

# ***The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant***

## ***Covenant Primer***

Lesson #2 for April 10, 2021

Scriptures: Genesis 9:8-17; 12:1-3; Isaiah 54:9; Galatians 3:6-9,29; Exodus 6:1-8; Jeremiah 31:31-34.

1. In our first lesson, we described how sin arose on this earth. We need to remember that sin and the great controversy over the character and government of God really arose in heaven! (See Revelation 12:7-12.) It only spilled onto this earth when Adam and Eve agreed to accept the lies Satan offered instead of remaining loyal to God.
2. In this lesson we will review the covenant promises that were made to various individuals down through the Old Testament and compare those with God's promised covenant with us. We will also try to briefly mention how things were going in heaven during that time.
3. What is a covenant?

"The Hebrew word translated as 'covenant' (appearing about 287 times in the Old Testament) is *berith*. It can also be translated as 'testament' or 'last will.' Its origin is unclear, but it has come to mean 'that which bound two parties together.' It was used, however, for many different types of 'bond,' both between man and man and between man and God. It has a common use where both parties were men, and a distinctively religious use where the covenant was between God and man. The religious use was really a metaphor based on the common use but with a deeper connotation [meaning]."—J. Arthur Thompson, "Covenant (OT)," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), vol. 1, p. 790.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, April 4, including the brackets and the content in brackets in the paragraph].<sup>‡§</sup>

4. There are three main elements in the covenant that God wants to make with us:
  - 1) **God affirmed the covenant promises with an oath. (Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 6:13,17)**

**Galatians 3:16:** Now, God made his promises to Abraham and to his descendant. The scripture does not use the plural "descendants", meaning many people, but the singular "descendant", meaning one person only, namely, Christ.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Galatians 3:16). New York: American Bible Society.

**Hebrews 6:13,17:** <sup>13</sup>When God made his promise to Abraham, he made a vow to do what he had promised. Since there was no one greater than himself, he used his own name when he made his vow.... <sup>17</sup>To those who were to receive what he promised, God wanted to make it very clear that he would never change his purpose; so he added his vow to the promise.—*Good News Bible.\**

- 2) **The covenant obligation was obedience to God's will as expressed in the Ten Commandments. (Deuteronomy 4:13)**

**Deuteronomy 4:13:** [Moses said to the people:] "He told you what you must do to keep the covenant he made with you—you must obey the Ten Commandments, which he wrote on two stone tablets."—*Good News Bible.\*‡*

**3) The means by which God's covenant obligation is ultimately fulfilled is through Christ and the plan of salvation. (Isaiah 42:1,6)**

**Isaiah 42:1,6:** The LORD says,

“Here is my servant, whom I strengthen—  
the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased.

I have filled him with my Spirit,  
and he will bring justice to every nation....”

<sup>6</sup> “I, the LORD, have called you and given you power  
to see that justice is done on earth.

**Through you I will make a covenant with all peoples;  
through you I will bring light to the nations.**”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

5. So, we see that **the three main elements of God's covenant with us include: (1) God's promises, (2) our obedience, and (3) the plan of salvation.**

6. This is a life-changing commitment from God for us. Jesus Christ became a human being.

7. What was **God's covenant with Noah?**

**Genesis 6:17-18:** <sup>17</sup> “I am going to send a flood on the earth to destroy every living being. Everything on the earth will die, <sup>18</sup>but I will make a covenant with you. Go into the boat with your wife, your sons, and their wives.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

8. It is important to notice that **everyone who responded to God's call got into the ark! The door was open.** Others could have gotten in; however, they did not.

9. We also need to remember that God is dealing not just with us on this earth, but also He has the entire universe to deal with. How did they respond to God's plan to destroy the world? The plan of salvation (reconciliation) must include the entire universe!

**Colossians 1:19-20:** <sup>19</sup>For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. <sup>20</sup>**Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood [footnote: *his Son's blood; or his Son's sacrificial death*] on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†§</sup>

**For centuries God looked with patience and forbearance upon the cruel treatment given to his ambassadors, at his holy law prostrate, despised, trampled underfoot. He swept away the inhabitants of the Noachian world with a flood. But when the earth was again peopled, men drew away from God, and renewed their hostility to him, manifesting bold defiance. Those whom God rescued from Egyptian bondage followed in the footsteps of those who had preceded them. Cause was followed by effect; the earth was being corrupted.**

**A crisis had arrived in the government of God.... All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of his elect. One word from him, and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction.**

The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. **The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth....**

**The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love. To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon himself.**—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* July 17, 1900, par. 4-7.† Compare *Desire of Ages* 37.2. [So, what did God do? He sent a helpless baby Boy!]<sup>‡</sup>

Compare this diary entry by Ellen White made January 10, 1890, in Battle Creek, Michigan.

