

**Good Word Schedule**  
**The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant**  
**April, May, June, 2021**

1. **What Happened**—*March 27-April 2*
2. **Covenant Primer**—*April 3-9*
3. **“All Future Generations”**—*April 10-16*
4. **An Everlasting Covenant**—*April 17-23*
5. **Children of the Promise**—*April 24-30*
6. **Abraham's Seed**—*May 1-7*
7. **Covenant at Sinai**—*May 8-14*
8. **Covenant Law**—*May 15-21*
9. **Covenant Sign**—*May 22-28*
10. **The New Covenant**—*May 29-June 4*
11. **New Covenant Sanctuary**—*June 5-11*
12. **Covenant Faith**—*12-18*
13. **The New Covenant Life**—*June 19-25*

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# The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant

## General Introduction

This study guide is meant to accompany the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School lesson for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter of 2021. The format of this guide follows a similar pattern for each week's lesson: an introduction to the topic, a short discussion on several verses or a bulleted list of concepts for a passage, followed by questions in bold type. Please read through the Biblical passages, and then prayerfully consider the bolded questions. Perhaps you'll find better questions that should be asked, and answered!

May the God who made a covenant with us through Jesus Christ illumine your study by His Spirit as we look forward to the time when His plan and covenant are fulfilled!

Brant Berglin  
March 9, 2021

## Introduction to the Quarter

Our study this quarter focuses on the ancient social contract known as “*covenant*.” Depending on the Biblical scholar queried, some will say there have been many different covenants between God and different groups humans, others will argue for a single covenant reiterated throughout time, and still others may say that God’s covenants, while different for different people, all point to the same goal. While we may not completely clarify these issues during the next 13 weeks, it’s clear from the Bible’s trajectory that God wishes to enter into relationships with humans.

Social contracts come in many forms in our world: a business partnership, a marriage license, a car-rental, military enlistment, a cross-my-heart promise made to a friend, or even just a cash transaction at the grocery store. Each of these is a contract of greater or lesser significance. Each one carries expectations for all of those involved, and perhaps consequences or penalties for violating the contract.

Some of these are of a legal, binding nature in courts of law, while others are based on trust between friends. The legally binding contract is no more valuable than the personal promise, and in fact, it’s violation may cause far less pain and loss than a friend or spouse failing to fulfill a verbal promise when it matters most. Such is the nature of covenants.

But the Biblical covenant has some unique aspects, which we’ll examine this quarter. We’ll see why covenants were God’s means of interacting with His people Israel, what the expectations were for God and His chosen people, the penalties for violating the contract, and how those penalties were paid.

Most of all this quarter, we’ll also see the good news of God’s enduring faithfulness, the great depths of His love, and His desire to be in the closest of possible relationships with humans. No greater expressions of self-sacrificing love can be found anywhere in all of literature or history or social media than in the Biblical accounts of God’s fulfillment of the covenant at His own expense and loss—the death of His son in behalf of sinful humanity.

*Opening Question*

**How are humans like God?**

*Introduction to Lesson 1*

It seems each quarterly that takes a theological topic begins with Genesis. While this is often appropriate, the lessons often feel like nearly an exact repeat of previous quarters. From a covenant perspective, it becomes important to frame human existence by its similarity to the Creator. We are beings who live in interdependence with each other. This was intended by the Creator who also wishes to live in association with us; in fact, He would rather die than live without us!

*Created in God's Image: Genesis 1-2*

Genesis 1:27-29 is the center of a chiasmic structure in the 6<sup>th</sup> day of creation. After making the animals, God makes man uniquely in His own image. The text doesn't explicitly state what that image is, but several things become clear in these verses:

1. The image of God includes both male and female; one biological gender alone doesn't suffice to reveal God's image fully.
2. The image of God results in the loving, human act of creation, that is, the fruit-bearing gift of procreation, just as the love of God results in creation first.
3. The image of God involves communicating, hearing, understanding, and relating
4. The image of God allows and requires humans to care for and maintain their stewardship over creation as under-shepherds of God's bigger world.
5. The image of God may—though the text doesn't state it explicitly—involve sentience, self-awareness, growth, and ability to measure experience(s) via memory.
6. The image of God may even include some attributes of physical form, though anthropomorphizing God can approach blasphemy.

**Which of these are most significant to you? Can you add other aspects of God's image in humans to this list?**

In these ways, and perhaps others, humans are like our Creator. We were unlike Him in many ways at creation (and of course, far more now because of sin), but God imparted to humans enough similarities to Himself that we can be in a relationship with Him. Genesis account says that Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden, shared fellowship with Him. What an amazing picture of His desire to know us, and for us to know Him.

Our close created likeness to God Himself forms the foundation for His covenants in Scripture. We are like Him, and able to communicate and experience each other. What an amazing thought for the creature recognizing from Whose hand he or she came!

**How does God's final statement at the end of the first six days of creation (1:31) reveal His joy and pride in what—and whom!—He had made?**

### *The Nigh-Obliteration of God's Image: Genesis 3*

As narratives go, Genesis 1 and 2 establish a beautiful, and stable, world. The command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil foreshadows chapter 3 and the rest of the Biblical narratives until Revelation 20. The question of authority, of trust/faith in God's words in spite of not having all the answers, is central to this passage. God, through this narrative, offers us a glimpse of the unequal relationship between God and humanity. No measure of education, technological advancement or sophistication, if a person is anti-authority, can

An important notice of the condition of man is described in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595:

“The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious. But the Fall and its effects have perverted these gifts. Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man. It was to restore this that the plan of salvation was devised, and a life of probation was granted to man. To bring him back to the perfection in which he was first created is the great object of life--the object that underlies every other.”

This disappointing perspective of fallen human nature is at odds with that of popular culture, and even that of many professionals in academic disciplines (such as sociology or psychology) but it undergirds every further act of God in the Bible.

