

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Promise God's Everlasting Covenant

Lesson 4: An Everlasting Covenant

Not one human soul will enter the pearly gates into the New Jerusalem except as a child of Abraham!

That doesn't mean literal Jews only (many of them will repent, thank God!), but when God promised fantastic blessings to Abraham He made it plain that "in Isaac shall your seed be called" (Genesis 21:12). That is, his "seed" will not be literal descendants through Ishmael, the old-covenant son of the second wife, but all who have Abraham's new covenant faith.

Ishmael came "according to the flesh," but "the seed" will come through Isaac, the one who was "the child of promise," "born according to the Spirit" (Galatians 4:28, 29). This means that all of God's promises to His people come through the righteousness by faith that Abraham experienced (seven times in Romans 4 he is identified as "our father").

What is the new covenant? God's promises to Abraham (and therefore to us as well) are "the new covenant." The first step in understanding the new covenant is to see that when God makes a covenant, it is always a promise on His part. Paul tells us that God's "covenant" with Abraham was His "promise" to him (Galatians 3:17).

Abraham the unbeliever became "the father of us all" when he chose to believe those promises of God. "It is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed [that is, all of us], not only to those who are of the law [natural descendants, literal Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ... the father of many nations" (Romans 4:6-18).

We read those promises in Genesis 12: "[1] I will make you a great nation; [2] I will bless you [3] and make your name great; [4] and you shall be a blessing. [5] I will bless those who bless you, [6] and I will curse him who curses you; and [7] in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (vss. 2, 3). The promises were renewed again in chapter 15 when God called him out of his tent one night and asked him to count the stars: "So shall your descendants be" (vs. 5).

As one reads the entire story through chapters 12-19, the surprising fact emerges that God never asked Abraham to make any promise in return! God's "new covenant" was totally one-sided. Abraham did the only right thing he could do when he responded with faith: "He believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (vs. 6). That is all that God has asked us to do: believe His promise to us. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Those who worry that salvation by grace through faith alone won't produce enough works need to remember that true faith always "works by love" (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Galatians 5:6).

This is the unique nature of God's covenant. God's covenant is always a one-sided promise on His part, because He knows that our nature is so weak and sinful that we cannot keep our promises to Him. When we make promises to Him and then inevitably break them later, we feel down on ourselves, "I-am-no-good," "I-am-not-cut-out-to-go-to-heaven," etc. Note how Paul speaks of God's "covenant" and "promise" as being identical: "The law . . . cannot annul the covenant . . . that it should make the promise of no effect" (Galatians 3:17).

The old covenant "gives birth to bondage," says Paul (Galatians 4:24). Some people in church even give up in despair, and many go through their so-called "Christian experience" under a constant cloud of discouragement.

But the confusion about the two covenants can be resolved very simply. The problem concerns "the law" that was given at Mt. Sinai; does that law alter the "new covenant" that was the straight-forward promise of God to Abraham and thus to us?

Paul was probably the first Israelite who clearly understood the function of the law and of the two covenants in the light of Israel's up and down, discouraging Old Testament history.

In several simple steps in Galatians Paul clarifies the confusion:

a. "The blessing of Abraham" is to come on everyone, "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14). Not one human soul is left out.

b. A "will" or covenant that anyone makes (even God's!) cannot be annulled or added to once the testator dies (vs. 15). In God's "will" or "covenant" He promised (and then swore to it with a solemn oath) to give Abraham the whole earth "for an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8). This had to

mean after the resurrection, for he could never inherit it that way unless he also was given everlasting life. But since only “righteousness” can “dwell” in the “new earth” (2 Peter 3:13), the promise had to include making righteous those who believe God’s promise. Therefore the new covenant has to be the essence of righteousness by faith.

c. When we make a covenant, it is always a contract. You do so-and-so, and then I will do-so-and-so. But God never makes such bargains with us humans. His new covenant is always an out-and-out promise on His part.

d. God explicitly said that His promise was made to Abraham’s descendant (singular, “Seed”) “who is Christ.” We are not left out, but we come into the picture only as being “in Christ” by adoption through faith (vs. 16).

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“AN EVERLASTING COVENANT”

There is only one everlasting covenant. It was in the mind of God from eternity. It was, and is, the agreement, the compact, the pledge entered into by the Godhead in behalf of fallen mankind. This covenant came out of heaven’s council as God’s “counsel of peace” which describes the work of Christ as the Master Builder of “the temple of the Lord”, Who is now Ruler and High Priest upon the Father’s throne where as co-equals “the counsel of peace” is “between them both.” Zechariah 6:13.

This counsel was appealed to, in prayer, by the early church after threats from the religious authorities in Jerusalem because there had been the healing of a man in the name of Jesus. The prayer of the believers is recorded in Acts 4:27-28 – ²⁷“For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, ²⁸For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

This counsel was previously referred to by Peter in his sermon as recorded in Acts 2:23. This also was in regard to the crucifixion of Christ – “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (KJV).

The everlasting covenant, entered into by the Father and the Son in their counsel of peace, was confirmed or ratified in the death of Christ during the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24-27.

