

Present Truth in Deuteronomy

The Everlasting Covenant

Lesson #3 for October 16, 2021

Scriptures: Genesis 12:1-3; 17:7; Romans 4:1-5; Exodus 2:24; Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 8:5; 26:16-19; Matthew 28:10.

1. To those who have carefully studied all of Scripture, it becomes apparent that there is a very close link between the first chapters of Genesis and the book of Revelation. What happened to our study of Deuteronomy?
2. This lesson will discuss the issues involved in *covenant* as in a promise or an agreement.

Revelation 14:6: Then I saw another angel flying high in the air, with **an eternal message** of Good News to announce to the peoples of the earth, to every race, tribe, language, and nation.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Revelation 14:6). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible**].[†]

Titus 1:2: ... which is based on the hope for eternal life. God, who does not lie, promised us this life **before the beginning of time**.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

3. There are actually a number of references to an everlasting covenant in Scripture. This week, we will discover that the idea of *covenant*, talking about our faith relationship with God, is prominent in the book of Deuteronomy.

Hence, it's no wonder that the Bible talks at other times about the "everlasting covenant" (*Gen. 17:7, Isa. 24:5, Ezek. 16:60, Heb. 13:20*), because **the essence of the gospel is covenant, and the essence of the covenant is the gospel:** God out of His saving grace and love offers you a salvation that you do not deserve and cannot possibly earn; and you, in response, love Him back "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (*Mark 12:30, NKJV*), a love that is made manifest by obedience to His law: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (*1 John 5:3, NKJV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, October 9.^{†§}

4. What does it mean to say: "The essence of the gospel is covenant, and the essence of the covenant is the gospel"? Is this God's promise to us? Or, ours to Him?
5. Would you consider the promise of God made to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 to qualify as a covenant? Is this a covenant between God and the Devil? Would it be correct to call the covenant relationship that we can have with God, *faith*? Is that why Paul wrote what he did in Acts 16:30-31?

Acts 16:30-31: ³⁰Then he [the Philippian jailer] led them out and asked, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**"

³¹ They answered, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your family.**"—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Can my faith save my family?][†]

6. The first obvious covenant in Scripture is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3.

Genesis 12:1-3: The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. ²I will give

you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,

But I will curse those who curse you.

And **through you I will bless all the nations.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

7. Read Genesis 15:5-21. God and Abram/Abraham went through an incredible process to seal that covenant. Imagine cutting a cow, a goat, and a ram each in half and also killing a dove and a pigeon and laying them out on the ground in order to “sign” an agreement! As a result of that experience, Abraham was promised that his descendants would rule from Egypt to the Euphrates. Was this an actual event? Or, was this in a dream?

Romans 4:1-5:¹ What shall we say, then, of Abraham, the father of our race? What was his experience? ²If he was put right with God by the things he did, he would have something to boast about—but not in God’s sight. ³The scripture says, “**Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.**” ⁴Those who work are paid wages, but they are not regarded as a gift; they are something that has been earned. ⁵But those who depend on faith, not on deeds, and who believe in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is this faith that God takes into account in order to put them right with himself.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Obedience involves two steps: 1) Listening, and comprehending God’s words, and 2) Following that advice.][‡]

8. What are these verses trying to tell us? It should be obvious that **we can never earn our way to heaven**. So, heaven, in one sense, must be a gift. But, God cannot give that gift to everyone. He chooses to give it to those who have faith which will cause them to be safe to live next door to for eternity. And that faith is accounted for righteousness.
9. Why do you think Abraham trusted God? Remember that he had no Bible, no pastor, no Sabbath school, and no church to attend. He only had a special relationship with God through various experiences, some of which are recorded in Scripture.
10. But, Abraham was certainly a friend of God! Look what he did.

Galatians 3:6-9:⁶ Consider the experience of Abraham; as the scripture says, “He believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.” ⁷You should realize then, that **the real descendants of Abraham are the people who have faith.** ⁸The scripture predicted that God would put the Gentiles right with himself through faith. And so the scripture announced the Good News to Abraham: “**Through you God will bless the whole human race.**” ⁹Abraham believed and was blessed; so all who believe are blessed as he was.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

God called Abraham to be a teacher of His word, He chose him to be the father of a great nation, because He saw that Abraham would instruct his children and his household in the principles of God’s law. **And that which gave power to Abraham’s teaching was the influence of his own life.** His great household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism.