For centuries God bore with the inhabitants of the old world. But at last guilt reached its limit.... He came out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth, and **by a flood cleansed the earth of its iniquity.**

Notwithstanding this terrible lesson, men had no sooner begun to multiply once more, than rebellion and vice became widespread. Satan seemed to have taken control of the world. ***The time came that a change must be made, or the image of God would be wholly obliterated from the hearts of the beings He had created.*** All heaven watched the movements of God with intense interest. **Would He once more manifest His wrath? Would He destroy the world by fire? The angels thought that the time had come to strike the blow of justice, when, lo, to their wondering vision was unveiled the plan of salvation.**—Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*\* 569.2-570.1.† [Italic type is added for emphasis.]<sup>‡</sup>

10. After the flood was over, notice these words from God.

**Genesis 9:8-17:** <sup>8</sup> God said to Noah and his sons, <sup>9</sup> “I am now making my covenant with you and with your descendants, <sup>10</sup> and with all living beings—all birds and all animals—everything that came out of the boat with you. <sup>11</sup> With these words I make my covenant with you: I promise that never again will all living beings be destroyed by a flood; never again will a flood destroy the earth. <sup>12</sup> As a sign of this everlasting covenant which I am making with you and with all living beings, <sup>13</sup> I am putting my bow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my covenant with the world. <sup>14</sup> Whenever I cover the sky with clouds and the rainbow appears, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings. <sup>16</sup> **When the rainbow appears in the clouds,** I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth. <sup>17</sup> That is the sign of the promise which I am making to all living beings.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

11. Many years later, we come to the story of Abram/Abraham (referred to as Abraham or Abram/Abraham in this handout except when discussing the change of his name as recorded in Genesis 17 or in quotations using *Abram*). What was God's plan for him?

**Genesis 12:1-3:** The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. <sup>2</sup> I will give you many descendants, and **they will become a great nation.** I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,

But I will curse those who curse you.

And **through you I will bless all the nations.**”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

12. How were all the nations involved and blessed?

**Galatians 3:6-9:** <sup>6</sup> Consider the experience of Abraham; as the scripture says, “He believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.” <sup>7</sup> You should realize then, that **the real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith.** <sup>8</sup> The scripture predicted that God would put the Gentiles right with himself through faith. And so the scripture announced the Good News to Abraham: **“Through you God will bless the whole human race.”** <sup>9</sup> Abraham believed and was blessed; so all who believe are blessed as he was.—*Good News Bible.*\*†

**Galatians 3:29:** **If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.**—*Good News Bible.*\*†

13. Notice specifically in the covenant promise recorded in Genesis 12 that, repeatedly, God said: “I will,... I will.” Who was making the main promises? It was God making the promises!

Read **Genesis 15:4-21.** This whole story may seem very strange to us; but, records found from the area where Abraham was born and raised demonstrate that this was a standard way that people of that time made covenants.

**Genesis 17:1-14:** <sup>1</sup> When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am the Almighty God. **Obey me and always do what is right.** <sup>2</sup> **I will make my covenant with you and give you many descendants.**” <sup>3</sup> Abram bowed down with his face touching the ground, and God said, <sup>4</sup> “I make this covenant with you: **I promise that you will be the ancestor of many nations.** <sup>5</sup> Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham, because I am making you the ancestor of many nations. <sup>6</sup> I will give you many descendants, and some of them will be kings. You will have so many descendants that they will become nations.

<sup>7</sup> “I will keep my promise to you and to your descendants in future generations as an everlasting covenant. I will be your God and the God of your descendants. <sup>8</sup> I will give to you and to your descendants this land in which you are now a foreigner. The whole land of Canaan will belong to your descendants for ever [*sic*], and I will be their God.”

<sup>9</sup> God said to Abraham, “You also must agree to keep the covenant with me, both you and your descendants in future generations. <sup>10</sup> You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you. <sup>11-12</sup> From now on **you must circumcise every baby boy when he is eight days old,** including slaves born in your homes and slaves bought from foreigners. **This will show that there is a covenant between you and me.** <sup>13</sup> Each one must be circumcised, and this will be a physical sign to show that my covenant with you is everlasting. <sup>14</sup> Any male who has not been circumcised will no longer be considered one of my people, because he has not kept the covenant with me.”—*Good News Bible.*\*†† [Jewish males were permanently identified!]\*†

14. God repeated this promise to Abraham twice before Sarah finally had a child. What was the response from Abraham and Sarah?