**How do God's actions in Genesis 3 after the “tree incident” reveal His character and desire for relationship?**

**Why would God desire to make a covenant relationship with creatures who are now so separated from Him?**

### *Closing Comments*

The covenant theme throughout Biblical history is seen in its greatest beauty and glory when contrasted with human degradation. The greatest acts of God's intervention and salvation shine most brightly in light of the magnitude of His condescension to our deep need and desperate condition.

### *Opening Question*

#### **Why do we make legal agreements with each other?**

#### *Introduction*

The study this week summarizes some of the major covenant experiences throughout Scripture, which later lessons will focus on more specifically. For our purposes here, we'll summarize these covenant experiences, then ask some broad questions about covenant, examining how the Bible paints the broad strokes.

#### *Covenants Throughout the Bible*

Some covenant theologians would see a covenant in Genesis with the creation of humankind, a sort of covenant with Adam, Eve, and even the Serpent, after the fall, and then with Cain after he murders his brother. But actual terms for “covenant aren't found in these verses, so any attempt to call them “covenants” will be tenuous.

- The first time the Hebrew term for covenant—*berith*—shows up in the Hebrew Bible, it is with Noah (Genesis 6-9), but extends well beyond to Noah's family, and ultimately, every descendant—that is, all people on earth. God's covenants have long-ranging effects. It becomes clear that God's involvement in history is not intended for just one or a few people.
- Next, the word shows up in Abraham's call and God's ratifying a covenant. The story from Genesis 15-17 expresses God's role, Abraham's role, and the consequences of the broken covenant. The promises (Gen 12) to Abraham are threefold: Land, offspring (seed), and that his descendants would be a blessing to the nations. Once again, the covenant extends far beyond Abraham, and beyond the ethnic boundaries of his family.
- Exodus 2 next mentions a covenant between God and His people, Israel, who are in Egypt as slaves. God takes them to Mt. Sinai, and there invites the newly-redeemed people of Israel into a covenant with Him. They are given the law, but maybe more importantly, the sanctuary as a means of dealing with sin so that God could dwell among them. The role of the lamb in the covenant process isn't death with this week, but hopefully more will be said, as without it, Israel's future, even their promise “all that the Lord has spoken, we will do,” is empty. The Sinai covenant, likewise, is not just for that generation, but generations following.
- The last covenant the quarterly examines is the New Covenant, mentioned in Jeremiah 31. This passage suggests another, a new, covenant. Just as in the law of Moses formed a critical aspect of the Sinai covenant, the law again is vital. But unlike Exodus where the law is written on tablets of stone, now it is engraved on human hearts. The text of Jer. 31 implies that this covenant will find fulfillment in the hearts of all people, from the least to the greatest. Knowledge of God is a covenant result here.

Examining these covenants briefly brings up many questions. Below are some that you might consider asking, and as always, you can and should add your own. We don't learn if we don't ask good questions!

**Are there other covenants God made in the Old Testament not mentioned here, or reiterations to other individuals? If so, why do you supposed the quarterly didn't mention them?**

**How many years intervene between each of these various covenant ratifications? Why did God wait so long in between covenant visits? Why doesn't He show up to each generation and people group on earth, to every individual with a covenant? Or does He?**

**What similarities do we see in these covenants? What is God's role in each, and what is the role of the person or people with whom He makes the covenant?**

**What does God hope to accomplish by making covenants with His people?**

*Closing Comments*

A study of the covenants in Scripture opens many doors into God's character, human nature and responsibility, and the entire theme of sin and salvation. Throughout this quarter, we'll see some wonderful glimpses into God's amazing love.

*Opening Question*

**What was the most meaningful promise someone ever made to you?**

*Introduction*

Our lesson this week examines Genesis 6-9 in detail, the story of the flood and God’s covenant with Noah. Regarding the covenant itself, three main sections of the story appear:

1. God’s covenant with Noah in a corrupt generation, to save him out of it
2. God’s fulfillment of His covenant promise, saving Noah in the Ark
3. God’s universal New Covenant with Noah and his descendants after the flood

*Genesis 6-9*

The condition of the earth is described in ch. 6:5, 11-13. Evil thoughts, corruption, continual violence; these are broad terms for human plight. Maybe we don’t want the specifics! The quarterly suggests a downward spiral from Adam and Eve to Genesis 6 and the reason for the flood, but the effects seem immediate between chs. 3-4. Most people probably aren’t comfortable with the language of a gracious, loving God allowing, much less causing/sending, a catastrophe that ends the lives of humans. Our current culture would view such extremes as inhumane, torturous, and capricious. Yet the text of Genesis 3-6 presents a fairly strong case for the flood being neither a supernatural tantrum from a gunny-sacking deity, nor an extreme punishment given the crime(s). So many questions can be asked from this chapter (and some that aren’t—on the surface, anyway—related to the covenant such as the Nephilim, the Sons of God and Daughters of Men!), but here are a few to consider:

**If Humans were living for nearly 1,000 years, and their natural bent was away from holiness, away from love, away from the Creator’s likeness, how far might a person swerve given that much time?**

**Do you think that Genesis 6 is hyperbolic? Were the thoughts of the human heart *really* only evil continually? If you think it’s a figure of speech, what is the text conveying? If literal, how could humanity have sunk so low, and would this condition make the flood into a just response on God’s part?**

Enter Noah. The text describes him with a number of moral adjectives: he found favor in God’s eyes, he was righteous, blameless, and walked with God. What a contrast with the world around him at the time. While we might wonder (especially later in Genesis) about his kids, Noah himself represented God on earth.

**What might have led Noah to this relationship with God, when the rest of the world was going east, Noah was going west? Who might have been a positive influence in his life?**

**What would it have been like for Noah to live in such a world? Have you ever experienced times when walking a righteous path was difficult? How did you manage it?**



The word for Covenant first shows up here in Gen. 6:18. The verb used with covenant is “cause to stand” or “establish.” The subject of this verb is God. He is the one who makes the promise stand. God is also the “owner” of the covenant as He calls it “my covenant.” Noah certainly has a role in building the ark, but the covenant goes well beyond the floating chest of wood. God hopes to save the righteous, those who trust Him and are willing to obey His voice; and He *will!* Noah’s role is to get on board. God’s role is everything else!