[Abraham was running a faith-based university!] Such a household required a firm hand at the helm. No weak, vacillating methods would suffice. Of Abraham God said, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.” Genesis 18:19. Yet his authority was exercised with such wisdom and tenderness that hearts were won. The testimony of the divine Watcher is, “They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.” Genesis 18:19. And **Abraham’s influence extended beyond his own household**. Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.—Ellen G. White, *Education** 187.2.† [What kind of relationship did those Canaanites have with God? What was their relationship with Abraham? Was that a saving relationship?][‡]

11. Clearly, Abraham was teaching those who became a part of his household to worship a very different kind of God. And that God is constantly seeking for ways to draw near to His people. (See Jeremiah 31:33; Leviticus 26:12.)
12. A challenging question which we must deal with repeatedly as we study the Bible is: “**Why did God choose the children of Israel as His special representatives on this earth?**” It certainly was not because they were all saints. And why did He give them permission to go in and occupy the land and drive out or destroy the nations that were there?
13. God repeatedly told the children of Israel that He honored them because of their forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If it was Abraham to whom God gave that original promise to which the children of Israel looked back, do we have someone to look back to as the leader of Christianity? **Would we dare to claim Christ as our Leader?** Do we—as Gentile Christians—have the privilege of claiming Abraham as our father?

Galatians 3:28-29: ²⁸So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. ²⁹**If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised.**—*Good News Bible*.*† [What a statement from a former Pharisee!][‡]

14. God had told Abram about 400 years before the exodus that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan as their property. But, to make sure that they understood clearly how directly He planned to work with them, they went through that incredible experience of witnessing the 10 plagues on Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and, then, that experience at Mount Sinai. While they were at Mount Sinai, that covenant which God wanted to have with them was renewed.
15. The experience at Sinai is remembered by Bible students primarily for the giving of the Ten Commandments. **If we are not Jews, does God expect that law to apply to us? Even in our day?** If so, shouldn’t God expect us to fulfill our side of the covenant? Could you find any reason why any of God’s laws should be discarded? Why do people discard the Sabbath commandment?
16. The Hebrew word for *covenant*, *berit*, is found 27 times in the book of Deuteronomy; so, Deuteronomy has been called *the book of the covenant*. Those four sermons that Moses

prepared, wrote, and presented to the people repeatedly emphasized **the relationship that God wanted to have with them; which is known as His covenant**. And God started out by **repeating the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5**. Why was that necessary? The older generation of Israelites who had been the primary people at the foot of Mount Sinai were all gone—they died in the wilderness. **God was now repeating His commandments and emphasizing them to a new generation.**

17. One of the most puzzling parts of this second giving of the Ten Commandments is the difference in reasons given for observing the Sabbath. Didn't Moses recognize that difference in the Sabbath commandment? We usually feel that the Exodus 20 version of the Ten Commandments is the more authentic one. Why did Moses then say in Deuteronomy 5:22: "He gave these commandments and no others"?
18. Having left Egypt, do you think the children of Israel were focused on the fact that God had promised Abram that they would have the land of Canaan as their home? How many of them understood that original promise to Abram? How many knew of that promise?
19. We started this lesson by suggesting that God's covenant plans for the human family were established before the foundation of the earth.

Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped Their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled. When upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished," He addressed the Father. The compact had been fully carried out. Now He declares: Father, it is finished. I have done Thy will, O My God. I have completed the work of redemption. If Thy justice is satisfied, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." John 19:30; 17:24.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 834.2.†

20. We have seen that the Bible suggests—and Ellen White explicitly says—that God's covenant with the human race was made before this earth was created. What does that imply? God made plans for our rescue and our salvation even before we, the human race, were created or sinned. Could we, as a Seventh-day Adventist Church, accomplish what the Jews failed to do in their day? We have already seen that Genesis 6:18; 9:13; 15:18-19, tell us that God had tried to establish a working relationships with many before the days of the Israelites. Genesis 17:7 talks about an everlasting covenant. (Compare Revelation 14:6-7.)
21. It is clear from the five books of Moses that God was constantly trying to prevent His people from adopting the pagan practices of the nations around them. How much do we know about those pagan practices? Not a great deal. Clearly, they were pagan, polytheistic, and involved some very degrading practices. They believed that to really impress their god, they might even need to burn to death one of their children as a sacrifice!
22. In Deuteronomy 20 which we will study in the future, it is suggested that the children of Israel could enter the land of Canaan, killing utterly everyone. But, do you remember God's original instructions to them about how they were to conquer the land?

