

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic
The Promise God's Everlasting Covenant

Lesson 1: What Happened?

Robert Wieland described his confrontation with a deadly viper. It happened so fast there wasn't a moment to prepare. It was in Nairobi, Kenya. A group of us missionaries was gathered for some committee meeting. It was Sabbath afternoon. We were staying at the home of Hubert Stevenson. For some reason the others were out in the backyard and I was alone in the house. I heard them shouting excitedly and I rushed to the back door, stepped outside to see what was happening. There it was—an African Black Mamba was heading straight for me, its head held high for attack!

Hubert yelled at me to grab a club he had behind his back door, which I did. Instinctively I knew it was one or the other of us: either that deadly poisonous snake or I was going to die. Any one of the other men was physically better qualified for such a fight, but this time it was me not them (there was no time to pray, incidentally). I must have had a rush of adrenalin, for I flailed at that serpent with every ounce of energy the adrenalin inspired. I beat it ferociously on the head, and wonder of wonders, I killed it! (And it was big!)

I think I have never known the flooding sense of exhilaration that came over me. Not only had I killed a poisonous serpent; I had killed one that was intent on killing me. For days I walked on cloud nine. Had I touched upon some primeval instinct?

It was at the Garden of Eden that the Lord God had addressed "the serpent" who had "beguiled" Eve: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head" (Gen 3:15). The New Covenant is not the promise of people, but the promise of God, which Hebrews 8:6 says is "better." To the one who wants to honor and glorify God, His New Covenant promises are clear: "I will put enmity between" you and a runaway appetite (see Gen. 3:15). In other words, you will genuinely want to say No! to temptation to indulge your desires that you know you shouldn't. God will "put" that resistance in you! Indeed the African missionary had "bruised the head" of a literal serpent.

Jesus knew an infinitely more grand sense of exhilaration when on His cross He drew His last breath and cried out, "It is finished!" He had trampled on the head of the great cosmic Enemy of man and God. He had been triumphant to His last breath. Could He have died at last in ecstasy? Do you suppose that Joseph knew that sense of exhilaration as he trampled

on the head of Satan when Potiphar's wife seductively allured him and he yelled a triumphant "No!" and fled? The Egyptian prison was for him like the Holiday Inn. Could young David have known it when he slew the giant Goliath, who had challenged the God of Israel? Could Paul have known it when the executioner bade him lay his head on the block and the apostle knew "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7)? Exhilaration at death? Yes! At the end of the race. But you and I will know this exhilaration now as we deny self and follow after Jesus, and "take up [our] cross daily" (Luke 9:23). We don't have to wait until the end to enjoy victory.

SECOND QUARTER 2021

SABBATH SCHOOL INSIGHT #1

APRIL 3, 2021

"WHAT HAPPENED?"

Before the mountains were brought forth,

Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,

Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. Psalms 90:2

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. Jeremiah 32:40

Are You not from everlasting,

O LORD my God, my Holy One?

We shall not die.

O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment;

O Rock, You have marked them for correction. Habakkuk 1:12 NKJV

What a blessing to have an entire quarter to study God's Everlasting Covenant – His magnificent promise to humanity!

Our first lesson asks, “What happened?” The focus is what went so wrong that it needed the miraculous intervention of God. But to understand what happened, it would be beneficial to explore a bit about the everlasting truths about God that underpin everything He does, because **it was unbelief in these truths that led to the first catastrophe on earth.** Understanding what went wrong informs our study of what God has done and is doing to make things right.

God chose to create the human race as an extension of His own identity, to be united with Him so closely that we might reflect His character of self-giving and self-denying love to the universe. This is revealed through the creation story and in the gospel.

The Creative Power of the Word

The essence of faith is believing the Word of God, and recognizing the evidences of His creative faith in the creation we enjoy.

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” Genesis 1:3

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” John 1:4

“The words that I speak unto you are spirit and they are life.” John 6:63

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that hears My word and believes in Him Who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” John 5:24

The Sustaining Power of the Word

The operative faith, the day-to-day faith experience, is appreciating that every breath, heartbeat, drop of water, and morsel of food comes from the hand of our loving Creator.

"for in Him we live and move and have our being." Acts 17:28.

"The physical organism of man is under the supervision of God, but it is not like a clock, which is set in operation, and must go of itself. The heart beats, pulse succeeds pulse, breath succeeds breath, but the entire being is under the supervision of God. 'Ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building.' In God we live, and move, and have our being. Each heartbeat, each breath, is the inspiration of Him Who breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life—the inspiration of the ever-present God, the great I AM." The Review and Herald, November 8, 1898.

"When sentence has been passed upon a murderer, he is to all intents and purposes a dead man. But it was more than that in the case of Adam; he was dead, and the Son of God was to make him alive....All that Christ has to give to man is summed up in that one word, - LIFE. Everything is comprised in that. This fact shows that without Him men have no life...." E.J. Waggoner, GCB 1891, No. 9.

The Risks and Blessings of a Shared Image and Dominion

Because of this intimate relationship of divinity and humanity, and the opportunity of a shared dominion with God, ruling as He rules, Adam and Eve's creation as the beginning of the entire race represented the risk and reward that love brings. This is the foundation of religious liberty and of the Everlasting Covenant which restores our choice.