### **Who benefits from keeping the covenant? Who loses if it’s broken?**

Following the flood, God uses the rainbow as a symbol of His covenant promise with all people never to flood the earth again. While some readers of Genesis have suggested a localized flood event would fulfill the story, the covenant promise of God never to flood the entire earth again would not be worth anything in such light. Every local flooding that takes lives would reflect badly on this promise. That the land hasn’t been flooded entirely (though mostly covered with water already), suggests God’s faithfulness to this covenant.

### **What is mankind’s role in the “rainbow” covenant of God?**

#### *Closing Comments*

The lesson on Thursday notes the use of the “remnant” concept, the “left-over” faithful through whom God fulfills His promises. While in the Flood and Sodom, the remnant was small, the term doesn’t require it. If I eat two cookies out of the bag and give “the rest” to my family, the “remnant” is certainly the large majority. Context must determine whether a remnant is large or small. In Noah’s case, the remnant was sadly small. But the flood account borrows the language of creation throughout the narrative; God is starting over with a new humanity after the flood. God isn’t giving up on people yet!

*Opening Question*

**How do you feel when someone keeps their promise to you? What about when they let you down?**

*Introduction*

God's covenant with Abraham forms the foundation of the world's three major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The setting for the covenant is God's call to Abraham to leave the country of his family—Ur in what would become Babylonia—and resettle in Canaan. God's relationship with Abraham is deep, complicated, and challenging to study.

*The Name of God*

Scripture identifies the deity who contacts Abraham. The quarterly notes the meaning of the four-letter name of God (Hebrew: yod-he-vav-he), usually spelled Yahweh in English. It is closely related to the word "to be" or "to exist." Therefore, God's name is, "the one who exists." Certainly that is true of an everlasting God. But many Hebrew linguists have noted the spelling of the Hebrew name is the *causative* form of the word "to be," meaning "the one who causes to be." That means more likely, that His name is "the creator." Who else can bring something into existence that doesn't now exist, in essential material form?

This God, who alone can make something out of nothing, calls Abram to the land of Palestine. No planes, trains, or automobiles aided him in his journey. It was solely on foot and by faith that He followed God's leading.

**The text may not say so directly, but how did Abram know that he was hearing the voice of the creator? Do we hear His voice today? Does He still speak to us, asking us to follow His leading?**

**What barriers or obstacles do you imagine Abram had to overcome in order to make such a journey.**

*Covenant Promises to Abram*

In several places (see Genesis 12, 15, and 17, especially), God makes promises to Abraham. Each one strikes at Abram's personal situation and identity.

1. To the homeless man who left all behind, God promises land, as much as he could see
2. To the man and woman too old to have children, God promised them offspring, descendants as numerous as the stars or grains of sand on the shore.
3. To the insignificant offspring of Noah's son Shem, God offers to be a blessing to all the nations, and a representative of heaven on earth.

**What was required for Abram to fulfill His part of the covenant? How did He respond to each of God's visits and subsequent promises?**

**How are these promises fulfilled in the New Testament through Jesus? What does the land have to do with God's promises? (see Hebrews 11 for more...)**

*Credited as Righteousness*

Between God's promises in ch. 15 and ch. 17 is the unfortunate and sad story of Hagar, Sarah's maid. Because Abraham and Sarah don't trust God's power to give them a child, they attempt to force the outcome of the promise through someone else. Their interference in God's promises brought only misery and pain, both immediately and for centuries following. Of course, the conclusion to the matter is found in the next stage of the covenant promise in ch. 17. God reassures Abraham, and the patriarch believed God. That is, He took Him at His word. God counted Abraham as righteous, changes his name, and assures Abraham that His wife will bear their child.

**What is the relationship between "taking God at His word" and using my (admittedly quite limited) reason, logic, or experience to judge God's promises? Is it a balancing act, must one be subsumed under the other, or can I live with both active, even if they contradict each other?**

*Closing Comments*

Some points to remember about this lesson:

1. God initiated the covenant with Abram, as He did with Noah. God is the one who does the seeking after relationship, even when people are ignorant of Him or don't know His voice.
2. Human stipulations in the covenant are few, but powerful: to obey God's voice and trust Him.
3. *After* Abraham believes, God grants him a new name, and gives a sign of the covenant—circumcision. The order is vital here!

*Opening Question*

**Why do we hesitate to enter into agreements that seem imbalanced or “unfair” to one party or the other?**

*Introduction*

One of the greatest divisions in protestant Christianity is between dispensationalists (many Baptists, non-denominational and Pentecostal churches) who read all the promises in the Old Testament as if they will be fulfilled literally to ethnic Jewish people at some time in the future, and covenant congregations who believe that the Jews in the Old Testament were God’s covenant people but the group expands in Christ to accept Gentile believers as well. Which is it?

If we can understand the promises made to Abraham—the father of the Jewish people!—and the New Testament affirmations about the identity of Israel, much of the confusion could be alleviated. The good news is that Jesus changes everything!

*Genesis 12:3, 18:18, and 22:28*

As we already alluded to the previous lesson, God’s promise to Abraham was a blessing to “all nations,” that is, all people groups on earth. Was Abraham alive to see that promise fulfilled? Hebrews 11 says “no.” The promise extended far into the future. But just how could such a promise be fulfilled?