In this covenant, entered into by the Godhead, we learn of God's promise regarding our assurance of salvation. This is "the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ." This is the covenant promise regarding Christ that was made to Abraham. "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." Galatians 3:16, 17.

Christ is the promise; He is the covenant. This is affirmed in Isaiah 49. In this second Servant Song we hear a conversation between God the Father and Jesus, God the Son.

The Heavenly Conversation:

- Jesus – Isaiah 49:1-2
- The Father – v. 3
- Jesus – v. 4-5
- The Father – v. 6-9

The Father's promise to Jesus (verse 8) is also His promise to us in Christ. Christ is God's Promise, His Covenant to us — "**to** the people" (NJV); "**of** the people" (KJV) and "**for** the people" (NIV).

Later in the book of Isaiah God spoke of the flood and His promise of mercy in His covenant of peace. ⁹"As I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. ¹⁰For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has mercy on you." Isaiah 54:9-10.

The everlasting covenant was God's promise first given to Noah, then to the animals, and next to all the earth. Since God promised that the waters would never again cover the earth, it follows that without this promise Noah and his family would have been terrified as they should see rain and wind coming upon them. It is of interest that there are no conditions required here for receiving the promise of God's everlasting covenant. It was given unilaterally to Noah, to the animals and to all the earth. See Genesis 9:8-17.

God later established His covenant with Abraham and his seed—"I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their

generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” Genesis 17:7, KJV.

This covenant promise included land: ““And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Verse 8. This land is an “everlasting possession” which means its possessors must first have everlasting life before they can own the land everlastingly. This means the promise involved more than a piece of real estate in the middle east. Previously, Abraham had been standing in the heart of Canaan when God told him, “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.” Genesis 13:14-15.

Later, when Stephen was on trial for his life said that Abraham did not set his foot on the inheritance: “God gave him (Abraham) no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.” Acts 7:5.

Again, this points to something other than the geographical land of earthly Canaan, which was a type of something greater, even the whole world, just as Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome: “The promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Romans 4:13. So, Abraham waited by faith in the righteousness of Christ “for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Hebrews 11:10.

The everlasting covenant is the promise of the righteousness of Christ, because it is the promise of Christ Who brought into our fallen world His “everlasting righteousness” (Daniel 9:24) so that we may possess the everlasting inheritance of the world made new. Christ is an eternal member of the Godhead. He is the “I AM” Who spoke to Abraham and to Moses. His name “I AM” means what He is. It means that He is the “Self-Existing One” Who’s life is underived. And His righteousness eternal.

“I AM” also means *what* He is. Whatever our needs, that is precisely what Jesus is to us. When Moses longed to see Him in all His glory, Jesus said that He would make all His goodness pass before him while declaring His name. Exodus 33:18-20.

The day following, ⁵“the Lord (I AM) descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord (I AM). ⁶And the Lord (I AM)

passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord (I AM), the Lord (I AM) God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:5-7. He will not clear those who are guilty, but He longs to remove their guilt.

Regarding the rest of His name on of which is “merciful”; do you need mercy? He is to you, merciful. Do you need grace? He is gracious. What of the need of “longsuffering?” He suffers long for you. Are you in need of “goodness and truth?” This, too, is for you. Do you need forgiveness? He gave Himself for you and for your sins (see Galatians 1:4). So, whatever your need, that is precisely what He is to you. This is what His name (the great I AM) is to you.

This is Christ Jesus, the LORD (I AM) Who came to Abraham as ’El-Shaddai which means “I AM the Almighty God.” Genesis 17:1. When God came to Abraham, He commanded “walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” To fulfill this command takes nothing less than Divine power to accomplish its achievement. Inherent in God’s commands are His promises of Almighty power to do the thing commanded. His promises are for all, especially for those who know they are weak and helpless. This command was given to the weak, the wretched, the helpless. The strength is the power of the Almighty God—’El-Shaddai—the LORD, the I AM, Who voluntarily left heaven to suffer and die for you and me in all our weaknesses and helplessnesses. ’El-Shaddai is the Friend of the helpless.

I wanted to close with a few promises based on the everlasting covenant of peace pledged by the mighty God of heaven.

“We may pray, ‘Jesus, my Redeemer, I am weak. I cannot do anything without Thy special help. I hang my helpless soul on Thee.’” *Our High Calling*, 41.

“Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness.” *Bible Echo*, December 1, 1892.

“He is watching over you, trembling child of God. Are you tempted? He will deliver. Are you weak? He will strengthen. Are you ignorant? He will enlighten. Are you wounded? He will heal. The Lord ‘telleth the number of the stars;’ and yet ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their

wounds.’ Psalm 147:4, 3. ‘Come unto Me,’ is His invitation. Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be opened for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer. The rest that Christ offers depends upon conditions, but these conditions are plainly specified. They are those with which all can comply. He tells us just how His rest is to be found.” *The Desire of the Ages*, 329.

“With the assurance given to Noah concerning the Flood, God Himself has linked one of the most precious promises of His grace: ‘As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee.’” Isaiah 54:9, 10. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 107.

~Pastor Jerry Finneman