

# **Jeremiah**

## **The Covenant**

Lesson #11 for December 12, 2015

Scriptures: Genesis 9:1-17; 12:1-3; Galatians 3:6-9,15-18; Exodus 24; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

1. As suggested by the title, this lesson is all about the agreements and covenants made between God and His people at various times in history. Christians often speak of *covenants* in terms of the old covenant and the new covenant. (Romans 9:4; Galatians 4:24) But, in fact, there is only one basic agreement between God and human beings: God's agreement to rescue human beings from our sinful, erroneous ways and restore us into His kingdom by faith.
2. What is faith? In order to understand the role of faith in our salvation, we must clearly understand what faith is. Here is the best definition of *faith* that I know. It was formulated by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell in the following words:

***Faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well-known. The better we know Him, the better the relationship may be.***

***Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God—based on the more-than-adequate evidence revealed—to be willing to believe what He says as soon as we are sure He is the One saying it, to accept what He offers as soon as we are sure He is the One offering it, and to do what He wishes as soon as we are sure He is the One wishing it, without reservation, for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.***

***Faith also means that, like Abraham (Genesis 18:22-33) and Moses, (Exodus 32:5-14; Numbers 14:11-25) we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"—Stated many times by Dr. A. Graham Maxwell***

3. Almost every Christian knows that the greatest example of faith that the Scriptures talk about is Abraham. So, what can we learn about Abraham's faith? Read Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6-9; and James 2:18-24. In other words, "faith works." But, what about Rahab? One other point that we must make clear is that in Scripture, there is one Greek word, *pistis*, that is translated into four different words in English: *faith*, *belief*, *trust*, and *confidence*.
4. Do you see a parallel between the Adamic covenant (Genesis 3:15), the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:6-7), the Sinai covenant (Exodus 19:8; 20:2; 24:3,7), the Davidic covenant (Ezekiel 37:24-27), and the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)?
5. We need to be very clear on several points: 1) There is no way human beings can earn their own salvation. 2) God's salvation is a gift, a gift which He gives freely to those who trust Him enough to let Him be the most important thing in their lives. 3) To those who understand clearly God's instructions and their implications, it becomes a wonderful gift because they realize that God never asks them to do anything which is not for their own best good.
6. What is the difference between the first covenant—sometimes called the old covenant as given at Sinai—and the new covenant as discussed in Jeremiah 31:31-34? The most obvious difference is this: In Exodus 19:8, the people of Israel promised to do everything which God told them to do even before they heard Him say what He wanted them to do! When Moses came down from the mountain and told them what God wanted them to do, the people said, "We will

do everything that the Lord has said.” (Exodus 24:3, *GNB*) Then, after God appeared on the mount, Moses wrote God’s words on a scroll and read it to them; and for the third time, they said, “We will...do everything that he has commanded.” (Exodus 24:7, *GNB*) Thus, the first covenant was basically God setting out the conditions and the people promising that they would obey. Of course, we know how long that lasted!

7. By contrast, the new covenant is God promising to do all the work. But, there are conditions. Through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing, we must focus on God over sufficient time and intensity that the truth becomes cemented into our lives.
8. Think for a moment about the covenant given to Noah as recorded in Genesis 9:1-17. Do you think the world in Noah’s day was more wicked than our world today? Why did God choose to send a flood at that point? The real reason why God chose that time was not because things were so incredibly evil—although they were—but rather because of the fact that only one family or possibly only one man was still in communication with Him! He could not risk losing complete contact with the human family.

God had given men His commandments as a rule of life, but His law was transgressed, and every conceivable sin was the result. The wickedness of men was open and daring, justice was trampled in the dust, and the cries of the oppressed reached unto heaven.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 91.2.

9. Notice two important facts about the covenant given to Noah: 1) God did all the promising. 2) His promises were for the benefit of everyone living on earth including the animals. The rain which refreshes the earth and sometimes brings the beautiful rainbows, falls on the good and the bad like. (Matthew 5:45) What do you think? Should God have imposed conditions on the family of Noah after the flood? It is clear from the events which followed the flood as recorded in Genesis 10 and 11 that not everyone who got on the boat was a saint! Should God have put more conditions on Noah and his family?
10. Why weren’t there any rainbows before the flood? What causes the rainbow to form in the sky? When raindrops fall through the air, the trailing part of the drop forms a prism which causes the sunlight passing through it to scatter into the rainbow colors when multiple water drops act together. Thus, it was impossible to have a rainbow before there was rain.
11. Read Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-5; 17:1-14. What was God promising Abraham? What did He ask Abraham to do in exchange? Abraham was required to leave his home in Ur/Haran and travel to Canaan. He was asked to circumcise not only himself but also all the males in his household. He was asked to faithfully await the arrival of the son given to Sarah. And later, he was asked to sacrifice that son on the altar on Mount Moriah. In exchange for the early promises, a son was to be given to Sarah through a miraculous birth. And through that son, Abraham was to become the father of many nations and the ancestor of the Messiah/Christ.
12. Read Romans 4:1-3 and James 2:18-24. Are these two passages in Scripture in conflict with each other? Do you agree with the following words from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, December 7?

Abraham was no more saved by works than the thief on the cross was; it’s always and only God’s saving grace that brings salvation. Abraham fulfilled his end of the covenant promise. His obedience revealed the faith that took hold of the promise of salvation. His works didn’t justify him; instead, the works showed that he was already justified. That’s the essence of the covenant and how it is expressed in the life of faith (see *Rom. 4:1-3*).

