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Q
2003

The **Ultimate
Covenant**



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



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The Ultimate Covenant



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Welcome to CQ's World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

Get Interactive

Ever think about writing for *CQ*?

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You are the most important ingredient in our *CQ* formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson, write us today:

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Got Questions?

Sabbath School University has answers!

Sabbath School University is a 28-minute discussion of *CQ* and the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the lesson content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on the Adventist Television Network.



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This Quarter's Illustrator



Joel Bews (pictured with his wife Jann) was born in New Zealand then moved to Australia for his final two years of high school. He recently graduated with an advanced diploma of electronic arts and interactive multimedia design and is now pursuing a career in graphic design. He has done illustrations, cartoons, and design work for various organizations and publications. Presently he lives in London with his wife Jann.

Getting the Most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the Adult Bible Study Guide find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 65,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the Church.*

What **H**appened?



“God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.’ . . . So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26, 27, NRSV).

The Hope of Israel

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 1:27, 31

It had happened on only the sixth day. The earth still had that brand-new car smell, just as the oceans must have had that sparkling just-removed-from-the-cellophane wrapper look. How beautiful it must have been.

As God breathed life into His human-shaped sand castle, surely He must have been filled with joy. Anxious to share His news with His angels, He certainly returned to them beaming with pride.

"Look at My child," He must have said. "He looks just like Me. He even has My smile!"

Surely, He roamed through heaven spreading the love and joy that only a new Father can give, and stopping passersby to share pictures of His newborn child.

He would love His children; that much was certain. He went on daily walks with them through the Garden. As they walked, His children talked to Him and learned from Him. They learned about love and caring for those around them. They learned how to smile and laugh, and make others feel good about themselves.

Then one day while alone in the Garden, they learned about sin. Soon after that they learned about shame. How God must have cried that day. No doubt He approached His angels that very day and revealed His plan to reclaim His beloved children.

He would teach them their greatest lesson. His children would learn something new, an idea foreign to them; they had never before conceived it.

His only Son, Jesus Christ, would have to give His life for His children to learn this new word. What a painful price for one single word!

It must be a lesson His children would learn, had to learn. They must know the terrible price that was to be paid for them.

And as God revealed His plan of salvation to His beloved children, it was then that they began to realize the meaning and the significance of the word *hope*.

In this week's lesson we take a look at what happened to the perfect humans and what God's true original plan for humanity was. More importantly, we'll discover how important the idea of hope was to God's children then, and why we need it even more today.

**The earth still had that
brand-new car smell.**

The Sound of Breaking Glass

LOGOS

Gen. 1:1, 27-29; 2:15, 16; 3:1-6

Just Like His Dad (Gen. 1:27-29)

Our young son, Joel, picks up a photograph that's lying on a table. "Mom!" he yells, "I've found me on this picture!" There's a thoughtful pause. "But, Mom, I don't have any clothes like that and no one ever took a picture of me without any color on it!"

He brings the picture to show me. It's one of his dad's school photos. We laugh together about how much he's just like his dad. Made in his image. Joel feels special. He loves his dad, adores him, and wants to be a pastor just like him when he grows up.

It isn't just a genetic coincidence.

God made us in His image; it isn't just a genetic coincidence. He *chose* to make us in His image. He chose to create a beautiful world for us, and gave us all creation to rule over. He created wonderful food for us to eat. He gave us everything we could want. He even gave us someone to take away our aloneness, to share the wonder of it all, to love. And, incredibly, He gave us a free choice. Even though there was the chance we would ruin everything.

But most amazing of all is His grace that had already made the contingency plans, worked out the whole way to give us back everything we might lose, even by giving His Son to die for us. This is love, incredible love that doesn't turn its back and walk away, but stays close by. It is a love that always keeps a promise and won't let us go.

Simon Says (Gen. 3:1-9)

"You can play anywhere at recess," explains the teacher, "in the woods, the field, the playground, wherever. But stay away from the old greenhouses."

Five-year-old Chris has to walk past the old greenhouses several times a day. He doesn't even think about going near them—until his friend Simon says, "I wonder what would happen if you threw a stone at the glass?"

"But we're not supposed to go near the greenhouses," Chris says with a frown.

"Well, my mom teaches at this school and she told me they're going to pull them down anyway, so it won't hurt. Look, lots of the windows have been broken and smashed. Another one won't make much difference! You don't even have to go near the greenhouse. I bet you could hit it from here!"

Chris picks up a stone to do what Simon says. He's never broken glass before.

He has no idea that it's going to make such a loud noise, that his teacher will hear, and that his teacher will come looking for him.

As soon as Chris realizes what he's done, he hides in the bathroom. He feels alone, rejected, guilty, sad, and scared. Even Simon has deserted him. But his teacher comes looking for him, gently calling his name, not in anger, but in love. She hears his snuffled sobs. She pulls him onto her lap and brushes away the tears. She tells him a story of a little girl who broke a window in her father's factory. She thought the sound was so lovely that she picked up more stones, and smashed more windows. By the time her father found her, she'd broken more than 50 panes of glass!

Chris smiles. The teacher understands because she was that little girl. The teacher forgives. She explains that she put the rule there to prevent him from getting hurt, to protect him, not to spoil his fun. Chris decides that he never wants to let his teacher down again. Somehow there is a covenant between them. She will protect and he will trust.

Chris listened to the pupil and not the teacher. Adam and Eve listened to a creature and not the Creator. We listen to our heart and not to our mind. It's hard to resist just one Belgian chocolate truffle. Could I have resisted a seductive serpent and a luscious piece of fruit? If I'm honest, I'll admit that given a thousand years or so in the Garden of Eden, my curiosity would certainly have been aroused.

But is there something missing, another force besides the forbidden fruit? It's our relationship with our Creator, a powerful and loving force, pulling us away from temptation and into trust.

Today the fruit is still there, all around us, hanging from every tree. Will we listen to a serpent? Will we listen to Simon, our friend? Or will we stay close to our Creator, trusting Him to keep His promise to protect us? And knowing that He will, because we're made in His image and bound to His heart.

REACT

1. How does my being made in God's image affect my perspective of Him?
2. What kinds of covenant relationships have I experienced, and what have they added to my understanding of God's covenant with me?
3. Is it ever acceptable to question the instructions or actions of God?
4. What do you believe a Christian's attitude should be about the environment?
5. What can you do today to show God that you love the gift of the environment?
6. Name some "Simons" you know who are encouraging you to try sin.
7. The story of Eve sharing the fruit with Adam is a constant source of debate. What is the bigger lesson for us behind Eve's actions?
8. John 4:24 says that God is a spirit. So in what respect are we made in the image of God?
9. Saying that humans are in the image of God suggests similarities, but there are obviously major differences. List them.

TESTIMONY

Gen. 1:1

All was perfect in the beginning. "As the earth came forth from the hand of its Maker, it was exceedingly beautiful."¹ Nowhere can be found any taint of sin or shadow of decay.

Created with individuality in God's image, Adam and Eve were given the freedom and power to think and to do. Granted dominion over all else that was made, they had an intimate and loving relationship with Him. But "our first parents, though created innocent and holy, were not placed beyond the possibility of wrongdoing. God made them free moral agents, capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience. They were to enjoy communion with God and with holy angels; but before they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested."² They were permitted to eat freely fruits of every other tree, except that of the tree of knowledge. This was a test of their faith. Sufficient warning was given, but they chose to disobey.

**This was a test
of their faith.**

Heaven was filled with sorrow. "The world that God had made was blighted with the curse of sin and inhabited by beings doomed to misery and death. . . . Angels ceased their songs of praise. Throughout the heavenly courts there was mourning for the ruin that sin had wrought."³ Adam and Eve fell from the high position they were designated. Being their descendants, we share this fallen nature and its consequences. Humankind is born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil.

"But divine love had conceived a plan whereby man might be redeemed. The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but one who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven."⁴ Christ took upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin, rescuing the guilty race. And all that we need is to believe. He promised to restore in us God's lost image, and all creation back to what they were—in the beginning.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 44.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

4. *Ibid.*

Who's Your Buddy?

EVIDENCE

Jer. 7:23; John 15:15

What is the fact that we were created in the image of God telling us about God and His covenant with His people? For the answer we don't have to look far but rather deep. We must look into the act itself, for in it is the answer to the question of God's creation and covenant. In the answer we can all be assured of God's love.

A covenant is a reciprocated promise between two parties, a commitment. We need to ask ourselves, "What was God promising to humanity before we had even been created, much less sinned and were in need of redemption?" We are children of God yet being created in God's image means more than just that. By God creating us in His image, God was creating in us a connection, a common point. This point of similarity between God and us allows for a communion that far exceeds the relationship God calls the squirrels or monkeys to. This connection establishes an ability between God and us to partake in an interactive and mutual relationship.

God has not forced us into a relationship, but because of the way we were made we are compelled to fill the God-shaped void in all of our lives. This void is evidence that the desire for God's communion with His people is eternal and internal. In the very act of Creation, God was writing into our being a drive for a relationship between us.

In Jeremiah 7:23 God says, "I will be your God, and you shall be My people" (NKJV). But what kind of relationship does God desire? We find this answer in the words of Christ Himself: "No longer do I call you servants, . . . but I have called you friends" (John 15:15, NKJV).

God's purpose in creating humanity was not meant for servitude but for friendship. We know all this because in the beginning God created humankind in His image,

forever linking the two of us together. We have many times looked at God as our Creator, but have you ever seen Him through the eyes of a friend, the eyes that He is responsible for making?

**The desire for God's
communion with His people
is eternal and internal.**

REACT

1. Do we ever come to a point of realizing our need for God without then stumbling again?
2. Think about the time you first experienced God's love. How would you describe it to someone?

Wednesday
January 1

How to Trust When You Cannot See

HOW-TO

Prov. 3:5, 6

Daniel had reached an age of independence. He had all the tools to be able to navigate through this part of his life. The only thing left for him was to do it.

There was one problem. He distrusted himself. Without a table, or a couch, or chair, or a person near, he would not go very far. Learning to walk was the marker between staying an infant and becoming a toddler.

Daniel's father knew he was ready. Taking him to a room with very few support items, he began working with him. First, standing behind him, holding both hands, they walked around the room. Then, moving in front, holding both hands, appearing to coax him forward, his father led him around the room.

The time came for the father to let go. Standing Daniel up, he moved a couple of steps away. With extended arms and outstretched hands, he beckoned his son

The time came for
the father to let go.

to join him. Daniel sat down. Standing him back up, his father tried again, coming close enough for the boy to touch his fingers, and then slowly pulling away. Daniel sat down again. Gradually, his confidence grew. Daniel

took two steps; then four; then six. Finally, he was walking around, but only as he walked with his father.

Daniel trusted that if his father was leading, he would be safe. The path he followed would be free from hurt, harm, or danger. If he fell, his father was there to catch him. His faith was borne of a trusting relationship between father and son.

It was the lack of trust on the part of Eve that led to her misstep. Eve had never experienced sin, or seen death. She only knew that which was good. What intrigued her about knowing evil? Did she not see the serpent as a created being like herself?

● **When in doubt, trust God's Word.** Eve knew God's explicit instructions: Do not eat; do not touch. She explained it to the serpent. Yet she lingered at the tree long enough to be beguiled into doubting God.

● **Avoid questionable associations.** Eve should have stayed by her husband's side.

● **Do not be confused by the paradox of sin.** The serpent suggested to Eve that by disobeying God, she could become as a god. We become like God, fashioned in His image, by living in His will.

● **Obedience proves trust and love.** "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, NRSV). We would be wise to pass this test of loyalty daily.

Someone Does

OPINION

Matt. 5:3; John 16:32

Do you know what it's like
to be so alone
that darkness and light
blend into one?
Where fallen prayers hang
in silence—
the blank answer penetrating
your soul.
Amidst a thronging crowd
yet totally alone.
In a cold world
which claims you as its own

then pushes you down
the moment you turn your back.
Where no one understands
your past.
When laughter cuts through skin
and nails the pain to hard wood.
When salty tears fall
to heal the broken earth.
A broken love.
Do you know what it's like?
Someone does.

Bertrand Russell once wrote, "Of all forms of caution, caution in love is perhaps the most fatal to true happiness. To fear love is to fear life, and those who fear life are already three parts dead." I think one of the greatest needs we have as humans is to love and be loved in return. The most intense love I have ever felt is from God. I remember the first time I felt it.

I would have been about four years old, and I remember crying because it overwhelmed me so much. I wasn't sure where the feeling came from at the time, but I now understand that I was feeling God's arms around me.

I think one of the mind games that Satan plays is to make us feel as if we're completely alone. We all feel that at times: that sense of emptiness, that hole inside us somewhere. We try to fill it with things to make us feel good and complete, but we find that we keep filling it with new things, because they just don't satisfy. Not until we put God there.

What a paradox between the childlike love God asks from us and all the complexities of our modern world! I never seem to fully learn the extent of my need for God. The moment I feel confident about my closeness with Him, I trip and then finally reach for Him again.

The more I know God, the more I see He brings bits of heaven into my world. He keeps reminding me that I'm never alone.

EXPLORATION

Gen 1:26, 27; Exod. 20:4, 5

CONCLUDE

Because we, as fallen humans, are not what God meant us to be, we have difficulty understanding and identifying with the idea that God made humankind in His image.

As Christians, we strain forward toward the day when we will be restored to complete humanity as the “image of God.” It is enough for most of us to realize that to be created in the image of God is to be inseparably linked with God. Only He can fill the void within each of us.

CONSIDER

- Constructing a diagram that tabulates four “realities” and their corresponding “images” (e.g., God, Barbie [the doll], Statue of Liberty, etc.). Describe the characteristics of each and the relationships between them. (Hint: Use “human” as the image of God.)
- Analyzing the relationship between “reality” and “image.” What does this say about being human?
- Discussing with a friend the following: The second commandment protects the identity of God versus the identity of humanity.
- Listening to the Top 10. What do they say or imply about humanity being created in God’s image?
- Exploring Web sites (official and unofficial) for one media personality. Consider the image that that person has tried to assume. Has he or she ever tried to change image? If so, how successful was the change?
- Imagining that if you were God, how you would make a living creature. Sculpt a model of your creature. Why have you made it the way you have?
- Going to a public place and observing people. How many of them appear to be in a relationship with God? What determining criteria are you using?

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 2.

Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*.

Covenant primer



“ ‘If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine’ ” (Exod. 19:5, NKJV).

Human Promises Versus God's Covenant

INTRODUCTION

James 1:17

He promised the people his best efforts. He pledged free education and a higher standard of living. In essence, he promised them a better life. But the truth is, it never happened. He didn't keep his promise.

Growing up in Guyana, South America, under the presidency of Linden Burnham, was hard. He is now dead and his party has since lost the government.

**We were forced to work—
without pay—on his estate.**

But while he was alive, he ruled with a rod of iron. When I was a teenager, President Burnham banned all imported food items into Guyana, making it illegal to import wheat for bread, cooking

oil, potatoes, pasta, canned foods, baby nutrients, or anything edible. Often his soldiers would pull up in Army trucks and confiscate the bread and other banned items the vendors were selling at the street corners to feed their children. We watched in horror as the soldiers ripped the bags open, trampled the bread with their boots, and threw it into the nearby canal. This was one of the many cruel acts committed by Burnham. Another was having us work on his plantation for free so we could buy the very products he banned. We were forced to work—without pay—on his several-hundred-acre estate. All day long we had to dig, plant, weed, water, and harvest his crops.

So why did we subject ourselves to such unfair treatment? Why did we obey him, even though he broke his promises? It was simply because we hoped to enjoy the better life he promised.

God is not like Burnham. Look at God's covenant, meditate on His promises, and you will see that they are sure. His omnipotence always fulfills His stated pledges. You and I can be confident that just as He has been faithful in the past, He will be faithful in the future. As you continue to trust Him, you will become more confident of the undeniable, unmerited, abounding love and mercies of God. The Bible says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17, NKJV). He offers us the very best and then empowers us to receive it.

As you study this quarter about God's covenant, you will find that Jesus promises lavish pleasures of eternal life and all the benefits that come with it. There is no "catch," no "bait and switch," no "curve ball." You can rest joyously assured that what He promises up-front He delivers at the end. And unlike President Burnham, He is neither unfair nor self-serving. His promises remain eternally unbreakable.

What a Plan!

EVIDENCE

Gen. 17:2

The Old Testament records covenants (agreements) beginning with Adam all the way to Jeremiah. In the ancient world, there were two kinds of covenants: those between equals and those between lord and servant. A covenant between equals was a formal agreement on the conditions. The one most commonly referred to in Scripture is not the covenant between equals, but between God and His people Israel.

It was God who informed them of the covenant, who determined the provisions of the agreement, and who gave them the choice of being a part of so awesome an arrangement. Once ratified, however, it was considered binding upon both God and His people. In brief, the covenant embraced all that was required to make the plan of salvation fully effective. On His part, God promised to bless His people, to give them the land of Canaan for a possession, to send them the Messiah, and to make them His chosen instrument for the conversion of the world.

On their part, the people were to yield implicit obedience and cooperate with all God's requirements. *What a plan!* Simple, wasn't it? Maybe that's where it all went wrong. The plan was too simple. Israel's portion of the agreement began to slip, and God had to allow their choices to become consequences.

After centuries of faithlessness to their covenant with God, Israel was released from it and they were allowed to experience captivity as a sign that the provisions of the covenant were no longer in effect. So what about the plan?

God must have said, Let's try this again. After Babylonian captivity Israel was restored to the

The plan was too simple.

covenant agreement. God promised to make a new covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah. But again, having the power of choice got the best of them and as they rejected and crucified Christ, they rejected the covenant as well as their status as God's chosen people.

Does the covenant still exist today? God has a covenant in place with individuals who are believers in Christ. On each heart, He has written His promises to the Christian church. God made a covenant with an imperfect people, knowing fallen humanity could not uphold its part. Yet He consistently kept His covenant promises, even all the way to the Cross.

What a God! What a plan!

REACT

What distinguishes the old covenant from the new covenant? Is the new covenant an everlasting covenant? Explain your answer.

Monday
January 6

God's Remedy for Humanity's Predicament

LOGOS

Gen. 6:18; 12:3; 17:2; Exod. 6:6; Jer. 31:31-33

God's Plan for the Salvation of Humanity (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 5:6, 8)

God did not find Himself in a dilemma when Adam and Eve sinned. Human disobedience did not catch God by surprise. Before God created humanity, He had already established a plan for its redemption should Satan succeed. "In the councils of heaven, before the world was created, the Father and the Son covenanted together that if man proved disloyal to God, Christ, one with the Father, would take the place of the transgressor, and suffer the penalty of justice that must fall upon him."¹

Not only would humanity disobey its Maker, but this disobedience would also cause the death of God's only Son. The plan to redeem humankind should it fall was based on love and self-sacrifice. " 'God so loved the world that he gave his

Human disobedience did not catch God by surprise.

one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' " (John 3:16, NIV). The objective of the plan of salvation is to restore the human race into fellowship with

God which it enjoyed before the Fall, and to eradicate every trace of sin from the universe. After the Fall, humanity became God's enemy, unable by its own effort to meet God's approval. Humanity was helpless, but God proved His love by giving His only Son for the redemption of the race.

God's Plan Revealed (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:25, 26)

There is only one way that humankind can be saved. God established one plan of salvation, and anyone who will be saved into God's kingdom would have to make it through the provisions of this one plan. When Adam and Eve sinned, God made a promise to them: He announced His plan to deliver them from the power of Satan (Gen. 3:15). This was a promise that the seed (Christ) of the woman would ultimately destroy Satan's power, and liberate humanity from the shackle of sin.

Genesis 3:15 is often known as the *protevangelium*, the "first good news" or "gospel." The Christian world has always understood Genesis 3:15 as the promise of the coming Messiah. This first announcement came to be known as the everlasting covenant. The covenant was made with Adam and his descendants to restore them into the fellowship and will of God.

God's Covenant With Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:7)

A dictionary definition of the word "covenant" is a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties, especially for the performance of some action.² In the Bible, however, there is more than one type of covenant. There is the two-sided covenant between human parties, of which both voluntarily accept the terms of the agreement (for friendship [1 Sam. 18:3, 4]; marriage [Mal. 2:14]; or political alliance [Josh. 9:15; Obadiah 7]). However, God never entered into such a covenant of equality with humanity. "Ancient covenants were of 2 kinds, those between equals and those between lord and vassal. In a covenant between equals, there is a mutual agreement on conditions, privileges, and responsibilities (Gen. 21:32; 26:28; etc.). In a covenant between lord and vassal, conqueror and conquered, superior and inferior, the lord or conqueror specified the conditions, privileges, and responsibilities."³ The covenant that God made with humanity is not an agreement between equals, but it is between the infinite God and finite man.

God's promise to Abraham was, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3, NIV). Several times during Abraham's life, this promise was repeated with additional explanation. In essence this covenant between God and Abraham was a renewal of that in Genesis 3:15. "The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden, when after the Fall there was given a divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. . . . This same covenant was renewed to Abraham."⁴

Does this covenant appear to be an agreement between God and Abraham or an ordinance on the part of God and acceptance by Abraham? In Genesis 17:1-23 the covenant is repeated. Pay special attention to what is said about keeping the covenant. Is obedience made a condition for establishing the covenant or for continued reception of its blessings? The blessings of the covenant could not be enjoyed or maintained unless certain conditions were met on the part of its beneficiaries.

But the conditions were actually not conditions for establishing the covenant. It included righteousness by faith and blessings to those who by faith are the children of Abraham. This covenant was an arrangement to bring humankind into harmony with the divine will of God. It was made with Abraham and his descendants not for their benefit alone, but that they might give to the nations of the earth a knowledge of the true God.

Those who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are grafted into the promise that God made to Abraham (Rom. 11:13-24), and they are made heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29). Since we are Abraham's seed by adoption, we have all the rights and privileges of the covenant—and also the awesome responsibility to impart to those around us a knowledge of the true God.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1070.

2. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1987.

3. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 229.

4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 370.

Tuesday
January 7

"Sign Here, Please!"

TESTIMONY

Isa. 31:33

Have you ever purchased anything on credit? You know the routine: you select the item, then complete the credit contract. After an extensive credit check to reveal any financial improprieties in your repayment history, the application is finally approved. In addition to your merchandise, you are handed a lengthy contract, rendering your indebtedness and describing the terms.

Let's look at the metaphoric application of this credit process. In this case, the merchant is an omniscient God, the treasurer of all earthly wealth. The credit agreement symbolizes God's grace through a crucified Savior. Instead of a contract, a covenant is formed. This covenant entitles the consumer to eternal life—guaranteed, only if he adheres to the stipulations of the agree-

It is not enough to have a general idea of God's requirements.

ment. What are those stipulations? "God's people are justified through the administration of the 'better covenant,' through Christ's righteousness. A covenant is an agreement by which parties bind themselves and each other to the fulfillment of certain conditions. Thus the human agent enters into agreement with God to comply with the conditions specified in His Word. His conduct shows whether or not he respects these conditions."*

Humanity gains everything by obeying the covenant-keeping God. His covenant assures us of His unchangeable character. Why, then, are those who claim to believe in God changeable, fickle, untrustworthy? Why do they not do service heartily, as under obligation to please and glorify God? It is not enough to have a general idea of God's requirements. We must know for ourselves what His requirements and our obligations are. The terms of God's covenant are, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself' " (Luke 10:27, NKJV). " 'Do this,' " Jesus said, " 'and you will live' " (verse 28, NKJV).

Terms of God's covenant are as effective today as they were at the fall of humankind. We need not search for any self-defense. Despite life's adversity, this divine contract is to be our refuge and defense at all times.

May we as Christians purpose in our hearts to render total compliance with the terms of His covenant through obedience, unconditional love, and cooperation with Christ.

*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 932.

