

The Old Covenant

MEMORY TEXT: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Hebrews 8:8).

“God saw what was going on in the camp. He saw that the people, even while the divine glory still rested upon Sinai, had yielded to the temptations of Satan, and were plotting against the rule which they had promised to obey.”—*The Youth’s Instructor*, November 21, 1901.

Suggested Reading: Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 370-373. (at the bottom of this page)

Sunday March 12

1. SLAVERY CONFUSES MINDS

a. What was the condition of Israel for a number of years—and how did that situation affect their knowledge of God and His laws? Exodus 20:1, 2; Deuteronomy 5:15.

Exodus 20:1-2 And God spake all these words, saying, **2** I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Deuteronomy 5:15 And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

“In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. In delivering them from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. He brought them down to the Red Sea—where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible—that they might realize their utter helplessness, their need of divine aid; and then He wrought deliverance for them. Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage.

“But there was a still greater truth to be impressed upon their minds. Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God’s law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 371.

b. Where did God bring them in order that they might understand the holiness and sacredness of His law? Exodus 19:1, 5, 6.

Exodus 19:1, 5, 6 In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. **5** Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: **6** And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Monday March 13

2. THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

a. How did the Israelites react to promises of blessings even after they understood the law when spoken by God? Exodus 19:8; 24:3.

Exodus 19:8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.

Exodus 24:3 And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do.

“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 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.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

b. What were the terms of this covenant? Deuteronomy 27:26; Ezekiel 20:11; Leviticus 18:5.

Deuteronomy 27:26 Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Ezekiel 20:11 And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them.

Leviticus 18:5 Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.

c. Similar to our natural condition, what were they unable to comprehend? Jeremiah 17:9; Isaiah 1:5, 6; 64:6.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Isaiah 1:5-6 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. **6** From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

“ ‘Ye cannot serve the Lord,’ said Joshua: ‘for He is a holy God. . . . He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.’ Before there could be any permanent reformation the people must be led to feel their utter inability in themselves to render obedience to God. They had broken His law, it condemned them as transgressors, and it provided no way of escape. While they trusted in their own strength and righteousness, it was impossible for them to secure the pardon of their sins; they could not meet the claims of God’s perfect law, and it was in vain that they pledged themselves to serve God. It was only by faith in Christ that they could secure pardon of sin and receive strength to obey God’s law. They must cease to rely upon their own efforts for salvation, they must trust wholly in the merits of the promised Saviour, if they would be accepted of God.”—*Ibid.*, p.524.

Tuesday March 14

3. RATIFYING THE COVENANT

a. After Moses read the law with all its conditions of curses and blessings, how did Israel persistently react? Exodus 24:7.

Exodus 24:7 And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.

“The minds of the people, blinded and debased by slavery, were not prepared to appreciate fully the far-reaching principles of God’s ten precepts. That the obligations of the decalogue might be more fully understood and enforced, additional precepts were given, illustrating and applying the precepts of the ten commandments. Unlike the decalogue, these were delivered privately to Moses, who was to communicate them to the people.”—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 506.

“Moses had written, not the ten commandments, but the judgments which God would have them observe, and the promises on condition that they would obey Him. He read this to the people, and they pledged themselves to obey all the words which the Lord had said. Moses then wrote their solemn pledge in a book, and offered sacrifice unto God for the people. ‘And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.’ The people repeated their solemn pledge to the Lord to do all that He had said, and to be obedient.”—*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 240.

b. What was immediately done to show the seriousness of such an agreement? Exodus 24:6, 8.

Exodus 24:6, 8 And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. **8** And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.

“Thus the people ratified their solemn pledge to the Lord to do all that He had said, and to be obedient.”—*The Signs of the Times*, May 6, 1880.

“Here the people received the conditions of the covenant. They made a solemn covenant with God, typifying the covenant made between God and every believer in Jesus Christ. The conditions were plainly laid before the people. They were not left to misunderstand them. When they were requested to decide whether they would agree to all the conditions given, they unanimously consented to obey every obligation. They had already consented to obey God’s commandments. The principles of the law were now particularized, that they might know how much was involved in covenanting to obey the law; and they accepted the specifically defined particulars of the law.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 114.

Wednesday March 15

4. A LOST GENERATION

a. What happened to the vast majority of the nation of Israel because they failed to understand their inability to save themselves and keep the law perfectly without divine aid? Numbers 26:63–65.

Numbers 26:63-65 These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. **64** But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. **65** For the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

“Everything that we of ourselves can do is defiled by sin.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 311.

“Nicodemus had heard the preaching of John the Baptist concerning repentance and baptism, and pointing the people to One who should baptize with the Holy Spirit. He himself had felt that there was a lack of spirituality among the Jews, that, to a great degree, they were controlled by bigotry and worldly ambition. He had hoped for a better state of things at the Messiah’s coming. Yet the heart-searching message of the Baptist had failed to work in him conviction of sin. He was a strict Pharisee, and prided himself on his good works. He was widely esteemed for his benevolence and his liberality in sustaining the temple service, and he felt secure of the favor of God. He was startled at the thought of a kingdom too pure for him to see in his present state.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 171.

b. Was the problem with God or with the people in this “old” covenant? Hebrews 8:8.

Hebrews 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

“ ‘A natural Christian!’ This deceptive idea has served many as a garment of self-righteousness, and has led many to a supposed hope in Christ, who had no experimental knowledge of Him, of His experience, His trials, His life of self-denial and self-sacrifice. Their righteousness which they count upon so much is only as filthy rags. Says Christ, the beloved Teacher: ‘Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’ Yes, follow Him through evil as well as through

good report. Follow Him in befriending the most needy and friendless.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 177, 178.

