

The Old Covenant

MEMORY VERSE: “For if that first [covenant] had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second” (Hebrews 8:7).

“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.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372.

Suggested Readings: *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 135; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 675-677. (At the bottom of this page)

1. A MONUMENTAL COVENANT

Sunday, February 18

a. When and where was the old covenant established? Exodus 19:1, 2.

Exodus 19:1-2

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. **2** For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.

“Soon after the encampment at Sinai, Moses was called up into the mountain to meet with God. Alone he climbed the steep and rugged path, and drew near to the cloud that marked the place of Jehovah’s presence. Israel was now to be taken into a close and peculiar relation to the Most High—to be incorporated as a church and a nation under the government of God.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 303.

b. What was the condition of the covenant at Sinai, and why is this principle important? Exodus 19:3–6. How did the people respond? Exodus 19:8.

Exodus 19:3-6

And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; **4** Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. **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.

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.

“Obedience was the only condition upon which ancient Israel was to receive the fulfillment of the promises which made them the highly favored people of God; and obedience to that law will bring as great blessings to individuals and nations now as it would have brought to the Hebrews.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 218.

“Moses returned to the camp, and having summoned the elders of Israel, he repeated to them the divine message. Their answer was, ‘All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.’ Thus they entered into a solemn covenant with God, pledging themselves to accept Him as their ruler, by which they became, in a special sense, the subjects of His authority.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 303.

2. ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

Monday, February 19

a. In what did the Israelites put their confidence when making their promise to obey God’s law? Romans 10:1–3.

Romans 10:1-3

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

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

b. When was the same mistake made by the Jewish people in the time of Christ? Matthew 5:20; Romans 9:31, 32.

Matthew 5:20

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Romans 9:31-32

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. **32** Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

“While the law is holy, the Jews could not attain righteousness by their own efforts to keep the law. The disciples of Christ must obtain righteousness of a different character from that of the Pharisees, if they would enter the kingdom of heaven. God offered them, in His Son, the perfect righteousness of the law. If they would open their hearts fully to receive Christ, then the very life of God, His love, would dwell in them, transforming them into His own likeness; and thus through God’s free gift they would possess the righteousness which the law requires. But the Pharisees rejected Christ; ‘being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own

righteousness' (Romans 10:3), they would not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God."—*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 54, 55.

c. What is written about our own righteousness? Isaiah 64:6.

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.

“[Isaiah 64:6 quoted.] Everything that we of ourselves can do is defiled by sin. But the Son of God ‘was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin.’ ”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 311.

“Unless the Holy Spirit works upon the human heart, at every step we shall stumble and fall. Man’s efforts alone are nothing but worthlessness; but cooperation with Christ means a victory.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 381.

“When the light from Christ shines into our souls, we shall see how impure we are; we shall discern the selfishness of motive, the enmity against God, that has defiled every act of life. Then we shall know that our own righteousness is indeed as filthy rags, and that the blood of Christ alone can cleanse us from the defilement of sin, and renew our hearts in His own likeness.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 28, 29.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE OLD COVENANT

Tuesday, February 20

a. Since the covenant of grace was sufficient for salvation, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? Galatians 3:19; Psalm 119:18; Revelation 3:17, 18.

Galatians 3:19

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Psalm 119:18

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

Revelation 3:17-18

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: **18** I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

“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.

“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. What happened only a few weeks after the Israelites promised to keep God’s law? Exodus 32:1–6. In whom was the fault found under the covenant made at Sinai? Hebrews 8:8.

Exodus 32:1-6

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. **2** And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. **3** And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. **4** And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. **5** And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the Lord. **6** And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

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:

“In utter discouragement and wrath because of their great sin, he [Moses] threw down the tables of stone by divine direction purposely to break them in the sight of the people, and thus signify that they had broken the covenant so recently made with God.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary [E. G. White Comments]*, vol. 1, p. 1109.

“[The Israelites] 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*, p. 372.

Luke 22:33

And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

b. What was the answer of Christ to Peter? Luke 22:34.

Luke 22:34

And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

“In his early discipleship Peter thought himself strong. Like the Pharisee, in his own estimation he was ‘not as other men are.’ When Christ on the eve of His betrayal forewarned His disciples, ‘All ye shall be offended because of Me this night,’ Peter confidently declared, ‘Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.’ Mark 14:27, 29. Peter did not know his own danger. Self-confidence misled him. He thought himself able to withstand temptation.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 152.

c. Soon afterwards, how did Peter behave when asked about his relationship to Jesus? Matthew 26:69–74.

Matthew 26:69-74

Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. **70** But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. **71** And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. **72** And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. **73** And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. **74** Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

d. How did Jesus respond when Peter denied Him? Luke 22:61, 62.