How to Appreciate the Covenant Relationship

HOW-TO

Jer. 31:31-33

Just as a bridegroom takes the hand of his bride, gives a promise of love and seals his pledge with a kiss, even so God accepts the heart of each believer, presents a love token of grace, and confirms it with His oath. Our God of the covenant draws us into a covenant relationship with Him through Jesus. He declares, "I will offer my everlasting covenant" (Jer. 31:31, Clear Word); "I will make a new contract with the people" (TLB).

Any promise God has made to His people remains in force.

God wants to reveal Himself to humanity and chooses to do so by His favor and cup of overflowing blessings. Can you witness to that?

A covenant relationship is not just a pact between two individuals with Jehovah as a solemn witness, but it is a pledge between God and His people. There is no termination date, for this is an enduring contract as everlasting as the day and night.

What do you need to do to appreciate this covenant relationship? Here are some steps:

1. Begin your covenant relationship by learning of Him. Give Him your commitment and availability. Jeremiah 7:23 states, "Obey me and I will be your God and you will be my people" (Clear Word).

2. Renew your covenant relationship. Your God of a second chance is willing to go back and meet you where you first met Him. He offers to ignore your missteps and cover your failures so you can begin again if you wish to renew your covenant relationship.

3. Nurture your covenant relationship. Your God of promise desires you to keep, tend, and nurture the relationship and specifies how to do this. Your job: "Humble [yourself], and pray and seek [God's] face, and turn from [your] wicked ways" (2 Chron. 7:14, NKJV). God's job: "Hear from heaven, and . . . forgive [your] sin and heal [your] land" (verse 14, NKJV).

4. Glorify your promise-keeping God. Do your part and God will bestow on you His blessings in a wonderful display of His love. "Fear not that He will fail of fulfilling His promise. He is eternal truth. Never will He change the covenant He has made with those who love Him."* Any promise God has made to His people remains in force. Better still, His eternal plan of redemption and covenant of grace will be the glorious reward to His covenant-keeping people.

*Prophets and Kings, p. 165.

Thursday
January 9

The Right Decision

OPINION

Rev. 3:20

More than a decade ago, I clutched my graduate school diploma and headed to Alabama to marry the girl of my dreams. The previous December, at an early morning breakfast, I had asked her to marry me. With a smile that brightened my heart as much as it did the room, she had said Yes.

On the morning of the wedding, however, confusion ambushed me, and I wondered whether I was doing the right thing.

“Are you ready to marry so soon after graduation?” a friend had asked me in December. Looking in my mirror, I noted that I now had two job offers and was accepting the one enabling me to teach at my undergraduate alma mater. *Am I right for her?* I wondered. *What about her? Will we be happy? What if it fails?* I frowned, for I suddenly had no answers to these questions I had soberly resolved months before!

In my perplexity, I talked with an elderly friend, who set my mind at ease. Hours later, I stood confident, smiling, and expectant, awaiting my bride’s entrance in church. In another few minutes, we exchanged vows, pledging our commitment to each other

I suddenly had no answers to these questions.

forever. It was one of the happiest days of our lives! Fourteen years have passed. Among the multitude of rosy spots, a few rough ones have appeared, but God has blessed our commitment with love, growth, His never-ending presence—and two fantastic children.

Amid the deluge of today’s separations, divorces, and marital woes, our marriage has taught me the meaning of God’s covenant with humans. Just as marriage offers completeness to the persons meshing the fabric of their lives with each other, so God, in His covenant relationship with us, balances our deficiencies and is overjoyed by the commitment of our lives to Him. For our enmity and hatred, He pledges His friendship and love; for our sinfulness, His purity; for our guilt and unhappiness, His forgiveness and joy; for our weakness and vacillation, His strength and constancy; for our loneliness, His eternal presence. He fills every aspect of the void we have suffered since our first parents’ fall.

He has ratified this abundant promise in terms that cannot fail. Not with a rainbow this time, but with the blood of His Son. Symbolic of the unbreakable, right covenant that He forms with those accepting Him, He is flesh of our flesh—ours now and forever!

After the “Happily Ever After”

EXPLORATION

Genesis 17

CONCLUDE

Two kinds of ancient covenants include agreements between equals and contracts written by a lord for his vassal. The latter is described in the Old Testament as God's covenant. God is not a self-serving lord who refuses to keep His promises. But, after receiving His blessings, Israel refused to worship Him. Humanity's repeated disobedience broke the covenant, releasing God from His part of the bargain, and Israel experienced the Babylonian captivity.

However, God's promises are everlasting. God promised Adam and Eve a child to save them. Abraham was promised that all actions would be blessed through his offspring. Jesus is the fulfillment of those promises. If you accept Him as Savior and Lord, you are a spiritual heir of Abraham and God's promises are yours. As with marriage partners, our contract is held together by love. It's up to us to renew those vows each day.

CONSIDER

- Writing your own marriage vows to Jesus.
- Choosing an image from nature, like a rainbow, to be your private symbol of your covenant with your Creator/Redeemer.
- Selecting a hymn or a contemporary Christian song that you and God can call “our song.”
- Looking up the word “covenant” in a concordance and studying the references and their contexts.
- Listing all the synonyms for the word “covenant” that you can think of.
- Viewing a recent video that depicts a covenant (or agreement) between two individuals. Analyze how the covenant is made and how it is fulfilled or unfulfilled. On what principle is the covenant based?
- Listing the symbols that the Bible uses for God's covenant.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 13.

Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* chap. 14; F. B. Meyer, *The Life of Abraham*, chap. 14.

All Future generations



“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord”
(Gen. 6:8, KJV).

A Flood and a Promise

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 3:24; 4:2-16; 6:1-8, 13; 7; 9:8-17

After Adam and Eve were removed from Eden's garden, God set an angel and a sword to guard it.

So from its presence forever, yes, they were parted, but little did they know their woe had just begun. They gave birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Abel raised sheep while Cain grew vegetables.

And one fateful day, the time had come for them to offer to the Lord, but He only accepted one gift—that was Abel's. Being rejected enraged Cain, and he became so angry that he slew his brother.

And when God confronted him, he uttered the famous saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9, KJV). But God already knew what Cain had done, so He cursed him and Cain became a man on the run. He ran and ran and settled in the land of Nod and despite his evil deed, it was the hand of God that protected him and kept anyone from ever hurting him, because if anyone ever caught him they would have murdered him.

No one had ever
seen rain.

As the years went by, the world became as wicked as it could possibly be. People were killing each other and stealing from each other. God saw the world and decided to send a flood. But before He did, He notified His servant Noah and instructed him to build a boat. As Noah built the ark, he preached for years, yet despite his pleas, all the people did was jeer.

Prior to the Flood no one had ever seen rain, so the people thought, *Noah must be going insane*. They sat back and watched as the animals flocked, and no one bothered to wonder how the door of the ark was locked. Seven days following that, the rains came down and every living land dweller outside of the ark was drowned.

It continued to rain for 40 days and 40 nights. It didn't stop until the highest mountain was out of sight. A few months later the waters receded, and a few months after that, they were completely depleted. So the survivors on the ark walked on dry earth again, and the Lord promised humankind that He would never destroy the earth again with a flood. And He sealed this covenant with a rainbow so that all of humanity would forever know that His ocean of love would never run dry and that through His love they could receive eternal life.

Sunday
January 12

The Wicked, the Righteous, the Loving

LOGOS

Gen. 6:5, 9, 18; 7:23; 9:12, 13

At 8:45 in the morning, September 11, 2001, one of the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan in New York City was attacked when a commercial aircraft flew into it and exploded. Twenty minutes later a second commercial aircraft hit the other tower and it, too, exploded. Within an hour after that both towers came tumbling down to total destruction, killing thousands of people. The scenes shown on all TV stations in the entire world were not scenes from the movie *Independence Day*.

It was the most horrific terrorist attack in the history of humanity. The headline in the Miami *Herald* the day after read, "Evil Acts." Thousands of years ago, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5, NIV).

The cover story of *Newsweek* magazine for May 21, 2001, read, "Evil: What Makes People Go Wrong?" Robert I. Simon, psychiatrist and director of the program in psychiatry and law at Georgetown University School of Medicine said: "The capacity for evil is a human universal. . . . Within us all are the roots of evil."¹

Millennia ago the psalmist lamented the condition of humanity: "They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good" (Ps. 14:1, NIV).

The Wicked People

Jesus defined the wickedness of the people of Noah's time in terms of ordinary activities like "eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage" (Luke 17:27, NIV). Psychologist Michael Flynn of York College in New York says, "I spent 18 years working with people who everyone would call evil . . . and with few exceptions I was always struck by their ordinariness."² The heart

We can say that He has
annoying love for
human beings.

and inclinations of human beings are evil. God hates evil because evil destroys people. God intervenes in the evil affairs of humanity because He takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezek. 33:11, NIV). God's intervention is by providing a way out of wickedness. In the midst of wickedness there is always a people or a person who is righteous.

The Righteous Man

"Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. . . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless

among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Gen. 6:8, 9, NIV). In the midst of a wicked people there was a righteous person. In the midst of corrupt people there was a blameless person. While people partied wildly, there was a man who walked with God. Noah and his family were the incarnation of God's saving power. Wicked people could look at Noah and see in him the likeness of God. "While Noah was giving his warning message to the world, his works testified of his sincerity. . . . He gave the world an example of believing just what God says."³

The Loving God

God always intervenes in the personal affairs of human beings. We can say that He has annoying love for human beings. He is always after people. God respects the privacy of each individual, but He doesn't allow that privacy to keep Him away. Somehow, somehow, God intervenes. His voice is heard in the midst of noise. His message is heard in the midst of pain. His compassion is revealed in the healing that takes place in the life of a drug addict. The storm may be hard and heavy yet God is there. And after every unfortunate situation—every tragedy—the sun shines bright. God is constantly and consistently reaching out to people. He asks Himself, "How can I give you up . . . ? How can I hand you over . . . ? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused" (Hos. 11:8, NIV). One hundred and twenty years is a long time for God to wait. But God does not simply passively *wait* for people. He *interferes* and *intervenes* and *annoys* people with "cords of human kindness, with ties of love" (verse 4, NIV).

REACT

1. Is God's love annoying? Why or why not?
2. Noah preached for decades before the Flood came. Where and how did he get his strength? Be specific. Do you think, perhaps, the evil that surrounded him may have been a driving force?
3. What is so special about a rainbow that God used it as a symbol of a covenant?
4. How do you harmonize Genesis 6:9 ("Noah was a righteous man") and Romans 3:11 ("There is no one righteous, not even one")?
5. Atheists often point to universal evil and suffering as reasons for their disbelief. But others contend that the presence of good poses an even greater philosophical conundrum. How might this be true?
6. Those who killed thousands on September 11, 2001, felt they were pleasing a Higher Power. Is misguided zeal a lesser evil than sin motivated by mere selfishness? Why or why not?

1. *Newsweek*, May 21, 2001, p. 32.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 95.

Monday
January 13

Be a Messenger for the Lord

TESTIMONY

Luke 17:26, 30

Throughout the Bible you will find God sending His messengers to warn the people of the earth about what He was about to do. Unfortunately, we see in history that the majority usually disregard God's messages of mercy and warning. "In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:38, 39, NIV).

Do we not see the same conditions today? Many continue their everyday activities without any concern or preparation for the coming of the Lord. While

**Most of the world appears
to be clueless or
unconcerned.**

most of the world appears to be clueless or unconcerned, God, in His love and mercy, is still sending His messengers! Will you, today, become a messenger for the Lord?

"Before the Flood God sent Noah to warn the world, that the people might be led to repentance, and thus escape the threatened destruction. As the time of Christ's second appearing draws near, the Lord sends His servants with a warning to the world to prepare for that great event. Multitudes have been living in transgression of God's law, and now He in mercy calls them to obey its sacred precepts. All who will put away their sins by repentance toward God and faith in Christ are offered pardon. But many feel it requires too great a sacrifice to put away sin. Because their life does not harmonize with the pure principles of God's moral government, they reject His warnings and deny the authority of His law."*

As a result of Noah's faithfulness to God, he and his whole family were saved. Will we be like Noah in these last days? "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8, NIV).

REACT

1. How might our emphasis on readiness for Christ's coming result in legalism and perfectionism? Be specific.
2. According to the Valuegenesis research, the majority of Adventist youth do not look forward eagerly to the coming of Jesus. Why? What can be done to correct the problem?

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 102.

God's Science of Covenants and Rainbows

EVIDENCE

Genesis 6–9

Many world cultures have believed in some form of a worldwide flood story. Two of the more prominent are the Greek myth of Deucalion and the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. The legends present a variety of heroes and villains among the gods. The biblical account, however, depicts humankind as the villain and God as the hero.

It is God who covenants with Noah and all earthly life (Gen. 9:9, 10). The biblical Flood story is more about God than about Noah. So is the covenant. "Covenant . . . is a legal concept often used in the Bible as a metaphor to describe the relationship between God and humankind. The biblical usage was derived from ancient secular usage, where covenant meant a binding and solemn agreement between two or more parties."¹

"One type of ancient covenant that serves as a model for certain biblical passages is the royal grant. In this type of covenant, a king or other person in authority rewards a loyal subject by granting him an office, land, exemption from taxes, or the like. In such covenants only the superior party binds himself; conditions are not imposed on the inferior party; they are called covenants of promise or unconditional covenants. The covenants God made with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17), Abraham (15:18), and David (2 Sam. 7; 23:5) fit this pattern. In each of these cases, it is God alone who binds Himself by a solemn oath to keep the covenant."²

**God is under no external
pressure to promise
humans anything.**

God is under no external pressure to promise humans anything. Whatever He commits Himself to, He does out of sheer benevolence. We have nothing to offer Him that is worthy as an enticement.

God selected the rainbow to memorialize His promise, probably because of its recurring nature and its association with rain. Today the meaning of the rainbow is gone. Many people see a rainbow in the sky, and understand it on a scientific level only. They know that what they see is refracted light caused by the prism effects of raindrops. Regardless of people's inclination to dismiss God, He chose the recurrence of the rainbow as a reminder of His royal grant. Even if we're not listening, God is still speaking. He says, "I love you."

1. *Grollier Multimedia Encyclopedia*, 1998.

2. *Ibid.*

Keeping Your End of the Contract

HOW-TO

John 14:15

Melissa wandered the aisles of K-Mart holding the very doll she had seen on television, the very doll her mother had promised to buy for her. "I found it, I found it," she cried, waving the doll in her hand as she approached her mother who was occupied among the bakery goods. "Melissa, put the doll down," her mother said. "I have no money for that now." "But you promised," Melissa said as tears streamed down her face. "You promised," she whispered.

The meaning of a word in a child's understanding, in many instances, exemplifies the true definition of that word. When given a promise, a child is led to believe without a doubt that the promise will be fulfilled. As we get older, unfortunately, we tend to use the word "promise" lightly, placing it before or after our statements in order to reassure the receiver that our words are binding. We do this because the statement that follows or precedes the phrase "I promise" gains more credibility.

**"You promised,"
she whispered.**

In the Bible, God gives His children many promises. Often what goes unnoticed, however, is the fact that in order to receive God's promise, we have to meet small requirements. When God made His covenant with Noah, it was because "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8, KJV). Noah was able to find grace in the eyes of the Lord because he walked with God (verse 9).

There are elements in a covenant (a promise) that need to be taken into consideration. They are:

1. A covenant is like a contract, an agreement between two parties in which each party is responsible for keeping his or her end of the contract. We know that God will keep His end of the agreement (Heb. 9:15).

2. We must keep our end of the agreement. The Bible tells us that if we love God, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). Just as we understand the need to reassure others that our words are binding, God, too, understands our need for reassurance. The rainbow, which appeared after the Flood, is a testimony to that fact. One thing we must always keep in mind, however, is that God can do His part only if we allow Him to by doing our part.

REACT

1. What is the difficulty in keeping the human side of the contract in being faithful to God?
2. What does it mean to love God and keep His commandments?

The Foolish Logic of Humanity

OPINION

Genesis 6; 7

Often God's greatness is frowned upon from the perspective of human foolishness. This is the situation in the story of Noah (Genesis 6; 7).

The logic of the people in the day of Noah would not allow them to acknowledge the true greatness of God. Many years had come and gone since Creation. The people had become complacent. They had become accustomed to the things of the world and believed them to be preeminent. They could not understand the things that were spoken by the man of God.

Noah taught the people of his time that the world would be destroyed by a flood. Foolish logic convinced the people that this kind of thing had never happened before, so therefore it could not happen. The people could not understand the things taught by Noah because they had moved so far away from God that they had forgotten God's character. They had forgotten the God of Creation, the God that had walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, the God that had taken Enoch to be with Him.

Since the people of Noah's day did not remember who God was, they could not identify His word when they heard it. As young people who are dedicated to following Christ, there is a great lesson to be learned from the people of Noah's day. If we allow ourselves to forget the character of God; if we do not remain in constant connection with Him, we leave ourselves open to becoming victims of our own foolish logic. We run the risk of missing God's calling in our lives.

We leave ourselves open to becoming victims of our own foolish logic.

REACT

1. What pictures of God are portrayed by secular music today?
2. How can we hear God as Noah did?
3. The Bible says the sun "rises" and "sets." Copernicus and Galileo said, No, the earth rotates. The Catholic Church cried, "Heresy!" How do we know when to believe science over Scripture and when to take Scripture literally?
4. Knowing that even the elect are in danger of being misled (Matt. 24:24), how can we determine the validity of "Noah-types" who appear today?
5. If God is not willing that any should perish (1 Pet. 3:9), why didn't He send a sample rainstorm to show the antediluvians that rain was a real possibility?

Friday
January 18

The Hound of Heaven

EXPLORATION

Gen. 9:8-17

CONCLUDE

God has been called by many names, but “The Hound of Heaven” must be the strangest—if not the most descriptive—of all. At the end of the nineteenth century, Francis Thompson wrote a poem with that title. In it he described the human urge to run from God, to avoid Him at all costs while searching for security and happiness in all the wrong places. He pictures a long-suffering, patient God who pursues us, unwilling to let us wander off alone.

God’s covenants were always about drawing His children back to Him. But there comes a time when God must say, “Enough is enough.” It happened in Noah’s time, and it will happen in the very near future. We can choose life—or death. God’s covenant is available to all. Have you stopped running?

CONSIDER

- Drawing a picture to illustrate the concept of good in the midst of evil.
- Listing reasons that people are not ready for Jesus to come. People were not ready when the Flood came. Are we any more prepared for the Second Coming? Make two different lists: one for Christians and one for non-Christians. Then compare and contrast the two lists. Are they similar or totally different?
- Sculpting from clay or a similar substance symbols that represent promises you would like God to make to you.
- Rephrasing Genesis 9:12 without using the letter *i*. (Find words that express similar meanings so that the main thought still comes across.)
- Journaling your thoughts on what it means to be blameless.
- Singing songs of consecration. Look through the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Hymnal*, pages 301–331. Choose songs from this section and sing them as part of your worship.
- Reading carefully “The Hound of Heaven” in an anthology or at <http://www2.bc.edu/~anderso/sr/ft.html>. Review your own life and recount times when, as you were running from God, you sensed His presence in the shadows.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chaps. 7, 8.

Chris Blake, *Searching for a God to Love*, chap. 5.

The Meaning of the Name



“I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen. 17:7, NRSV).

What's in a Name?

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 17:5

“No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5, NIV).

A young couple sit in their cozy living room. The light casts a glow over their bent heads as they pour over a book of baby names. For months they have been trying to make an important decision: what to name their child. They want to find the perfect name, a name with meaning.

Have you ever taken the time to look up the meaning of your name? Most of us

have at one time or another.

When I first learned the meaning of my name, I laughed.

When I first learned the meaning of my name, I laughed because it did not describe me at all. In some cultures they name the child when they are older based upon the personality of the child.

Throughout the Bible God is called by many names: Jehovah, Yahweh, Lord, King of kings, and many others. Did you ever stop and consider the meaning behind the name of God, or what is the significance of the names God used to identify Himself to Abram? Why did God change Abram's name? These questions and many others are going to be answered throughout this week's lesson, so dig in, and discover the meaning behind the name.

Contracts and Covenants

EVIDENCE

Gen. 15:7; 17:1

Why does God use different names to refer to Himself, and how does that impact our study of the covenant between God and Abram?

Too often we read verses, chapters, even books of the Bible, without stopping to think about what we are reading. Oh, we catch the major points, hopefully. Most of the characters are familiar, maybe *too* familiar. But do we even begin to understand the culture and the motivations of the men and women whose lives, both good and bad, are portrayed for us in Scripture? These were people whose reality was very different, for the most part, from our modern way of life. Yet they had the same basic needs and desires.

A covenant, in the biblical sense, implies much more than a contract or simple agreement. A contract always has an end date, while a covenant is a permanent arrangement. Another difference is that a contract generally involves only one part of a person, such as a skill, while a covenant covers a person's total being.*

Would you be likely to enter into a contract with someone who called himself Bill one day and Joe the next? Let's hope not! Why was Abram, a man who understood the concept of a covenant and its life-changing impact, not deterred?

Names in biblical times, and in some cultures today, held a depth of meaning easily overlooked. One way God reveals His character to us is by His names. He shows us aspects of His personality by giving us word-pictures in the form of names. For our study this week we have two that are important to Abram—and to us today. The first is *YHWH*—"I AM," or "I will be"—translated into the Eternal One or the Self-Existing One.

The second is *Ei Shaddai*, God Almighty. These two names tell Abram that his covenant is with a God who is eternal, that requires nothing from outside of Himself for His existence, and that has supreme power and strength. He tells Abram, and all of us, that we need not be afraid to enter into a binding covenant with Him, for He is able to fulfill all that He has promised.

A covenant is a permanent arrangement.

REACT

What other names does God use to refer to Himself and what do they say to us about the character/personality of God?

* *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 259.

Monday
January 20

Two Types of Covenants

LOGOS

Gen. 12:1, 2; 15:7; 17:1, 4, 5; 18:19

Covenant—Empty or Full?

Living in such a fast-paced, hectic society, how many people draw up and/or make an agreement with someone—and actually keep their end of such a bargain? We try to, am I correct? Whether it is on the job, a bill, or some promise we have made to someone, we agree on some specific thing or action that should take place. Many people, however, do not keep their end of the bargain or agreement.

This brings us to our two types of covenants: empty and full. The first mentioned, an empty covenant, is something we experience every day. Many times we do not recognize it. We make an agreement then do not keep up our end of it. How many times have you asked the Lord, "I will give You my entire life, Lord, *if* You just get me out of this situation"? This agreement is usually short-term and very seldom followed for longer than two weeks. Take a second and think about all the things you have agreed to accomplish. Are we really going to come through with our promise?

While contemplating this, let us look at the full covenant, the second type. This covenant may be short- or long-term, depending upon those involved. This can be seen especially in paying a school bill or credit cards. I have noticed that we even make a covenant in our relationships with each other, and with Christ.

The Lord also makes agreements with His children and followers. The difference, however, is that God's agreement, promise, or covenant is upheld and true. Human

**This is where trust
comes in.**

agreements are not always fulfilled. God, the Father, made a covenant with Abram: " 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. . . . I will establish my

covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you' " (Gen. 17:4, 7, NIV). This is a perfect example of God's covenant with Abraham. Many of us are alive today because of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed.

Trust—Believe

This is where trust comes in. In order to have a full covenant with someone, you must have some aspect of or build some form of trust or belief. "Abram left, as

the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him" (12:4, NIV). Unlike Abraham, who trusted God, started out for a place he did not know, did not have a name for, and did not know how far he was to travel, we find it hard to live by faith. This is where many fall away. If we cannot have some kind of control over our life, we become afraid when we try to walk in blind faith. When it comes to keeping up our end of the bargain—wherever You lead Lord, I will follow—impatience settles in.