1. First, with the expansion of Israel. As the people of God prospered, so their influence was to expand. Other nations would be drawn to Jerusalem and Israel’s prosperity, as was the case in the time of Solomon. The more Israelites around the world, the more people groups could hear of Israel’s God, and His invitation to join in the covenant.
2. Second, with preservation of the lineage through whom the Messiah would come. The promise in Genesis 3:15 continues through Abraham’s offspring, the hopeful future of God’s deliverer, a mighty one who would save His people.
3. Third, by remembering that the other nations were God’s special care; Israel was privileged with a message *about* God, but not alone with the blessings *from* God. The purpose of God was not an “us vs. them” attitude, but an “us and also them” perspective. God loved all people, and desired a relationship with the nations (see Jonah’s experience)
4. Fourth, by recognizing the messiah when He came, and joining in His work in the world. What a surprise that the Messiah should be God’s very own Son, not *just* another human on whom God put His stamp of approval.!

**What did Israel do with the privileges afforded them to them as witnesses of God to the nations?**

**How did the Jewish people view the nations around them throughout the Old Testament narratives including the Babylonian exile, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period (post-exilic period), and the 1<sup>st</sup> Century time of Jesus?**

*Remembering, and Deuteronomy 26:5*

When Israel entered the promised land after Egyptian bondage, they were to remember their history. They were small in number, but God fulfilled the promise made to Abraham. Over and over in the first 8 chapters (and a few later on) of Deuteronomy, Israel was urged to remember, warned not to forget, the promises of God and His role in their deliverance. He was the one who was fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant of making them into a great nation, and of blessing them to bless others. Even the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy 5 urged them to remember that they had been slaves, and thus to treat their servants with respect and honor, as “humans whom the Lord loved.”

**What role did forgetfulness and arrogance play in Israel’s failure to be a blessing to their neighbors? How might they have avoided the elitism that cropped up later? How might we avoid the same predicament?**

*True Israel: Romans 2, Ephesians 1-2, and Galatians 3*

Paul was very clear about Israel, that in Christ, the doors open to accept the nations into fellowship with ethnic Jews. Together, they make up *Israel*, the faithful followers of God. This was a revolutionary idea, and Paul even calls it a “mystery” in Colossians, that Christ’s Spirit could dwell in the gentiles by faith just as in the Jews.

This is the ultimate consummation of God’s promise to Abraham, that in Christ, all the promises of God are “yes,” they are a blessing to all people. The Greek word for “nations” is also often translated “gentiles,” the word from which we get “ethnicity.” The Jews were racist in that regard. But in Christ, those boundaries fall and all are one.

**How does it change one’s reading of the New Testament if “ethnic Israel” is no longer the main focus, but rather Israel by faith in the messiah, made up of blessed people from every nation?**

*Closing Comments*

Can there be a greater promise made to an individual in history than that made to Abraham about His descendants? And the powerful truth is that if you’re in Christ, you’re part of His offspring!

*Opening Question*

**What is your ethnic heritage and how significant is that background in your daily life?**

*Introduction*

God's plan and purpose for Israel was far-reaching. And without question, their ethnicity comes into the story. But it certainly isn't the *only* feature. In fact, Israelites were a "mixed race" from the start. They had no reason for ethnic pride as far as their spiritual election was concerned. This has far-reaching consequences for Christians of all people-groups today. God's covenant wasn't dependent on Israel's pedigree, but in His selection.

*Ezekiel 16:1-16*

Read through this amazing passage. This chapter in Ezekiel is meant to show how God feels about His people. He found them like an abandoned child, newly born, still wriggling helplessly in blood. But God took pity on her, raised her, and she became a woman, full grown, beautiful. It says God fell in love with her. This woman was ready for love, so God made her His own bride. While our modern sensibilities may be a bit shocked at these mixed metaphors, they convey God's role throughout Israel's history. He was there when they became a people, loved them, and has been everything for them. They aren't special because of their intelligence, beauty, wit, or any other characteristic in which people take pride. Instead, he loved her because she needed love. He was the parent she needed at just the right time. He became the spouse she needed at just the right time.

**What human experience can be compared to God's role toward Israel in this passage?**

Further in this passage, verses 17-59, Israel's apostasy and separation from God clearly bring the prophet (and God) to tears and heartbreak. Israel went after other lovers, violated the covenant which God made with her. She became more wicked than the nations around her. But God didn't give up on her. In fact, he even desires to reinstate the covenant! Verses 60-63 promise God's covenant again being established with Israel, and forgive them for their disobedience.

**What led to Israel's downfall? How did she become so *adulterous*?**

**How can the heart of humans become this soft and forgiving? How might a psychologist or psychiatrist view God's persistence for relationship in spite of His lover's rejection?**

### *Deuteronomy 28-29*

The covenant came with promised blessings to Israel. As you read through these chapters, it's hard to miss the implied material blessings Israel would reap if they remembered the Lord their God. They would become the lenders, not the borrowers; they would be the head, not the foot. But the opposite was also true. Should they forget Him, however, the covenant curses would follow. Just judging the two sections—blessings vs. curses—leads to a difficult conclusion: there is far more said about the curses than the blessings.

**Which covenant blessings would mean the most to you? What curses would be most impactful to experience?**

**Why would so much be written about the covenant curses and so much less about the blessings? What would God be communicating with this literary device?**

### *Remnant*

The quarterly moves to the beautiful yet contentious topic of the remnant. At a recent scholarly meeting, one well-respected Adventist professor presented a paper on the Remnant, pointing out how Adventists commonly assume the word “remnant” always means a small group left over. While it does mean “the rest,” that remaining portion may be rather large. For instance if the text said “Peter and John went into town while the rest (remnant) stayed with Jesus,” then the remnant is the majority! The caution was simply not to assume we know the size of the remnant in comparison with the other portion. Point well taken! However, there are numerous examples found throughout scripture that when God saves His people from a great calamity that involves judgment for sin, the faithful are often smaller than hoped for. This was the case at the flood, at Sodom, and in the prediction by Amos of future exile. It describes the faithful disciples after Jesus proclaimed we must eat His body and drink His blood (John 6); many were scandalized and only a few remained. Jesus’ parable about the paths to destruction and life indicate few find the high-road.