Luke 22:61-62

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. **62** And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

“When the crowing of the cock reminded him of the words of Christ, surprised and shocked at what he had just done he turned and looked at his Master. At that moment Christ looked at Peter, and beneath that grieved look, in which compassion and love for him were blended, Peter understood himself. He went out and wept bitterly. That look of Christ’s broke his heart. Peter had come to the turning point, and bitterly did he repent his sin. He was like the publican in his contrition and repentance, and like the publican he found mercy. The look of Christ assured him of pardon.”—*Ibid.*, pp. 152–154.

“It was in sleeping when Jesus bade him watch and pray that Peter had prepared the way for his great sin. All the disciples, by sleeping in that critical hour, sustained a great loss. Christ knew the fiery ordeal through which they were to pass. He knew how Satan would work to paralyze their senses that they might be unready for the trial.

Therefore it was that He gave them warning. Had those hours in the garden been spent in watching and prayer, Peter would not have been left to depend upon his own feeble strength. He would not have denied his Lord. Had the disciples watched with Christ in His agony, they would have been prepared to behold His suffering upon the cross. They would have understood in some degree the nature of His overpowering anguish. They would have been able to recall His words that foretold His sufferings, His death, and His resurrection.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 713.

5. WITHOUT CHRIST, NOTHING CAN BE DONE

Thursday, February 22

a. How useless is our battle against sin by ourselves? Romans 7:14, 15, 18–25; Hebrews 8:7.

Romans 7:14-15

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. **15** For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

Romans 7:18-25

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. **19** For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. **20** Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. **21** I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. **22** For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: **23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. **24** O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? **25** I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Hebrews 8:7

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

“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. What did Christ say about our efforts without Him? John 15:5.

John 15:5

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

“The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch. So the soul dead in trespasses and sins receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Saviour the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ’s strength, his emptiness to Christ’s fullness, his frailty to Christ’s enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity. Thus through the agency of the Holy Spirit man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is accepted in the Beloved.

“This union with Christ, once formed, must be maintained. [John 15:5 quoted.] This is no casual touch, no off-and-on connection. The branch becomes a part of the living vine. The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the root to the branches is unobstructed and constant. Separated from the vine, the branch cannot live. No more, said Jesus, can you live apart from Me. The life you have received from Me can be preserved only by continual communion. Without Me you cannot overcome one sin, or resist one temptation.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

Friday, February 23

1. Consider the positive and negative aspects of Israel’s pledge at Sinai.
2. What warnings should we take from the frailty of Israel?
3. How can God make the best of our own mistakes and failures?
4. What should we always remember about Christ’s attitude when Peter fell?
5. Why does Jesus compare Himself to a vine?

Suggested Readings: *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 135

“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 19:8. (AG 135.1)

Another compact [other than the Abrahamic covenant]—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.—Patriarchs and Prophets, 371. (AG 135.2)

Soon after the encampment at Sinai, Moses was called up into the mountain to meet with God... Israel was now to be taken into a close and peculiar relation to the Most High—to be incorporated as a church and a nation under the government of God. The message to Moses for the people was: “... 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. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:4-6). (AG 135.3)

Moses returned to the camp, and having summoned the elders of Israel, he repeated to them the divine message. Their answer was, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Exodus 19:8. Thus they entered into a solemn covenant with God, pledging themselves to accept Him as their Ruler, by which they became, in a special sense, the subjects of His authority.—Patriarchs and Prophets, 303. (AG 135.4)

In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant.... 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.... God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience.... The people did not realize ... that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God's law.... 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).—Patriarchs and Prophets, 371, 372. **(AG 135.5)**

"I am the true Vine." John 15:1. The Jews had always regarded the vine as the most noble of plants, and a type of all that was powerful, excellent, and fruitful. Israel had been represented as a vine which God had planted in the Promised Land. The Jews based their hope of salvation on the fact of their connection with Israel. But Jesus says, I am the real Vine. Think not that through a connection with Israel you may become partakers of the life of God, and inheritors of His promise. Through Me alone is spiritual life received. **(DA 675.1)**

"I am the true Vine, and My Father is the husbandman." John 15:1. On the hills of Palestine our heavenly Father had planted this goodly Vine, and He Himself was the husbandman. Many were attracted by the beauty of this Vine, and declared its heavenly origin. But to the leaders in Israel it appeared as a root out of a dry ground. They took the plant, and bruised it, and trampled it under their unholy feet. Their thought was to destroy it forever. But the heavenly Husbandman never lost sight of His plant. After men thought they had killed it, He took it, and replanted it on the other side of the wall. The vine stock was to be no longer visible. It was hidden from the rude assaults of men. But the branches of the Vine hung over the wall. They were to represent the Vine. Through them grafts might still be united to the Vine. From them fruit has been obtained. There has been a harvest which the passers-by have plucked. **(DA 675.2)**