Every true covenant has some kind of test, or situation, we must pass. Abraham's test to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, was a pure test of trust. God had promised to multiply his seed and set up kingdoms throughout generations to come. But how could this happen, if he was to sacrifice his only son? Moses would have to go through the Red Sea in leading the complaining people of Israel out of Egypt while being chased by the Egyptians.

REACT

1. What does it mean to be children of the promise? Be specific.
2. Does faith in itself save, or is it simply the means by which the sinner accepts the salvation that God offers? Explain your answer.
3. Explain how someone develops faith in God, whom he or she has never seen.
4. Can you think of any time when it is better not to keep a covenant? Explain your answer.
5. What is the difference between human covenants and God's covenants?
6. Compare and contrast God's covenant with Abraham with the marriage covenant.
7. In a covenant, both parties promise or pledge certain things. What did God require of Abram? What does He require of us?
8. In Genesis 16 does the lack of faith of Abram and Sarai change God's covenant? Explain your answer.
9. Did Abraham think God was breaking His covenant in Genesis 22:2? Does faith go beyond our revealed knowledge of God? Explain your answer.
10. What are some promises that you have made that have led to peace of mind? Does covenant keeping always lead to peace?
11. How can a plumber fulfill God's call as effectively as a preacher?

Tuesday
January 21

Merits of Christ, Our Only Hope

TESTIMONY

Isa. 55:7

"We must learn in the school of Christ. Nothing but His righteousness can entitle us to one of the blessings of the covenant of grace. We have long desired and tried to obtain these blessings, but have not received them because we have cherished the idea that we could do something to make ourselves worthy of them. We have not looked away from ourselves, believing that Jesus is a living Saviour. We must not think that our own grace and merits will save us; the grace of Christ is our only hope of salvation. Through His prophet the Lord promises, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon' (Isa. 55:7). We must believe the naked promise, and not accept feeling for faith. When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire.

"We look to self, as though we had power to save ourselves; but Jesus died for us because we are helpless to do this. In Him is our hope, our justification, our righteousness. We should not despond, and fear that we have no Saviour, or that He has no thoughts of mercy toward us. At this very time He is carrying on His work in our behalf, inviting us to come to Him in our helplessness and be saved. We dishonor Him by our unbelief. It is astonishing how we treat our very best Friend, how little confidence we repose in Him who is able to save to the uttermost, and who has given us every evidence of His great love."¹

"Some who come to God by repentance and confession, and even believe that their sins are forgiven, still fail of claiming, as they should, the promises of God.

**"We dishonor Him by
our unbelief."**

They do not see that Jesus is an ever-present Saviour; and they are not ready to commit the keeping of their souls to Him, relying upon Him to perfect the work of grace begun in their

hearts. While they think they are committing themselves to God, there is a great deal of self-dependence. There are conscientious souls that trust partly to God, and partly to themselves. They do not look to God, to be kept by His power, but depend upon watchfulness against temptation, and the performance of certain duties for acceptance with Him. There are no victories in this kind of faith."²

1. *Selected Messages*, Bk. 1, p. 351.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 353.

How to Live by Faith

HOW-TO

Gen. 16:6; Rom. 5:1

Sin was never a part of God's original plan for humankind. Because perfect love cannot be forced, however, freedom to sin was granted to all. Not willing that any should die (mercy), yet upholding the law (justice), God had made a provision by which transgressors could find freedom from the binding force of the law. It was first promised to our parents in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15) and later recognized by Abraham when he was called out by God to be separated from the rest of the world (12:3).

Abraham's descent was from a lineage of such patriarchs as Enoch and Noah who testified to the world of the character of God. God uses the experiences of Abraham to give the world a better understanding of the plan of salvation and its three steps: justification, sanctification, and glorification. I believe that we can list them as follows:

**Sin was never a part of
God's original plan for
humankind.**

1. Acceptance. The Bible tells us that Abraham believed God and He accounted it to him for righteousness (15:6). We, too, can believe by accepting what Christ has done for us at the Cross and believing that His grace is sufficient. Our debt is paid. This is justification.

2. Response. Abraham obeyed, not knowing where he was going and then by faith offered up Isaac (Heb. 11:8, 17). Just as Abraham had to make difficult decisions, so do we. It is God's goal to perfect our character. He lovingly allows us to experience trials and hardships that expose our character flaws that would otherwise be hidden. Though we may fall as Abraham did (Gen. 12:13; 20:2), we do so only when we remove our faith from God and place it in ourselves. Our response to what Christ has done and is doing for us is willingly to endure, trusting in Him and knowing that we are being fitted for heaven. This is sanctification.

3. Peace. This is the result of our assurance of God's faithfulness—knowing that in Him we have eternal life and desiring to hear that trumpet sound, we, as Abraham, look for the coming promise of that glorious city of God. This will be our glorification.

REACT

1. Why was the old covenant destined to fail? (See Hebrews 8:6-10; Galatians 3:17, 18.)

2. What does it mean to you when God says, "I will be your God and You shall be My people"? Be specific.

God Means Everlasting Business

OPINION

Luke 4:43

I never really understood the covenant God gave to Abraham until I read the chapter in *Patriarchs and Prophets* entitled "The Call of Abraham." After the Flood, the earth was filled with wickedness once again. Therefore, God chose Abraham, a righteous man, and his descendants as His chosen people. It was through this man's seed that God promised to send His Son Jesus Christ to fulfill the plan of redemption. To prove that He had chosen Israel, He gave them His covenant of circumcision, to set them apart, physically and spiritually, from the rest of the world. God revealed His plan of redemption to His people so they could tell the rest of the world that Jesus Christ will deliver the fallen race from the bondage of Satan. The Jews, however, didn't share this message of hope with the rest of the world.

As spiritual Israel, we must not make the same mistake ancient Israel did. We

**Heaven is our most
important goal.**

must witness to those who are perishing without a Savior, giving them hope. God is not willing that any should perish. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19, NKJV).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we should let the world know that money, fame, and worldly possessions shouldn't be the ultimate objective in life. Heaven is our most important goal, and the only way to make it there is through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and great High Priest. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (6:20, NKJV).

Jesus is merciful in delaying His coming, giving others a chance to hear about His love and also to receive Him as their personal Savior. The only way others will know Jesus is through our witnessing. This is a serious job and a serious soul-winning business God wants to accomplish through us. Our heavenly Father took care of everlasting business by sending Jesus His Son to die on the cross. Therefore, we are to labor in witnessing until Jesus comes back. He has given us a job to do for His business of soul winning because He is coming soon and means serious, everlasting business.

REACT

1. What would you say to a person who professes disbelief in God?
2. What is the relationship between God's covenant and God's call?

A Name to Believe In

EXPLORATION

Gal. 3:26–4:7

CONCLUDE

In the Old Testament a name was more than just an identification tag. Rather it was a symbol of one's potential and mission in life. Part of the naming process was a committal of one's life to God and placing that life in the hands of the Almighty. God has many names that describe the different aspects of His godliness. He hasn't stopped being YHWH or El Shaddai just because there are no patriarchs around.

A covenant with God is everlasting. In that covenant we must trust our Lord through both the good and the bad times. When we lay our burdens at Jesus' feet, our purpose in life takes on a new meaning and new goals.

CONSIDER

- Thinking of the many names God is known by. Think of a list of names that you would like to be called by. Since we will all be given new names by God when we get to heaven, what would you want your name to be?
- Spending at least the coming week writing a prayer journal in which you write down your specific burdens, opportunities, concerns, and joys. Each time you journal, spend a moment in specific prayer on that item. Don't worry about repeating the same things every day, but bring everything to the Lord and lay them at His feet.
- Using index cards to write out the names of the Lord and what they mean. Place them in locations where you will see them every day to remind you of God's different characteristics.
- Writing a poem or painting a picture that describes the inheritance that God has promised to us—e.g., Abraham's seed was promised an inheritance.
- Taking an evening to "look at the stars" as did Abraham. Commune with God as did Abraham on those nighttime conversations. Rededicate your life to the new covenant with God.
- Writing a song to perform in church or Sabbath School that includes thoughts from Genesis 17 and/or today's "Exploration" text.
- Writing a mission statement that combines the requirements of your occupation with the gospel commission.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chaps. 11-15; *The Desire of Ages*, chaps. 1-3.

Children of the Promise



**“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”
(Matt. 28:20).**

Our Keeper's Amazing Grace

INTRODUCTION

James 4:8, 10

Philip Yancey looked critically at the promise of God's grace, and his response is detailed in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* He describes a Los Angeles entrepreneur who, having put together a tantalizing itinerary that would take tourists through the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, approaches a venture capitalist for a million-dollar loan.

His loan is approved, given that income from the tourism enterprise would be a guaranteed source of repayment of this enormous debt. Before even the first trip is begun, however, Kuwait is invaded and all travel to Iraq is banned. The Hanging Gardens are therefore no longer accessible to foreigners. Having utilized the loan for operating expenses, he has no way of repaying the debt. Eventually, he calculates a plan that would require him to repay \$5,000 a month for the rest of his life.

He walks into his backer's office to explain the situation.

Crestfallen, he walks into his backer's office to explain the situation. He has no idea where the \$5,000 will come from, nor has the inevitable interest on such a massive loan been taken into account. But he brings out his pathetic, unreasonable contract, lays the paperwork on the desk, and begins to explain.

The venture capitalist interrupts him. "What nonsense are you talking about? Repayment? Don't be silly! I knew your plan had risks, but it was a great idea. It's hardly your fault that a war broke out. Just forget it."

He takes the pitiful contract and runs it through the paper shredder.

We come to God in our humility and lay bare before Him our pathetic attempt to right our wrongs. With painful awareness of our inadequacies we show Him how we will try with all our might to fix everything. Our gracious Father pulls us onto His lap and hushes our explanations: "You can't help that a war broke out. Fix things? *Don't be silly!*" Our childish, faithless amendments are hushed with those comforting, fatherly words, "*Don't be silly!*"

"Come near to God and he will come near to you. . . . He will lift you up" (James 4:8,10, NIV).

There's a church near my house with a billboard standing in its yard. It reads: *You're a child of God? Call home.*

LOGOS

Gen. 12:2; 15:1-3; 18:18; 28:14

Promises have ways of drowning out all other forms of communication. For example, just try reminding a child to straighten up their room or asking them to get something for you. The remarks are easily, if not conveniently, forgotten. Even the words "I love you" pass by without much notice, much less remembrance.

Promises are different. If I promise my daughter that in three days I will buy her an ice cream cone, I know that exactly 72 hours later, she will not only be demanding payment on that promise, she will also state that I promised a chocolate ice cream and a trip to the mall as well. No matter what the promise, she remembers.

God made a number of promises in His covenant with Abraham, among the least of which was the promise of an heir. In Genesis 12, He promises to bless Abraham, to make his name great, to make him a blessing to all nations, yet the only nation that Abraham remembers is his own, a great nation, made up of his promised heirs.

Reaffirming the covenant in Genesis 15, God tells His friend, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (verse 1, NKJV). This statement restates the theme of His original promise, but Abraham is now fixated on the fact that no children have been born to him and Sarah, that his "great reward" is in danger of passing on to his servants.

Perhaps this was the problem, the very reason that Abraham was forced to wait so long for a son. God saw Himself as Abraham's reward, not tents or flocks or treasures, and He had every intention that Abraham pass this reward on to his servants and the nations around him. If sons had been the sole requirement for making Abraham a great nation, he

**God saw Himself as
Abraham's reward.**

should have never left Ur. No, God had wanted more for Abraham, and in the remote hills north of the Dead Sea, God had granted him a peculiar treasure called *righteousness* (verse 6).

What Abraham couldn't understand (perhaps he was too busy selecting baby names) was that righteousness was the great blessing by which God would reward all nations through Abraham as well as the shield with which God would defend His chosen people from wickedness. In order to bless the nations with righteousness, one doesn't need sons, just servants who are willing to follow God.

Certainly the psalmist understood this alternative meaning of the word "inheritance" when he wrote: "Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever" (Ps. 28:9, NKJV). God sought to save all of creation through His covenant with Abraham, not just a chosen race.

Abraham's frustration with his own infertility mirrored God's frustration with the world's (Abraham's) inability to conceive of righteousness.

It was only in the context of the coming of the Messiah that the New Testament writers finally understood the meaning of God's covenant with Abraham. John the Baptist, ridiculing the Pharisee's assumption that they were saved by race, told them: "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones' " (Luke 3:8, NKJV).

Like their father Abraham, the Pharisees had mistaken race for grace. They were indeed heirs of Abraham in the biological sense, but their theology was illegitimate. They were not seekers of righteousness, as John the Baptist had accurately pointed out. The inheritors of the covenant were not children of Abraham but children of truth.

It was Paul who applied God's covenant with Abraham in its full, worldwide scope: The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "In you all the nations shall be blessed" (Gal. 3:8, NKJV). Imagine what Abraham would have thought if he could have truly foreseen that God's promise applied to all tribes, not just his own!

This gospel was the righteousness that comes from God to all who believe. "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16, NKJV).

I am not a biological heir to Abraham. At the time that this covenant was made, my ancestors were tribesmen in the thick forests of Northern Europe, far away from Canaan. Yet Abraham is also my forebear. I bear no resemblance to him and share no family tree; but I believe in God, and the righteousness that He gives me in return can be traced all the way back to His star-lit walks with father Abraham.

God spoke to Abraham of blessings, rewards, a shield of protection. All Abraham heard was the promise of an heir, a race, an earthly kingdom. Jesus' disciples made the same mistake, interpreting His teachings and miracles to be precursors to an empire in which they themselves would rule.

We dare not forget that the covenant God made with Abraham is ours today. The reward is not a kingdom, but righteousness.

REACT

1. Could God's covenant with Abraham have been fulfilled without the birth of Isaac? Explain your answer.
2. Apply Paul's interpretation of the gospel given to Abraham to the story of the Old Testament. If the nation of Israel had understood this meaning, how would history have been different?
3. What are some things you have inherited (a) from your family, (b) from your culture, (c) from your faith?

Thanks for the Two-Dollar Bill

TESTIMONY

Jer. 18:6; Phil. 1:6

When I was much younger, Dad would take me to golf each Sunday. Each week, a covenant, or agreement, was kept between us. My part was dragging his heavy golf buggy around the 18 holes of never-ending fairway. His reward for me was lunch, and more importantly, a two-dollar bill. Struggling on the up hills and relishing the downs, I couldn't wait to get my hands on that crisp, green note. You see, the two-dollar bill was both my promise and reward for a job well done.

Years ago, my heavenly Dad made another covenant with a guy called Abram. The deal was this: God's part was to give Abram a great name, a great blessing, a promise of many children and most importantly, a promise of a new, real home (Gen. 12:1-5). Abram's part was to trust in God to be faithful, to complete the good work He had promised.

**Abram was a little slow
on the uptake.**

Simple, right? Abram was, however, a little slow on the uptake. No fewer than six times did God reiterate the same promise before Abram finally believed in the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness (15:6). Yet still, Abram's doubt in the divine dream remained. When he demanded a sign, our patient God caused him to sleep and witness in a dream the things that were to come.

Cutting a long story short, God was faithful, and so was Abraham. Abraham's exceeding great reward (verse 1) was not a two-dollar bill. Rather, it is a living covenant kept alive even to this day between God and Abraham's children. Who's that? you say? Abraham's children include you and me. God has promised us His own great name, eternal and individual blessings, a complete polarization of His friends and enemies, a promise of a real family with Him, and most importantly, a new, real home. Our part is being confident of this very thing, "that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6, NKJV).

God taught Jeremiah this lesson early in his life too. Through the illustration of a potter and his clay, God proclaims, "'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter? . . . Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand'" (Jer. 18:6, NKJV).

Looking back, I think it was Dad who did most of the carrying of the heavy golf cart, yet still, my reward was the same. Our heavenly Dad is like that too. Though we struggle on the up hills and relish the downs, our promise and reward remain the same. I can't wait to thank Him for the two-dollar bill, my new home that finally realizes His eternal covenant.

It Goes On and On . . .

EVIDENCE

Gen. 28:14; 2 Pet. 3:9

It is amazing how the truth and consistency of God's Word radiates through all the ages. Commencing way back in the days of Abraham, God promised that He will make Abraham a great nation and that his name shall be great. He promised him that his " 'descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; . . . [and] shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and . . . all the families of the earth shall be blessed' " (Gen. 28:14, NKJV).

Combing through the realms of time, we can see examples of the Lord carrying through with His promise. Jabez, for instance, prayed for the Lord to bless him (1 Chron. 4:10). He was simply asking the Lord to do something he had already promised to do. Then we surge forward slightly to the days of Jeremiah when the Lord

said to Israel, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, . . . thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11, NKJV). These thoughts seem very much to be in accordance with the thoughts He had for us from the very beginning.

Even today, for us, the New Testament generation, the Lord's promises are infallible. As children of the promise, we can surely rest assured that the blessings of the Lord are as available to us now as they were to Abraham.

Harmonious to His nature, Christ continued to grant promises that correlated directly to His promise to Abraham. We can search the Bible over and pinpoint the plethora of wonderful promises that He has given to His children. He promised Abraham that the families would be blessed. We can certainly agree that the Lord has been true to His word.

Are you not blessed? Have there not been times when you knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Lord has blessed you? Has not God carried through on His promise to bless us and by extension take care of His children? He surely has proven time and again that He is as true to His word as the needle to the pole. Malachi 3:10 says that if we are faithful to the Lord, He shall pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room to receive it.

Ellen White states, "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."* That indeed is consolation. As we chorus, the world over: God is good, *all* the time.

God is good, *all* the time.

**Life Sketches*, p. 196.

Laying Hold of the Promise

HOW-TO

Heb. 6:13-18

We can be certain of God's everlasting covenant promise. God took an oath on His own ability and power to confirm it. Though this was not necessary, God wanted to show us His intention to keep His promise in a way that we could understand it. His promise rests on two unchangeable facts that make His word totally reliable: (1) He never lies, and (2) what He promised was confirmed by an oath with the highest authority on earth—Himself. The Bible tells us that "we can hold on to his promise with confidence" (Heb. 6:18, NLT).

True children of the promise have an appreciation for the hope that God has set before us in His Word, and want to know how to lay hold of it. Abraham provides a worthy example. His life after God called him was very different from the one he had before the call of God. At the Lord's command, Abraham left the metropolis of

**Living by the solemn
covenant promise is active,
not passive.**

Ur, with all its security and comfort, familiar surroundings and family. Abraham had been chosen to be the inheritor of God's holy trust. This covenant promise that connected him with heaven required a peculiar

character, one that clearly set him apart from the world. These spiritual attributes were evident in his daily life:

1. Faith. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" (11:8, NKJV). Abraham's unquestioning obedience is one of the most striking evidences of faith to be found in all the Bible. By leaving Ur, Abraham had to abandon all that was significant to him, with no forwarding address. Of course God rarely demands personal sacrifice without the compensation of even greater blessings. How much greater were the things that God had promised!

Children of the promise will be tested, as was Abraham. Important choices regarding family, careers, wealth, and status may be the subjects of such tests. Faith will be a supreme need of those awaiting fulfillment of the promise.

2. A life of prayer. Prayer initiates and helps to maintain the connection to heaven, which is essential for every child of the promise. It places God within our reach.

Living by the solemn covenant promise is active, not passive. It often requires us to do our part in a complicated life scheme, where we must exhibit dedication, sacrifice, endurance, and always obedience to God's Word. But if we do our part, He will always do His part—it's a promise!

More Than Just a Song

OPINION

John 1:12; Heb. 11:10

Ever since my childhood, the song “Abraham’s Blessings Are Mine” has been indelibly registered in my memory. More often than not, I sing the song without due consideration to its meaning. In the world we live in today, do we as Africans, Americans, Australians, Asians, etc., truly believe that Abraham’s blessings extend to us? On a few occasions, I have come to ask myself, *Can I claim these blessings today as much as an Israelite would?* I wonder how much of the blessings are truly mine. I wonder if I truly am a child of the promise, too, and am sincerely waiting “for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10, NKJV).

Amidst these confusing questions is the reassuring answer that He who has promised is able. God, the Promise-Maker, also said that “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12, NKJV). We have a caring Father who is ever ready to fulfill His promises. Therefore, definitely (for sure), He is going to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32). He will be with us till the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). He is going to give us a city, a heavenly one (Heb. 11:10). But most importantly, He is coming back to take us, so that we also may be where He is (John 14:3).

**“The me I think is the
me I’ll be.”**

But then, the promises become real only when we receive them by faith because we weren’t there when the promises were made and those to whom they were made have died without yet receiving them. We can only believe that when the promise of the afterlife has been fulfilled, together with them, we shall receive many other promises made.

Occupying our role as children of the promise will not be difficult if only we can come to the full realization that the Promise-Maker is also our Father. In a world that is divided on all fronts, be it racial, economic, cultural, political, or what have you, how can one see the world Church uniting as children of the promise? How can the privileged and the underprivileged kneel together in prayer, claiming and believing the same promises from a supposedly caring Father? No matter what our doubts may be about the Promise-Giver and/or His promises, looking through the prism of faith powered by a reassuring hope, we can confidently sing with renewed assurance that Abraham’s blessings are truly ours. As the saying goes, “The me I think is the me I’ll be.” We must constantly remind and reassure ourselves that we are and will be children of the promise.

Standing on the Promises of God

EXPLORATION

Hebrews 11

CONCLUDE

From time immemorial, God has been making promises with His people—not because He had to, but simply because He wants a relationship with each person He has created. Even more amazing is that He does all the work in the relationship! All we have to do is stand on His promises and look forward to their temporal and eternal fulfillment.

CONSIDER

- Making a collage representing numerous ways God has kept His covenant from the time of His initial promise to Abram until today.
- Asking church members which of God's names are most meaningful to them. Compare these answers with your own favorite name of God as you consider the importance of having a complete understanding that comes only from incorporating God's full revelation of Himself through Scripture.
- Rereading Hebrews 11—the “Faith Hall of Fame”—keeping in mind that even our faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Look at these heroes of faith through the lens of grace.
- Making a table with God's promises in His Word beside His answers. Now add God's promises to you, and be ready for His answer.
- Singing or listening to “Standing on the Promises” (no. 518 in *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* or at <<http://www.kirkdale113.freeserve.co.uk/standing.htm>>. Concentrate on the words of each verse, then write another verse or a poem focusing on your personal experiences with God's promises.
- Observing the ways in nature in which even creation has been “subjected to frustration” (Rom. 8:18-24, NIV). Imagine the perfect restored world God has planned for the redeemed.

CONNECT

The Bible Promise Book: One Thousand Promises From God's Word; William G. Johnsson, *A Practical Guide to Abundant Christian Living in the Book of Hebrews*, pp. 202–214; Max Lucado, *He Chose the Nails and Six Hours One Friday*, chap. 12; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap. 7.

Abraham's seed



“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9, NIV).

The Ironing Board Phenomenon

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 100:3

Do you know what the ironing board phenomenon is? It involves, naturally, an ironing board—left standing—usually in haste. Over the course of time, the ironing board exponentially accumulates articles of clothing and other materials and the chaos spills over to the rest of the room. Soon you are living exclusively off the contents of your ironing board. Well, perhaps not exclusively, but you get the picture. The cause for this phenomenon is not clear. What is clear, however, is the solution: Upon completion of the ironing duties, *immediately* fold the board and put it away.

In the time of Jesus' first coming, Israel had become a standing ironing board. Like the ironing board, they had exchanged the natural purpose that they were

**Soon you are living
exclusively off the contents
of your ironing board.**

designed for and had become a useless and even destructive model to the world. Instead of being a light, they contributed to the darkness. Instead of giving hope to the Gentiles, they demonstrated hopelessness.

They had become a nation unto themselves. "Pride obscured their vision. They interpreted prophecy in accordance with their selfish desires."¹ And "they were actually jealous lest the Lord should show mercy to the Gentiles."² Instead of being a blessing to the nations, they had become a curse, and God's name was defamed in the process.

