**Lesson – 10 The Two Covenants**

**Read for your study:** [*Gal. 4:21–31*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal+4:21-31); [*Gen. 1:28*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+1:28); [*2:2, 3*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+2:2-3); [*3:15*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+3:15); [*15:1–6*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+15:1-6); [*Exod. 6:2–8*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod+6:2-8); [*19:3–6*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod+19:3-6).

**Memory Text: “But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother” (**[***Galatians 4***](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal+4:26)[***:26***](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Phil+2:2)**, NIV).**

**Introduction:** Many times when we learn some new truth, there is a threshold at the door of that truth that we have to learn in order to understand the rest of it. And this threshold at the door of that truth is about Law and Grace. Any man who does not understand the difference between Law and Grace will never understand the gospel. It is like trying to learn to drive without learning how to use a steering wheel and the brakes.

Christians who reject the authority of the Old Testament often see the giving of the law on Sinai as being inconsistent with the gospel. They conclude that the covenant given on Sinai represents an era, a dispensation, from a time in human history when salvation was based on obedience to the law. But because the people failed to live up to the demands of the law, God (they say) ushered in a new covenant, a covenant of grace through the merits of Jesus Christ. This, then, is their understanding of the two covenants: the old based on law, and the new based on grace. But Salvation was never by obedience to the law; biblical Judaism, from the start, was always a religion of grace. (***Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, for November 26)**

**Ellen White** tells that “Adam and Eve, at their creation, had knowledge of the law of God; they were acquainted with its claims upon them; its precepts were written upon their hearts. When man fell by transgression the law was not changed, but a remedial system was established to bring him back to obedience. The promise of a Saviour was given, and sacrificial offerings pointing forward to the death of Christ as the great sin offering were established.

Adam taught his descendants the law of God, and it was handed down from father to son through successive generations. But notwithstanding the gracious provision for man’s redemption, there were few who accepted it and rendered obedience…

The law was preserved by Noah and his family, and Noah taught his descendants the Ten Commandments. As men again departed from God, the Lord chose Abraham, of whom He declared, “Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” **Genesis 26:5.** To him was given the rite of circumcision, which was a sign that those who received it were devoted to the service of God—a pledge that they would remain separate from idolatry, and would obey the law of God (**Patriarchs and Prophets pp. 363).**

This lesson deals with the ideas involved in *covenant*. By Definition: Covenants are agreements or promises between two people or two groups of people. There are three major covenants mentioned in the Old Testament:

1) The original covenant with Abram/Abraham **(Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-14)**

2) The covenant with the children of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19:7, 8; 24:3, 7)**

3) The covenant with the children of Israel at the time of their Babylonian captivity mentioned in **(Jeremiah 31:31-34)**. We usually speak of only two covenants because the renewed covenant to the children of Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity was largely a repeat of the covenant with Abraham back in the beginning. Let us dive into our study with this thought!

 **Covenant Basics:**

God had always dealt with humanity through His promises as **Hans K. LaRondelle** writes, “From Adam to Jesus, God dealt with humanity by means of a series of covenant promises that centered on a coming Redeemer and which culminated in the Davidic covenant **(Gen. 12:2, 3; 2 Sam. 7:12–17; Isa. 11)**. To Israel in Babylonian captivity God promised a more effective ‘new covenant’ (**Jer. 31:31–34)** in connection with the coming of the Davidic Messiah **(Ezek. 36:26–28; 37:22–28).**”—**Hans K. LaRondelle, Our Creator Redeemer (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2005), p. 4.**

Paul uses an Old Testament story from the life of Abraham. This is significant because the Legalists all claimed to be the sons of Abraham. Paul shows them the difference between Law and Grace and proves that the Legalists were not under grace and therefore not the spiritual children of Abraham.
The Galatians had not yet turned back to the bondage of the Law but they desired to. Paul was trying to stop them and focus them on life under grace. Paul challenged them to be aware of what the Law really was.

**Question: What** **was the basis of God’s original covenant with Adam in the Garden of Eden before sin?** [*Gen. 1:28*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+1:28)*;* [*2:2, 3*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+2:2-3)*,* [*15–17*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+15-17)*.*
The main focal point of God’s command to Adam and Eve was not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The simple command was to **‘obey and live’**. It was a covenant from God saying as long as you will obey Me, you will live. So, it was a covenant based on obedience and relationship. But once the promise or the covenant was broken by Adam and Eve, God had to restore the relationship by immediately enacting a covenant of grace based on the eternal promise of a Saviour ([*Gen. 3:15*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+3:15)). This was the first gospel promise for the hope of eternal life through Christ.

