gospel to Abraham when He said, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed", it is very clear that in that promise the cross of Christ was made known to Abraham, and that the promise thus made was one that could be gained only through the cross of Christ. This fact is made very clear in Galatians 3:13-14: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Here we have it stated in the most explicit terms that the blessing of Abraham, which was to come on all the families of the earth, was to come only through the cross of Christ. When we see the gospel of the cross of Christ in God's promises to Abraham, and continually remember that all the promises of God are in Christ, to be enjoyed only through His cross, that consequently they are spiritual and eternal in their nature, then the study of the promises to Abraham will be a delight and a blessing.

Wednesday: The Covenant With Moses – In Exodus 6:1-8 God charged Moses to let His people know that He was to deliver them from Egypt in fulfilment of His promise to Abraham. God's promise to Abraham assured to him and his seed the righteousness of the law by faith. Not by works, but by faith. That covenant was wholly of faith, and that is why it assures salvation, since "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The history of Abraham makes very emphatic the fact that salvation is wholly of God, and not by the power of man. "Power belongeth unto God" (Psalm 62:11); and the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16). From Abraham, Isaac to Jacob, we know that only God Himself can fulfil the promises of God. They got nothing by their own; everything was a gift from God. He led them, and He protected them. This is the truth that had been made most prominent in the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. God introduced Himself to them as: "The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:15); He charged Moses to let them know that He was about to deliver them in fulfilment of His covenant with Abraham (Exodus 6:4-8).

Thursday: The New Covenant – We first find the New Covenant in Genesis 3:15 where God promised to give a Saviour to bruise the head of Satan. It is called "New" (or "second") covenant because both its ratification by Christ's blood at the cross and its more minute statement were after that of the Old (also called the "first") covenant made at Sinai. In the New covenant, God did not ask Adam and Eve to promise anything in return. Paul cites God's promise to Abraham as the clearest statement of the New Covenant (Galatians 3:8-18). As He gave to Abraham, what God requires of us He gives. God's law is His promise – it must necessarily be such, because God knows that men have no power to fulfil His law. When He says, "Thou shalt not," we may take it as His assurance that if we but trust Him He will preserve us from the sin against which He warns us. God's law is fulfilled in you through Christ who is "able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24). It is not you who are to do that, which the Lord pleases, but the word of God, "it shall accomplish that which I please" (Isaiah 55:11). You are not to read the word of God and say, 'I will do that,' but open your heart to "the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13) and "let the word of Christ dwell in you" (Colossians 3:16) that it may accomplish the will of God in you.