**What does the remnant concept tell us about God’s character and affection for His people? Remember, the remnant is usually that group of faithful people left after judgment for their sin...**

### *Closing Comments*

This week’s lesson focused on the characteristics of Abraham’s seed. Much more could be said about the church (ecclesiology) and her relationship to Christ as fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. A few other passages to read might include Ephesians 1-2, 5 and 1 Peter 2 for more about Israel’s identity as Abraham’s seed, God’s chosen people.

*Opening Question*

**Why might it be necessary renew a promise previously made?**

*Introduction*

Israel's redemption from Egyptian slavery presents the quintessential "mighty act of God" that is referred to throughout the prophets and the Psalms. God brings His newly freed people to Mt. Sinai and there proclaims His covenant to them. But it's really a reiteration of the covenant to Abraham. This covenant is based in God being their God and they as His people.

*Ransom Theology?*

The lesson notes the idea of Israel being *redeemed* or *ransomed*. This concept is used by Jesus as well in the gospels (see Mat 20:28 and Mar 10:45), that He gives his own life as a ransom for many. This theology brings up multiple issues and questions. Typically, someone is ransomed from a criminal who holds hostage. The price buys the freedom of the hostage. For God and Israel, the answers to the questions below may seem obvious; they are more difficult when we consider Jesus' ransoming us.

**Who or what held Israel captive? What about in Jesus' time?**

**Who or what demanded a price for Israel? What about in Jesus' time?**

**What was the price paid for Israel? What was the price paid by Jesus?**

**Why was Israel ransomed? Why were we ransomed?**

*Sinai*

Alden Thompson's book "Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God" takes on the difficult passages of the Old Testament, and few are more frightening than the scenes at Sinai when, on what would become the original "Pentecost" (50 days after the Passover), God gave His law(s) to Moses and the newly redeemed Israelites. The law is given in the context of covenant, and God's desire to be with His people.

As the quarterer walks through the covenant process, it notes the people receiving God's covenant, but they respond "all that the Lord has said, we will do." They haven't even heard the covenant stipulations yet. When the law is given, they cannot conceive of it's being beyond their ability to keep.

This process loses its impact if we fail to read the rest of Exodus, and see the building of the sanctuary, and God's desire to dwell among the people. The law would be a hinderance to unity between God and Israel, because He knew ahead of time that they wouldn't be able to obey completely. Paul, in Romans 5:20 and Galatians 3:17-29, makes a clear case that the law was only given to increase sin, not provide true life. Its role was to show Israel's sin, and then point to the redeeming/ransoming Lamb of God. The sanctuary service becomes of vital importance for Israel, then, in contrast to the Law of God in the Sinai Covenant.



**The sanctuary has played a significant role in Adventist theology and eschatology (last-day events). Has that role been overdrawn, or is the sanctuary as important today as it was in the early formation of the Adventist congregations?**

### *A Holy People*

It appears there are two primary theological errors concerning salvation that are easy to fall into. The first says that Salvation and the gospel is equal to God declaring sinners as holy, though they are not. The other error is that Salvation and the gospel is equal to sinful people, through keeping of the law, becoming holy. Both of these exist in Adventism, and other Christian faiths as well (though the first error is more prominent in other groups, and the second in Adventism). But Exodus 19:5, 6 reveals the truth about God's plan and purpose: God saves Israel while they are still helpless, declares them His people while they are learning to trust Him, *so that He* could make them holy. This means that salvation is a process whereby God delivers His sinful people, declares them saints, but does so in order that He might make them "a holy nation, a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests." Peter's quotation of this passage in 1 Peter 2:9ff is applied to both Jewish and Gentile believers, revealing the cross-ethnic ramifications of God's purposes.

**Which of the above errors do you find easier to fall into? How do we escape from the seductive lure of a cheap-grace "justification-only" salvation, or enticements of a "works-righteousness" salvation?**

### *Closing Comments*

God's covenant with Israel is beautiful because it takes a helpless, powerless people in slavery and redeems them. They are given an opportunity to know the holiness and lovingkindness of God, as depicted in His law. But their self-confidence in their ability to keep His covenant misunderstood the vast gulf sin created between them and their redeemer. Israel's history (and our own) show the human tendency to trust our own goodness far too much, and trust in God's ability to transform His people far too little. His desire is that we become holy, as He is holy; the good news and at the same time, most difficult part to accept, is that this is God's work in us. We must trust that He will do this that we might become the people He desires us to be.

*Opening Question*

**What is the most difficult obligation you've ever faced?**

*Introduction*

What a wonder that the God who created everything we know would also want to be personally invested in the lives of people who didn't even know Him yet. The covenant He makes with Israel places His law in the center of their congregation and at the front of their daily lives. Is it any wonder that they became so focused on actions, on "doing" what they thought might gain them credit in heaven?

*Election: Deuteronomy 7 and Romans 9-11*

The election of Israel—God's choice—was not because of Israel's amazing characteristics, but because God had made a promise to Abraham, and He is faithful to keep them. Calvinism presents election as something people have no choice over, and it appears there is at least a bit of truth in that. Romans 9-11 argues that God's election stands—He chose Israel because of His love and desire for the world to see His goodness. However, the covenant role Israel was to play cannot be equated to eternal salvation, and a once-saved-always-saved result. Election means purpose and privilege, not eternal security.

**How should Christians respond to the idea that God saves some people and chooses others to be lost? Is this the idea of Biblical election?**

**What lessons should Adventist learn from Israel regarding God's election and purpose for them? How does Jesus' parable in Matthew 21:33-46 offer a warning to Christians believing their election and privilege is secure?**

*The 10 Words*

Are the 10 Commandments essential to keep in order to maintain God's covenant with us? If we fail, is the covenant broken? These questions make more sense in a marriage relationship, one of the most sacred and beautiful expressions of human-to-human covenant. When a couple vows to love and cherish, even in difficult times (sicker, poorer, etc.), they vow an ideal. But the reality is not always beautiful promise-keeping. In fact, it's not the most difficult times that destroy relationships, but the mundane and daily grind that saps their love and destroys desire to fulfill their vows. But if those vows are intended as a promise to always be loving, does that mean an unkind word or insensitive action selfishly carried out suddenly and irrevocably destroys the marriage covenant? Is the couple then divorced because the vows were broken? I think most couples would argue of course not. The vows establish the hope of the best covenant relationship; reality can be less than that. Continual and flagrant ignoring of the covenant vows, however, will destroy the marriage. It will throw cold water on the fire of romance, and may even prevent any sort of reconciliation.

