

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

Lesson #8 for May 22, 2021

Scriptures: Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 56:7; Hebrews 2:9; Deuteronomy 4:13; 7:9; 10:13; Amos 3:3; Genesis 18:19.

1. What would our lives be like today if we followed God's directions in everything we did? What does it mean "to walk in the paths of righteousness"? Why did God choose Israel? Can that teach us anything about the Seventh-day Adventist Church in our day? Exactly what is the role of God's law today? What did Moses tell us about why God chose the children of Israel?

**Deuteronomy 7:7:** "The LORD did not love you and choose you because you outnumbered other peoples; you were the smallest nation on earth."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Deuteronomy 7:7). New York: American Bible Society.

2. **Jewish tradition teaches that God chose Israel because all the other nations had rejected Him first!** That is not based on the Bible, and it does not give us clear indications about how the other nations rejected God!

They [the Hebrews] had no merit of their own that would make them worthy of God's love and His choice of them as His people. They were few in number, a group of enslaved tribes, and politically and militarily weak. Plus, in terms of culture and religion, they were mixed, bland, and without much influence. **The basic cause, then, for Israel's election lay in the mystery of God's love and grace.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, May 16.<sup>††</sup> [Does God have a good reason for everything He does?]<sup>‡</sup>

3. Did it make any difference that they were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? What happened to the thousands of people who had been a part of Abram's/Abraham's "household"?

**Abraham's household comprised more than a thousand souls.** Those who were led by his teachings to worship the one God, found a home in his encampment; and here, as in a school, they received such instruction as would prepare them to be representatives of the true faith. Thus a great responsibility rested upon him. He was training heads of families, and his methods of government would be carried out in the households over which they should preside.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets\** 141.1.<sup>†</sup>

4. Isn't it very likely that Isaac and Jacob had significant numbers of people connected to their households as well? Did any of those people go into Egypt with the children of Israel?
5. It is important to recognize that when we believe that God chose Israel for some reason, it does not mean that they are the only ones who will be saved and everyone else lost. As we have suggested earlier, **perhaps God chose Israel because He knew they would demonstrate all the best and all the worst characteristics that befall humankind!**
6. Did God have plans for the other nations even back in the days of ancient Israel?

**Isaiah 56:7:** “I will bring you to Zion, my sacred hill, give you joy in my house of prayer, and accept the sacrifices you offer on my altar. **My Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations.**”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

7. We know that ancient Israel was supposed to be a shining light, revealing the truth about God to everyone around them. Unfortunately, they failed in that goal.
8. Do we, as a church, believe that we have been given a task like that as well? Are we saying something to the world that no one else is saying? Who else understands and is talking about the great controversy between God and Satan over the character and government of God? How many of us are? Very few!
9. It is certainly true that God has not chosen either ancient Israel or us to be some kind of exclusive club! God’s plan has always been to offer salvation to everyone.
10. So, what percentage of Seventh-day Adventists are actively sharing the gospel today? Are we fulfilling the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14?

**Matthew 24:14:** “And this Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world for a witness to all nations; and then the end will come.”—*Good News Bible*.\* [How much of that task is left?]<sup>‡</sup>

11. We are very familiar with the story of Israel at Mount Sinai and the two tables of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. In ancient times when something was really important, they wrote it on stone so it would not be forgotten!

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

12. So, what does God’s covenant relationship mean for us today? Does God’s covenant involve any compliance on our part? What is the role of law in that relationship?
13. Can you think of any kind of relationship that does not have some boundaries connected to it? A marriage, a business partnership, even a friendship would be destroyed if one violated it by stepping outside of accepted norms and boundaries. Whole organizations are trying to subtly eliminate the principles of Christianity from the USA.
14. If you were responsible for setting up a new society, which of the Ten Commandments would you think was unnecessary? Why?
15. In the Bible we find such words as *law*, *statutes*, *testimonies*, *commandments*, and even *the word of the Lord* being used almost interchangeably. (Psalm 78:10; 50:16; 25:10; 103:18; and Deuteronomy 33:9) Think of some person with whom you have a very close relationship. Are there certain boundaries around that relationship which you would never consider violating?

**Deuteronomy 10:12-13:** <sup>12</sup> “Now, people of Israel, listen to what the LORD your God demands of you: **worship the LORD and do all that he commands. Love him, serve him with all your heart,** <sup>13</sup>**and obey all his laws. I am giving them to you today for your benefit.**”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

What are your first thoughts when you think of law? Police officers, traffic tickets, judges, and jail? Or do you think of restrictions, rules, authoritarian

parents, and punishment? Or, perhaps, do you think of order, harmony, stability? Or maybe even . . . love?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Tuesday, May 18.

