

Sabbath School Lesson #8 – Covenant Law – 15-21 May 2021

Christ through Moses had set before the descendants of Abraham God's purpose, and had made plain the terms of their prosperity. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

Sunday: The Election of Israel – In the covenant which God made with the Jews concerning the Ten Commandments, He said of the law, "Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice" (Exodus 19:5). The commandments were spoken "in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice" (Deuteronomy 5:22). When the law of God speaks to a man, it is God Himself speaking to that man. Satan has invented a proverb, which he has induced many people to believe, to the effect that 'the voice of the people is the voice of God.' This is a part of his great lie by which he causes many to think themselves above the law of God. Let every one who loves the truth, now substitute for that invention of Satan the truth that the voice of the law of God is the voice of God. It is taken for granted that what "the people" say and do must be right, even though there may be a command of God to the contrary. And thus this mischievous saying leads "the people" to exalt themselves above God, by making them think that by their united action they can change the decrees of God. Men ought to be able to learn something from history; if they do not, history is written in vain. The lessons which we learn from the history of the past are equivalent to lessons concerning the future, for, "The thing that hath been," said Solomon, "it is that which shall be; end that which is done is that which shall be done." This is true because human nature is the same among all people, and in all ages. Let us recall that when God would have a people for Himself, who should honour Him and keep the knowledge of His will alive in the earth, He found only one man, Abraham, whom He could select as the father of His people. And when that people had become great and were being conducted to the land which God had given to them, they were told, "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people" (Deut. 7:7). The majority of "the people" ignored God, and did as they pleased. Surely, if it were true that "the voice of the people is the voice of God," God would not have rejected the bulk of mankind for a comparatively insignificant race.

Leaving out the great world who had rejected God, and had in consequence been rejected by Him, we find that "the people" whom God chose as His own peculiar people were, as a people, more often in opposition to God than in harmony with Him. It was "the people" who said to Aaron, "Make us gods, which shall go before us;" and when the golden calf was made, "the people" worshiped it. It was "the people" who said, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt;" and it was "the people" who time and again murmured against the Lord's chosen prophet, and were often on the point of stoning him to death.

Monday: 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" (Deuteronomy 4:13). We may recall, we covered this last week. The simple facts are these: The "covenant" which the people were to "keep" was the ten commandments, which had not yet been given. It was not a covenant made with them, but God's own covenant given to them. Moses refers to it as follows: "And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. 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" (Deuteronomy 4:12-13).

Let the reader bear in mind these points, and he will have no difficulty: (1) The ten commandments are God's covenant. (2) God did not make this covenant with the children of Israel, but He commanded them to keep it by faith as had Abraham. (3) This covenant is entirely different from a covenant in the ordinary sense of the term; for there was no agreement about it; it was God's will which He commanded the people to keep by faith. (4) Notwithstanding the fact that it was the duty of the people to keep God's law, – His covenant which He commanded them to perform, – God made a covenant with them concerning it. Although He could rightly have required unconditional obedience of them, He condescended

to enter into covenant relation with them; as they presumed to promise on their own part to keep His covenant, – the ten commandments, – as was their duty, He on His part agreed to grant them peculiar blessings. This was the covenant which God made with Israel here.

Tuesday: Law Within the Covenant – Again, this is part of what we covered last week. The reader needs to watch closely here, lest he become confused. The simple facts are these: The “covenant” which the people were to “keep” was the ten commandments, which had not yet been given. It was not a covenant made with them, but God’s own covenant given to them. Moses refers to it as follows: “And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. 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” (Deuteronomy 4:12-13).

Wednesday: The Stability of God’s Law – “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). “Let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” At first thought it would seem as though these two statements had no connection with each other; but when we consider another text, we shall find that the second depends on the first. The wisdom here spoken of is the wisdom that comes from above, for it is wisdom that God gives. Now in James 3:17 we learn what the wisdom is that comes from above. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy.” Patience, then, is the wisdom that God gives, and which may be had for the asking in faith. So that we might without violence to the text paraphrase it thus: “If any of you lacketh patience, let him ask of God, who will giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” But does not this narrow the text very much? If it is only patience that we are to get by asking God, are we not deprived of very much comfort that we have been in the habit of taking, in the thought that we can get help in our understanding of the Scriptures, and of how to conduct our affairs? No; patience marks perfection. He who has patience in perfection is a perfect man, lacking in nothing. So we may further read the text, If any of you lack any good thing, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. For “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” In the Psalms we read, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do His commandments.” Again in Job, “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” Patience is wisdom, and the keeping of the commandments of God is wisdom. Therefore patience is the keeping of the commandments of God. This also we are plainly told in other parts of the Scriptures. Paul writes, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of law” (Romans 13:10). But in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 we read what love, or the fulfilment of law is: “Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked.” It is then that this is patience; it is the keeping of the commandments; it is the only true wisdom.

Thursday: If . . . – In Genesis 26 we find the Abrahamic covenant repeated to Isaac. “Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of; sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (verses 2-5). When the descendants of Abraham came to Sinai, God simply referred them to what He had already done, and then said, “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” (Ex. 19:5). The covenant here was God’s covenant with Abraham. If they would simply keep God’s covenant, that is, God’s promise, they would be a peculiar treasure unto God, for God, as the possessor of all the earth, was able to do with them all that He had promised.