The 10 commandments of God are similar to the wedding vows on which God wants the best of relationships to be built. We cannot ignore them without great pain to God, and to our neighbors. Originally, the Hebrew term for the 10 Commandments was the “10 Words” of God. They aren’t even given in the imperative mood, that is, as commands, but rather as unfulfilled promises. Even when the New Testament quotes them, it does so by translating them as “future-tense” verbs, actions that Israel *will perform*, rather than using the available imperative mood. For Israel, these ideas were some of their first glimpses into the values of their Redeeming God. And just like a marriage vow, there is volition and choice; most people aren’t forced into marriage, and neither was Israel.

**How would these ideas have struck the Israelites fresh out of Egyptian slavery?**

**In what way are the 10 Commandments promises of future behavior? Why weren’t they given as *commands*?**

**Describe how these 10 Words of God can be seen as all-encompassing in terms of human relationships and how they might be limited. Is there a difference between the letter of the laws and the principles of these laws?**

**If the 10 Commandments were written by the finger of God Himself, how might we explain the differences between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, especially the Sabbath commands?**

**How might we explain the similarities between the 10 Commandments and the laws of the nations around Israel? What are some of the significant differences? Perhaps a quick Google search can help you here...**

**What would Israel have looked like if they had kept these commands completely? What about our society today?**

### *Closing Comments*

The commands of God are often viewed by sinful people as burdens that restrict their freedom, even though they ultimately lead to greater happiness and order in relationships. Others believe that keeping them as simply “rules” without concern for their relational value and purpose somehow earns favor with God. But a broader view of the commandments within the covenant clarifies their role as exemplars of God’s lovingkindness, a pattern for His people to have the best lives with one another, and the ultimate basis for determining righteousness and the need for forgiveness.

*Opening Question*

**How much evidence do you need to prove that someone loves you?**

*Introduction*

Few practices of most sects of Judaism set them apart from the rest of the world more than the Sabbath. This becomes true for Seventh-day Adventist, Seventh-day Baptists, and many Messianic Jews, as well. The idea of resting from all labor on a specific day of the week isn't unknown in secular culture or other religions (like Islam), but the reasons for it, and the specific day of rest, is unique in the Bible. How does the Sabbath function within the covenant? In what way can the Sabbath be a "sign" of God's covenant people?

*Genesis 2:1-4*

The Hebrew word for Sabbath is tied directly here to God's ceasing of creative activity, a noted "stopping." Thus Genesis 1:1-2:4 are like bookends—God beginning to create and God ceasing to create. The specialness associated with the Sabbath is often missed by Christians who believe that it is simply rest that God values, something that can happen at any time; but Genesis 2:1-4 clarify that God did something special with Time Itself. He didn't sanctify or bless "rest," but the seventh day itself. This act predates Sinai and the 10 Words, yet forms a foundation for the heart of God's covenant law.

**Why do you think God blessed a certain day of the week and not just rest itself? What is the value of sharing the same day off with other people around us? Doesn't that create some liabilities in society if someone isn't working?**

**The sun, moon, and stars were created partially as signs in the heavens as markers for days of the week, months, seasons, and years. Where do we get the seven-day weekly cycle, then?**

*Manna and the Sabbath: Exodus 16*

It's noteworthy that the Sabbath is clarified to Israel before they receive the law at Sinai. Providence saw fit to rain bread from heaven, but with stipulations. Not only was the *manna* a daily occurrence except on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week, it couldn't be saved for the next day *unless that day was a Friday*.

**What lessons did Israel learn about the Sabbath from the manna? How might this gathering/resting cycle have solidified or engrained the 7-day week in their culture?**

**How many different miracles were encapsulated in this "Bread from heaven"?**

**Many cultures around the world share a 7-day weekly cycle even if the Sabbath isn't part of their religious culture. How might you explain this?**

### *Sabbath as a Sign*

The quarterly listed the four places in the Old Testament where the Sabbath is referred to as a *sign* or *mark* of Israel's covenant-constituted people (Exo 31:13, 17, Ezekiel 20:12, 20). But it was a sign also of God's transforming power, His ability to make them Holy. If God can make a day holy, certainly He can make a people holy, special, set apart. After all, re-creation is akin to creation.

Some scholars have suggested that God was the first to ever create labor-laws by gifting people with the Sabbath. Thus, part of the covenant sign is resting, trusting that God has our back, that He will care for us. We are to labor six days, and believe in His providence for the 7<sup>th</sup>, just as Israel did concerning manna.

**What makes the weekly Sabbath such an ideal outward sign of our covenant loyalty to the Creator?**

### *Remembering: Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5*

There is only one commandment that begins with the words, "remember." Ironically (or not so much, given the Great Controversy), it's the one command that much of the world has neglected to take seriously. But how much we need rest! Though keeping the Sabbath on a specific day, honoring specific time, is often termed "legalism" by those who haven't tasted the beauty of Sabbath, those who truly experience God's rest—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual—have found it to be one of the most freeing of experiences.

**How has the Sabbath been meaningful in your experience? Do you have traditions that make the day special? Are there Sabbath traditions or rules today that do *not* have their foundation in Scripture, and might even violate the Sabbath in principle?**

**Why is physical rest so important for humans?**

**How is resting from work an act of loyalty, an act of worship, and a covenant sign to God, people around us, and the onlooking universe?**

### *Closing Comments*

As with any of the gifts God entrusted to Israel at Sinai, the Sabbath was intended to be shared. When the workaholic world around us sees the beauty and rest of Sabbath, God's people putting their trust in Him for everything, and seeing that the God of Heaven won't allow us to become slaves to labor, they will be drawn to this amazing, gracious God. How can you keep the Sabbath special from this day on?