Exodus 23:20-33: ²⁰ "I will send an angel ahead of you to protect you as you

travel and to bring you to the place which I have prepared. ²¹Pay attention to him and obey him. Do not rebel against him, for I have sent him, and he will not pardon such rebellion. ²²**But if you obey him and do everything I command, I will fight against all your enemies.** ²³My angel will go ahead of you and take you into the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and **I will destroy them.** ²⁴Do not bow down to their gods or worship them, and **do not adopt their religious practices.** Destroy their gods and break down their sacred stone pillars. ²⁵If you worship me, the LORD your God, I will bless you with food and water and take away all your illnesses. ²⁶In your land no woman will have a miscarriage or be without children. I will give you long lives.

²⁷ “I will make the people who oppose you afraid of me; I will bring confusion among the people against whom you fight, and I will make all your enemies turn and run from you. ²⁸I will throw your enemies into a panic; I will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites as you advance. ²⁹I will not drive them out within one year; if I did, the land would become deserted, and the wild animals would be too many for you. ³⁰Instead, **I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land.** ³¹I will make the borders of your land extend from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean Sea and from the desert to the Euphrates River. [That happened in the days of David.] I will give you power over the inhabitants of the land, and you will drive them out as you advance. ³²**Do not make any agreement with them or with their gods.** ³³**Do not let those people live in your country; if you do, they will make you sin against me. If you worship their gods, it will be a fatal trap for you.**”—*Good News Bible*.*†

23. **But, they did not want to do it God’s way and let Him get the credit for the victories! They wanted the credit. God’s reason for wanting to take the Israelites into Canaan His way was to avoid any chance of their learning pagan ways and following them.**
24. One other thing that the ancient pagan religions were known for besides child sacrifice was their fertility cult religions. What does that mean?
25. **Numbers 25:1-5,9:** ¹ When the Israelites were camped in the Valley of Acacia, the men began to have sexual intercourse with the Moabite women who were there. ²These women invited them to sacrificial feasts, where the god of Moab was worshipped. The Israelites ate the food and worshipped the god ³Baal of Peor. So the LORD was angry with them ⁴and said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of Israel and, in obedience to me, execute them in broad daylight, and then I will no longer be angry with the people.” ⁵Moses said to the officials, “Each of you is to kill every man in your tribe who has become a worshipper of Baal of Peor.”... [A plague broke out; but, it was stopped.]
⁹But it had already killed 24,000 people.—*Good News Bible*.*†
26. Can you even imagine what kind of worship services those were?
27. Is it any surprise that God called His people to be separate and distinct from those nations?

Deuteronomy 26:16-19: ¹⁶ “**Today** the LORD your God commands you to obey all

his laws; so obey them faithfully with all your heart. ¹⁷**Today** you have acknowledged the LORD as your God; you have promised to obey him, to keep all his laws, and to do all that he commands. ¹⁸**Today** the LORD has accepted you as his own people, as he promised you; and he commands you to obey all his laws. ¹⁹**He will make you greater than any other nation that he has created, and you will bring praise and honour to his name. You will be his own people, as he promised.**”—*Good News Bible*. *† [Italic type and bold type are added for emphasis.]‡

28. As Moses was finishing his sermons to the Israelites, they were camped across the Jordan River from Jericho. Moses was determined to make it as urgent as possible that Israel maintain a right relationship with God. Given all we know about them, would you call them “The faithful people of God”? Would God claim us as His faithful people today? While our study of the history of the children of Israel might lead us to think that they were pretty wicked, we have seen that in contrast to the other nations around them, they probably looked pretty good! And the other nations recognized that Israel’s God was very remarkable. Imagine a wandering young person observing the pillar of fire or cloud over Israel! What would s/he think? What did they say about it to their fellow countrymen?
29. Compared to the other nations, the children of Israel had “present truth.” And what about us? After Jesus came and showed us how to live and how to relate to God, then He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6, *GNB*,* *KJV*,* *NKJV**) There should not be any questions left.
30. We have noticed the fact that Deuteronomy is organized in a pattern that was consistent with covenant agreements common in the days of Abraham and Moses. But, the relationship God wants to have with us is much deeper and broader than just a legal agreement. **God wants to treat us as His children, even as His friends.** (John 15:15) Can we be sure that God has chosen us as His children? Are we His friends?
31. Think of how Jesus related to His disciples while He was on this earth. He treated them as brothers and friends.
32. So, what is the relationship between obedience to God’s law and a loving relationship with Him?
33. Remember that Jesus said: “If you love me, you will obey my commandments.” (John 14:15, *GNB**) To know Him is to love Him.