"He desires that the universe shall be full of joyful intelligences enjoying His love to the full. In order to do this, they must be free to choose not to serve Him, to choose not to enjoy His love. They must be free to choose Him or themselves, life or death.... He made all intelligences free to choose, and to think as they choose; and therefore, free to sin if they choose.

"And at the same time, in His infinite love and eternal righteousness, He purposed to give Himself a sacrifice to redeem all who should sin; and give them even a second freedom to choose Him or themselves, to choose life or death. And those who the second time would choose death, let them have what they have chosen.

“And those who would choose life, - the universe full of them, - let them enjoy to the full that which they have chosen, - even eternal life, the fullness of perfect love, and the dear delights of unalloyed joy forever.” A.T. Jones, Ecclesiastical Empire, p. 587-588.

Loving Dependence vs Transactional Suspicion

The choice of unbelief in the goodness of God has ramifications through all of creation, “all the way down,” from man to turtle.

“She coveted what God had forbidden; she distrusted His wisdom. She cast away faith, the key of knowledge.... There was nothing poisonous in the fruit itself, and the sin was not merely in yielding to appetite. It was distrust of God's goodness, disbelief of His word, and rejection of His authority, that made our first parents transgressors, and that brought into the world a knowledge of evil.” Education p. 24, 25.

Doubting the Word is doubting God.

Rejecting the Word of Life is death.

How do you choose to trust God when you don't believe Him?

How does God restore this ability to choose?

“In heaven Lucifer had aspired ‘to be equal with God,’ and here he set before the woman the aspiration, ‘Ye shall be as God.’ And that herself might be exalted to equality with God, she turned away from God to accomplish it through the ways of sin! O, **it is the desire to please self instead of God that is the origin of every sin!**” A. T. Jones, Ecclesiastical Empire, p. 592

“God had given them His word clearly spoken. The word of God is the expression of the thought of the mind of God. **If** they had remained faithful to that word, **if** they had fully put their trust upon that word, **if** they had depended upon it for their sole counsel, and to guide them in the way they should go, **then** this word – the thought and mind – of God would have lived in them, and would have been manifested in them.

“But when the enemy came speaking his words, laying before them the thoughts and suggestions of his evil mind; and when they accepted his word instead of the word of God, and the thoughts and suggestions of his mind in place of those of the mind of the Lord; then the evil mind of the enemy, instead of the mind of God, was in them and lived in them.” A.T. Jones, Ecclesiastical Empire, p. 593.

“God's life is righteousness; therefore, there can be no righteousness apart from the life of God. Now it is evident that if a man rejects God, he effectually cuts himself off from life.... Sin is simply separation from or rejection of God; and that means death.” E. J. Waggoner, GCB 1891, No. 9.

Restoring the Creator's Purpose Through the Life of Christ

As we will see throughout this quarter, the Everlasting Covenant is God's Promise to bring us back to the original purpose and relationship that He desires for humanity (if we will let Him), restoring His image in us, and it includes the promise that we shall never die.

“Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” Romans 5:18

“Christ became the curse for us.” Galatians 3:13

“In order to understand what is comprehended in the work of education, we need to consider both the nature of man and the purpose of God in creating him. We need to consider also the change in man's condition through the coming in of a knowledge of evil, and God's plan for still fulfilling His glorious purpose in the education of the human race....

“Christ is the ‘Light, which lighteth every man that cometh in to the world.’ John 1:9. As through Christ every human being has life, so also through Him every soul receives some ray of divine light. Not only intellectual but spiritual

power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart. But against these principles there is struggling an antagonistic power.

“The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man's experience. **There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist. To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ. Cooperation with that power is man's greatest need.**” Education 14-15, 29.

“In this declaration God broke up the pall of total darkness which through sin enshrouded mankind...In this blessed word, God again gave to mankind freedom of choice.... He would not compel man, even now, to take the way of righteousness and keep it. He simply made man free again to choose for himself, who he would serve....

“Man's will is now, and by this word, freed, and abides free, to choose and serve whom he will – to choose deliverance from the bondage of sin, or to remain in the bondage of sin. **God will deliver no man from bondage against his will.** But **whoever will submit his will to God, there is no power in the universe that can hold him in sin....**

“This word of God which plants in each soul, enmity against Satan; this hatred of evil that calls for deliverance which is found alone in Christ; this is the gift of faith to man. The object of this faith is Christ, and the author of it is Christ; and so, He is ‘the author and finisher of faith.’ By faith Christ dwells in the heart; and Christ in men the hope of glory is the mystery of God.” A.T. Jones, Ecclesiastical Empire, p. 597-599.

“Are all men going to be justified? All men might if they would; but says Christ: ‘Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.’ All are dead in trespasses and sins. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men. It comes right within the reach of all men, and those who do not get it are those who do not want it.” EJW, GCB 1891, No. 9.

“As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all.... the gift of righteousness and life in Christ has come to every man on earth.

“When you go to God, take these Scriptures on your lips: ‘We shall be saved by His life.’ ‘By the obedience of One shall many be made righteous....’ There never was a time in the life of any man when of himself he had power to resist temptation. We cannot do it. That proves that we must have a life different from our natural life in order to resist sin at all. That must be a life that sin has never touched and can never touch.” Waggoner on Romans, p. 101.

The essence of the Everlasting Covenant is the means by which the creative and sustaining power of Christ is to be restored in us, to heal us from sin and suffering.

~Todd Guthrie