13. Considering the definition of *faith* which we looked at earlier, is it clear in your mind why faith

is the only requirement for salvation? It should be obvious that God has won the great controversy all by Himself. None of us had anything to do with that victory. But, He offers us the benefits of that victory if we will trust Him. God is able and willing to remake us—step by step—into His image. We cannot do that ourselves; we can only allow Him the opportunity to do it as we study our Bibles, pray, and practice witnessing or teaching others about Him. As we do that, we give Him the opportunity to work in our minds and hearts, thus, transforming us. The Holy Spirit has all the power needed to transform your life.

14. Read Hebrews 4:2. What was the obvious problem with that covenant made at the foot of Mount Sinai? Did they receive it by faith? We are naturally sinful human beings. There is nothing we can do about that ourselves without the help of the Holy Spirit. Only by allowing God to come into our lives can we crowd out sin. Sin cannot be stamped out; it can only be crowded out. If I have enough faith, can I get by without grace? Grace makes faith possible!
15. Have you ever had the experience of reading or hearing some important truth from Scripture and promising God that you would faithfully follow it? How successful were you in doing that?
16. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. How does this actually work in our experiences? What is God asking us to do? What is He promising to do for us? What does it mean when God says He will no longer remember our sins? Is it because some fancy book work has been done in heaven and God's memory has been modified? Is there ever anything wrong with God's memory? Or, is it that God chooses to ignore our past sins because He says, truthfully, that those sins no longer describe us? Can we actually be changed into His image? (GC 555) Forget about your past sins. Turn to God, and let Him guide you in the future.
17. Think of the context in which Jeremiah 31 was spoken. Jerusalem was about to fall into the hands of the Babylonians and be completely demolished. In that situation, what was God trying to say to His few remaining faithful friends in Jerusalem? He was promising that if they would come back to Him—and He was thinking especially about those who would return to Jerusalem after the exile—He would be their God, and they would be His people. The same law which had been written on the tables of stone at Mount Sinai would then be written on their “hearts.”

The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart. Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness, we accept the righteousness of Christ. His blood atones for our sins. His obedience is accepted for us. Then the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth “the fruits of the Spirit.” Through the grace of Christ we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts. Having the Spirit of Christ, we shall walk even as He walked.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372.2.

18. The real key to the new covenant or testament or agreement that God was promising to His people once again was that they would come to know Him as fully as possible. To really know God is to love Him. That kind of a faith relationship transforms us. (John 15:15; 17:3)
19. Read Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. In these two passages, Luke and Paul were talking about the life and death of Jesus and suggesting—as Jeremiah had done 600 years earlier—that a faith relationship with God is what is required for salvation. Jesus was a perfect representation of the Father. If the Father had come instead of the Son, nothing would be different. (TMK 338.4)
20. Our salvation is linked to the death of Christ because without the answers He gave in the great controversy, no one could be saved. And His love expressed by His willingness to live and die for us moves us to want to be like Him. This is not a legal transaction that takes place somewhere in heaven; it is a real change that takes place in us.
21. Christians have a ceremony given to them by Jesus Christ to remind them on a regular basis

of this agreement between themselves and God. Jesus Himself at the last supper with His disciples linked this new ceremony with His second coming. (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:12-18)

22. Stop and think about it for a moment. If Jesus does not intend to come back again to rescue His faithful and trusting people, there really was no reason for Him to come the first time.
23. Why do you think Jesus promised that He would not eat the unleavened bread or drink the fresh grape juice until He comes to rescue His people from this earth at the second coming? Was God giving us just a hint of some of the things we will eat and drink in heaven? Or, is it all symbolic of His death?
24. Today, Seventh-day Adventists still follow the instructions given by Jesus nearly 2000 years ago. Once every three months as a part of the Communion Service, we wash one another's feet, partake of the unleavened bread and grape juice, and seek to understand more clearly God's plan for our lives. What does the Communion Service mean to you?
25. In our modern day of scientific exploration, there are many things that science can explain in great detail which were complete mysteries to our ancestors. For example, science can now explain why raindrops produce rainbows. But, there are many other things that science can never explain. Those include: 1) Why did Jesus have to die? 2) How does His death affect each one of us personally? 3) How can we know for sure that He is coming back?
26. In light of this lesson, what is the relationship between *faith* and *works*? What would it actually mean to say that the law is engraved on our hearts (minds)? Science would tell us that a heart is just a specialized muscle that pumps blood. We know that God was talking about our minds.
27. Read Galatians 3:15-18. What point was Paul trying to make there? Clearly, he wanted to demonstrate that the promise made as a covenant with Abraham cannot be annulled or changed by the giving of a law to the children of Israel 430 years later.
28. So, what was the purpose of the law? Read Galatians 3:19-25.
29. We often hear people talking about *justification by faith*, *sanctification by faith*, *righteousness by faith*, even *salvation by faith*. What is the common factor in all of these expressions? Obviously, it is *faith*. If we maintain the right kind of relationship with God, He will take care of all the details necessary to save us. If we come to regard God as a Friend by developing that faith relationship with Him, He adopts us into His family; by faith we become children of Abraham. Justification, sanctification, righteousness, and salvation do not come any other way.
30. We all know that because of our teachings about the Old Testament and law, Adventists have been accused of being legalists. What impact has the law had on your life on a day-by-day basis? As Seventh-day Adventists, we clearly keep the Sabbath; the keeping of the law links us to the three angels' messages in the book of Revelation which John said will be the characteristics of the remnant people of God at the end of this world's history.
31. As sinful human beings, we have ignored God's covenants, tried to change them, tried to circumvent them; and by every means possible, we have tried to bypass God's simple instructions.
32. Having studied all about covenants today, what is your understanding of Genesis 15:6 (*GNB*)? "Abram put his trust in the LORD, and because of this the LORD was pleased with him and accepted him." In our day, could we have an Abraham-like faith by putting our trust in the Lord?

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