16. The Hebrew word sometimes translated as *law* is *Torah*. That word in its largest context is the word used for the five books of Moses in the Bible. But, in general, it means “teaching” or “instruction.” Those books include all sorts of instructions: Moral, civil, social, and religious. How do you feel about the instructions given in the five books of Moses? Do some of them seem strange to you? Or, do you delight in God’s *torah-law*?
17. Why do you think God felt it was necessary to give them so much detailed guidance? Was it for the “benefit” of the people? (See Deuteronomy 10:13 quoted just above in Item #15.)
18. **Do you really regard all of God’s requirements as a benefit to you?** Did God expect too much of the Israelites? Did He really expect them to obey all of His instructions? All the time? Is unquestioning and uncompromising obedience an unreasonable request?
19. Seventh-day Adventists have been privileged to have Ellen White as our modern-day prophet. She has given us hundreds of thousands of pages of handwritten guidance from God. Do you consider the counsel of Ellen White equal in importance and validity to those instructions given by Moses to the children of Israel?
20. How do you understand Romans 9:31-32?

**Romans 9:31-32:** ... <sup>31</sup>while God’s people, who were seeking a law that would put them right with God, did not find it. <sup>32</sup>And why not? **Because they did not depend on faith but on what they did.** And so they stumbled over the “stumbling stone.”—*Good News Bible.\*†*

21. What does it mean *to depend on faith in everything you do*?
22. In modern times, we tend to think of science as a way to discover truth. In fact, science would not even be possible if the laws governing the universe were not consistent and unchanging. Should we find that surprising? Who made those rules?

**Malachi 3:6:** “I am the LORD, and **I do not change.** And so you, the descendants of Jacob, are not yet completely lost.”—*Good News Bible.\*†*

**James 1:17:** Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven; it comes down from God, the Creator of the heavenly lights, **who does not change or cause darkness by turning.**—*Good News Bible.\*†*

23. Do those verses give you confidence in the trustworthiness of God? It can be demonstrated that without consistency and reliability, we cannot depend on anything; science would be impossible. And love would also be impossible. (See the handout: “Love” at [https://www.theox.org/images/uploads/bbk/KHart\\_BTGG\\_PDF\\_Gnrl\\_Love\\_16.pdf](https://www.theox.org/images/uploads/bbk/KHart_BTGG_PDF_Gnrl_Love_16.pdf))

**Psalms 40:8:** “How I love to do your will, my God!

I keep your teaching in my heart.”—*Good News Bible.\**

The “assurance that God is reliable and dependable lies in the truth that He is a God of law. His will and His law are one. God says that right is right because it describes the best possible relationships. Therefore God’s law is never arbitrary or subject to whim and fancy. It is the most stable thing in the universe.”—Walter R. Beach, *Dimensions in Salvation* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1963), p. 143.—[as quoted in

24. As Christians, we firmly believe that we are saved by faith. What is the relationship between faith and God's laws? **We always need to remember that *faith* is just a word we use to describe one's relationship with God as with a close friend.**
25. So, how do you think about the Ten Commandments, for example? We believe that those first four commandments talk about our relationship with God; the last six talk about our relationships with other human beings. Would you accept the statement that God has given us these particular laws for our own benefit? When you look around or consider listening to national or international news, what happens to people who break one or more of the Ten Commandments?
26. What do you think God is saying to us in the following verses?

**Genesis 18:19:** "I have chosen him in order that he may command his sons and his descendants **to obey me and to do what is right and just.** If they do, I will do everything for him that I have promised."—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*†</sup>

**Genesis 26:4-5:** <sup>4</sup> "I will give you as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, and I will give them all this territory. All the nations will ask me to bless them as I have blessed your descendants. <sup>5</sup>**I will bless you, because Abraham obeyed me and kept all my laws and commands.**"—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*†</sup>

**Exodus 19:5:** "Now, **if you will obey me and keep my covenant,** you will be my own people. The whole earth is mine, but **you will be my chosen people.**"—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*†</sup>