How could they forget God's promise to Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3, NKJV) and God's promise in Isaiah 56 that even the foreigner, who holds fast His covenant, will be made joyful in His house of prayer? They forgot because they lost sight of Jesus Christ in the daily rituals. And when Jesus is out of the picture, "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness [cannot] comprehend it" (John 1:5, NKJV)—and chaos reigns.

The ironing board is a lesson in purpose by design. We were created to praise God because He's worthy of all praise. We have also been made to be servants to our fellow humanity. The commandment was given: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:18, RSV).

In God's covenant with Abraham, His people were to be a vehicle of blessing to the world. It is high time for us, as spiritual Israel, to put self aside and allow the light and love of Jesus to shine out of our hearts.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 30.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Is God Anti-Semitic?

EVIDENCE

Jer. 11:8

When my brother gives reasons for rejecting Christianity, he quotes a Week of Prayer speaker at Atlantic Union College. Describing the Crucifixion, the preacher said, "Already the trains were heading to Auschwitz." My brother gasped, but no one else in the crowded chapel reacted to a statement that he interpreted to be a justification for Nazi atrocities.

For centuries Christians have thrown rocks at, have denied access to, and have ultimately killed Jews for being "Christ-killers." The only way Adolph Hitler and his Nazi minority could have killed six million people was by enlisting the complicity of most of the Western world. This includes North America, who refused refuge to people trying to escape the genocide. In Germany Christian protest was muted. Some churchgoers thought Hitler was fulfilling God's curse against the Jews.

Isolated in the wooded countryside, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer heard of the burning of synagogues two days after the event. Underlined in his devotional Bible is Psalm 74:8, "They burned all the meeting places of God in the land" (KJV). In the margin Bonhoeffer wrote, "9.11.38," the date we now call Crystal Night. Bonhoeffer added an exclamation mark to verse 9 and wrote, "We do not see our sign; there is no longer any prophet; and there is none among us who knows how long." One of a few German pastors who protested Nazi persecution of the Jews, Bonhoeffer would be executed by the regime he worked to overthrow. A lover of music, he told his seminarians, "Only he who cries out for the Jews may sing Gregorian chants."*

**North America refused
refuge to people trying to
escape the genocide.**

REACT

1. Read God's curses in Deuteronomy 11:26-32; 28 (especially verses 49-57); Jeremiah 11:8; Matthew 21:34-44. Are we responsible for enforcing God's curses? Explain your answer.

2. In a letter written after Crystal Night, Bonhoeffer urged his students to study Psalm 74; Zechariah 2:8; Romans 9:4; 11:11-15. Are the Jews still "the apple of God's eye"? Explain your answer.

3. In the course of World War II, Bonhoeffer went from advocating pacifism to involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler. Was that a godly thing to do? Why or why not?

*Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1970), pp. 511, 512.

Monday
February 3

The Deal With Abraham's Seed

LOGOS
Gen. 12:1-3

As Christians, it is extremely easy to read the Old Testament in hindsight, to spiritualize the literal situations and predictions so that the Old Testament can mean something to us. We read as if Christianity is God's Plan A, whereas in fact it is God's Plan M or N—or perhaps Z. Christianity, as we know it, should never have existed.

The first Christians faced an almost impossible task: How were they to fit Jesus, His teachings, His claims to be the Messiah, His claims to be Yahweh, and His New Testament (i.e., New Covenant/Contract) into the tabernacle-centered, One-God Old Testament? Jesus had not been much help, stating enigmatically, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins" (Luke 5:37, NKJV) and, "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment" (Matt. 9:16, NKJV).

**Christianity, as we know it,
should never have existed.**

Paul stepped up to the challenge and developed an understanding of how Christianity and Old School Judaism fit together. One problem he faced was, How do we Christians understand the prophetic promises made to the children of Israel? He seized on a word play in the Greek version of the Old Testament, that the promises were made to Abraham and his Seed (singular in Greek). He thus took "his Seed" to mean "The Christ," and thus all those who are "In Christ" (i.e., Christians) are able to claim the promises made to Abraham as their rightful inheritance. Neat and clever? I'll say! (See Galatians 3:16, 29 and surrounding.)

If we release our grasp on hindsight, however, the promises to Abraham's descendants take on a significantly different hue. The general drift of the Old Testament, read without hindsight, is this:

Abram, a pagan from the cradle of civilization, was met by an unknown God. This God told Abram that He was going to cut Abram a deal: He would make Abram into a great nation, and everyone around would say, "Why are you doing so well?" and Abram would respond, "Well, it's because we have this Almighty God. You should try Him and His system out!" (Gen. 12:1-3, my reading). It was a risky proposition, but Abram accepted. The mysterious Almighty God cut the same deal with Israel, Abram's grandson (35:11-13). As time went on, this mysterious God revealed more of His nature (e.g., His name was actually Yahweh, He loved, etc.). The Israelites grew more prosperous.

Thus Israel's descendants' future was rosy. The loose cannons whom we call

prophets delivered messages from Yahweh—that after a falling away, Jerusalem would one day become the center of civilization, attracting all peoples and nations to it. The Messiah would appear to rule in Jerusalem on King David's throne, domestic squabbles between North and South would be settled. Together, the Messiah and His people would go on an almighty holy war against the enemies of Yahweh and Israel. It would all come to a head on the day of Yahweh, when the enemies of Yahweh would be destroyed once and for all. And thereafter the Israelites would suckle fat babies, grow their own vineyards, and live happily ever after. (See Micah 4; Isaiah 49.)

Sounds nice? You can spiritualize it all you want, but the bare bones of the matter is that most of the prophecy regarding the blood descendants of Israel was never realized. Jerusalem did not become the center of civilization; nations did not come knocking on Israel's door. The Messiah appeared, but far from being accepted, He was rejected by His people and suffered a pagan death. The day of Yahweh was pushed forward thousands of years.

So why didn't it happen? Basically, because most of the Israelites didn't bother getting to know their God. They preferred a cardboard cut-out god, who was more safe and less tame than the real One. Thus they abandoned the covenant and its laws. Why free slaves after seven years when you could work them for a lifetime? Why give money to widows when you could extort it from them? Why be a Yahweh's goody-goody when you could visit the local Ashteroth temple prostitutes?

Yet throughout the history of Israel there stood a minority, a remnant, a small percentage, who bothered to search out the real Yahweh and serve Him for who He really was. This remnant stood straight and tall for the truth when all others were bending in the wind.

There has always been a lot of dead weight in the church. Yet Yahweh recognizes that there is always a remnant, a handful of believers, who are prepared to be obedient to God no matter what, and to believe what He says. To this remnant is extended the same promise of a glorious future as was extended to Abram and his seed.

REACT

1. Read Isaiah 65:17-25. Is it legitimate to use this passage to describe the new earth God will create after the millennium? Explain your answer.
2. If Christians are spiritual Israel, then how do we interpret the specific prophecies of the Old Testament regarding Jerusalem and Mount Zion?
3. Study the following New Testament quotations in their Old Testament contexts. How would Abraham understand each pair differently than Paul? (Matt. 12:17-21 and Isa. 42:1-4; Matt. 17:9-13 and Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 21:5 and Zech. 9:9, 10).
4. How is our understanding of the Old Testament promises an expansion of God's original covenant? (Gal. 3:28; Heb. 8:6-13).

The Promise That Heals

TESTIMONY

Mic. 4:6, 7

A group of singing missionaries visited a church in my country. While they were singing in the church, the husband of one member—an unbeliever who was a retired soldier and had been sick for months—came by and was inspired by their songs. After the worship he told the group, “I’ll buy a guitar and next Sabbath I’ll come back and sing with you. Promise!”

The next Sabbath he was worse and wasn’t able to return. That night he asked his wife to pray for him and give him a moment to pray for himself. At his last breath, he told his wife, “Take care of our son and see you in heaven. Promise!”

Oftentimes we ask God about the circumstances that occur in our lives. Why is it that sometimes He allows so much pain? Many are confused and nobody knows the answers. But we sometimes forget that “no distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind.”¹

“Heaven’s plan of salvation is broad enough to embrace the whole world. God longs to breathe into prostrate humanity the breath of life. And He will not permit

**“I’ll come back and sing with
you. Promise!”**

any soul to be disappointed who is sincere in his longing for something higher and nobler than anything the world can offer. Constantly He is sending His angels to those who, while

surrounded by circumstances the most discouraging, pray in faith for some power higher than themselves to take possession of them and bring deliverance and peace. In various ways God will reveal Himself to them and will place them in touch with providences that will establish their confidence in the One who has given Himself a ransom for all.”²

The promise of the husband to his wife healed their heartache and brought hope of seeing each other again. But God’s covenant is full of compassion, love that never ends.

REACT

1. Why do we sometimes lose faith in God even though we know that God has an everlasting covenant for us?

2. Did God break His promise when this man died before he could receive the blessings of being a Christian? (Matt. 5:4; Isa. 61:2, 3). Explain your answer.

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 369.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 377, 378.

Our Role as the Chosen Ones

HOW-TO

Deut. 7:6

What a wonderful feeling knowing that God has chosen us! Our skin color, status, age, and gender do not matter. We are all the same in His eyes. Now what does this mean for us? God has promised to give us abundant blessings, but we must do our part. So what is that part? What is our role as God's chosen people?

● **Spread the Word of God.**

We must let the world know of our good news. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV). We

cannot keep to ourselves the wonderful things God has done and is doing for us. The world today is a world of misery and sadness. We need to bring joy and happiness that only God can give.

● **Be an example.** We must live our lives as a reflection of Jesus Christ. Others will know that we are the people of God through our actions, behaviors, and words. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (5:16, NIV). What we say and do says a lot about us and about what we believe.

● **Pray.** "Pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17, NIV). God has given us a method of communication. It is so very important to stay in constant contact with God. Through prayers we build a deep relationship with Him. And when we develop that relationship, we become more dependent on Him and less on ourselves.

● **Build your faith.** We need to have a strong faith in God. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17, NIV). Read the Bible, look for God's promises, and find out how He has fulfilled them in your life.

● **Do God's will.** God knows what is best, but, as stubborn as we are, we still want to do things our own way. God knows the future better than you or I. Why not let God be the Guide in our life?

We must live our lives
as a reflection of
Jesus Christ.

REACT

1. How does knowing that we are chosen change our relationship with God? (Gal. 4:1-7).

2. Which comes first: obedience or faith? (1 John 4:19 and surrounding verses; James 2:18-22).

Thursday
February 6

The Chosen Team

OPINION

Deut. 7:6

I nervously bite my bottom lip, as one by one, my classmates are called. Ann goes to one side of the playground, Seth to the other.

There I am, a nervous eight-year-old mess.

It's recess time, which means another game of kickball. The most anticipated—in some cases, dreaded—30 minutes in the day of a grade-schooler.

Remember? You're standing with the others as nonchalantly as possible, while your eyes plead with the kickball captains, "Pick me, come on, pick me!" It doesn't matter whose team you end up on, just as long as you're not the last one picked.

There I am, a nervous eight-year-old mess, watching as the captains carefully choose their teams. They pass over the smaller, less-coordinated players, and head straight for the big hitters. I know I'll be standing around for a while.

The huddle of potential kick bailers is thinning quickly. Please! Won't somebody pick me? So what if I can't kick the ball more than 20 feet? So what if I'm always a guaranteed "out"? I've got team spirit. I'm an excellent cheerleader. Hey, I'm even good at cleaning dirt off the ball.

The cluster of kids is now down to four . . . three . . . two . . .

Finally, I'm picked! I'm saved from the humiliation of being that last kid. You know, the one who doesn't even get his name called. He just slinks over to his team as discreetly as possible.

For once, I'm not that person; I'm not the leftover. That means I've got to give it everything I've got. Today, I'm going to kick just a little harder, run a bit faster, and clean that kickball until it shines. Why? Because someone thought I was worth it, and I'm going to prove him right. Next recess, the captains will be fighting over me.

God has chosen His team—albeit, in this game, there are no leftover players. Each of us can go first in the pick, so to speak. It doesn't matter if we're scrawny or slow. He doesn't care if we're full of faults. We have been picked by the greatest team Captain ever. We are chosen. That means we have an unbelievable opportunity to show Him how much we appreciate His love and attention. But not only that, God has a game plan, one that requires active and willing players. Just as God promised the people of Israel, so He has promised us innumerable blessings, if we but follow.

It's time to win this game. And I'm not talking kickball.

Heir of Different Colors

EXPLORATION

Gal. 3:26-29

CONCLUDE

Whatever your race, gender, or social status—you can be part of a handful of heirs to the covenant promises God made with Abraham. God has chosen you to be among His remnant.

Inclusion in the circle of God's true Israel requires a spiritual, covenant relationship with Christ. Respond to the divine choice by extending a hand of faith in kinship with Christ, Abraham's special Heir *and* our Brother. This response makes you His representative who is prepared to be obedient to His biddings and to share with the world His saving grace.

CONSIDER

- Making a simple last will and testament specifying your beneficiaries and properties. You may include alternate beneficiaries and some restrictions on gifts.
- Asking a New Testament (Greek) scholar or your pastor to explain the deeper nuances of the four titles used in 1 Peter 2:9, 10, as they apply to the church.
- Listing (in a journal) goals you have promised to accomplish this quarter. At the end of the quarter, think about these questions: Which goals were or were not accomplished and why?
- Interviewing identical twins. What features do they have or don't have in common? Think about this: When in Christ, no distinction can disqualify anyone from becoming an heir.
- Drawing a scene with a rainbow over a church building as part of the landscape. Use this drawing to illustrate the point that God's people belong to a church of many colors.
- Reading with understanding Galatians 3:26-29 and then Romans 4:16, 17. Explain to a friend links you may find between these passages.
- Meditating on how the six points outlined in "How-To" were part of your day today. Create a schedule for tomorrow that includes time and space to fulfill these six goals.

CONNECT

2 Peter 1:1-11.

Prophets and Kings, chap. 59.

John C. Brunt, *Romans*, in *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, pp. 100–111.

The Rescue



“ ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’ ”(Exod. 19:4, NRSV).

Holding on for Life

INTRODUCTION

Exod. 19:4, 5

A small, orphaned boy lived with his grandmother. One night their house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to rescue the boy asleep upstairs, perished in the smoke and flames. A crowd gathered around the burning house. The boy's cries for help were heard above the crackling of the blaze. No one seemed to know what to do, for the front of the house was a mass of flames.

Suddenly a stranger rushed from the crowd and circled to the back where he spotted an iron pipe that reached an upstairs window. He climbed up the hot pipe, disappeared into a window for a minute, then reappeared with the boy in his arms. Amid the cheers of the crowd, he climbed down the pipe as the boy clung to his neck.

Weeks later a public hearing was held in the town hall to determine in whose custody the boy would be placed. Each person wanting the boy was allowed to speak briefly. The first man said, "I have a big farm. Everybody needs the out of doors."

The second man told of the advantages he could provide. "I'm a teacher. I have a large library. He would get a good education."

Others spoke. Finally the richest man in the community said, "I'm wealthy. I could give the boy everything mentioned tonight: farm, education, and more, including money and travel. I'd like him in my home."

The chairman asked, "Anyone else like to say a word?" From the back seat rose a stranger who had slipped in unnoticed. As he walked toward the front, deep suffering showed on his face. Reaching the front of the room, he stood directly in front of the boy. Slowly the stranger removed his hands from his pockets. The man's hands were terribly scarred. The boy emitted a cry of recognition.

**No one seemed to know
what to do.**

Here was the man who had saved his life. His hands were scarred from climbing up and down the hot pipe. With a leap the boy threw himself around the stranger's neck and held on for life.

Grace, by definition, is an undeserved reward or, in the case of this little boy, an unwarranted rescue. Like the ignorant Israelites on the shores of the Red Sea, he was rescued "on eagles' wings" (Exod. 19:4, KJV).

God's grace is such that having rescued His people as He did at the Cross, He persists in the rescue of our souls by committing Himself to a covenant relationship. Scarred hands are permanent reminders of the love of God and the grace He shows toward us, even in our darkest hour. A relationship with God will involve more rescue efforts—in fact, *daily*. And like the stranger in this story, He offers a permanent home and constant companionship.

LOGOS

Exod. 6:6, 7; 19-24

Covenant as defined by the *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary* is "the conditional promises made to man by God as revealed in scripture" and is "the agreement between God and the ancient Israelites in which God promised to protect them if they kept His law and were faithful to Him."

"There is only one basic covenant of Salvation in Scripture. It is promissory in character—the blessings and salvation of God are given by God, not earned by human beings—but looks for humanity's response of faith and obedience."¹ Covenanting with God suggests that in God's plan of salvation He

**Law, grace, and the
Cross are irrevocably
intertwined.**

formulated a means whereby human beings can accept the promises He freely offers because of His everlasting love. Law, grace, and the Cross are irrevocably intertwined.

The Bible introduces us to "the unexpected good news that the three mightiest powers in the universe—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—have united in a covenant to redeem wayward humanity, no matter how enormous the price had to be."²

Throughout biblical history God has made covenants with His people and shows His willingness to save us if we surrender to His will:

God's covenant with the human race (Gen. 3:15).

God's promise not to destroy the world again by a flood (6:18-20; 9:9-17).

The Lord's covenant with Abraham (15:18).

The covenant with Moses and the children of Israel (Exod. 24:8; Deut. 5:2).

God's promise to David: " "Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations" " (Ps. 89:4, NKJV).

A covenant made by sacrifice (50:5).

Mercy and promise of restoration through the Lord's promise to put His law in our minds and write it on our hearts (Jer. 31:31; 32:40).

God's covenant of peace, an enabling covenant (Ezek. 37:26).

God sent His Son to die that we may have life (Heb. 13:20). Christ, being our sacrificial Lamb (Rev. 13:8), gives everyone who has faith in Him eternal life (John 3:15-17). "God's covenant and commands are so incontestably equitable in themselves and so highly advantageous to us that the more we think of them, the more plainly and freely they are set before us, the more reason we shall see to comply with them."³

God's covenant demands that not only Israel of old, but present Israel live as God's people by responding in faith and obedience to His law. God wants to be our God and to live with us. He promises to hold us up on eagles' wings, as the eagle does her young.

"In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant."⁴ "The special emphasis upon the law at Sinai indicated that the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant awaited a people for whom the reality of God's grace would be exhibited by obedience."⁵ The law was therefore proclaimed from the mountain and written on tables of stone and then written on the tables of the heart by the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:33, 34).

REACT

1. The "new" and "old" covenants are similar in regard to obedience to the law. The old covenant, however, was based on human promises, while the new covenant was established by a divine promise. How does the promise work for both Christians and non-Christians?

2. What other scriptural evidences can be found to support the divine promise that established the new covenant?

3. What insights into God's character do we find in the law?

4. What is the most effective impetus behind obeying God's commands?

5. What similarities exist between God's covenant relationship with Israel and the relationship Jesus' sacrifice has extended to us today?

6. What are some of the trials in my life that I can be grateful for knowing that God is using them to help me to grow and become more like Him?

7. Compare each of the examples given of God's covenants with the definition given by Webster's. Do you agree or disagree that covenants are conditional? Explain your answer.

8. Give your own definition of "covenant," given your previous understanding and what you have learned from today's study.

9. Explain what it means for "law, grace, and the Cross [to be] irrevocably intertwined." Why is this important to the understanding of God's covenant with humanity?

10. As a Church, do you think that we have been set apart by God for a special reason? If yes, what do you see that reason to be?

1. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), vol. 12, p. 276.

2. Hans LaRondelle, *Christ Our Salvation* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions), p. 9.

3. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p.27.

4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 371.

5. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, *ibid.*, p. 277.

Based on Better Promises

TESTIMONY

Exod. 19:5, 6

“God brought [the children of Israel] to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: ‘If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.’ Exodus 19:5, 6. The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath

“Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant.”

said will we do, and be obedient.’ Exodus 24:7. They had witnessed the proclamation of the law in awful majesty, and had trembled with terror before the mount; and yet only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with

God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant.

“The terms of the ‘old covenant’ were, Obey and live: ‘If a man do, he shall even live in them’ (Ezekiel 20:11; Leviticus 18:5); but ‘cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.’ Deuteronomy 27:26. The ‘new covenant’ was established upon ‘better promises’—the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God to renew the heart and bring it into harmony with the principles of God’s law. . . .

“The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart. Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness we accept the righteousness of Christ. His blood atones for our sins. His obedience is accepted for us. Then the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth ‘the fruits of the Spirit.’ Through the grace of Christ we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts.”*

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

Who's Asking?

EVIDENCE

Exod. 19:5, 6

Picture encountering a complete stranger in the park, who, after introducing herself, requests that you watch her five dogs "for a second." Under any normal circumstances, such a request would not only be considered odd, but somewhat inconvenient and not the least bit tempting.

Now consider that this same woman were a close friend of your family. Would your response to the opening question be any different? God made some fairly unusual requests, e.g., asking Noah to build an ark and Abraham to sacrifice his own son. What was it that drove a nation to agree so fervently to honoring a covenant with Him?

Knowing only bondage and oppression in Egypt enabled the Israelites to yearn for a taste of freedom, for evident protection from threat of recapture and generous provision for their immediate needs of food and water. Through these acts, a certain confidence in Him was inspired. At Sinai God proposed a new relationship that would far surpass any previous encounter He had experienced with humanity. God's vision for the Israelites was one of new identity—His identity.

In Leviticus 19:2, God's identity is revealed in the word "Holy." This word in Hebrew contains the idea of difference and separation, of being set apart to live lives that reflect the very nature of God. The commandments laid out in Exodus 20 are not simply a set of behavioral guidelines but a moral revelation of God's own character. Summarized as love toward God and fellow humanity (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18), obedience to these precepts is in fact a display of loyalty, if not love, for their architect. Further insights into the God of Israel are displayed through the civil, criminal, and ceremonial laws that follow. These demonstrate a concern for fairness and justice (Exodus 21), compassion for the poor and oppressed (22:1-15), and consecration of self and resources to God (20:16–23:19).¹ For humankind to be associated with God, these elements of His character would need to be adopted into his own identity.

At Sinai God proposed a new relationship.

The Israelites did not have to commit their mutual obligation to this relationship as a prerequisite to qualifying as God's choice. Although they were not a powerful nation or culture (Deut. 7:7, 8), "Obedient response was possible for Israel, and is possible for anyone . . . in response to God's prior act of grace."²

1. Maxie D. Dunnam, *Mastering the Old Testament*. A book-by-book commentary by today's great Bible teachers. *Exodus*. In Ed. Ogilvie, Lloyd J. (Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1979), pp. 286–291.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

Signing Up for God's Covenant

HOW-TO Heb.10:16-18

The Lord made a promise—an agreement—with the Israelites that they would be delivered from the slavery of the Egyptians if they followed His commandments. This promise was His covenant and simply required faith and obedience in return. This did not mean, of course, that they would not endure hardships. In fact, God allowed trials to occur in order to test the Israelites' faith and build their trust in Him.

The promise of deliverance out of Egypt offered to the Israelites is symbolic of the promise of deliverance from sin offered to all humanity. The covenant given by God in the Old Testament was to be representative of the new covenant that would be poured out on all through the death of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note the parallels between the two, not just on God's part but also on the part of those for whom the covenant was made.

The ungratefulness of the Israelites demonstrated a complete lack of trust. It showed

The ungratefulness of the Israelites demonstrated a complete lack of trust.

an unwillingness to allow God to transform their lives to become more like His. In the same way we are often reluctant to accept God's promise for us in allowing Him simply to take control of our lives.