*Opening Question*

**How easy is it to forgive someone you love dearly?**

*Introduction*

God promises in Jeremiah 31:31 that he would make a new covenant, not like the one made at Sinai. So, what was wrong with that covenant? Some people argue that the problem with the old covenant was that the stipulations in the law couldn't be kept; in other words, the Jewish law was the problem, and that law needed to be changed. Thus Jesus came and did away with the law on the cross and instituted a new covenant based on grace. But a glimpse at the passages that speak of this New Covenant suggest the problem lay elsewhere, as did the solution.

*The New Covenant: Jeremiah 31, Hebrews 8*

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34, then examine the context by reading the rest of ch. 31. The context for this new covenant is Jeremiah's promise to the exiles returning from the Babylonian captivity that God wouldn't forsake them. The people of Judah went into captivity because they had left their relationship with God, and they reaped the Deuteronomy 28-29 covenant curses. As far as they knew, the broken covenant left them somewhat hopeless. But God didn't leave His people without hope. Jeremiah assures the people that God would restore the fortunes of Israel.

In this new covenant, God writes the law in a new place—on the human heart! The law would become internalized, not external on tables of stone. Only then could God's people maintain the covenant relationship! And a central portion of the new covenant displays God's desire to put Israel's failures behind them, through His willingness to forgive their sins.

**How did Israel's failures leading to the Babylonian captivity reveal the need for a new location for the writing of the law?**

**If God was so quick to forgive Israel's sins, why didn't he just do away with the law? There would be no more covenant violation, then, right?**

*A Covenant for All People*

The Beauty of the new covenant is that it would encompass all people on earth. But this would require a new structure and legal framework, since many of the Mosaic covenant statutes were intricately linked to the theocracy and later Jewish monarchy. As the quarterly points out in Tuesday's lesson, Isaiah 56 clearly includes the Gentiles in the future promises. This means that when Jesus came to "confirm a covenant with many for one "seven" year period of time (see Daniel 9:24-27), He was looking beyond just the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

But this brings up an important question about the new covenant. Hebrews 8:8 makes it clear that the fault of the first covenant was with the people. So with whom, then, was this new covenant to be ratified? If the first covenant was being made with people who broke the law, then the new covenant needed to be made with an Israel who would keep the law. Where was such a people to be found?

Throughout the gospels, the parallels between the life of Israel and the life of Jesus gives us our answer. In Jesus Christ, we find the faithful Israelite, in whom the law was written on the heart and mind, who would keep the covenant stipulations perfectly. Hebrews 8 says that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant, yet He is also the receiver of the blessings promised in the Old Testament. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says that “as many as are the promises of God, in Christ they are yes!” Because God has fulfilled His covenant in Christ, we through faith in His perfect priestly ministry representing people to God receive the covenant blessings poured out on Christ.

The beauty of this covenant is that faith isn’t restricted to Israel; anyone can trust in Christ’s work in their behalf. Ethnicity is irrelevant to the New Covenant promises. Any human being can now—through faith!—have the assurance of the law written on his or her heart.

**How do we get the law written on our hearts? Does it just happen automatically? Must we ask for it to be done? Is it a one-time request and permanent application?**

**As our country (at the time of this writing) seems to be facing major upheaval politically, climatically, racially, and spiritually, how should we view this “new covenant” promise that people can actually live out God’s law of love? Is it even realistic?**

#### *New Covenant in Blood*

Read through the story of the last supper in each of the gospels, and answer the following questions:

**What made that meal so significant for Jesus? For His disciples? For us today?**

**How was His “new covenant” promise related to the Passover and the mosaic covenant? How was it different?**

#### *Closing Comments*

The New Covenant promise of the law written in our hearts seems to be the only answer to human sinfulness, the inherited cultivated selfishness natural to all people. Without a brand-new set of motivations, we cannot be like our Savior. We **MUST** be born again!

*Opening Question*

**Think of a place you used to live while growing up. How easy is it to recall the layout, the sounds, smells and experiences you had there?**

*Introduction*

Just as the old covenant had a sanctuary to accompany the law, priesthood, and sacrifices, so does the new. The author of Hebrews draws on the Old Testament imagery and confirms an important truth found in Exodus 25: Israel's sanctuary was a small-scale model based on plans shown to Moses. Those plans originated in heaven with God. That means that if Jesus serves as a priest, then the temple in which He serves must be parallel in some ways to the one given to Moses.

*The Purpose of the Sanctuary*

Read through Exodus 25:8-9, Leviticus 26:11-12, and Hebrew 8 and 9. According to these passages, the sanctuary served several roles:

1. To provide a place for God to "dwell" with his people, to have a relationship with Him
2. To enshrine the law of God centrally in the middle of the camp of Israel
3. To prevent God from abhorring His people
4. To provide a place for forgiveness
5. To teach Israel about the blood of the sacrifice
6. Others?

In many ways, the sanctuary is a living parable, a small-scale model of God's lovingkindness, holiness, law and presence offset by the reality of Israel's sin and need for constant forgiveness.

**Does there need to be a literal sanctuary in heaven just like the one on earth, or is the sanctuary more about ideas and actions of God? Defend your answer from scripture.**

**According to Hebrews, the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, so why did Israel need to offer them? What does this say about the need for a "better sacrifice"?**

**What makes Jesus' sacrifice "better"? In what way is it truly able to cleanse the conscience from sin? Is there a literal cleansing or is it something else?**

**Many theologians argue for a "substitution" theology where Jesus takes the human's place. How might Isaiah 53 or other passages support this theological view of the atonement? What might be arguments against it?**

*Sanctuary Limitations*

Read through Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:22-66. Solomon in his wisdom admits several facts about the sanctuary. Most importantly here, though, is that it couldn't "contain" God. Humans do not manipulate the divine in order to control it through buildings. Second, all



the promises made to Moses happened just as God had said, thus the temple was likely to be defiled by Israel's sins. Third, if Israel turned away from sin and back to God at His temple, He would hear and forgive, and restore them. Thus Daniel's prayer of repentance in Daniel 9 is really a covenant fulfillment of Solomon's prayer, as was his daily routine of prayer 3 times a day opening his windows for which he was thrown into the lion's den. With Solomon's prayer in mind, it's easier to see why the prophecies of Daniel concerning the sanctuary would be so important to him.