**Leviticus 26:3:** "If you live according to my laws and obey my commands...."—*Good News Bible.*<sup>\*</sup>

Exodus 19:5 makes it clear: "*If ye will obey . . .*" The conditional aspect of the covenant is undeniable; though bestowed by grace, though unearned, though a gift to them, the covenant promises were not unconditional. **The people could reject the gift, deny the grace, and turn away from the promises. The covenant, as with salvation, never negates free will. The Lord does not force people into a saving relationship with Him; He doesn't impose a covenant upon them. He freely offers it to everyone; everyone is invited to accept it. When a person does accept it, obligations follow, not as a means of earning the covenant blessing but as an outward manifestation of having received the covenant blessings. Israel should obey, not in order to earn the promises, but so that the promises could be fulfilled in her.** Her obedience was an expression of what it is like to be blessed by the Lord. **Obedience does not earn the blessings,** in that God is obligated to bring them; obedience, instead, **creates an environment in which the blessing of faith can be made manifest.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Thursday, May 20.<sup>†§</sup>

27. Are God's requirements unreasonable? Do you enjoy obeying God? Do you feel guilty if you violate one of His commandments? Do we think that everyone else should obey the commandments even though we might not need to?

**Deuteronomy 5:33: “Obey them all, so that everything will go well with you and so that you will continue to live in the land that you are going to occupy.”—Good News Bible.\*†**

28. Would it be correct to say that God will take to heaven everyone who is safe to save—safe to live next door to for eternity?
29. As one reads through the five books of Moses, much is discussed about law and covenants. Was all that necessary? Why did God feel it necessary to take them to the foot of Mount Sinai and perform that incredible epiphany on the top of the mountain?

**If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision.** And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; **they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone.** And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*\* 364.2.† [Is this talking about the Ten Commandments?]<sup>‡</sup>

30. When Jesus was asked about which is the greatest commandment, we have His response as recorded in Matthew 22:34-40.

**Matthew 22:34-40:** <sup>34</sup> When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together, <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to trap him with a question. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher,” he asked, “which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ [Deuteronomy 6:5] <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and the most important commandment. <sup>39</sup>The second most important commandment is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself.’ [Leviticus 19:18] <sup>40</sup>The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

There must first be love in the heart before a person can, in the strength and by the grace of Christ, begin to observe the precepts of God’s law (cf. Rom. 8:3, 4). **Obedience without love is as impossible as it is worthless.** But where love is present a person will automatically set out to order his life in harmony with the will of God as expressed in His commandments.—Article on Matthew 22:37. In F. D. Nichol (Ed.), *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, 484.1.†§ [Also see Item #32 below.]<sup>‡</sup>

In the precepts of His holy law, God has given a perfect rule of life; and He has declared that until the close of time this law, unchanged in a single jot or tittle, is to maintain its claim upon human beings. Christ came to magnify the law and make it honorable. He showed that **it is based upon the broad foundation of love to God and love to man, and that obedience to its precepts comprises the whole duty of man.** In His own life He gave an

example of obedience to the law of God. In the Sermon on the Mount He showed how its requirements extend beyond the outward acts and take cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 505.1.†

31. What kind of people will find keeping God’s laws easy? Why is it that love works better for law-keeping than fear?
32. The bond of love makes one want to obey while **to obey because you are afraid means you would disobey if the opportunity presented itself**. Review these passages that we studied last week.

**The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*\* 97.3-98.0 (1900).† [How can we develop that kind of life?]<sup>‡</sup>

**A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. *If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.*** Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* July 22, 1897, par. 11.† [Italic type is added.]<sup>‡</sup> [Compare 12MR 236.1 which has minor differences. Also compare *That I May Know Him* 120.4 in which the crucial section in italic type above is omitted.]<sup>‡</sup> [How many people in heaven will be complaining?]<sup>‡</sup>

33. We have been discussing God’s relationship with the Hebrew people; but, it is very clear even in the Old Testament that God intended to reach out to all other nations as well.

“Yahweh has always been in contact with *non-Hebrews and chose to make ‘heathens’ His representatives and agents, even priests according to His will.*

. . .