**Genesis 17:17:** Abraham bowed down with his face touching the ground, but he began to laugh when he thought, “Can a man have a child when he is a hundred years old? Can Sarah have a child at ninety?”—*Good News Bible.*\*

**Genesis 18:10-15:** <sup>10</sup> One of them said, “Nine months from now I will come back,

and your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was behind him, at the door of the tent, listening. <sup>11</sup>Abraham and Sarah were very old, and Sarah had stopped having her monthly periods. <sup>12</sup>**So Sarah laughed to herself** and said, “Now that I am old and worn out, can I still enjoy sex? And besides, my husband is old too.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child when I am so old?’ <sup>14</sup>Is anything too hard for the LORD? As I said, nine months from now I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

<sup>15</sup> Because Sarah was afraid, she denied it. “I didn’t laugh,” she said.

“Yes, you did,” he replied. “You laughed.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

15. Should God have honored Abraham and Sarah as the parents of the faithful, even after laughing at Him and lying to Him? So, they named their son *Isaac*, which means laughter!
16. There were about 25 years between the time God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees until he finally received that child born to Sarah. Abraham would come to believe and trust in God’s guidance in almost all situations. He and Sarah had lied to Pharaoh in Egypt, and they had done the same to the king of Gerar. But, God remained faithful. God always goes the extra mile despite our foibles. Abraham continued to trust God.
17. **God also establish a covenant with Moses and, then, with the people of Israel.**

**Exodus 6:1-8:** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you are going to see what I will do to the king. **I will force him to let my people go. In fact, I will force him to drive them out of his land.**”

<sup>2</sup> God spoke to Moses and said, “I am the LORD. <sup>3</sup>I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as Almighty God, but I did not make myself known to them by my holy name, the LORD. <sup>4</sup>I also made my covenant with them, promising to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they had lived as foreigners. <sup>5</sup>Now **I have heard the groaning of the Israelites**, whom the Egyptians have enslaved, and I have remembered my covenant. <sup>6</sup>So tell the Israelites that I say to them, ‘I am the LORD; I will rescue you and set you free from your slavery to the Egyptians. I will raise my mighty arm to bring terrible punishment upon them, and I will save you. <sup>7</sup>**I will make you my own people, and I will be your God.** You will know that I am the LORD your God when I set you free from slavery in Egypt. <sup>8</sup>I will bring you to the land that I solemnly promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as your own possession. I am the LORD.’ ”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

18. More than 400 years had passed since God’s covenant had been given to Abraham. Was it finally going to be fulfilled? In what sense? This covenant contained many of the same principles mentioned to Noah and Abraham before Moses. Again notice the three elements:
  1. God was establishing a **special relationship** with His people. (See Genesis 17:7-8 and Exodus 19:5-6.)
  2. God promised them very **special status as a great nation**. (See Genesis 12:2 and Exodus 19:6.)
  3. But, **God “could not” and “cannot” especially bless His children unless they remain obedient**. (See Genesis 17:9-14; 22:16-18; and Exodus 19:5.)

“Note the order here: the Lord first saves Israel, then gives them His law to keep. The same order is true under the gospel. Christ first saves us from sin

(see *John 1:29; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4*), then lives out His law within us (*Gal. 2:20; Rom. 4:25; 8:1-3; 1 Peter 2:24*).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 602.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Wednesday, April 7].<sup>§†</sup>

19. God had recognized the weaknesses of human beings. But, He still made those precious covenant promises to them. Notice especially:

**Romans 8:1-3:** There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>**What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like sinful human nature, to do away with sin.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

20. Christ came “to do away with sin.” What does that mean? God is not ignoring our sins; He is “dealing with them.”

**1 Peter 2:24:** Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

21. Is God still waiting for His covenant relationship to be established with His people today?

**Exodus 6:7:** “ ‘I will make you my own people, and I will be your God. **You will know that I am the LORD your God** when I set you free from slavery in Egypt.’ ”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

22. But, finally, **after Israel had been taken into Babylonian captivity, God spelled out in more detail what His covenant involved. He even called it a *new covenant*.**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34:** <sup>31</sup> The LORD says, “The time is coming when **I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.** <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Although I was like a husband to them, they did not keep that covenant. <sup>33</sup>The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: **I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.** <sup>34</sup>**None of them will have to teach his fellow-citizen to know the LORD, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the LORD, have spoken.**”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup> [But, see *Our High Calling* 45.4.]<sup>†</sup>

23. It is interesting to notice that this is called a *new covenant*. But, God’s promises are the same. How well are we doing on our part? God wants to be like a husband to us. In Revelation 19&20 we can read about God’s final end-time people being *the bride*.

24. Note especially that in Jeremiah 31:34, the secret will be that “all will know me.” How does that relate to these words from Jesus’s final recorded prayer before His crucifixion?

**John 17:3:** “And eternal life means **knowing you, the only true God, and knowing Jesus Christ, whom you sent.**”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

25. As we approach the end of this world’s history, will we be expected to get to know Him well? And be expected to obey God? And to remain faithful to Him despite difficulties?