“What is it that constitutes the wretchedness, the nakedness of those who feel rich and increased with goods?—It is the want of the righteousness of Christ. In their own righteousness they are represented as clothed with filthy rags, and yet in this condition they flatter themselves that they are clothed upon with Christ’s righteousness. Could deception be greater? As is represented by the prophet, they may be crying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we’ (see Jeremiah 7:4), while their hearts are filled with unholy traffic and unrighteous barter.”—*This Day With God*, p. 228.

Thursday March 16

5. ANOTHER COVENANT NEEDED

a. Since the old covenant is so hopeless, what was the only promise that could give hope to those living in the Old Testament period? Jeremiah 31:31–33.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: **32** Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: **33** But 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; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

“Through faith in Christ obedience to every principle of the law is made possible.

“The spirit of bondage is engendered by seeking to live in accordance with legal religion, through striving to fulfill the claims of the law in our own strength. There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus. The gospel preached to Abraham, through which he had hope, was the same gospel that is preached to us today, through which we have hope. Abraham looked unto Jesus, who is also the Author and the Finisher of our faith.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary [E. G. White Comments]*, vol. 6, p. 1077.

b. Name some heroes in Scripture who accepted these promises of divine aid. Hebrews 11:4–32.

Hebrews 11:4-32 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. **5** By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. **6** But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. **7** By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. **8** By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. **9** By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: **10** For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. **11** Through faith also Sara

herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. **13** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. **14** For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. **15** And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. **16** But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. **17** By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, **18** Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: **19** Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. **20** By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. **21** By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. **22** By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones. **23** By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. **24** By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; **25** Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; **26** Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. **27** By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. **28** Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. **29** By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. **30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. **31** By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. **32** And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

“From age to age the heroes of faith have been marked by their fidelity to God, and they have been brought conspicuously before the world that their light might shine to those in darkness. Daniel and his three companions are illustrious examples of Christian heroism. . . . From their experience in the court of Babylon we may learn what God will do for those who serve Him with full purpose of heart.”—*My Life Today*, p. 68.

Friday March 17

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1. How do we follow the same experience of the Hebrews as being unable to comprehend the true significance of the divine moral law?**
- 2. Why did they readily enter into promises that they could not keep?**
- 3. How are we easily led into making similar promises to God today?**
- 4. What kept reoccurring during the remainder of Israel's history?**

5. What examples do we have, revealing that national apostasy is no excuse for our wavering faith?

Suggested Reading: Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 370-373.

It was their own evil heart of unbelief, controlled by Satan, that led them to hide their light, instead of shedding it upon surrounding peoples; it was that same bigoted spirit that caused them either to follow the iniquitous practices of the heathen or to shut themselves away in proud exclusiveness, as if God's love and care were over them alone. **(PP 370.1)**

As the Bible presents two laws, one changeless and eternal, the other provisional and temporary, so there are two covenants. 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. To all men this covenant offered pardon and the assisting grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ. It also promised them eternal life on condition of fidelity to God's law. Thus the patriarchs received the hope of salvation. **(PP 370.2)**

This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Genesis 22:18. This promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it (see Galatians 3:8, 16), and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness. The covenant with Abraham also maintained the authority of God's law. The Lord appeared unto Abraham, and said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." Genesis 17:1. The testimony of God concerning His faithful servant was, "Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." Genesis 26:5. And the Lord declared to him, "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an *everlasting covenant*, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." Genesis 17:7. **(PP 370.3)**

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. **(PP 370.4)**

Another compact—called in Scripture the "old" covenant—was formed between God and Israel at Sinai, and was then ratified by the blood of a sacrifice. The Abrahamic covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, and it is called the "second," or "new," covenant, because the blood by which it was sealed was shed after the blood of the first covenant. That the new covenant was valid in the days of Abraham is evident from the fact that it was then confirmed both by the promise and by the oath of God—the "two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie." Hebrews 6:18. **(PP 371.1)**

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. In delivering them

from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. He brought them down to the Red Sea—where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible—that they might realize their utter helplessness, their need of divine aid; and then He wrought deliverance for them. Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage. **(PP 371.2)**

But there was a still greater truth to be impressed upon their minds. Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God's law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught. **(PP 371.3)**

God brought them 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 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. **(PP 371.4)**

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. "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. **(PP 372.1)**

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." Galatians 5:22. Through the grace of Christ we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts. Having the Spirit of Christ, we shall walk even as He walked. Through the prophet He declared of Himself, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." Psalm 40:8. And when among men He said,

“The Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.” John 8:29. **(PP 372.2)**

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 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. **(PP 373.1)**

God’s work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development and different manifestations of His power, to meet the wants of men in the different ages. Beginning with the first gospel promise, and coming down through the patriarchal and Jewish ages, and even to the present time, there has been a gradual unfolding of the purposes of God in the plan of redemption. The Saviour typified in the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law is the very same that is revealed in the gospel. The clouds that enveloped His divine form have rolled back; the mists and shades have disappeared; and Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, stands revealed. He who proclaimed the law from Sinai, and delivered to Moses the precepts of the ritual law, is the same that spoke the Sermon on the Mount. The great principles of love to God, which He set forth as the foundation of the law and the prophets, are only a reiteration of what He had spoken through Moses to the Hebrew people: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Leviticus 19:18. The teacher is the same in both dispensations. God’s claims are the same. The principles of His government are the same. For all proceed from Him “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James 1:17. **(PP 373.2)**