This wonderful gift of salvation is ours for the taking; however, in order to accept it, there is action that we must take:

1. Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died to fulfill a plan set out since the beginning of time. The purpose of this plan was to allow you and me the opportunity to spend eternity with the One who created us.
2. Obey His commandments. Fortunately for us, God is a stable and consistent God. Therefore, if the Ten Commandments were good enough for the Israelites, they're good enough for us. The essence of the Ten Commandments can be found in the two simple instructions that Jesus gives in Mark 12:30, 31.
3. Build a relationship with Jesus and allow Him to fill your entire being. God doesn't ask much more than for you simply to get to know Him because He can guarantee a friendship that is loyal, trustworthy, loving, and eternal (Prov. 18:24).
4. Allow God to transform you in whichever way He desires. Don't forget that God knows best and He won't allow you to go through anything that you can't handle, but He also wants you to become everything that He first intended you to be. Therefore, accept the words of James 1:2-4 as a promise in your life and remember there is One who in human flesh endured more than we ever will because of His love for us.

It's Not What You Say...

OPINION

Exod. 24:7; Matt. 21:28-32

Jesus once told an interesting story about a father who gave his two sons a task to complete. One said, "Of course, father," but never carried it out. The second initially refused, but later on changed his mind and got the job done.

In Exodus 19–24, God gave Moses instructions to share with the people of Israel that if followed, would make them a special nation. First, there was the law of

God—the Ten Commandments—that detailed how we can best love and serve both God and others.

Second, there were the ceremonial laws that pointed toward the future Messiah—Jesus Christ, who would take "away the sin of

the world" (John 1:29, KJV). God said to His people through Moses: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people" (Exod. 19:5, NKJV).

On three occasions after receiving these instructions, the people of Israel responded positively, saying, "We will do everything the Lord has said!" However, we find that it was not long before they were breaking their promise and began dancing around and worshiping a golden image. There was a discrepancy between what they said and what they actually did.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God has special plans for the Church and has set it apart as a treasured possession. We believe that He wants us to keep His covenant in a special way. We pride ourselves on obeying the Ten Commandments. But there can be a real danger in there being a discrepancy between what we say and what we actually do.

The law was to show how best to express our love toward God and others. Unless we have a relationship with Christ and begin to understand what God's grace and love is all about, then what we say will not necessarily match up to what we do.

Jesus told the story of the two sons to make a point to the scribes and Pharisees who thought that they were doing the right thing by saying, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." However, because of their lack of understanding of love and what Jesus Christ was all about, their words and actions became meaningless and void.

We should endeavor not to get to the point that we are in danger of doing the same.

**Seventh-day Adventists
believe that God has special
plans for the Church.**

EXPLORATION

Exod. 19:4; Heb. 9:15

CONCLUDE

In some places, February 14 is a day to celebrate love. Gifts, candy, and music express esteem for special people. But despite the best efforts, relationships can break down and result in pain. Committed to a covenant relationship with us, God offers a permanent home and constant companionship. Blessings and salvation are given by God, not earned by human beings. Our optimism is not adequate; faith and obedience are required. The life-altering new identity of Jesus Christ is manifest in our lives through fairness and justice, compassion for the poor and oppressed, and consecration of self and resources to God.

CONSIDER

- Sculpting or building an object as an award for the most selfless service and presenting it to the person you feel best demonstrates compassion and stands up for fairness and justice.
- Researching a traditional Passover supper, then inviting friends to help you prepare and eat it.
- Writing a script for a drama about the Last Supper, fully developing the participants as individuals and conveying their range of emotions.
- Visiting a dog obedience training session. Note the training techniques and contrast them with God's request for voluntary submission of one's will.
- Designing an identification badge that communicates adopting God's identity, including commitment to fairness and justice, compassion for the poor and oppressed, and consecration of self and resources to God.
- Interviewing an attorney about laws governing contracts, including how the justice system provides resolution when there is a dispute.
- Collecting a number of objects such as kitchen shears that become useless when they are taken apart and consider how we are incomplete when separated from God.

CONNECT

1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Hebrews 9.

The Desire of Ages, chap. 72.

Dwight Nelson, *The Eleventh Commandment*.

God's Guidelines



“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands” (Deut. 7:9, NIV).

What I Learned From Tyrell

INTRODUCTION

Deut. 7:9

All eyes were on me. Every single pair of dark, unflinching, six-year-old eyes were watching to see what I would do. I sat at the front of my humid classroom and fixed my eyes on Tyrell. He slumped back in his chair, attempting to stare me down.

"Tyrell, I'm not going to ask you again. Come sit at the story chair." No response. *What am I doing here?* I asked myself. I was trying to teach first grade on the

All eyes were on me.

small Pacific Island of Palau. I'd like to stress the word *trying*. Over three months into my student missionary experience, I still couldn't get my students to follow directions. Like

any environment structured for learning, my classroom had guidelines, and when the guidelines weren't followed, there were consequences. This was especially difficult when my troubled student somehow happened to be my favorite. I had to discipline him all too often.

"Tyrell, if you don't come and sit with the others, you'll have to sit outside, and you'll miss the story." My students didn't like sitting outside. It was hot, and it made them feel left out. Why wouldn't Tyrell just come and sit down with the others? I wanted so badly for him to be able to hear the story. But alas, poor Tyrell seemed to resent my reminder of the rules, and he obstinately shook his head and folded his arms across his chest. Once again he had to sit outside.

Through my students, God taught me a lot about how He deals with the human race. My goal in the classroom was to help all my students learn, do their best, and have fun. Our rules encouraged that environment, gave the students a sense of security, and even promised little rewards here and there. I was bound to follow through on keeping these rules just as my students were.

Like a classroom set up so everyone can learn and understand, God's covenant with us involves certain guidelines—given to us for our own well-being. His covenant law is a law of love, laced with promises He will follow through on.

When a law is established, two parties are bound by it: the one who is under that law and the one who established it. What an incredible thing to enter into a covenant whose guidelines offer a life of purity and love.

Unfortunately, like some of my students, not all of us are willing to reap the benefits of a life lived in God's law. And, after watching my favorite student mope back into the classroom after missing yet another story, I know that God's heart must ache for those who choose the alternative.

Christ in Us!

EVIDENCE

Rom. 7:15

“Ignorance is bliss.” Unfortunately, those words may cross the lips of more Christians than we would like. Some Christians feel that they were better off before the covenant law was known to them, because they certainly don’t seem able to keep it—hence a plea for the ignorance of the past.

In Romans Paul writes, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Rom. 7:15, NIV). How could a spiritual giant such as Paul have such seemingly basic problems? He doesn’t address fine theological points or ethics questions—no, his problem is that he can’t keep up his end of the covenant law. No matter how hard he tries, he just can’t stick to the deal that God wants to make with him. So then, what’s the solution? If Paul has trouble, how are we supposed to get things straight? We’re not.

That’s where Jesus comes in—Someone who knows the trials that we face, because He faced them too. The difference is that He overcame them. In fact, He’s the only Person to have done so. However, the question remains: How can His perfect life lived 2,000 years ago help us now? By serving as an example. The problem there is that we still can’t get it right. You may watch a mechanic work on a commercial airplane, but things will be much safer if you don’t try to fix the plane’s problems, even though you were given an excellent example. What we need is for Christ to live in us. The key factor is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27, NIV).

How are we supposed to get things straight?

The problems occur when we see areas of sin in our lives and try to eradicate them ourselves. Once we take care of one sin, up pops the next. Instead of attempting to uphold the covenant law through this and that deed, we must acknowledge that we are completely unable to do what is right, and then ask Christ to live His perfect life through us. Only then can we truly realize the implications of the words, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV). Once we stop trying to do what is right, and instead ask Christ to replace our will with His—our attempts with His triumphs—then we will be “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37, NIV).

REACT

If Christ was fully human as much as He was fully God, why can’t we, as humans, follow His example and “get it right”?

Rediscover the Covenant Treasure

LOGOS

Deut. 4:13; 7:7; 10:12, 13; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17

A Covenant With a Promise (Deut. 4:13)

In giving His people a covenant, God was doing more than setting down a few rules for a well-functioning society. A biblical covenant carried the same implications as a legal agreement would today, only with additional blessings and curses for those who agreed by the terms of the covenant.

The way that the Old Testament depicts covenants resembles ancient treaties from the Hittites. It was a contract, a legal promise, a treaty.

The Ten Commandments were not the only covenant that God offered Israel,

**He didn't need a résumé of
Hebrew accomplishments.**

but they were key to fulfilling their role as a special and blessed people. God initiated the covenant law with this promise: “ “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of

all nations you will be my treasured possession” ’ ” (Exod. 19:5, NIV).

God intended His people not simply to give partial or haphazard attention to the Ten Commandment covenant. He would delight in making them His “treasured possession” (verse 5, NIV). Even today, with the Ten Commandment covenant, God wants His people, spiritual Israel, you and me, to be His treasured possession and have us respond to His covenant with a desire for full obedience.

Overwhelmed, Not Overlooked (Deut. 7:7)

In the opening chapter of Exodus we see how few the Israelites numbered in the land of Egypt. Seventy people (1:5). And while they grew from a handful to 600,000 men, besides women and children (12:37), during 430 years of hardship and slavery, God didn't waver in His election of them.

He didn't need a résumé of Hebrew accomplishments or to see a numerical growth chart in order to bless them. He promised He would make them, Abraham's descendants, into a great nation—God's earlier covenant with Abraham. Though Abraham was childless, and the Israelites few in number, God chose to bless them.

The fact that God chose the Israelites when they were so few can give every sincere Christian hope and courage regardless of personal circumstances. Though we may not have much to offer God, He chooses to bless us similarly (1 Pet. 2:9).

God did not choose the Israelites because they obeyed the law, but He gave them His law as a gift because they were chosen. The same applies to us today.

The Two Sides of the Law (Deut. 10:12, 13)

I've often wondered how the Scripture portrays different reactions and definitions of the law of God. How can the psalmist "delight in your law" (Ps. 119:70, NIV), while Paul speaks of it in terms of wrath, judgment, even death (see Romans 4:15; 7:9-12)?

Can you delight in something that brings wrath? It depends on how you use the law (1 Tim. 1:8). If we use the law as a means of getting right with God, then we are going to find wrath and judgment (see Romans 3:10-20). The Holy Spirit will convict us of our shortcomings and failure in rendering perfect obedience. The Israelites failed at fully obeying the law. So have we.

Yet God did not lower the bar or change the rules because of our failure and sin. He raised the investment. Not only did He give the gift of covenant law, but through Christ, God would give the covenant blessings through faith "apart from observing the law" (Rom. 3:28, NIV). We would receive the blessings of perfectly keeping the law through faith in Christ and His perfect obedience in our place.

Second Corinthians 1:20 says, "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (NIV).

The law is not done away with. It is established. Cemented. The purpose provides the motive for our response. The law is joy when we use the law to show us God's character, to reveal His will, to help us realize our own sinfulness, and to drive us to Christ for justification.

Changeless Application (Mal. 3:6)

Though this text does not refer specifically to the covenant law, it speaks about the stability and reliability of God and His character. The law, a deeper revelation of God's character, is likewise dependable and reliable.

As a reliable statement of God's character, the law will find new and various applications in a changing world. Jesus found contemporary applications of the law that went beyond the mere letter of the law. He said that hatred was the same as murder, that unlawful remarriage and lust were the same as adultery (see Matthew 5). Even today we need to ask if there are new applications and avenues through which we can follow God's covenant law with all our heart and soul.

God's Greatest Gift (James 1:17)

As God is the Giver of good gifts, then it follows that His law is good (Rom. 7:12). It was not faulty as some have charged, but it did need to be written again—not on tables of stone, but in the hearts and minds of God's people (Heb. 8:7-12). No longer would God's people be motivated by external stone tablets with laws, but rather the inward pulse of love would lead to delighting in God's covenant law. "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15).

Tuesday
February 18

The Unbelievable Inheritance

TESTIMONY

Eph. 1:3-14

The covenant that God establishes with us is more than a treaty or legal agreement. It is an understanding between a generous Father and His sometimes rebellious, sometimes repentant children. The covenant conveys an unbelievable inheritance to those obedient children who participate in it.

“Though this covenant was made with Adam and renewed to Abraham, it could not be ratified until the death of Christ. It had existed by the promise of God since the first intimation of redemption had been given; it had been accepted by faith; yet when ratified by Christ, it is called a new covenant. The law of God was the basis of this covenant, which was simply an arrangement for bringing men again into harmony with the divine will, placing them where they could obey God’s law. . . . But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. . . . God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience. . . . Feeling that they were unable to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said, will we do’ . . . yet only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not

**The covenant is more than
a treaty or legal agreement.**

hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of a Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant. . . .

“The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart. Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness we accept the righteousness of Christ. His blood atones for our sins. His obedience is accepted for us. Then the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth ‘the fruits of the Spirit.’”*

**Patriarchs an Prophets*, pp. 370–372.

Garden of Grace

HOW-TO

Mal. 3:6; James 1:17

On the campus of Andrews University, is a Garden of Grace full of reminders of God's grace. The Cross reminds us of Jesus' desire for our salvation, and the Ten Commandments remind us of God's covenant of grace. A fountain constantly flows in the garden as a reminder that God's grace is unchanging.

Just as God's grace is unchanging, so is God. Malachi 3:6 says, "I do not change" (NKJV). You can't get much more direct than that. No matter what happens here on earth, God does not change. No matter how many times we sin, God doesn't change! God still loves us, still wants us, and still desires a relationship with us. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who *does not change* like shifting shadows" (James 1:17, emphasis supplied).

How can you change your response to the Ten Commandments?

One of God's good and perfect gifts is the Ten Commandments—unchanged since the day He wrote them. The first four still reflect our relationship to God and the last six still reflect our relationship to others. Some may believe they are harsh and unreasonable. Others break "just" one or two. Still others "forget" their location (Exodus 20).

How can you change your response to the Ten Commandments?

1. Recognize the holiness of God. At the base of Mt. Sinai, the Israelites had no true concept of God. The sin embedded in their hearts prevented them from obeying God's law and recognizing their need of a savior. "I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45, NKJV).

2. Desire intimacy with God. Abandon all traditional thinking of how to have a relationship with God and just talk to Him. Tell Him your thoughts, feelings, and dreams. Yes, He knows what you are thinking at all times. But He wants to hear from you personally.

3. Value your relationship with your parents. If possible, call your mom or dad, even if just to say hello. Tell them how much you love them and say thank you for being your parents. Make this a tradition.

4. Choose to love your neighbor. Remember the slogan, "acts of random kindness." Live it every day.

Each time I sat at the foot of the Ten Commandments in the Garden of Grace, I was in awe of the enormity of God and His love for me—and the fact that He has not changed. What happens when you sit at the foot of the Ten Commandments?

Thursday
February 20

Free Spirited With God

OPINION

Matt. 22:34-40

As a child I grew up with horses. There's something about watching horses run that gives me a sense of being free-spirited. I often feel that my relationship with God is similar to trying to rein in a wild horse: I'm the horse and God's trying to break me in.

Being independent, self-sufficient, and—with a lump of guilt in my throat—a bit proud even, submitting or being controlled doesn't come easily for me, or many others.

For some, Christianity suggests memories of rigid formalism, piles of rules, and legalistic adherence to strict standards. It can leave some people depressed and guilty from even trying to follow God. But is that God's intention for us?

Repeatedly I am reminded of how imperfect I am. As Paul said, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24, NKJV). The harder I try to do the right things, the more discouraging it is to realize I can never earn my way. I have viewed the law as one more list

Self-help books are some of the hottest items in bookstores.

of things that I need to do right. When you focus on the rights and wrongs of what being a Christian is all about, it's easy to become overwhelmed.

Self-help books are some of the hottest items in bookstores: how to know one's purpose in life, learning how to understand yourself, improving your relationships, overcoming codependency, and a slew of other issues that plague our mental, emotional, and spiritual health. While trying to understand myself and why I respond the way I do, I'm reminded of how uncluttered and basic God's plan for us is.

As I read Matthew 22:37-40, it's as though a clap of thunder rattled through my heart and brain—the simplicity! " "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets' " (NKJV).

This puts it all into perspective. Instead of viewing the law as rules, perhaps it's better to see it as guidelines—a guidebook to the soul, as corny as that sounds. In life we follow thousands of guidelines and boundaries. I compare these boundaries with God's covenant and am more able to understand the way He strives to protect and guide us. After all, how useful is a wild horse? The value of the horse only increases the more broken in it is. God's covenant is for our own good, and this is where I find its value.

Cheryl Wren, College Place, Washington

So . . . Let's Make a Deal

EXPLORATION

Deut. 6:3-5; Jer. 31:31-34

CONCLUDE

God wants us to be complete humans. Throughout biblical history, God set out plans, or covenants, explaining how humanity could be complete.

As incomplete humans, however, we often get the process of covenant confused with its end result. Often this leads us to think that complete humanity is earned by observing rules, like trying to become a rock musician by wearing a certain kind of clothing. But God reminds us over and over again that complete humanity is a natural outgrowth of a real relationship with Him, and that the only way to achieve complete humanity is to "Love Yahweh your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength."

CONSIDER

- Using a computer program to create a schematic of Hebrews 8:7-10.
- Locating and analyzing five Old Testament covenants that God initiated. Analyzing whether they were conditional or nonconditional, short- or long-term, one-sided or two-sided.
- Researching the structure of a Hittite treaty in a library or at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Topics/Contracts/treat01.html>. Monday's portion of this week's lesson says that ancient Hittite treaties are similar to biblical covenants. Compare what you find on this subject to the book of Deuteronomy, and present your findings to your Sabbath School class.
- Reading Jeremiah 31:31-33. Reflect on how God is writing His laws on your heart. Which laws is He writing?
- Preparing and performing at church the song "Change My Heart, Oh God."
- Composing and performing a mime/dance to music that communicates what it means to be completely human.
- Going somewhere specific to find God. Deuteronomy 4 speaks of a time when God's people will be displaced, the covenant will be abandoned, and God will be hard to find. God says, "If from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 4:29, NIV). If God could be found in a *place* in your area, where would He be? Go there, try to find Him.

CONNECT

Deuteronomy 4:1-40.

"Ancient Near Eastern Treaties," Alexander, David and Pat (ed.), *The Lion Handbook to the Bible*.

The Sabbath sign



“ “The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant” ’ ” (Exod. 31:16, NKJV).

Uncle Screwtape's Sabbath Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 2:3; 16:23; Exod. 20:8; 31:13-16; Heb. 4:1-4

My Dear Wormwood:

I note with great displeasure that your patient has begun to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. How absolutely dreadful this is! How could you let this happen?

The Enemy created this Sanctuary in Time from the very beginning. This Sabbath was made for these despicable and altogether loathsome humans. It is their appointment with The Enemy—a time that The Enemy has created so that these creatures can grow in grace with The Enemy. The last thing we want is for your patient to begin to enjoy the Sabbath!

You must distort the meaning and experience of the Sabbath. Long ago we devils confused these obtuse humans about the day, but more important than the *when* of the Sabbath is the *what* of the Sabbath. Under no circumstance should your patient begin to experience the rest, recreation, and renewal that only the Lord of the Sabbath can give.

**You must inveigle and
deceive your patient with
either of two extremes.**

The Enemy has made the Sabbath a covenant sign, an emblem of relationship that points back to Creation and, as a sign of the covenant of grace, points them forward to the final recreation, that is, when The Enemy makes all things new. This is what makes the Sabbath so powerful and so dangerous—and so contemptible for us devils.

You must inveigle and deceive your patient with either of two extremes: a legalistic approach toward Sabbath keeping or a careless indifference toward it. Which you employ matters not, just so long as it succeeds. Burden him with rules. Weigh him down each Sabbath until it's impossible to delight in that day. He must never know that Sabbath is a gift. Discourage him with a burdensome Sabbath.

Or cause him to be prideful in his Sabbath keeping. A false assurance of salvation based on his own exemplary and laudable Sabbath keeping can be useful to us.

I look forward to a complete report shortly. This Sabbath stuff can derail all of our most devious plans and shield against our superlative temptations.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

*With apologies to C. S. Lewis, author of *The Screwtape Letters*, of which this letter is not a part but to which it owes its inspiration.

The Test of Authentic Trust

LOGOS

Gen. 2:3; 16:23; Exod. 20:8; 31:13; Heb. 4:1-4

A Cathedral in Time (Gen. 2:3)

We read in Genesis 2:3 that God did three things on the seventh day of Creation week:

- He *blessed* the 24-hour time period of the seventh day.
- He *sanctified* that time period.
- He *rested* during that time period.

It is God's activity that infuses the seventh-day Sabbath with its uniqueness. The blessing of God makes the seventh day qualitatively different from the other six days of the week. The blessing is in the communion with God. It is the presence of God that makes anything holy. So when God sanctified (set apart for holy use) the seventh day, He intended that communion with Him would occur during this time. This weekly encounter was for the benefit of humanity, for the Sabbath was made for humankind (Mark 2:28).

God also rested on the first Sabbath. He ceased from His labors. He invited Adam and Eve, whom He had created on Friday, also to rest with Him. What was the nature of that rest? Surely Adam and Eve were not in need of physical rest since

**He intended that communion
with Him would occur
during this time.**

they had been created the day before. The Creator invited Adam and Eve to enter into a trusting, dependent, rest-filled relationship with Him. He had created a perfect, beautiful world for the blessing and

benefit of Adam and Eve and their human family. The beauty of the newly created world was a testimony to Adam and Eve that He was worthy of their trust. God knew that the happiness of the human family was dependent on the continuation of that trusting relationship.

Teaching Trust in the Wilderness (Exod. 16:1-36)

The children of Israel had been in Egyptian slavery for more than 400 years and had forgotten that God could be trusted to provide for them. God provided manna for them to eat on a daily basis. For the first six days of the week, they were to gather it and eat it. Any that was kept overnight would spoil. On Friday, the sixth day of the week, they were to gather enough for two days because none would be provided on the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath. The manna that was kept overnight on the sixth day of the week would not spoil. These weekly miracles were designed to inspire trust in God's constant,

watchful care. This story reveals the importance of Sabbath before God gave His law on Sinai.

The Acid Test of Trust (Exod. 20:8-11; 31:12-17)

The Sabbath is a day of rest. It is a day we are to practice depending on God by avoiding gainful employment. This weekly “dependence day” provides us opportunity to practice trust. It is trust in action. It is a weekly test run of the quality of our trust, for if we will trust God to provide for us materially, we will much more likely trust Him for our salvation. For this reason it is a perfect sign of the covenant relationship between Him and His people. It is a sign that He is the Sanctifier of His people. It is He who makes us holy—not we ourselves.

Proof Positive of Salvation by Faith (Heb. 4:1-12)

Sabbath keeping is all about communing with God, receiving insights of His unfathomable love for us, His constant unflinching care, His immutable grace, His overcoming power. Experiencing God as He is frees one from anxious care, from worry, from fear. We enter into His rest. We cease from our works. The Sabbath is proof positive that one is saved by trusting in Christ’s sacrifice and His power to finish the work that He began in us. The Sabbath is proof positive that salvation is not of works but of faith.

REACT

1. What specific activities enhance your communion with God on Sabbath?
2. What specific activities detract from your communion with God on Sabbath?
3. The Sabbath is all about good news—very good news! What can we do to help the people of the world to realize how much God cares for them through this covenant with a promise?
4. Because we have some knowledge about last-day events, how can we as a church be perceived as caring and loving instead of pointing fingers or arrogantly saying, “We told you so”?
5. In today’s society, resting from worry and fear is often more difficult than merely avoiding gainful employment on the Sabbath. List specific ways in which you can rest from anxiety, worry, and fear.
6. Today’s author lists three things God did on the seventh day of Creation week—explain the difference between blessing and sanctification and why the distinction is significant.
7. Define, in both concrete and abstract terms, what it means to “enter into God’s rest.” (If you need help getting started, think about why God chose to institute Sabbath in a world free of sin.)
8. What future does the Sabbath covenant have after the destruction of sin? (Isa. 66:22, 23).