“Yahweh uses Jethro the Kenite, who was familiar with the name Yahweh before Moses, and, in fact, helped him to understand it, to facilitate His plans and purposes for humankind. . . . Here we have a so-called **heathen, Afro-Asiatic people preserving this vital intelligence before the Hebrews came on the scene!**”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, p. 36; emphasis supplied.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 106].<sup>†‡§</sup> [Jethro was a Midianite, a descendant of Midian, one of the sons of Abraham and Keturah. (See Exodus 3:1; Genesis 25:1-2.)]<sup>‡</sup>

“The Hebrew word law (*tôrāh*) appears in the Old Testament no less than

220 times. It must not be taken to mean 'law' in the Latin sense of *lex*, meaning law of the empire. Nor is it to be understood as the Greeks understood their word for law (*nomos*), namely, that which had always been done. In the Hebrew language the term *tôrāh* comes from the word *hôrāh*, meaning 'to point out,' 'to teach, [sic] or 'to instruct.' Accordingly, the noun *tôrāh* means in its broadest sense 'teaching' or 'instruction.' In this sense, the word *law* signifies all the revealed will of God, or any part of it."—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 106-107.<sup>‡§</sup>

"Thus it is evident that the way of salvation in the Old Testament and the way of salvation in the New Testament are the same—both being salvation by grace through faith, which results in obedience."—Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*, p. 78.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 108].<sup>‡§</sup>

34. Have you ever suffered from breaking God's law? How much better would our world be if everyone obeyed God's law? Even just the last six commandments!
35. A careful evaluation of the things we have been talking about will demonstrate that God's plan of salvation was just the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament.

**You cannot have a thought without Christ.** You cannot have an inclination to come to Him unless He sets in motion influences and impresses His Spirit upon the human mind.—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*\* 73.1.<sup>†</sup>

William Barclay said that to be truly religious is to love God and to love the ones whom God made in His own image. This love is not some vague, nebulous sentimentality but a full commitment to God that issues forth from the heart in practical service toward our fellow humans.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\*108.

36. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we sometimes suggest that our challenge is to follow the example of Jesus every day. Can you think of some **examples from the life of Jesus that demonstrated His incredible love for those around Him**? Remember that Jesus, even when young, lived under incredibly difficult circumstances.

Satan was unwearied in his efforts to overcome the Child of Nazareth. From His earliest years Jesus was guarded by heavenly angels, yet His life was one long struggle against the powers of darkness. **That there should be upon the earth one life free from the defilement of evil was an offense and a perplexity to the prince of darkness. He left no means untried to ensnare Jesus. No child of humanity will ever be called to live a holy life amid so fierce a conflict with temptation as was our Saviour.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 71.2.<sup>†</sup>

**Christ was the only sinless one who ever dwelt on earth; yet for nearly thirty years He lived among the wicked inhabitants of Nazareth. This fact is a rebuke to those who think themselves dependent upon place, fortune, or prosperity, in order to live a blameless life. Temptation, poverty, adversity, is the very discipline needed to develop purity and firmness.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 72.2.<sup>†</sup>

**Jesus worked to relieve every case of suffering that He saw. He had little money to give, but He often denied Himself of food in order to relieve those who appeared more needy than He. His brothers [Matthew 13:55-56] felt that His influence went far to counteract theirs. He possessed a tact which none of them had, or desired to have. When they spoke harshly to poor, degraded beings, Jesus sought out these very ones, and spoke to them words of encouragement. To those who were in need He would give a cup of cold water, and would quietly place His own meal in their hands. As He relieved their sufferings, the truths He taught were associated with His acts of mercy, and were thus riveted in the memory.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 87.1.<sup>†‡</sup>

**Jesus was the healer of the body as well as of the soul.** He was interested in every phase of suffering that came under His notice, and **to every sufferer He brought relief**, His kind words having a soothing balm. None could say that He had worked a miracle; but virtue—the healing power of love—went out from Him to the sick and distressed. Thus in an unobtrusive way He worked for the people from His very childhood. And this was why, after His public ministry began, so many heard Him gladly.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 92.1.<sup>†</sup>

37. Why did God think it was necessary to give so many detailed instructions to Moses? If we set as our goal to follow the example of Jesus, would we need all those detailed instructions? Are they supposed to be for our benefit? Or, for God's? Or, both? Does anything we do on this earth impact God in any way?

**1 Corinthians 4:9:** For it seems to me that God has given the very last place to us apostles, like people condemned to die in public as **a spectacle for the whole world of angels and of humanity.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

38. In light of what we have studied in this lesson, do you think it is possible to obey God's laws and to be a part of that group that will finally carry the gospel to the entire world? (Matthew 24:14)
39. Do you find that those around you consider the Ten Commandments firm and fixed, having been written in stone? Or, are they, like some have suggested, just "Ten Suggestions"?
40. How is your relationship with God impacted by God's law?

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Last Modified: March 14, 2021

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