26. God calls for His law to be written in our hearts. What does that mean?

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of  
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obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. **He does not obey.** When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. **This will lead us to do right because it is right**—because right doing is pleasing to God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*\* 97.3-98.0.†

**A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. *If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.*** Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* July 22, 1897, par. 11.† [Italic type is added.]‡ [Compare 12MR236.1 which has minor differences. Also compare *That I May Know Him* 120.4 in which the crucial section in italic type above is omitted.]‡

27. If we are bound to God by a yoke of love, what does that mean?

The yoke that binds to service is the law of God. The great law of love revealed in Eden, proclaimed upon Sinai, and in the new covenant written in the heart, is that which binds the human worker to the will of God. If we were left to follow our own inclinations, to go just where our will would lead us, we should fall into Satan's ranks and become possessors of his attributes. Therefore God confines us to His will, which is high, and noble, and elevating. He desires that we shall patiently and wisely take up the duties of service. The yoke of service Christ Himself has borne in humanity. He said, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." Psalm 40:8. "I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." John 6:38. Love for God, zeal for His glory, and love for fallen humanity, brought Jesus to earth to suffer and to die. This was the controlling power of His life. This principle He bids us adopt.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 329.3-330.0.

28. So, what do you think? Were these covenants, starting with Noah and continuing right down to us, consistent? Or, are God's covenant promises in our day different?

29. As we have already suggested, God compares His covenant relationship with us to marriage. Is that a good analogy?

30. In a good marriage, despite problems and disagreements that may arise, love overcomes all. But, often, we allow those problems to fracture our love.

31. It is clear all through the Old Testament and the New Testament that God goes way beyond virtually any limits that could be mentioned to reach out to us. We sometimes call that *His grace*, the "reaching out" on the part of God. What does *grace* mean?

Scripture depicts three distinctive meanings to *grace*. Grace means loving acts of God toward undeserving sinners; grace points to the wonderful character of God; and grace points to God giving us the strength to overcome. In the New Testament, the equivalent of the Hebrew term *grace* (*chen*) is the Greek idiom (*diatheke*), which refers to a *will*, or *gift*. In common with the covenant, *the will* (a legal document) is a free gift to a party that has no legal claim to it. Thus, a *will* also is a fitting model of God's grace.—*Adult*

32. In these covenants that God made with Abraham, Moses, His church in the New Testament, and us, He has spoken to them and to us as a very personal God. He does not use His sovereign name, *Elohim*; He uses His personal name, *Yahweh*.

“Yahweh [is] the proper name of the God of Israel. . . . Many recent scholars explain [Yahweh] as . . . *(the one bringing into being, life giver)* . . . *(giver of existence, creator,)* . . . *(he who brings to pass, . . . performer of his promises)* . . . *(the one who is . . . the absolute and unchangeable one,)* . . . *(the existing, ever-living, as self-consistent and unchangeable,)* . . . *(the one ever coming into manifestation as the God of redemption,)* . . . *he will be it, . . . (he will approve himself [give evidence of being, assert his being]).*”—Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), pp. 217, 218.

*Yahweh* is “the name of the God who revealed Himself to Moses at Horeb, and is explained [as] . . . *I shall be the one who will be it . . . He who will be it . . . I am he who I am, i.e. it is no concern of yours . . . I am (this is my name), inasmuch as I am . . . I am who I am, he who is essentially unnameable, inexplicable.*”—Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*, p. 218.

“ ‘Jesus said to her, **I AM**’ (John 4:26); . . . ‘But He said to them **I AM!** Do not fear’ (John 6:20); . . . ‘For if you do not believe that **I AM**, you will die in your sins’ (John 8:24); . . . ‘Then Jesus said to them . . . you will know that **I AM**’ (John 8:28); . . . ‘Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, . . . Before Abraham came into being, **I AM**’ (vs. 58); . . . ‘From this time I tell you, before it happens . . . **I AM**’ (John 13:19); . . . ‘Jesus said to them, **I AM!**’ (John 18:5). . . . ‘Jesus answered, I told you that **I AM**. Then if you seek Me, allow these to depart—that the word might be fulfilled’ (vs. 8).”—*The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible*, vol. 4, pp. 258-307.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\* 27-28* including the bold type, italic type, brackets, and content in brackets in the preceding 3 paragraphs].<sup>‡§</sup>

33. So, are we prepared to accept God’s covenant promise to us? Notice this interesting result of God’s new covenant promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

“Few people realize that the New Testament received its name from this particular passage. Since the Latin word for covenant is testament, Origen, the famous church father (ca. A.D. 185-254) called the twenty-seven books of the Bible . . . the New Testament.”—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant*, pp. 21, 22.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\* 28*].<sup>‡§</sup>

34. In looking at all of these covenants down through the generations, how should it impact us? Given all that He has done for us that involves our love and our commitment and our obedience, are we prepared for a truly personal relationship with God?

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