TESTIMONY

Isa. 52:6; Jer. 31:33, 34; Matt. 1:23; Rev. 21:3

This is being written exactly two weeks after September 11, 2001—a day destined to change the world. We will always remember the instant we heard the news—but do you remember your day just before? We now have a glimmer of understanding of how Adam and Eve might have felt that awful Day of the First Sin. One day was wonderful—the next day was not—instantaneous and permanent.

In both cases, Jesus wept. He has always desired to have fellowship with us. “Face-to-face, heart-to-heart communion with his Maker was his high privilege.”¹ Sin changed all that. “The fall of man filled all heaven with sorrow. . . . None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven.”²

Therefore, he made a promise—a covenant—with us. “The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden. . . . The law of God was the basis of this covenant,

which was simply an arrangement for bringing men again into harmony with the divine will, placing them where they could obey God's law.”³ “He is honored when

We will always remember the instant we heard the news.

we love him, and bear testimony to the genuineness of our love by keeping his commandments. He is honored when we set apart the seventh day as sacred and holy. To those who do this the Sabbath is a sign, ‘that they might know,’ God declares, ‘that I am the Lord that sanctify them.’ Sanctification means habitual communion with God. There is nothing so great and powerful as God's love for those who are his children.”⁴

Sin is awful and it produces great evil. Of that we have no doubt since September 11, but Jesus promised something different: “Except for the plan of redemption, eternal separation from God, the darkness of unending night, would have been his. Through the Saviour's sacrifice, communion with God is again made possible.”⁵ “Restored to His presence, man will again, as at the beginning, be taught of God.”⁶

The Day of the First Sin is over. September 11 is over. Any evil day before or since is over. Jesus no longer weeps—He rejoices!

1. *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 343.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 370, 371.

4. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 15, 1906, par. 20.

5. *Education*, p. 28.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

Why the Sabbath Is Holy

EVIDENCE

Genesis 1–2:3

The Bible in Genesis 1–2:3 makes three things clear:

1. The Sabbath was before sin.
2. The weekly cycle ending with the Sabbath day was universal.

Though there are scientific reasons for a 365-day year, a 30-day month, and a 24-hour day, there are seven days in a week only because *God said so!* Atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and infidels must accept that the Bible is the only source for the origin of the seven-day week. All humankind

The Sabbath is a universal symbol of a universal relationship.

observes the same seven-day week. Notice what the *Funk and Wagnall Encyclopedia* has to say about Saturday: "In Sweden . . . Saturday is *Loerdag*, or Lord's Day; and in Denmark and Norway it is *Lordag*. In Spanish it is *el sabado* and in Italian *sabato*, both derived from *sabbath*." This is true for many other languages and countries as well. God designed the Sabbath to be for all humankind.

It's a universal symbol of a universal relationship. It was made for all humanity—not Jews only (Mark 2:27, 28; Exod. 20:10). It comes to all people, all classes, all parts of the earth; none have to come to it. While Buddhists and Muslims and people of other world religions (even Christians) make long annual pilgrimages to their various sacred shrines, the Sabbath, God's great sacred shrine in time, comes to everyone on the planet. It says to each that the Divine Creator and Redeemer of the universe requests the honor of their presence in fellowship with Him. What a God! See Isaiah 58:13, 14.

3. The Sabbath was blessed, sanctified, and made holy 2,500 years before it was reiterated on Mount Sinai.

It is not holy because we keep it holy. It is holy whether or not we keep it holy. In observing its sacredness, we exercise our choice to accept the invitation of a holy God to be His holy people and to enter into fellowship with Him. After 6,000 years of being ignored, it is still just as holy as ever and comes to all humanity everywhere as God's invitation to us to enter into His holiness through fellowship with Him on that day. (See Ezekiel 20:12.)

REACT

1. Could there be sin before Mount Sinai if there was no law until Mount Sinai? Explain your answer (Rom. 7:7).
2. How does God's Word define sin? (1 John 3:4).
3. How was God legally justified in destroying the antediluvian world?

How to Improve Quality Time

HOW-TO

Lev. 16:31; 23:3; Ecclesiastes 3; Isa. 26:3; 58:13

Our Western way of thinking about time tends to emphasize time as a measurement. We tend to think of clocks, calendars, schedules, and To-Do lists. When we frame a particular time, we locate an epoch or an historical figure within certain events or dates. Time is conceived of here as a measured and

numbered empty space that can be filled with events of greater or lesser importance. Thus, the Western paradigm is one of *quantitative* time.

A Hebrew spoke and thought of time as *qualitative*.

On the other hand, a Hebrew spoke and thought of time as *qualitative*. This was clearly and succinctly expressed in Ecclesiastes 3. For the Hebrew, to know the time was not a matter of knowing the date; it was a matter of knowing what kind of time it might be. Was it a time for tears or a time for laughter, a time for war or a time for peace? To misjudge the time in which one lived might prove to be disastrous. To continue to mourn and fast during a time of blessing would be like sowing during harvest time. Time was the quality or mood of events.*

Because of this, the Hebrew of ancient time did not place himself anywhere on a specific date. Instead he located events, places, and times and saw himself as on a journey past these fixed points. It represented a quality of experience, a quality of relationship. Can we not do the same?

Why not try the following:

1. Reflect on ways you can anticipate getting ready for spending quality time in preparation of the Sabbath.
2. Once you enter into the Sabbath hours, how do you spend your actual chronological time?

What makes sense and meaning of qualitative time is ultimately a close relationship with Jesus, because it is He who ordained "the times." The events of history were acts of God, and their sequence depended on the free will of God. Events get their quality and meaning from the Lord of History.

*Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), pp. 73, 74.

Covenant Sign

OPINION

Exod. 20:8

In the fourth commandment, the Creator God gives us a personal invitation to revel in communion with Him. He asks us to “remember the Sabbath day” (Exod. 20:8, KJV) because He blessed and hallowed it. After creating a magnificent world vibrant with color, motion, beauty, and life, our heavenly Father was pleased. Nothing but the best would do for those He loved. He had created a perfect paradise, a masterpiece worthy enough for His created beings to inhabit. Love and power inspired Creation week, culminating in the Sabbath. This special day set aside in sacred significance was the gift of His lavish love.

The Sabbath is a covenant sign spanning the ages from Creation through eternity. As God’s people observe the Sabbath, affirming God’s creative powers and heeding God’s request to observe the Sabbath, they gain special blessings when the Lord of the universe reaches down to spend quality time with His beloved people.

God’s perfect plans in Paradise were thwarted when Adam and Eve sinned. They had to be expelled from their Eden home. How our heavenly Father must have grieved as He shared in their pain of guilt, shame, and isolation. The same love and power that created life and gave the Sabbath, however, provided a back-up plan to rescue those He created should trouble arise in Paradise. And the gift of the Sabbath remained, a comfort and a promise within that isolation—a promise that all was not lost. Paradise could be regained.

**Nothing but the best
would do.**

Even today God asks us to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. To keep anything holy, the observer must also be holy. The same Power that merely spoke to bring light, flora, fauna, dry land, and oceans into existence, is able to justify and sanctify us. We can thus experience that holiness which promises an eternity of Sabbaths and close communion with our Sovereign Father. Sin broke our communion, but the Sabbath bridges the gap. Now “we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV) and can only begin to understand His unconditional love, which not only gave the gift of the Sabbath but also prompted the ultimate Sacrifice. Soon, very soon, we will enter into the eternal Sabbath God has promised. The Lord of the Sabbath longs to return to claim His own. When Satan attacks God’s people as unworthy, Christ says, “I know them *by name*. I have graven them on the palms of my hands.”*

What a glorious day that will be when our physical separation is ended and Sabbaths are shared in face-to-face intimacy.

**The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

EXPLORATION

Isaiah 58

CONCLUDE

The Sabbath is a sign of God's covenant relationship with His people. It is a universal symbol, crossing barriers of language and space. Before sin came into this world, the Sabbath was created. Before the law was given on Mount Sinai, the Israelites were reminded of the Sabbath through the gift of manna. Similarly, modern Sabbath keeping is not about legalism but about experiencing an intimate relationship with God. Keeping it demonstrates our trust in God until the day we enter the eternal Sabbath. Thus the Sabbath is not a quantity of time but a quality of relationship. God's covenant is designed to bring humankind back into communion with Him. The Sabbath demonstrates escaping the world's evil and entering into His original plan: an intimate walk with our Creator. It is all about faith in Jesus, the Man who shares that walk in His garden.

CONSIDER

- Inviting a Sunday-keeping Christian to "swap" Sabbaths: you keep his or her Sunday with him for a day and he or she keeps a Sabbath with you.
- Beginning a discussion line about legalism and Sabbath keeping in a Christian chat-room.
- Making a special meal for Sabbath dinner and going to church looking for people to invite. (Ask only people who can't return the favor.)
- Researching the word for "Saturday" in other languages.
- Using a colored pencil to chain reference proof texts about the Sabbath in your Bible.
- Keeping the strictest Sabbath you can—and then using the Bible to evaluate how successful you were at Sabbath keeping.
- Committing to do some volunteer service for someone this Sabbath: deliver meals, do yardwork, visit a prison, take a friend's toddlers to the park, help the youth department.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 3.

Des Cummings, Jr., *Original Love: Experience Peace, Meaning and Harmony Through Sabbath Rest*; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*.

A Tug at the Heartstrings



“The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31, NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

John 8:32

A young Adventist boy decided to leave the church. His mother, to whom he looked for support, materially and spiritually, had emigrated to Canada. He felt alone. He never had a close relationship with his father. Now he needed some sort of solace and comfort.

More than that, he felt that he had been coerced into church all those years. *I'm a big boy now*, he said to himself. *I don't need church anymore.*

Unfortunately, when he stopped, his friends at church did not come to see him.

**As time passed, he became
a hardened drug-pusher
and user.**

It was now as if he were not missed, and he felt rejected even further. *Nobody cares*, he thought. His loneliness finally came to an end though. He began to associate with some of his non-Christian

friends, who indulged in all kinds of destructive behavior—drugs, crime, alcohol, and so on.

By his association with these friends, this boy (by now a teenager) lost his ambitions one by one. First he experimented with cigarettes, then on to marijuana. As time passed, he became a hardened drug-pusher and user. He carried and used guns and prided himself that he was now a hardened criminal.

But there was still a longing deep in his soul. He dabbled in many religions, hoping to quell the haunting in his conscience, but to no avail. There was still a tugging at his heartstrings to return not to church but to God.

Eventually his drug-pushing career came to an abrupt end. He had been playing a cat-and-mouse game with the police. This led to his arrest and conviction on drug possession charges and a two-year sentence in prison.

One day he had an altercation with another prisoner during which he almost lost his life. When he was returned to his cell, it struck him where he was: four walls, the controlled lifestyle, the incarceration. His past life flashed before him. He saw himself at Sabbath School; he heard his mother's voice praying, and tears began to stream down his face. For the first time in 13 years, he came to himself and he knelt down and prayed.

That day God heard his prayer and answered it. From that day on his life was changed. He was in prison yet he was free, because "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32, NKJV).

When he was released, he returned to his old church and was baptized. Today he is a soul-winner. Today he is studying for the ministry. Today he is writing this article.

A Better Way

EVIDENCE

Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8-13

The sovereign God of this universe, though a God of justice, is equally a God abounding in grace and mercy. "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22, 23, NIV).

The faithfulness of God is colorfully portrayed in His dealings with His chosen children as outlined in the Old Testament. At Creation God entered into a covenant relationship with Adam and Eve. They were promised the greatest divine blessings if they functioned within the stipulations and parameters of the covenant. As we all know, they failed miserably and thus the human race was plunged into the abyss of sin with all its consequences. Death, complete annihilation, and eternal separation from God were the just demands of God's law.

Yet God in His graciousness and mercy activated the covenant of redemption, which was agreed upon within the Godhead before the foundation of the world. This

plan of redemption was foreshadowed in the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, and the covenant at Sinai. The Sinaitic covenant can be specifically referred to as the Old Covenant. The

This plan of redemption was foreshadowed in the covenant with Noah.

sanctuary services and its rituals pointed forward to the life, ministry, and sacrifice of Christ. These symbols or types which were a means to an end became ends in themselves for the children of Israel. They became legalistic in their approach to spirituality and rebellious in their approach to their relationship with God. They thus failed to experience the intended blessing of the covenant of law (Sinaitic) because they failed to encounter and surrender to the loving God of the covenant of redemption.

They were now doomed to face the curses of the covenant of law. These curses are clearly portrayed by the prophet Jeremiah. Ultimately they would be exiled and lose their position as God's chosen people. But, glory to God, the covenant of redemption was still in effect; thus, God, through Jeremiah, promised to make a new covenant with His children (Jer. 31:31). The new covenant was the covenant of grace, a better way, because in this covenant the symbols of the old covenant would meet "the reality" and the types would meet the Antitype.

Jeremiah prophesied that a renewed covenant would be confirmed with the children of God. This covenant was fulfilled in the life and ministry of Christ (Heb. 8:8-13). It makes the old covenant obsolete (verse 13). Through the merits of the perfect life and ministry of Christ, we can come boldly to the throne of God and find mercy.

The Gift of God's Amazing Grace

LOGOS

Isa. 56:6, 7; Jer. 31:31-34; Hos. 2:18-20; Heb. 8:6; 10:4

A thorough investigation of the Bible and the writings of Ellen White on the concept of the new covenant would affirm that a more appropriate term for this covenant is "renewed covenant." The basic elements or principles of this covenant are the same as those of the old covenant. It can be viewed as a continuation of the old covenant. In essence it is the clearest expression of God's amazing gift of grace to humanity.

Several synonyms are used in the Bible to express the experience of the new covenant. These include: everlasting covenant (Isa. 61:8; Jer. 32:37-41; 50:4; Ezekiel 16) and covenant of peace (Isa. 54:8-10; Ezek. 34:25; 37:24-28). It is also referred to as a *better covenant* in the book of Hebrews. In the new covenant, our loving Lord, through the sacrificial ministry of Christ and the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit, unveils His glorious grace and His marvelous mercy.

Through this covenant, God demonstrates His relentless pursuit of lost humanity, His infinite love for fallen man, and His insatiable desire to reconcile humankind to Himself. This is the essence of the covenant of redemption that the Godhead decided upon before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-6; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:20), of

Through this covenant, God demonstrates His relentless pursuit of lost humanity.

which Christ was the surety—the One who would bear the full punishment of sin if the human race fell (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 7:22) and the Head and Mediator—the Representative Progenitor of the human race and the One

who executes and fulfills the covenant (John 5:30; 6:34; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22).

This theme was the basis of the covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:1-8; 11:1-9), the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18), and the Sinaitic covenant (Exodus 20; 24). These covenants were all derivatives from or modifications of the original covenant of redemption made among the members of the Godhead.

Similarities and Differences Between the Old and New Covenants (Heb. 8:6; 10:4)

Though the new covenant can be considered a renewal or restating of the old covenant, in many ways it is different from the old covenant. The major similarities can be summarized as follows: (a) God is the Author of both—only He could establish such covenants; (b) in both covenants the contracting parties are the same—God and humankind; (c) the essential conditions and promises are the

same; (d) in both cases eternal life is the ultimate promise; and (e) both covenants aim at ultimately bringing glory to God.*

Despite these similarities, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that as a result of the ministry of Christ, the new covenant is a “better covenant” (8:6). Whereas in the old covenant the sanctuary and its services foreshadowed and were, at best, inadequate representations of the ministry and sacrifice of Christ, the new covenant is distinguished by the very presence of the person of immanuel, God with us. This new covenant, through the ministry of Jesus Christ, offers us a High Priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15); a High Priest from a better priesthood (7:24, 25); a more perfect sanctuary (9:11, 24); and a better sacrifice (verse 28) “because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10:4, NIV), but “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (verse 14, NIV).

Blessings of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Hos. 2:18-20)

The new covenant is one of the greatest blessings that we as God’s people have today. It is the foundation of our salvation experience, the core of our faith encounter with our Savior, and the heart of Christian growth and development through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Through the new covenant God promises: (a) to put His law in our minds and write it on our heart (Jer. 31:33)—this is the internal transformational work of the Holy Spirit; (b) to be our God and we will be His people (verse 33)—this promise encompasses every possible blessing for this life and the life to come; (c) to make Himself known (verse 34)—God desires the most intimate relationship with His children, He is indeed a personal God; (d) to forgive our wickedness and remember our sins no more (verse 34)—God’s promise of complete cleansing and pardon from our unrighteousness.

God in His justice, love, and compassion, wants to enter into a lifelong, eternal covenant relationship with us (Hos. 2:18-20). He is willing to forgive and forget our past mistakes. Though we have caused Him great pain, His desire is to give us a new start, a second chance. Since Jesus paid the full price for our sins, through the new covenant God offers us the wonderful gift of His grace. All He asks in return is that we love Him supremely and our neighbors selflessly.

The blessings of the new covenant are not only offered to those of the household of faith, but to “‘all nations’” (Isa. 56:7, NIV). God cares for every individual. His gift of grace is for one and all. No one person or group has a copyright on God’s grace (56:6).

The new covenant is an opportunity for the Word to become flesh in our lives; for us to experience the rich blessings of Immanuel—God with us; for us to come boldly before God’s throne of grace and find mercy; and for us to experience the daily transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

*L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), p. 272.

Tuesday
March 4

The New Covenant and You

TESTIMONY

Isa. 55:3

**The law of God existed
before Creation.**

“From the opening of the great controversy it has been Satan’s purpose to misrepresent God’s character and to excite rebellion against His law, and this work appears to be crowned with success. The multitudes give ear to Satan’s deceptions and set themselves against God. But amid the working of evil, God’s purposes move steadily forward to their accomplishment; to all created intelligences He is making manifest His justice and benevolence. Through Satan’s temptations the whole human race have become transgressors of God’s law, but by the sacrifice of His Son a way is opened whereby they may return to God. Through the grace of Christ they may be enabled to render obedience to the Father’s law. Thus in every age, from the

midst of apostasy and rebellion, God gathers out a people that are true to Him—a people ‘in whose heart is His law.’ Isaiah 51:7.”¹

The law of God existed before Creation. After the transgressions of Adam, the principles of the law were definitely arranged and expressed to meet humanity in its fallen condition. Christ, in counsel with His Father, instituted the system of sacrificial offerings: that death, instead of being immediately visited upon the transgressor, should be transferred to a victim that should prefigure the great and perfect offering of the Son of God. Through the blood of this victim, humanity looked forward by faith to the blood of Christ, which would atone for the sins of the world.

“The terms of the ‘old covenant’ were, Obey and live: ‘If a man do, he shall even live in them’ (Ezekiel 20:11; Leviticus 18:5); but ‘cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.’ Deuteronomy 27:26. The ‘new covenant’ was established upon ‘better promises’—the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God to renew the heart and bring it into harmony with the principles of God’s law.”²

Though the sanctuary of the old covenant was built by men’s hands, the sanctuary of the new covenant is in heaven. (See Hebrews 9:11.) The high priest of the old covenant was ordained from the sons of Levi, but under the new covenant, we have a High Priest who “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. Heb. 7:25.”³

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 338.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 372.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 166.

Can't Refuse This — or Can You?

HOW-TO

2 Cor. 5:7

Have you ever wondered how you were going to pass an exam? You just don't understand the course; your tutor is not much help because he appears to be in your position, and you don't have the extra money to take extra classes. Well, how would you feel if someone offers you a deal you couldn't refuse? The person has an excellent knowledge of the course you are pursuing and he offers to assist and teach you for as many hours as you wish—free of charge! And above all, he promises to help you in the exam room itself. Too good to be true, isn't it?

Well, this is a simple illustration of the new covenant Jesus Christ has made with us. It's a deal that would seem irresistible, yet so many of us refuse it. Christ has done all the hard work; He sacrificed His life so we can experience abundant life. He has promised to teach us, to guide us into all truth, and best of all, to write

He is right there to help.

His laws in our hearts. Then, when the really difficult situations arise, He is right there to help. And what must we do in order to seal the deal? Just accept it!

But there are stages we must attain before we can receive the full benefits of this deal.

Here are the stages:

1. See yourself as a sinner in need of a Redeemer. We must recognize that we all have sinned and fallen short of what God expects of us (Rom. 3:23). We must then realize that it is impossible for us of our own selves to escape the pit of sin into which we have fallen. Therefore, we need a Redeemer.

2. Confess your faults to God. Christ is anxious for us to ask for forgiveness because He is more than willing to forgive us and cleanse us from all impurities (1 John 1:9). The Lord does not expect us to go and do some extraordinary thing for us to have forgiveness. All we have to do is ask.

3. Consecrate yourself totally to God. He wants your entire heart. He wants the first place in your life. For us to experience this new covenant and God's writing His laws in our hearts, we must first be His children and we are not until we are *totally* His.

4. Walk with God daily. Experiencing this new covenant is not an overnight phenomenon. It is a daily struggle and does not happen in minutes or hours. We must daily die to self and let His Spirit live out His will in our lives.

God Changed Something He Designed?

OPINION

Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6

As children we learned that God never changes. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. Therefore, His words, His laws, yes, even His covenants should remain the same. So why does the Bible speak of a new covenant? This implies that there was an original one.

Why did God change it? Wasn't it good enough? Could something designed by God not be perfect?

It is true that a covenant is made between two parties. In this case God made a covenant with us. Sadly, we did not keep this covenant with God. When this covenant was broken, God could have done one of two things: left us to perish or Himself paid the price for our sins. Thank God He chose the latter. He did send His only Son to die for our sins. Because of this, we today have the promise of a better covenant ratified by the blood of Jesus.

In a sense one can probably say that the covenant has been adapted—not changed. So there's no need to panic and say that God eradicated something He created. God's covenant still centers on His unconditional love—His grace and His mercy for us. And as Hebrews 8:6 tells us, it has been built upon better promises since it has been made available to

We sometimes take too lightly such issues pertaining to our salvation.

those who have broken the covenant, forgiveness, if he confesses his sins.

Whether initial talk of a new covenant evokes surprise ("I never even heard of an 'old covenant.'"), dismay ("Why speak of these complicated things?"), or excitement ("God is such an awesome God!"), the new covenant holds important keys for our salvation. In fact, even though the name was not familiar to us, we have all been partaking of this treat that God designed, especially for us today.

We sometimes take too lightly such issues pertaining to our salvation. When we have a better understanding of what God has done for us through His covenant, however, our relationship with Him can better flourish.

REACT

1. Do I automatically receive the new covenant when I accept Christ? Explain your answer.
2. In what ways can the new covenant transform or impact on the relativity and the antinomianism (lawlessness) of contemporary society?

I Am His and He Is Mine

EXPLORATION

Heb. 8:8-12

CONCLUDE

The new covenant is not a rejection of all the old covenant stood for. It's not the tossing aside of the Ten Commandments and our need to obey them. Rather it is an uplifting of God's law even higher because Satan's claim that the law could not be kept has been proved wrong. Jesus accomplished the requirements of the law on our behalf.

In the Old Testament the sacrificial lamb died for the sins of the people. But Jesus' work on earth went beyond His death. He also rose again in victory and ascended to heaven to continue His work in securing our salvation. And now He offers to live in us and through us so that we will not only keep His commandments, but also find our greatest joy in doing so.

CONSIDER

- Rereading Mark's story in Sabbath's portion of this week's lesson. Using symbols, drawings, or colors, sketch out the progression Mark went through before he finally came to God.
- Viewing the video *Forrest Gump* and consider the role of the unspoken lifelong covenant made when Jenny invites Forrest to sit next to her on the school bus.
- Journaling your thoughts on what it would mean in your life if God wrote His law on your heart.
- Interviewing three people and asking what Hebrews 8:10 means to them. (You may want to include individuals in different age levels, such as preteen, young adult, and senior citizen.)
- Listing as many different kinds of covenants that a person is likely to enter into during his or her lifetime. Arrange them in order from most important to least. What criteria did you use to rank them?
- Composing a song based on Jeremiah 31:33, 34.
- Taking a walk in nature to learn more about dependence. Keep in mind that accepting the new covenant means that we depend on God for the power to follow His laws. Look for examples in nature that portray the idea of dependence.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 32.

Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God*, chap. 7.

A Sanctuary from sin



“He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance”
(Heb. 9:15, NRSV).

Forgetting the Cold

INTRODUCTION

Titus 2:14

I'm cold! I'm in church at the college where I study, attending the Week of Prayer meeting and talking with a friend, when the enthusiastic pastor catches my attention while speaking about sin and my incapacity to overcome it if I try to do it alone. Then he quickly emphasizes the value of Christ in my life.

His words made me quit talking for a moment, and I even forgot the cold. I started to reflect, and it came to mind my condition of life in relation to the Lamb of God. I thought about the objective of Jesus' life on earth as my Savior. His sacrifice is so much greater than that of the animals of the Old Testament. It is a sacrifice offered a long time ago upon a cross, when He died in my place as He shed His own blood. His efficient and powerful blood is capable of cleansing my life of the wrong habits that unfortunately I haven't forsaken yet. It was offered for every sinner—living or who were yet to live—from the beginning of the world to its final consummation.

**The salvation plan
fascinates me!**

The salvation plan fascinates me! I kept thinking and reflecting about this until my friend called me to reality again.

Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant. A covenant doesn't mean a mere agreement. It's an adjustment, a combination of very important promises. Therefore, Jesus still intercedes for me and for you today in a heavenly sanctuary especially prepared for the remission of our sins. By His death He has freed us from a world in which perdition and defeat were certain. He has brought us redemption, victory, and the promise of an eternal heritage. Thinking it over, I realize it's the first time I have ever heard that a murder could be so meaningful!

It isn't easy to understand such a great love. But the acceptance of this sacrifice helps us to recognize His will, and thus tune ourselves in to the melody of the Christian life and continue in the right way "while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:13, 14, NIV).

Sunday
March 9

Bringing God to Us

LOGOS Heb. 8:1-6

Have you ever prayed, thinking that at that very moment Jesus was hearing your prayer up there in the heavenly sanctuary? If you've never thought of that, make plans to do it next time you pray: fix your thoughts on the person of Christ ministering in the heavenly sanctuary on your behalf.

Sooner or later, it varies from person to person, the day arrives when you begin to be attracted by someone in a special way. It's the beginning of a new reality in life. First the relationship, some time later the engagement, and then comes the wedding. The Bible teaches us that the wedding, or marriage, as the most intimate relationship between a man and a woman, was designed by God as a covenant ("pact" and "alliance" are other renderings of the Hebrew *berith*). Like other covenants that appear in the Bible, it has promises, conditions, penalties, pacts, and a period of validity.¹

The Tabernacle of the Covenant (Lev. 26:11)

In 1997, for research purposes, I attended Andrews University, in the United States. About six thousand miles separated me from my wife, who stayed in Brazil. The greatest obstacle was not the separation time, but the distance. It's a sacrifice to be far from people we love.

A natural aspect of the marriage covenant is the wish to be near our loved one. Thus the Lord says, "I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you" (Lev. 26:11, NKJV). God loves all of His children, and does not wish to be distant from them even one minute. For this reason, He ordered Moses to build a tabernacle. Through the ceremonies of the earthly tabernacle, the people of Israel could understand the right way of relating to God through His covenant, that is, through the promises, conditions, penalties, and pacts.

The tabernacle was "small, being not more than fifty-five feet in length, and eighteen in breadth and height."² But it was well appointed. The walls of acacia wood were overlaid with gold. Inside the first division of the tabernacle, called the Holy Place, was the table of shewbread, the altar of incense, both overlaid with

**Very soon Jesus will return
to consummate His
"wedding."**

gold as well, and the candlestick made of one solid piece of gold. The shewbread foreshadowed the spiritual Bread, Jesus Christ; the candlestick represented God's people as the moral and spiritual light of the world; but in a higher sense, it also indicated Jesus Christ as the Light of the world (John 9:5). And the altar of incense stood for

continuous intercession similar to the way in which the altar of burnt offering represented continuous atonement. Inside the second division of the tabernacle was the ark of the covenant containing the tables of stone with the Ten Commandments. The cover of the ark was solid gold, called the mercy seat, the symbol of God's mercy.

The most important part of the daily ministry in the earthly tabernacle was the ceremony conducted in behalf of sinners. The repentant sinner would bring his offering to the tabernacle door, and, placing his hand over the head of the little animal that substituted for him, would confess his sins. By so doing, he transferred, figuratively, his sins to the innocent animal. The animal was then killed by the very individual who brought him, and the blood was taken inside the tabernacle by the priest. Through this ceremony, sins were transferred to the tabernacle. But the most important part of the annual service in the tabernacle was the Atonement Day. On this solemn day, through a ceremony involving sacrifices and blood manipulation in the Holy and in the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary purification was performed by the high priest.³

The offering and sacrifice system in the earthly tabernacle was intended to show through symbols the "love of God revealed in Christ—in the suffering, dying victim, who took upon Himself the sin of which man was guilty, the innocent being made sin for us."⁴

The Sanctuary of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:1-6; 9:22, 24)

The wonderful news today is that Jesus Christ "did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence" (Heb. 9:24, NIV). How good it is to know that if we commit any sin and seek forgiveness, we will quickly find it, because Jesus Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary to present before God His merits in our behalf.

Although Adam broke the covenant with God through his sin of disobedience (Hos. 6:7), God remained faithful to His promises to continue loving His sons and daughters. Standing as a proof of this was the tabernacle system, later Solomon's temple, and today the ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Very soon Jesus will return to consummate His "wedding" with His church. Just like a bridegroom who can hardly wait for the ceremony, Jesus fervently wishes to be forever with His cherished bride—the church. But while He doesn't come, He continues to intercede for us in the heavenly sanctuary. Praised be the Lord!

1. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 118–122.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 347.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 354, 355.

4. *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 233.

New Covenant or New Beginning?

TESTIMONY

Heb. 9:15

When a courtship or a marriage isn't well and the couple through dialogue restore the relationship, there is a new covenant and certainly a new beginning.

A new covenant was established also by Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. There are biblical proofs of the existence of this sanctuary in heaven. Moses contemplated it when God showed it to him as a model to build the earthly sanctuary (Exod. 25:9, 40). Psalm 102:19 and Hebrews 8:5 testify of its existence too.

In ancient Israel the earthly sanctuary was intended to teach the whole sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His work for human salvation. Yet there are differences between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary.

The earthly sanctuary was: (a) a model built by men (Exod. 25:8); (b) ministered by a human priesthood (Heb. 8:5); (c) a shadow of the true one, transitory (Heb. 10:1).

The heavenly sanctuary was: (a) the original one built by God (Heb. 8:1, 2); (b) ministered by a divine Priesthood (Heb. 8:2); (c) the true and eternal sanctuary (Heb. 9:24).

Both the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary involve a priesthood and a sacrificial lamb. In the earthly one, the animal was sacrificed for the remission of the penitent's sins. In the heavenly sanctuary, the Lamb to be sacrificed is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, NIV).

The heavenly sanctuary had its Lamb sacrificed at the death of the Lord Jesus. Since the intercessory death of Jesus, the earthly sacrificial system was abolished, and a new covenant was established. In this new covenant, human priests are no longer necessary because we now have a perfect High Priest as described in Hebrews 4:15. "The earthly priesthood ceased; but we look to Jesus, the minister of the new covenant."¹

The new covenant and new beginning walk side by side. The great enemy of our souls wants to conceal this wonderful truth; however, there is a secret for preventing it

The new covenant and new beginning walk side by side.

from happening to us: "Looking unto Jesus, we are safe. . . . In constantly beholding Him, we 'are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'"²

Our Lord wants to initiate a new covenant and a new beginning too. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV).

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 166.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 72.

A More Excellent Mediator

EVIDENCE

Heb. 8:6

In Hebrews 8–10:18, the author describes the work that Christ is doing now in the heavenly sanctuary, the center of the new covenant. In Hebrews 8:1-6, Jesus' ministry and the need of this covenant are interconnected.

Verses 1-6 compare the old priesthood order (Lev. 26:11,12) and the old earthly tabernacle (Exodus 25–40) with the new priesthood of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. It also reinforces the fact that we have an appropriate High Priest, who is ministering now in His eternal sanctuary, made by the Lord Himself.

Whenever I think about Christ as our Mediator, I think of Him as the covenant Mediator. Since a covenant involves two contracting parties, and the High Priest's role was to mediate, I see Him as an intermediary, whose task is to maintain the parties in communion with one another. In a case in which God is one of the parties and humanity the other, it seems to me that the covenant initiative is always unilateral. I am always the one who breaks the covenant, and Christ the One who always intercedes in my behalf.

Humanity has distanced itself more and more every day from God's ideals.

No angel in heaven, no blood of lambs or any other animal, could ever redeem a single lost soul. Only someone with God's attributes would be worthy to be the sacrifice for the redemption of humankind. I like to think that whenever God looks at us, He doesn't see our faulty character, but He sees us covered with the perfection revealed in the life and sacrifice of Jesus for us.

Our age has been secularized. Humanity has distanced itself more and more every day from God's ideals. This shared secular viewpoint is enough to unite us in despair. The shared secular viewpoint provides no hope. For this reason the author of Hebrews presents Christ as the High Priest at the heavenly sanctuary, because only the assurance that our Mediator is the most excellent One can bring us peace and hope.

REACT

1. Explain what you see as the roles of Jesus and God the Father in the heavenly sanctuary.
2. When did Jesus' role of Mediator begin?
3. What information do Hebrews 9:22 and Romans 6:23 give us about sin and its consequences?

HOW-TO

Heb. 9:24

Jesus Christ is our High Priest because He triumphed. He didn't sin. Many people question whether Jesus was tempted in the ways we are tempted today. But the nature of the temptation is always the same; it may change its place, person, time, custom, and form; however, it will always present the same question: "Will you do God's will or not?"

Christ has the merit to be our High Priest. He began His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 with the investigative judgment. We must not fear this judgment

The Judgment Day is for those who didn't accept Christ's sacrifice.

because it isn't condemnation (Rom. 8:1), but confirmation of the services that Christ provides as the intermediary of the redeemed in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:23, 24). Christ's merits allow us to come

freely to Him as our Savior.

We can enter into the Holy Place. God's promise is that there is no condemnation. The Judgment Day is for those who didn't accept Christ's sacrifice, which opened to us the sanctuary doors (2 Pet. 2:9). You can enter the Holy Place, the first compartment of the sanctuary, where just the priests entered. By faith in Christ you can enter now and see the symbolic furniture:

1. Candlestick: The light of the Holy Spirit, which gives us spiritual discernment and enables us to enlighten the world as we testify to our neighbors (Matt. 5:14-16).

2. Shewbread table: Our special communion with Jesus, the Bread of Life, who feeds us through His Word and strengthens us each day (John 8:32-35).

3. Altar of incense: Where the incense was burned for people's sins, a reminder for us to pray for God's intercession for our neighbor (Phil. 1:3, 4).

4. Ark of the covenant: The ultimate symbol of the covenant, of the communion, of the intimacy with the Lord, when we feel His empowering presence in our lives forever.

Why not make the service of the sanctuary into something practical in your everyday life? You can imagine yourself inside it, making your home, your own room, or any other place in your house into one of the compartments of the sanctuary.

Imagine yourself at the courtyard. Confess before the altar and be washed clean of your sins. Enter into the Holy Place and see Christ's blood which will move you to true repentance. After that, Jesus will ask you to enter into the Holy of Holies and to receive the ultimate forgiveness in God's presence. That is the essence of the new covenant.

Bilateral Salvation

OPINION

Heb. 7:26, 27

When I consider the message of the sanctuary, I feel that it's most interesting that Christ is at the same time the High Priest and the Lamb. How can we understand this paradox? How can someone offer a sacrifice—which is Himself?

On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked New York and Washington. More than 3,000 people died at the hands of suicidal men. These men gave their own lives for a cause thought to be the highest possible, in utter disregard of the innocent lives that would be taken through their deaths. It is an unforgettable tragedy that raised debates all around the world, a testimony of the imminent end of time. In my country, although so far from all that happened in America, I saw how astonished people were as they watched the violence on TV.

We are by tradition a peaceful and cheerful nation, and many prayers were said for the families of the victims and for all the American nation. For the entire world it was very difficult to understand why such a thing had happened. Only the irrationality and cruelty of the human race could execute such a perverse plan. Things like that have happened throughout history, when in so many wars and conflicts nationalist ideals made men give their lives for the cause for which they fought.

But Christ made a superior plan that brought us salvation: He gave His own life that we could all have eternal life (Heb. 9:11, 12). Nothing can be compared to this! Humankind could never imagine so perfect a plan!

In the Old Testament sanctuary, the high priest sacrificed a lamb as an intercessionary offering for the sins of the people because the people are the ones who must die! (Rom. 3:23). Being a sinner also, the high priest was an interceding instrument used by God to purify His people of the sins through the sacrificial offerings. That was the old covenant.

**Humankind could never
imagine so perfect a plan!**

In the new covenant, through His own sacrifice, Jesus becomes the very Lamb offered for the remission of the sins of humanity (Heb. 9:13, 14). But He didn't remain dead as the lambs of the Old Testament did! He was resurrected to return to the Father and again intercedes for our sins, now as the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, unique and irreplaceable. At the same time, He is indeed the intercessory Offering and the offering Intercessor who gives us salvation and eternal life.

REACT

Why is death a necessity in order to establish the new covenant? (Heb. 9:15, 22; Rom. 3:23).

He's a 24/7 Kind of God

EXPLORATION

Exod. 25:8; 2 Cor. 6:16, 18; Rev. 21:3

CONCLUDE

Many comparisons can be made in regards to our relationship with God, but perhaps the most common and most effective is that of marriage. When we love someone, we want to be near them. That is what God desires for us. From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, God has desired to be near us. The earthly tabernacle was a way for God to dwell among the children of Israel all the time. In the heavenly sanctuary God is endeavoring to bring us home so that we might dwell with Him for eternity.

God waits, in the heavenly and original sanctuary, for us to uphold our part of the bargain. Regardless of the time of day or night, He is there patiently waiting. Through Christ we become a new creation, and we get to take part in the new covenant and a whole new beginning.

CONSIDER

- Making a model of the earthly sanctuary for a younger person or for a lower division Sabbath School class.
- Performing a dramatic skit on what it must have felt like to bring a sacrificial lamb to the sanctuary.
- Calculating into modern measurements how large the earthly sanctuary was and draw a comparison to some nearby landmark.
- Writing a modern parable in which an application is made between the aspects of the earthly sanctuary and our everyday life. (See this week's "How-To" article.)
- Viewing the video *Braveheart*. Think about the way in which sacrifice is portrayed in this film. In what way is William Wallace's ultimate sacrifice similar to—and different from—that of Jesus?
- Reading this week's lesson to see if your viewpoint has changed in regard to the heavenly sanctuary. If so, why not describe that experience in a journal entry, detailing your experience as you shifted from one viewpoint to another and how the love of God has changed and impacted your life.
- Painting or drawing a picture that expresses your emotional response to the fact that Jesus died for our sins and is currently in the process of mediating on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chaps. 30–32.

Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, book 2, chap. 21.

Covenant **Faith**



“That no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith’ ” (Gal. 3:11, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

Gen.15:6

I scarcely slept the night before.

Does hanging over the edge of a cliff with only a single rope to hold you sound like fun? I have a fear of heights, which means I am especially scared of such exciting activities as rock climbing or rappeling. When the chance to take a rappeling course came, I was not enthusiastic. In fact, I was in a state of fear for several weeks. One of the teachers demonstrated the strength of the ropes used; he attached a large mass to one end of an old rope and started to cut through the fibers. The rope broke only when a small number of rope fibers remained

uncut. This demonstration didn't provide me with a great boldness to conquer the largest cliff face I could find. I was reassured that the rope would hold me as I scrambled down a cliff face. But my faith was still sorely tested to believe I could rappel.

The big day came and I was so scared I scarcely slept the night before. The rock face was about 10 meters in height, and I had to take that first step over the edge into the unknown. It was then I had to have faith in the rope to act against the force of gravity, to believe the teachers and trust in their word. With trepidation I slowly descended the cliff to reach the bottom and the safety of the ground. After a short rest, I performed several more descents, each time becoming more confident.

The story of Abraham is one of great faith and also of great trials. God had repeatedly promised him children who would inherit the land, who would become a great nation (Gen. 12:1-7). As the years passed, Abraham became older and I am sure he doubted this promise many times. However, a time comes with a change in attitude as shown in Genesis 15:6: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (NIV).

I consider my faith to be like this descent over the cliff—I want to have control of my life, to have it all worked out and no worries. But there are many times that we must have faith in God and enter into the unknown. This can be the scariest time of our lives. By His grace, however, we can get through our life journey to heaven. By faith we can go over the edge into the unknown and believe His promises. And just like Abraham, we, too, can be credited with righteousness.

Promises, Promises, and More Promises

EVIDENCE

Gen. 15:6; Gal. 6:14; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19

The Greeks had trouble finding a good word to use for the Hebrew word “covenant.” They selected a Greek word that means “will” or “testament.” Hence we now speak of the Old Testament and New Testament, though Old Covenant and New Covenant could be said to be more accurate.¹

The new covenant is an agreement between God and humanity in which humanity would receive righteousness and forgiveness of sins through the intercession of Christ (Heb. 8:8, 13; 12:24). The old covenant was given to Abram, that his seed would become a great nation (Gen. 12:2) and that they would inherit Canaan (15:18).

What differentiated Abram from other men? He had faith. He lived circa 1900 B.C. and was very much an old man when God promised him a son. Instead of doubting, Abram “believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6, NKJV).

Abram’s faith and childlike trust in God did not make him righteous; rather, the Lord “counted it to him for righteousness” (verse 6, NKJV, emphasis supplied). For the first time these important concepts, faith and justification, are brought together. Here for the first time the full importance of faith is brought to view. Here also for the first time, imputed righteousness is mentioned.²

**Abram’s faith and childlike
trust in God did not make
him righteous.**

It is obvious that Abram had no righteousness (Rom. 3:10) until it was credited to him by God. Abram was a sinner and needed redemption, as does every other human being; but when righteousness was imputed to him, mercy and grace were also extended, effecting the pardon of his sin and bringing the rewards of righteousness.³

What chance do we have of obtaining that righteousness? We just need to believe; we need to have faith. “Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.”⁴

1. *The New Webster’s Bible Dictionary and Concordance.*

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 312.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 126.

Monday
March 17

Look Toward Heaven

LOGOS

Gen. 15:6; Gal. 6:14; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19

One of my most vivid memories of a childhood in Australia is of gazing up into the night sky. Even now those southern skies are amazingly clear and crowded with stars at night. Back then I took special pleasure in spotting the distinctive southern cross formation. And always that multilayered night sky reminded me of the immensity of God's creation. It early told me that I am not the center of my own universe, much as my childlike self-centeredness might insist to the contrary.

Early stargazers like Galileo have gone down in history as challenging the narrow religious orthodoxy of the day. But in reality they gave substance to an expanding concept of the immensity of God's design. And even in our day, the most recent report from the Hubble telescope and other space probes is of a universe whose margins sweep further away from us in an ever-expanding focus of light.

No doubt Abraham had his share of star-gazing on the clear skies outside the city of Ur. He surely gazed searchingly, with a hope to discover a sight of the God who beckoned him on by a still, small voice.

And that Voice came to this desert chieftain one night with a very simple message: " 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward'" (Gen. 15:1, NKJV). That was the message. The rest of the encounter is details of how that would be accomplished: the promise of an heir—a posterity; the reminder of God's leading in the past as proof;

We are fearfully and wonderfully saved.

the ritual to sanctify and verify the divine favor; the prophecy that in spite of a 400-year enslavement his seed would inherit the land.

"Look toward heaven," God directed the now troubled patriarch. Could he number the stars? No. But he could experience in his life and through his posterity the limitless signs of God's favor. And a covenant, or agreement, was forged. God's promise and Abraham's acceptance "counted as righteousness."

Millennia later the apostle Paul mused on this encounter and arrived at a wonderful conclusion: "It depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law [i.e., recipients of the oracles of Sinai] but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us)" (Rom. 4:16, NRSV).

Paul had spent his share of desert nights searching the skies for the God of Abraham. And he had heard Him as much in the promises given to "Father Abraham" as in the Voice on the Damascus road. Like Abraham, he was on a journey to find God. "Walk by the Spirit," he enjoined, by way of attitude on that pilgrimage (Gal.

5:16, NASB). "If you are led by the Spirit," he explained, "you are not under the Law" (verse 18, NASB). The law would damn all who live the "works of the flesh" (verse 19, NKJV). But the "fruit of the Spirit" (things like love, joy, peace, patience) "against such there is no law" (verse 23, NKJV).

Read those words and then look up into the pure sky toward God and the Source of the seminal promise to Abraham, and it does make sense. God, to Abraham, was giving all of us the opportunity to join the family of heaven.

The apostle Peter underscores this most interestingly in his first letter. He writes at some length of "the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you" (1 Pet. 1:10, NIV), then he says something trenchant with meaning: "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you [read: the joyous angel proclamation over Bethlehem and its encore in the apostolic witness]" (verse 12, NIV). That promise to Abraham was as much to his descendants as to him personally. And by the genetic code imparted by the spirit of truth, we are the true and only heirs to the promise as we answer in the same spirit of surrender shown by Abraham.

We are not only fearfully and wonderfully made, as the Bible puts it, but we are fearfully and wonderfully *saved*—"ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers [read: earthly, sinful inheritance]" as Peter reminds us (verse 18, RSV).

Some time ago I was impressed at a video representation of the immensity of space. Zooming back from a human lying in a field, the camera whisked us through to the outer reaches of the mapped heavens. Then at the same rate of progression it zoomed into the cellular structure of our body. Amazingly, there is relatively more space inside our bodies and the atoms we are composed of, than between the heavenly bodies we see in the night sky.

There is no justification for pantheistic notions in this analogy, but every encouragement to revel in the fact that God is not to be dismissed a vague glimmer of a presence on the outer reaches of a trackless void. He is closer than we sometimes think. He is as close as that comforting voice as we look into the bewildering night. He is as close as an indwelling presence drawing us back to Him—our Father.

REACT

1. What evidence did Abraham have for the existence of God?
2. God recognized that Abraham's descendants would become enslaved. How has He made provision for our release from enslavement today?
3. How many times have you heard the term "first things first"? How can we change this in our daily lives so we can say, "first God first"?
4. Describe how you feel when you gaze up at a star-filled sky. How does this affect your relationship with God?
5. How does being "led by the Spirit" mean that "you are not under the law"?

TESTIMONY

Isa. 31:33

"The terms of the 'old covenant' were, Obey and live: 'If a man do, he shall even live in them' (Ezekiel 20:11; Leviticus 18:5); but 'cursed be he that confirmed not all the words of this law to do them.' Deuteronomy 27:26. The 'new covenant' was established upon 'better promises'—the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God to renew the heart and bring it into harmony with the principles of God's law. 'This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. . . . I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more.' Jeremiah 31:33, 34."¹

"The apostle Paul clearly presents the relation between faith and the law under the new covenant. He says: 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through

"In the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ."

our Lord Jesus Christ.' 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.' 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh'—it could not justify

man, because in his sinful nature he could not keep the law—'God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Romans 5:1, 3:31, 8:3, 4."²

"Those who have by baptism given to God a pledge of their faith in Christ, and their death to the old life of sin, have entered into covenant relation with God. The three powers of the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are pledged to be their strength and their efficiency in their new life in Christ Jesus."³

"As anciently the sins of the people were by faith placed upon the sin offering, and through its blood transferred, in figure, to the earthly sanctuary, so in the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly sanctuary."⁴

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

3. *Australian Union Conference Record*, 1898-1914, October 7, 1907.