**What is the relationship between the sanctuary and God's "name" in Solomon's prayer?**

#### *The New Priest*

There isn't adequate space to speak about the new priesthood, but read through Genesis 14, Psalm 110, and Hebrews 5-7. The author Hebrews clearly believes that the new covenant needs a new priesthood, that the old priesthood's limitations would never provide the ideal intercessor. Several of those limitations include the sinfulness of the earthly Aaronic priests, as well as their humanity that left them weak with age and ultimately dead and unable to intercede. But Christ's ministry is better than Aaron's.

**Who was Melchizedek? What was his significance in the Old Testament?**

**After reading through these passages, why couldn't Jesus be a Levitical or Aaronic priest? Why did the Author of Hebrews believe Jesus was from the line of Melchizedek and a fulfillment of his typology?**

**How is the Melchizedekian priesthood perfectly suited for the New Covenant?**

#### *Closing Comments*

The New Covenant Sanctuary, Sacrifice, and Priesthood reveals the providence and revelation of God thousands of years before He brought the fulfillment to pass in Christ.

*Opening Question*

**What is the most valuable gift any human has ever given you?**

*Introduction*

The quarterly takes on the subject of the cross and our faith in God. The apostle Paul was overwhelmed with the graciousness of God in providing the gift of salvation—of oneness with God—free of charge to those willing to trust that it is so.

*The Sacrifice*

Much has been written about the cross throughout the ages. One of the most meaningful to me has been John Stott's "The Cross of Christ." In it, he posits that the cross shows at the same time the depths of man's fallenness contrasted with the greatness of God's love. This alone is often enough to prove to honest people that the Bible speaks the truth about humanity, and thus also about the divine.

Read Colossians 1:19-23 and Psalm 85 and answer the following questions:

**In Psalm 85, what has God already done for Israel, and for what does the Psalmist still long in this song?**

**Psalm 85:10 is frequently used to ascribe meaning to the cross of Christ. How might this be so, according to Colossians**

*Faith*

Just as much has been written about the cross, the same is true about faith. The quarterly this week returns to Genesis 15:6, describing the faith of Abraham. Paul takes on this subject in Romans 4. Read through that chapter before continuing.

Paul shows himself to be quite a Torah (Law of Moses) scholar here. In writing to the Romans, Paul had to address faith vs. works of the covenant law. In the Roman congregation were Jews who had believed circumcision brought someone into covenant relationship with God. But Paul had a different perspective, and He uses the story Abraham to prove it. First, he notes that Abraham is the father of the Jews and Gentiles alike, but it isn't because of the patriarch's "obedience," but because of His belief in God's promises. It was this kind of "belief" that made the promises of God a reality in his life. God said he'd have a son in his old age, in spite of the fact it seemed impossible. We know plenty about the humanity of Abraham, his imperfections, fears, and even doubts. But when he believed, God "credited it to him as righteousness." Faith, then, is the foundation for our righteousness if we're truly children of Abraham.

**Circumcision became a sign of the covenant for Abraham's descendants. Which came first for Abraham: circumcision or his faith in God's promises?**

**How is this fact good news for the Gentiles, and Jews alike? How is Abraham a model of faith for both groups?**

*Identity*

Today's popular culture spends a lot of time on the subject of identity. Some people have chosen to identify with genders or ethnicities into which they were not born. What is in their hearts is what is most important, some say. Apparently the subject of identity is important also to God. In the case of Abraham, God "declares him righteous" even though we know he isn't.

**How can God do this? Isn't it disingenuous? Or is there something to proclaiming a truth about someone that is yet to be?**

**What role to emotions have when it comes to accepting God's promise that He can make us righteous? What if I don't "feel saved" or "feel forgiven" or "feel righteous"?**

*Closing Comments*

If Abraham could trust God to make something new out of his dead body (and then see it happen in real life) then we can have the same faith today in God making something new out of us. We have no reason to doubt. There is plenty of evidence for His work in our lives. He just asks us to trust him implicitly!

*Opening Question*

**What would your ideal life look like if you could script it yourself?**

*Introduction*

The promises of God for a new life begin now and culminate when Christ returns and makes everything new. The quarterly focuses on many of the present realities of the new life: Joy, No Guilt, and New Love. But it also takes on the Eternal as well.

*The Hopeful Future*

Throughout the Old Testament, new covenant restoration was promised in passages like Isaiah 65-66. Read through these chapters and answer the following questions:

**What did the “new world” look like for Israel? How would they have envisioned the new covenant changing their world?**

**Which part would have meant the most to you then?**

But the New Testament takes on these promises and expands them. Read 2 Peter 3 and consider the following questions as well:

**What event(s) must take place for God’s recreation to become a reality?**

**What role do people play in bringing about those events? Take note of the word “hasten” in verse 12. Is Peter suggesting we can actually make a difference in God’s timing?!?**

Finally, consider Revelation 21-22. As you read those chapters, take note of the many promises there.

**Where is the temple/sanctuary, that has played such a tremendously meaningful part in the covenant to this point? Why would God not include it in the New Jerusalem?**

**When you consider life forever without death, mourning or pain, does it excite you, terrify you, or something else? Why?**

*Closing Comments*

The book of Revelation concludes with the promise “behold I am coming soon” three different times, and an invitation to “come.” God invites all of us into His covenant by faith that He might pour out on us the blessings promised in Revelation. What would hinder you from accepting His offer?