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. **The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service.** When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 668.3.† [To know Him is to love Him! Is sin hateful to us?][‡]

34. Notice also this comment by Ellen White.

The spirit of bondage is engendered by seeking to live in accordance with legal religion, through striving to fulfill the claims of the law in our

own strength. There is hope for us only as we come under the Abrahamic covenant, which is the covenant of grace by faith in Christ Jesus. The gospel preached to Abraham, through which he had hope, was the same gospel that is preached to us today, through which we have hope. Abraham looked unto Jesus, who is also the Author and the Finisher of our faith.—Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor*,* September 22, 1892, par. 1; Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 6, 1077.7.†

35. These are the themes we have seen in this lesson:

- **The God of life.** The Lord established His covenant with Israel, not because of them and who they were, but because of Himself and who He is—the God of life. [Shouldn't God be able to do that for everyone?]
- **The chosen people.** Because of God's faithfulness to the fathers, He has chosen Israel to be His covenant people.
- **A holy people.** Called by the God of life to be the covenant people, they are to be a holy [distinct] people, as well.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 39.†§

36. God seems to have suggested again and again that His covenant involves *today*, right now, every minute? (See #27 above.) God recognizes that in order to live according to His plan for our lives, it must become a habit. God's covenant with the human race is an indication of who He is and what He is like, not an indication of anything about us. Nothing we could ever do would make us worthy of what God has done for us. In Deuteronomy, there are many warnings against various aspects of idolatry. What is so bad about idolatry?

Idolatry is the very mechanism whereby God's people would move away from God and therefore away from life. Moses describes idolatry as a process that originates in ourselves; for the worship of idols is the worship of what we do, of who we are. This is why Moses counsels: " 'take careful heed to yourselves' " (*Deut. 4:15, NKJV*). This is why the first commandment that is derived from the affirmation of God's act of salvation (*Deut. 5:6*) is the commandment that enjoins monotheism (*Deut. 5:7*), which is followed by the commandment that forbids idolatry (*Deut. 5:8*). This also is why in the same context, the commandment to keep the Sabbath is justified by God's act of salvation (*Deut. 5:15*)—and why the repetition of the Ten Commandments is followed by the call to love God (*Deut. 6:1-9*), which implies the same exclusive relationship.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 40.†§

37. God tried to make a clear case in Deuteronomy 4:5-40 for why the children of Israel should faithfully obey Him and not get distracted into any of those other religions. He reminded the people of their experience with Him at the foot of Mount Sinai. No other nation had ever had such an experience. He warned them against worshiping sun, moon, or stars, as well as animals, birds, or reptiles which other nations were already worshiping. He also reminded them that even though they heard Him and they felt the effects of His being on the mountain, they never saw Him. There is no way they could make an idol representing Him because they had never seen Him. And then, starting with Deuteronomy 4:27-29, He talked about some of the evil things that would happen to them if they disobeyed and began worshiping like those other nations. But, after giving that long dissertation, Moses

turned to Deuteronomy 6 and said we must learn to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our strength. (See Deuteronomy 6:5.) And, He suggested some ways to remind us of that fact.

38. Was it really necessary for God to choose one particular people—in this case the children of Israel—to be His receptacle for the transmission of the truth about universal salvation? Why did God seem to work only with them for hundreds of years? Remember that the word *holy* or *sanctified* means to be set apart, to be different from those around. Try to imagine yourself camped with the children of Israel on the plains of Moab across the flooded Jordan River from the city of Jericho and God speaking to Moses who had been your leader for 40 years, giving you these messages. How do you think you would have responded? Can we, inherently sinful people, really develop a close working relationship with our holy God? Would our lives be obviously different? Is that why Jesus said what is recorded in Matthew 5:16?

Matthew 5:16: “In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.”—*Good News Bible*.*

39. What does it really mean to be separate? To be holy? What would you do if you found yourself in the following situations?

- You are invited to a friend’s house. Your friend, who is not an Adventist, serves you a meal with pork that she has prepared. How can you be “human”—that is, loving and respectful of her hospitality—and yet be holy, as in not transgressing God’s prohibition against unclean foods?
- You are in the church, and behind you a group of youth are laughing and talking. How will you teach them to be reverent and to respect the sacred character of the sanctuary (“being holy”) in a way that still inspires a positive relationship with them?
- How can you explain the truth of prophecy to a group of nonbelievers and still be clear, interesting, and relevant to them?
- You are a leader in a church that is divided into two groups. One group likes to emphasize social justice, brotherly love, and the importance of grace, while the other group emphasizes judgment and the law. How do you propose to manage the tension between both groups?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 42-43.

40. Are we ready to live the kind of lives God is asking us to live? Are we ready to represent Him so that those around us can recognize Him in us?

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