In **Deuteronomy 7:9** God shows His [faithfulness](http://www.cgg.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Library.sr/CT/PERSONAL/k/244/Fruit-of-Spirit-Faithfulness.htm) in keeping His covenant with those who submit to His will and in forgiving the sins of those who genuinely [repent](http://www.truegospel.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Basics.tour/ID/7/Repentance-Belief-and-Gospel.htm). In addition, His Word is eternally reliable and true.

**The Abrahamic Covenant: Genesis 12:1-5**

In **Genesis 12:1-5** God made some serious promises with Abraham. In this promise we only see God’s grace for it is only God who is making promises. There is no indication that suggests that God and Abraham had come to some agreement or understanding with any witness present as a mediator, for it is required when there is an agreement for two or more parties to agree to or discuss. God's promise to Abraham, and the inheritance that will come from that in the future, was not something that had to be negotiated. A mediator was not necessary, because there was only one party—God—who was agreeing to do a certain action. Abraham in return was just called to have faith in the fulfillment of the promise.

In Abraham's day, covenants were sometimes agreed to by preparing a sacrifice, cutting it in two pieces and halving it exactly. They would lay the pieces out on the ground. Then those making the covenant had to pass between the divided carcasses. This symbolized the seriousness of their intentions to keep the covenant, because the divided carcass represented what would happen to them if they did not keep their oaths. They were committing themselves to be cut in two if they broke their word. That was not the way every covenant was agreed to, only rather more serious covenants.

In **Genesis 15:10** it is interesting to read that *God* is the only one shown passing between the divided carcasses. **Why?**

* First, this shows God's seriousness to meet the requirement of the covenant.
* It also shows that God was not holding either Abraham or his descendants to the same stringent requirement to the covenant as He held Himself.
* This promise therefore would be met by God's grace, and not by man's works. Nobody will meet the terms of the covenant on the basis of works, but by grace.

**Hans K. LaRondelle** writes, “With the ‘blessing’ pronounced on Abraham and through him on all human beings, the Creator renewed His redemptive purpose. He had ‘blessed’ Adam and Eve in Paradise ([Gen. 1:28](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+1:28), [5:2](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+5:2)) and then ‘blessed Noah and his sons’ after the flood ([9:1](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+9:1)). This way God clarified His earlier promise of a Redeemer who will redeem humanity, destroy evil, and restore Paradise ([Gen. 3:15](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+3:15)). God confirmed His promise to bless ‘all people in His universal.

How true that God not only gave His word, but, by symbolically passing through the pieces of slaughtered animals, He staked His very life on it. **Of course, Jesus ultimately gave His life on Calvary to make His promise a reality.** Abraham believed, but he also had questions along the way. His faith was a growing faith. God assured him through a sign of circumcision.

**Question: Why did God give circumcision to Abraham and his family?**

Since God instituted circumcision as the sign of the covenant He made with Abraham ([Genesis 17:10-11](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/bible.show/sVerseID/408/eVerseID/409)), it predates the Old Covenant by several hundred years. When God called Israel out of Egypt and gave them His laws, He included the command to circumcise male babies ([Leviticus 12:3](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/bible.show/sVerseID/3048/eVerseID/3048)).

Circumcision identified the Israelites as physical descendants of Abraham, gave them a sense of national identity, and set them apart from other nations of the world. The most likely reason was so that young “Jewish” males could not hide their true identity if they went to the fertility cult religious services and got involved with sexual and immoral acts.

**Question: Did circumcision still serve that role or function in the days of Paul?** There was certainly a lot of immorality, sexuality, and there were many sexual perversions connected with the worship of the pagan gods in cities like Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and probably Rome. Furthermore, if one went to the gym to exercise, he did it in the nude. So, everyone could see if he was circumcised as a Jew.

**Ellen White** tells us that “To him was given the rite of circumcision, which was a sign that those who received it were devoted to the service of God—a pledge that they would remain separate from idolatry, and would obey the law of God.” - **Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 363.**

**Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar:**

Each of us would like to know what God’s purpose for our lives is. In fact, we would like to see it all mapped out quicker and according to our ways and our approval. This is what our human nature is. We like to take short cuts and run ahead of God’s way.

In **Galatians 4:21-31** Paul is talking about grace and law in the allegory of Sarah and Hagar. In this allegory, Sarah equals the New Covenant of Grace and Hagar equals the Old Covenant of Law.
Paul wants us to see that it is by grace and not by law that we will be able to fulfill God’s purposes for our lives. How? We are to bring honour and glory to Him by following His ways and doing what He wants us to do. Paul uses this story to show us how we often go about fulfilling God’s purpose for our life and the way we should go about it.