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 421.

How to Use Abraham to Witness

HOW-TO

Gen. 15:4-6; 22:1-19; Heb. 11:11, 17-19

Abraham became righteous when he believed in God's promise of giving him a son (Gen. 15:4-6). How do we help Abraham's children, Moslems and Jews, to *believe* in Jesus?

Mikael Torstensson preaches the gospel in the Middle East, and people find salvation in Jesus Christ! He writes that the Koran tells the story about when Abraham was to sacrifice his son. (In the Koran it was Ishmael instead of Isaac.) We are all in the same situation as Abraham's son and deserve to die for our sins (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). When Abraham was about to kill his son, God stopped him, and gave him another sacrifice. Torstensson then asks the Moslems what they thought would have happened if God wouldn't have provided another sacrifice. They answer that Abraham's son would have died.

Then he explains that God has provided a sacrifice for all humankind. He asks if they know the message of John the Baptist, called "Yahya Abn Zakaria" in the Koran. His message was " 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' " (John 1:29, NIV). Moslems know Jesus, called Isa in the Koran, and even the Koran says that Jesus is the only One who has lived a life without sin. Because of that, He is the only One that could be sacrificed for another person's salvation.

**Mikael Torstensson
preaches the gospel in the
Middle East.**

Torstensson concludes: "I ask the Moslem how he wants it; if he really thinks that God will accept all his sin if he stands before God in his sin or with a clean heart—cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. I then explain how you receive salvation and pray with the Moslem." After that, people give their lives to Jesus.

In Hebrews 11:17-19 we see that Abraham was convinced that God could even wake up the dead. Isaac could also be seen as a picture of the forthcoming Christ. That is another interesting thought: Abraham became righteous when he *believed* in God's promise of giving him a son—Isaac-Isa-Jesus. It is amazing to see how many ways God has given us in His Word to help us find salvation in Christ.

REACT

1. How will you witness for your friends, using their references?
2. How could you witness for a Jew, using texts about Abraham, such as Romans 4, Galatians 3, 4, etc.?

Thursday
March 20

Finding Faith in a Faithless World

OPINION

Gal. 3:11

"I can't have faith in you!" the young girl screamed as she ran into her room. As she slammed the heavy oak door, the whole house seemed to shake. While the girl sat crying on her bed, tears mixed with clumpy black mascara stained the white bedspread. *I just can't believe in anything anymore!* she thought.

Diane recounted the moments and years that had led up to this painful realization. When she was two years old, her parents had divorced, leaving her in emotional agony and hurt. All of her life she had tried to depend on people who kept letting her down. Both her parents had tried their best to follow through and be supportive, but somehow Diane was always in the way of their dreams and careers. In elementary school she made friends whom she hoped were loyal and supportive, yet somehow

**Promises become empty
and unimportant.**

she always felt as if she had to buy into their values or interests to feel included. High school brought new experiences with boyfriends who promised her the world. However, they always

showed their true colors as they left her lying flat on her face, an aching reminder that once again she could not trust in anything or anyone.

The past memories brought her once again to the present as she sobbed softly on her bed. The black streaks on her pillow reminded her that once again someone had let her down and not fulfilled promises made. As she lay down staring at her star-covered ceiling, she seriously questioned whether she could ever have faith in a God that she couldn't even see. In the back of her mind, an illustration kept popping up: You can't see the wind, but you can surely see the effects of the wind. Jesus is like the wind, even though you can't see Him you can trust and have faith in Him, just as you can trust that the wind will move the leaves causing them to dance among the branches in trees.

Could this be true? Could Diane ever believe in a God who simply asks us to have faith and trust in Him when we live in a world of lies and deception? There are so many Dianes in the world who have been let down again and again. Growing up on a planet thriving on capitalism and selfishness, people are taught to watch out for themselves. Promises become empty and unimportant, while fitting in and working independently are valued as success.

As Christians, what does this tell us about how we view God and trust in Him? Do we really embrace God's faith and righteousness, or has it simply become distorted in a world where we learn to do things ourselves to prevent hurt and disappointment?

Lauryn Deanne Wild, Redlands, California

God's Singular Covenant

EXPLORATION

Psalm 16; John 3:16; Acts 16:31

CONCLUDE

People often talk of “blind faith,” but Romans 1:20 tells us that God has revealed Himself in so many ways since the creation of the world that humankind is without excuse. Because even our faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8), we know that God's promises are true. The Bible is filled with promises, and, though we often separate these into old and new covenants, this gospel has a singular theme: the salvation of humanity. Just as with Abram, our “exceeding great reward” is none other than God Himself (Gen. 15:1, KJV)!

CONSIDER

- Doing something out of your comfort zone that would require faith—rappelling, sky diving, bungee jumping, etc. (Remember that God does not call for “blind” faith, so be sure to prepare adequately and do this activity with someone experienced in such things!)
- Drawing up the covenant between God and His people in your own words. Use parchment paper to make it look official and, if you agree to the terms after praying over it, sign it as a tangible reminder of your commitment to God.
- Defining the following in your own terms: faith, righteousness, justification, imputed righteousness, grace, mercy.
- Reflecting on your baptismal vows and the decision that led you to enter into this covenant relationship with God—have you lived up to this new life in Christ Jesus? If you have not yet been baptized, consider whether you are ready to enter into this relationship and allow Christ to live through you.
- Asking a Jewish, Muslim, or other non-Christian friend to share their beliefs with you. Listen respectfully and without personal response for both commonalities and differences. Use the experience to explore new ways to witness to friends from different faith traditions.
- Composing a song or poem that reflects some aspect of faith from your own life or that you have come to understand more deeply through this week's study.
- Taking some time to gaze at the night stars or a rainbow, recalling the ways God uses nature to confirm His covenants with humanity.

CONNECT

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday*, chap. 5.

An Undeserved agreement



“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, NKJV).

An Unequal, but Solemn Agreement

INTRODUCTION

John 10:10

As I look back over the years, I can but recall that particular day I finally signed the agreement to purchase my very first home. I came to the realization that, here I was, entering into a business partnership with total strangers. The terms and conditions were set before me. I signed with acceptance that I was in agreement and that I would adhere to this contract.

Similarly, we have a contract with God our Father—a solemn agreement binding both parties. I must emphasize, however, that the parties are not equal. Rather, it is God, the One who is greater than we are, who stipulates the conditions of the great covenant. Throughout Scripture we read about God's covenant with Noah, Abraham, then Israel at Sinai, and so on. What is the significance of all of this? This shows me the gracious condescension of a God who cares enough for us that, in order to reassure us, He even finds a way of bonding Himself to us. The covenant is trying to tell us that God can be trusted, and He really does care. And it is God and God alone who provides salvation for each of us.

Heaven begins right here,
right now.

Whenever I see that rainbow in the sky, I remember the covenant God made with Noah and his sons after the Flood. Promising never again to bring the waters of destruction on the world, God made an everlasting covenant and ratified it by the rainbow (Gen. 9:13-17). To enable us all to remember without fear, He gives us this sign as a promise.

Whenever I see that rainbow in the sky, I remember the covenant God made with Noah and his sons after the Flood. Promising never again to bring the waters of destruction on the world, God made an everlasting covenant and ratified it by the rainbow (Gen. 9:13-17). To enable us all to remember without fear, He gives us this sign as a promise.

That's why, being Christlike is the best, the happiest, and the most fulfilling life we can enjoy on this earth. "Heaven is to begin on this earth," wrote Ellen White. "When the Lord's people are filled with meekness and tenderness, they will realize that His banner over them is love, and His fruit will be sweet to their taste."*

When Jesus is our Best Friend, heaven begins right here, right now. We find our true selves. We feel wholly complete, fulfilled; we have peace, wonderful peace. There is little wonder then, that the psalmist exclaims: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11, NKJV).

**Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 131.

An Agreement That Binds and Frees

LOGOS

Matt. 28:19, 20; John 11:25, 26; Rom. 8:1; Eph. 3:17-19; 1 John 1:4

Covenant Defined

A covenant is a contract or an agreement. In law, a contract is an agreement between two or more *competent* parties for a *legal* purpose and supported by a *consideration*. At least three things are evident from this legal definition:

(1) The parties to a contract must be competent. This means simply that they must be capable of understanding the agreement into which they are entering. They must be sober and of a sound mind.

(2) The agreement must be for a legal purpose. This suggests that an agreement between two people to engage in an illegal activity is an invalid contract.

(3) The agreement is supported by a consideration. This means that the parties to the agreement have obligations. They *promise* to do or not to do something.

A contract binds the parties to the terms of the agreement for the duration of the contract. Failure to comply with any of the terms by either party constitutes a breach of contract.

Contracts That Bind

When I completed my doctoral studies, I applied to a few universities for work. I was soon invited for interviews. Thereafter, I was offered a faculty position at a few universities. Once I had decided which offer I would accept, I was asked to sign a contract indicating my agreement with the terms of my employment as set out in the contract. Obviously, that was an important contract.

After I had worked for a few years, I decided to purchase a home. Like most people who want to purchase property, I approached a bank for a mortgage. Again, I had to sign several agreements (contracts).

Many of us go through life signing contracts—contracts that bind us to our commitments. When a contract is signed, the parties to the contract are obliged to comply with the terms specified in the contract. The contract is a

Contracts are nothing new.

document that binds the parties to their obligations under the terms of the agreement. When you affix your signature to a contract, you are in fact saying that you promise to comply with all the terms of the contract.

Contracts are nothing new. But can you imagine having an agreement with

God? God had covenants with Noah (Gen. 6:18), Abraham (15:7, 18), Phinehas (Num. 25:13), the Israelites (Exod. 6:4), and David (2 Sam. 23:5), to mention a few. We, too, have a covenant that binds us to the Source of life: Jesus Christ.

An Agreement That Frees

God's promise to us is that He will give us a more abundant life. His covenant is one that frees us from the burden of guilt. Indeed, Christ came to set us free from the bondage of sin. Just as He promised to give Abraham's descendants a new land, so, too, He has promised (covenanted) to give us a new Eden. He has redeemed us. God's covenant with His people promises eternal life in a new world.

Validity of the Covenant

Let us examine the parties to the covenant. God is *competent*. He knows everything. Scripture tells us that He is perfect in knowledge (Job 37:16), that His knowledge is such that we "cannot attain it" (Ps. 139:6, NKJV), and that He knows all things (1 John 3:20). God does not engage in illegal acts. He redeems and saves. He forgives sins. He specializes in love, grace, and mercy. No trace of illegality can be found in Him. He is holy (Ps. 99:9), righteous (John 17:25), and just (Rev. 22:12). Therefore He has no part in illegal activities. Finally, God never defaults on a promise (Deut. 7:9). It follows then, that if we enter into a covenant with God, and if we keep our part of the agreement, then the covenant is valid. Our faith in God and our submission to His divine will keep our covenant valid.

Blessings Now

A covenant relationship with God carries certain rewards or benefits. Can we enjoy the rewards of that relationship now or do we have to wait until the end of the age? The good news is that we can enjoy the covenant blessings today, right here and now.

By faith, we can enter into a covenant relationship with God and enjoy the blessings even now, in addition to the joys He promises hereafter. Here are just a few of the *immediate* blessings that we can enjoy if we open our hearts to Him:

1. Everlasting companionship with Jesus. We will never be alone because He will never leave us (Matt. 28:20).
2. Prosperity now (John 10:10; 3 John 2).
3. Freedom from the law of sin (Rom. 8:1).
4. Knowledge and understanding (Eph. 3:17-19).
5. Happiness (1 John 1:4).

God's assurance to Jeremiah extends to us also. Our Creator God is a covenant God. He is eager to establish covenant relationships with His people—relationships that last forever. He says, "'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you'" (Jer. 31:3, NKJV).

You've Got the Wrong Person!

TESTIMONY

Matt. 28:19, 20

God has appointed us, His people, to go out into the world and preach the good news to all nations. Many a time we hear the church say that "you are the generation to finish the work," yet at times we may be scared, anxious, or have feelings of self-doubt. But God reassures us that He will never leave us or forsake us (Matt. 28:20).

God says, "Go." We seem to respond, "God, You've got the wrong person!"

God says, "Go."

God has chosen us to finish the work He has started. As human beings, it is natural to have these feelings of inadequacy. Even Moses, a great man of God, argued with God that he was the wrong person to deliver the

children of Israel out of Egypt. (See Exod. 3:11.) God assured him, "I am with you." Those are powerful words. Jesus has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. It's His covenant with us.

Some may reason, *I have nothing to say, or I don't know what to say.* Sometimes we feel as if we do not know enough about the Scriptures to teach others about God, yet, the little we do know may lead someone to Christ. But fear not that you may be at a loss for words, because Jesus says, "Whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11, NKJV).

Jesus will never send us on a mission without a master plan. He is waiting patiently for us to accomplish this mission. We are at the end of time. The Bible tells us in Matthew 24:7 that "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" (NKJV).

How would you feel if a soul was lost because you failed to finish the work Jesus started? It may be only one soul, and Jesus is waiting for that one soul who needs to hear His Word before He comes. Will you be the one to proclaim the good news of salvation? Or will you be the one saying, "Jesus, You've got the wrong person?"

REACT

1. If it is God's will that we go out and preach to all nations, what steps can we take to start doing our part within our communities?

2. What is the major roadblock in our lives to spreading the gospel, and how can it be overcome?

Joy in the Covenant

EVIDENCE

John 11:25, 26; 1 John 1:4

God's covenant with Abraham is embodied in His relationship with the children of Israel. The miracles He performed during that dispensation were revelations of His love, His care, His guidance, His providence, His power, and His protection. All these characteristics of the Almighty serve to strengthen our belief in His goodness, which can be ours through Jesus Christ.

The raising of Lazarus is the last of eight signs of Jesus recorded in the gospel of John. This eighth sign crowns Jesus' ministry of miracles and provides ample evidence that Jesus is indeed "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25, NKJV). Jesus' miracles prove that He is indeed the Son of man, and within Him lies the power to heal and restore.

That Jesus has power to heal the sick, raise the dead, and calm the storm gives the assurance that those who trust in Him need neither worry nor fear. The apostle John, who witnessed Christ's ministry, made record of it so that our "joy may be full" (1 John 1:4, NKJV).

There is joy in knowing that through Jesus' death and resurrection our sins are forgiven; that through His love and mercy, our needs are supplied, and through His intercession, our future is secure. From his experience of a covenant relationship with God, Paul declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1, NKJV).

No more condemnation! What assurance! What comfort! The Greek word for "condemnation" is *katakrima*, which means "adverse sentence." Therefore, if we believe in Jesus and exercise our belief by walking after the spirit and not after the flesh, we will not receive a guilty verdict in the judgment. There is no worry in the present, no retribution for the past, and no fear of the future, for in Jesus we are made whole. This, then, is the true significance of the covenant relationship with God.

There is joy in knowing that through Jesus' death and resurrection our sins are forgiven.

This new covenant relationship brings abundant life (John 10:10), guarantees eternal life (3:16), sustains physical life (Acts 17:25), and mobilizes us to loving service (Matt. 28:19).

REACT

How does the fulfillment of prophecy in these times impact on the joy of your covenant with God?

HOW-TO

Ps. 118:24; John 10:10

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, will be indelibly printed on my mind. Thousands died during a terrorist attack on the United States. With my eyes glued to the television, I witnessed the destruction and devastation. While listening to the harrowing accounts of people looking for missing family members, I asked God to

Today is neither accidental
nor incidental.

show me the lesson to be learned from this crisis. A man who lost the mother of his three small children admonished the public to live each day to the fullest, because we never know

what may happen. Christians can claim the promise of John 10:10. Satan enters our lives to destroy all that is good, pure, and holy. He fills our hearts with hate, envy, and jealousy. But when we surrender our lives to Christ, He fills our hearts with joy, love, and peace. He creates a new heart within us.

So how then can we live life to the fullest? How can we get past times of hardship and despair? Let's heed the words of Psalm 118:24. Let this be the day we let Christ enter our hearts. Let us rejoice for the covenant relationship we enjoy with Christ.

1. Be joyful today. Today is all we have. To live in yesterday is to waste today and rob tomorrow. To live in tomorrow may cause us not to come to grips with the present. Today is the only day of which we can be sure. Celebrate today and live responsibly, for tomorrow may never come.

2. Accept this day as a gift of God. Today is neither accidental nor incidental. God wants to help us make today a useful, productive day that will enable us to have pleasant memories of it when tomorrow comes.

3. Be grateful for this day. Today we have an opportunity to worship, work, and witness. Let us praise God with prayer and thanksgiving.

Let us rejoice and be glad in God's love for us. Let us rejoice in the privilege of being sons and daughters of God. Let us rejoice and be glad for the privilege of serving our Lord. Let us rejoice in the assurance of an eternal home in the future. Let us rejoice and be glad today in anticipation of rewards for our faithfulness when we meet our Savior.

REACT

1. How can Christians rejoice amidst the myriads of catastrophes?
2. What does it really mean to you, personally, to "live life to the fullest"?
3. In the light of Hebrews 12:6, what biblical assurances would you give a new convert?

Different Perspectives

OPINION

Eph. 3:17-19

Many Christians think it imperative to live a life of complete devotion to Christ in order to reap the blissful rewards promised. Among Christians, it is generally believed that one must pledge oneself to God completely. In the prayer for the Ephesians (3:17-19), it is obvious that Paul held this perception. This passage of Scripture expresses a desire for God's glorious riches to strengthen us with power through His spirit, and to be rooted and established in His love. Paul ends his prayer with the hope "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (verse 19, NKJV).

The covenant life is mentioned throughout the Bible, and it is undoubtedly important to anyone who wants to be God's treasured possessions. Some people, however, entertain contrary beliefs. Others don't take the meaning and composition of the covenant life literally. What of the people who are not exposed to Christianity the way some of us are? Are they doomed to hell, even though they live peacefully with nature and hurt no one? It is impossible to do as God says if you do not know *what* He says. The Church should execute the teachings of the Bible, because to do otherwise would be to disobey, and more so, breach the covenant.

The idea of a new covenant life is an ideal. It is a benchmark for humankind to live by ultimately. Whether or not one is a devoted Christian, it certainly would make for a better coexistence on many levels, especially socially. Nonetheless, it doesn't make much of a difference what the many divergent minds think, because the Bible is clear. Those who hear God's Word and reject it in favor of their own beliefs cannot expect to reap the promised rewards.

It is necessary to have some belief system. In fact, not believing in the existence and reign of a superior being is a belief in itself. Regardless of what one believes in, one must develop utmost trust and commitment in the object of that belief. In the Christian conviction, the goal is to be one with God in heaven and live an eternally blissful and joyful life. From a Christian perspective, the only way to do so is to form a meaningful and lasting relationship with God, to promise Him love and unconditional allegiance.

**It is impossible to do as
God says if you do not
know *what* He says.**

REACT

Can *anyone* establish a covenant relationship with God? Explain your answer.

Blessings Galore— Here and Hereafter

EXPLORATION

Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8

CONCLUDE

Having a covenant relationship with God binds us to the Source of life—Jesus Christ. We benefit from this saving, faith-based relationship, having been given access to countless blessings now and especially at the second coming of Christ.

Joy. A new heart. Freedom from the burden of guilt and sin. Abundant life now and in the world to come. These are among the rewards that those bound by the covenant relation enjoy. These also leave them with no choice but to share these blessings and their Source.

CONSIDER

- Singing with gusto the chorus “Happiness Is to Know the Savior.”
- Sending a card or an email to someone with whom you have had a misunderstanding. Include in the message something that talks about the freedom from the burden of guilt that comes from having been forgiven.
- Writing a 100- to 150-word essay on your understanding of the passage in Ephesians 3:17-19.
- Sharing a testimony before a group of inmates about some immediate benefits you’ve reaped as a result of your having a relationship with Christ. Tell them these benefits have a future dimension that unfolds at His second coming.
- Listing some changes that need to be made in your life.
- Visiting a cemetery and reading every hopeful epitaph. Imagine getting transported to the time when graves open and the dead in Christ rise first.
- Designing a bookmark on which is written a quotation about a Christian’s mission or mandate (e.g., “Anyone in Christ is a missionary. Anyone outside Christ is a mission field.”). Reproduce copies of the bookmark for sharing.

CONNECT

Matthew 28.

“Rejoicing in the Lord,” *Steps to Christ*.

Keavin Hayden, *Lifestyles of the Remnant*.

“As We Forgive . . .”

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 2003, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: God and Forgiveness

Logos: Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 5:18-20; Rom. 3:26; 5:20; 1 John 1:9

When did God start loving us? Why is it necessary for sinners to confess before God? Is God's love and willingness to forgive sin and evil greater than sin and evil themselves?

Lesson 2: Forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible

Logos: Exod. 32:1-14, 32; Pss. 25:18; 32:1; 78:38; Hos. 1:2; Hosea 3

Why do we need divine forgiveness? What does it mean to sin against God? What are the various Hebrew words in the Old Testament for “forgiveness,” and what can they teach us about how God forgives? What does the story of Hosea teach us about God's willingness to forgive sins? Is forgiveness any different in the Old Testament than in the New?

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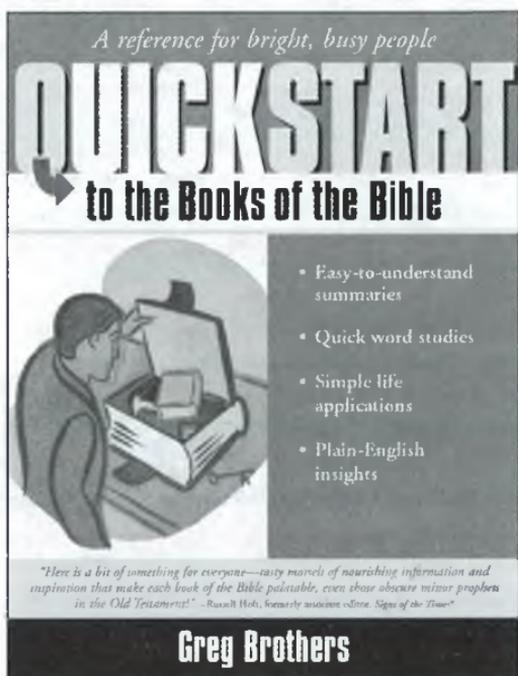
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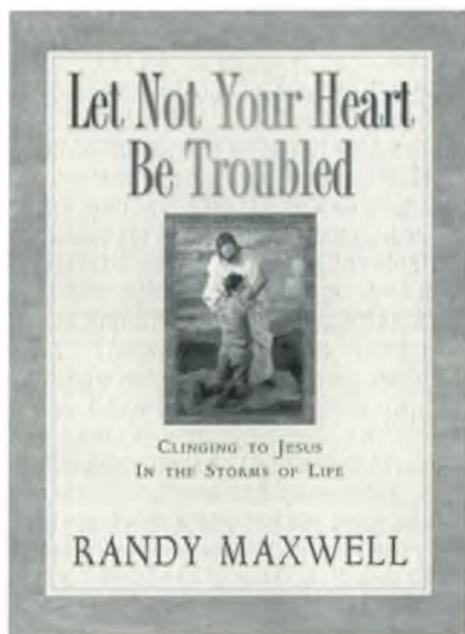
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South American
Division

Andrés Gómez hung out with a street gang and played satanic music. His gang membership nearly cost him his life; still, he hated it when his parents moved from Santiago, Chile, to a tiny town in the country.

When there was no room for him in the local public school, he had to enroll in a small Christian school run by Adventists.

To his surprise, the students at the school welcomed him. And when a new friend learned that Andrés had scribbled graffiti on the school walls, he spoke gently to him about it.

What does a street-wise youth from the big city do when he encounters God in a small-town private school? How does he turn from being a disciple of the devil to a disciple of Christ? And how does his secular family react? Read Andrés' exciting story in this quarter's *Teen Mission*.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help build churches in Chile and southern Brazil.



ECQ030101