"I am the Vine, ye are the branches," (John 15:5) Christ said to His disciples. Though He was about to be removed from them, their spiritual union with Him was to be unchanged. The connection of the branch with the vine, He said, represents the relation you are to sustain to Me. The scion is engrafted into the living vine, and fiber by fiber, vein by vein, it grows into the vine stock. The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch. So the soul dead in trespasses and sins receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Saviour the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ's strength, his emptiness to Christ's fullness, his frailty to Christ's enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity. Thus through the agency of the Holy Spirit man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is accepted in the Beloved. **(DA 675.3)**

This union with Christ, once formed, must be maintained. Christ said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." John 15:4. This is no casual touch, no off-and-on connection. The branch becomes a part of the living vine. The communication of life,

strength, and fruitfulness from the root to the branches is unobstructed and constant. Separated from the vine, the branch cannot live. No more, said Jesus, can you live apart from Me. The life you have received from Me can be preserved only by continual communion. Without Me you cannot overcome one sin, or resist one temptation. **(DA 676.1)**

“Abide in Me, and I in you.”(John 15:4) Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service. The channel of communication must be open continually between man and his God. As the vine branch constantly draws the sap from the living vine, so are we to cling to Jesus, and receive from Him by faith the strength and perfection of His own character. **(DA 676.2)**

The root sends its nourishment through the branch to the outermost twig. So Christ communicates the current of spiritual strength to every believer. So long as the soul is united to Christ, there is no danger that it will wither or decay. **(DA 676.3)**

The life of the vine will be manifest in fragrant fruit on the branches. “He that abideth in Me,” said Jesus, “and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.” John 15:5. When we live by faith on the Son of God, the fruits of the Spirit will be seen in our lives; not one will be missing. **(DA 676.4)**

“My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away.” John 15:1, 2. While the graft is outwardly united with the vine, there may be no vital connection. Then there will be no growth or fruitfulness. So there may be an apparent connection with Christ without a real union with Him by faith. A profession of religion places men in the church, but the character and conduct show whether they are in connection with Christ. If they bear no fruit, they are false branches. Their separation from Christ involves a ruin as complete as that represented by the dead branch. “If a man abide not in Me,” said Christ, “he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” John 15:6. **(DA 676.5)**

“And every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth [pruneth] it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” John 15:2. From the chosen twelve who had followed Jesus, one as a withered branch was about to be taken away; the rest were to pass under the pruning knife of bitter trial. Jesus with solemn tenderness explained the purpose of the husbandman. The pruning will cause pain, but it is the Father who applies the knife. He works with no wanton hand or indifferent heart. There are branches trailing upon the ground; these must be cut loose from the earthly supports to which their tendrils are fastening. They are to reach heavenward, and find their support in God. The excessive foliage that draws away the life current from the fruit must be pruned off. The overgrowth must be cut out, to give room for the healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness. The husbandman prunes away the harmful growth, that the fruit may be richer and more abundant. **(DA 676.6)**

“Herein is My Father glorified,” said Jesus, “that ye bear much fruit.” John 15:8. God desires to manifest through you the holiness, the benevolence, the compassion, of His own character. Yet the Saviour does not bid the disciples labor to bear fruit. He tells them to abide in Him. “If ye abide in Me,” He says, “and My words abide in you, ye

shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” John 15:7. It is through the word that Christ abides in His followers. This is the same vital union that is represented by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The words of Christ are spirit and life. Receiving them, you receive the life of the Vine. You live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4. The life of Christ in you produces the same fruits as in Him. Living in Christ, adhering to Christ, supported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ. **(DA 677.1)**

In this last meeting with His disciples, the great desire which Christ expressed for them was that they might love one another as He had loved them. Again and again He spoke of this. “These things I command you,” He said repeatedly, “that ye love one another.” John 15:17. His very first injunction when alone with them in the upper chamber was, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” John 13:34. To the disciples this commandment was new; for they had not loved one another as Christ had loved them. He saw that new ideas and impulses must control them; that new principles must be practiced by them; through His life and death they were to receive a new conception of love. The command to love one another had a new meaning in the light of His self-sacrifice. The whole work of grace is one continual service of love, of self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. During every hour of Christ’s sojourn upon the earth, the love of God was flowing from Him in irrepressible streams. All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another. **(DA 677.2)**