**Question: Looking specifically at the promises God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-5, how did Abraham respond?**

Abraham had understood that God’s Purpose was to bless the World through him. Abraham thought this was a good plan. He wanted to have a family, leave a legacy and he wanted to be a blessing. The only problem, in Abraham’s eyes at least, was that God was moving too slow. And this shows one of the problems when we expect God’s purposes to be fulfilled with Man’s plans.

Paul reminded that Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac, was born of Sarah, the free woman. Ishmael, was born of Hagar, the slave woman.

According to ancient law and custom the status of a mother affected the status of her son. Ishmael was born the ordinary way, requiring no miracle and no promise of God. Isaac was born as the result of a promise. Abraham and Sarah were beyond the age of childbearing, but God miraculously fulfilled His promise in bringing life out of the deadness of Sarah’s womb.

**Lesson -** There are many times that we think we know exactly what God wants for us, but it is not happening fast enough. It gets tough on us. But it is often in the hard times that God encourages us to stay close to Him and receive His grace. In those times of difficulty, God is not moving too slowly, He is perfecting His power in us. But when we seek a shortcut, we disconnect the power. That is what Abraham did. He sought a shortcut.

Be patient and let God work things out according to His schedule.

**Proverbs 14:12** tells us, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

Whatever the situation in your life that seems to be taking God too long to resolve, recognize that He is perfecting His power in you. Rejoice in that fact.
Whether it be marital issues, job related issues, financial issues, stress issues, school issues, whatever it is that God doesn’t seem to be taking care of, Don’t short circuit the Power Source by using your own schedule, because that will only lead to the second problem.

**Hagar and Mount Sinai:**

In order to emphasize the contrast between Law and grace Paul treated those two mothers figuratively:

* One was the Mosaic, which had its origin at Mount Sinai. Those under this legal covenant were slaves. As Hagar brought forth a slave son, so does the Law.
* The other covenant was Grace. As Sarah brought forth a free son, so does grace.

Hagar stood for the first-century city of Jerusalem - a city enslaved to Rome and in slavery to the Law.

* Sarah stood for the Jerusalem which is above, the mother of all the children of grace. This heavenly city, which one day will come to earth (according to Rev. 21:2), is now the “city of the living God” (according to Heb. 12:22). The heavenly Jerusalem is the home of all the righteous believers.

**Question:** **Why does Paul identify Mount Sinai with the negative experience of Hagar?** [*Exod. 19:7–25*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod+19:7-12); [*Heb. 8:6, 7*](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Heb+8:6-7).

The author points out that the covenant at Sinai was intended to point out the sinfulness of humanity and the remedy of God’s abundant grace, typified in the sanctuary services. Instead of responding to God’s promises in humility and faith, the Israelites responded with self-confidence. They sought to turn God’s covenant of grace into a covenant of works. Hagar symbolizes Sinai in that both reveal human attempts at salvation by works.

**Question: What are the Consequences of Trying to Fulfill God’s Purpose with Man’s Plan?**

The result is separation, self righteousness and loss. Whether we are slaves to sin or slaves to the law, we will face separation.

Slavery to sin is driven by desires. A desire to experience life to the full, but we seek to do it in the way we think will bring joy.

Slavery to law is often driven by pride. Pride in the fact that we deserve the blessings God will give us if we are obedient enough.

Paul is not claiming that the law given at Sinai was evil or abolished. He is concerned with the Galatians’ legalistic approach of the law. “Instead of serving to convict them of the absolute impossibility of pleasing God by law-keeping, the law fostered in them a deeply entrenched determination to depend on personal resources in order to please God. Thus the law did not serve the purposes of grace in leading the Judaizers to Christ. Instead, it closed them off from Christ.”—**O. Palmer Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 181.**

**Ishmael and Isaac Today**

As “Isaac” experienced a supernatural birth and was a child by means of a promise, so believers experience a supernatural birth (John 3:3, 5). As children of promise Christians are in a distinct category and should not live as children of bondage.
Paul compared Ishmael’s persecution of Isaac to the false teachers’ opposition to believers. Abraham celebrated the weaning of Isaac with a banquet. At that time, Ishmael mocked Isaac, laughing at his younger step brother, since Ishmael was the elder son and assumed he would be the heir to his father’s estate **(Gen. 21:8-9)**.

Paul compared the legalists to Ishmael as those who were born out of legalistic self-efforts. He charged them of persecuting the true believers who were born by the power of the Spirit. With few exceptions Paul’s persecution came from the Jews, the people in bondage to the Law.

**God Bless You!!!**