

The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant Abraham's Seed

Lesson #6 for May 8, 2021

Scriptures: Ezekiel 16:8; Deuteronomy 28:1,15; Jeremiah 11:8; Genesis 6:5; John 10:27-28; Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 4:16-17; 1 Peter 2:9.

1. Why did God place Israel in that land-bridge called *Canaan* between three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa? Didn't He know what was going to happen? It certainly was God's plan for them to be a light to all the nations in every direction. But, Israel failed its job. However, we must recognize that all through history there have been a few faithful; think of Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, Daniel, and Daniel's three friends. Why did these chosen people stand out? What was their relationship with God that made them different? What were the attractions that were so alluring to the children of Israel that caused them to stop worshiping the true God and worship idols?
2. What was God's plan?

Deuteronomy 7:6: Do this because you belong to the LORD your God. From all the peoples on earth he chose you to be his own special people.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Deuteronomy 7:6). New York: American Bible Society.

3. The Hebrew word *segullah* can mean “valued property” or “peculiar treasure.” The important point to remember is that God chose them. Was there any special reason why God should have chosen them? Was He just trying to fulfill His promise to His friend Abraham?
4. **Is it possible that God chose the Hebrews because He knew in advance that they would exhibit all of the good as well as all the bad things with their corresponding results that needed to be seen and recognized by the universe looking on?**
5. There are a number of passages by the prophets talking about God's choice of His people. Look, for example, at Ezekiel 16:8.

Ezekiel 16:8: “As I passed by again, I saw that the time had come for you to fall in love. I covered your naked body with my coat and promised to love you. Yes, I made a marriage covenant with you, and you became mine.” This is what the Sovereign LORD says.—*Good News Bible*.*

“Why was Israel chosen by Yahweh? That was inscrutable. She was a small group of people without great culture or prestige. She possessed no special personal qualities which would warrant such a choice. The election was the act of God alone. . . . The ultimate cause for that choice lay in the mystery of divine love. Yet the fact is that God *did* love Israel and *did* choose her, thereby honouring His promise to the fathers. . . . **She had been chosen in virtue of Yahweh's love for her.** She had been liberated from slavery in Egypt by a display of Yahweh's power. Let her once grasp these great facts and she would realize that she was indeed a holy and a specially treasured people. Any tendency on her part, therefore, to surrender such a noble status was reprehensible in the extreme.”—J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), pp. 130, 131.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, May 2].^{†§}

6. Israel was chosen to be a royal and a priestly race. What did God intend by using those words? How were they interpreted by the Hebrew people themselves? They were

supposed to be kings, moral and spiritual! And they were supposed to spread the good news of God's wonderful grace and blessings to all around them. They were to be instructors, preachers, and prophets. Furthermore, they were to live the kind of lives that would shine as lights. So, why did God call them to be "above all people ... of the earth"? (Deuteronomy 7:6, *KJV**) Wasn't that a bit of an invitation for them to be egocentric and self-centered? Abraham, Joseph, and Daniel stood out because they were faithful.

7. Do we, as a Seventh-day Adventist Church, believe that God has chosen us for special privileges? Or, a special task? Are there certain privileges connected to that special task? Have we become lights to the whole world?

8. As one reads through the Old Testament, it becomes very clear that Israel wanted to claim all the promises/privileges that God had given without meeting any of the conditions.

Genesis 35:12: "I will give you the land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, and I will also give it to your descendants after you."—*Good News Bible*.*

9. That promise by God was repeated to Jacob and his sons. (Genesis 50:24)

10. The book of Deuteronomy consists of three fairly lengthy sermons that Moses gave to the children of Israel just before he left them. Deuteronomy 28 summarizes the conditions that they were supposed to meet in order to receive all the blessings God had promised.

Deuteronomy 28:1,15: "If you obey the LORD your God and faithfully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, he will make you greater than any other nation on earth....

¹⁵ "But if you disobey the LORD your God and do not faithfully keep all his commands and laws that I am giving you today, all these evil things will happen to you...."—*Good News Bible*.*

11. If one reads the entire chapter of Deuteronomy 28, one would think that disobeying God would be unthinkable! One might be scared to death! But, is it possible to scare people into being good? Why did God use all that horrendous language to warn them? Notice, of course, that the first 14 verses of Deuteronomy 28 are wonderful promises if they would be obedient. But, the rest of the chapter is full of terrible curses. Notice especially:

Deuteronomy 28:53-57: ⁵³ "When your enemies are besieging your towns, you will become so desperate for food that you will even **eat the children** that the LORD your God has given you. ⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵ Even the most refined man of noble birth will become so desperate during the siege that he will **eat some of his own children** because he has no other food. He will not even give any to his brother or to the wife he loves or to any of his children who are left. ⁵⁶⁻⁵⁷ Even the most refined woman of noble birth, so rich that she has never had to walk anywhere, will behave in the same way. When the enemy besieges her town, she will become so desperate for food that **she will secretly eat her newborn child and the afterbirth as well**. She will not share them with the husband she loves or with any of her children."—*Good News Bible*.*†

These curses were "largely, though not wholly, brought about by simply giving sin scope to work out its own evil results. . . . 'He that soweth to [his] flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption' (Gal. [6]:8)."—*The Pulpit Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed., H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), vol. 3, p. 439.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, May 3 including the brackets and content in brackets].‡§

12. When God makes promises to a group of people, does He indicate that those promises must apply only to that group and not to any others? Or, are God's promises intended to be for any who comply with the conditions? Leviticus was written at the foot of Mount Sinai!

Leviticus 26:27-33: ²⁷ "If after all this you still continue to defy me and refuse to obey me, ²⁸then in my anger I will turn on you and again make your punishment seven times worse than before. ²⁹Your hunger will be so great that **you will eat your own children.** ³⁰I will destroy your places of worship on the hills, tear down your incense altars, and throw your dead bodies on your fallen idols. In utter disgust ³¹I will turn your cities into ruins, destroy your places of worship, and refuse to accept your sacrifices. ³²I will destroy your land so completely that the enemies who occupy it will be shocked at the destruction. ³³I will bring war on you and scatter you in foreign lands. Your land will be deserted, and your cities left in ruins."—*Good News Bible*.*†

13. We as Seventh-day Adventist Christians look forward to the second coming of Jesus and a glorious home in heaven and eventually on a new earth. God has made wonderful promises; but, are we meeting the conditions?

14. Should we learn anything from these passages? Having seen the results spread out in the Old Testament, we know that Israel was not obedient.

Jeremiah 11:8: "But they did not listen or obey. Instead, everyone continued to be as stubborn and evil as ever. I had commanded them to keep the covenant, but they refused. So I brought on them all the punishments described in it."—*Good News Bible*.*

15. How are we to understand those words? Does God bring punishments on the wicked? **Or, in light of the great controversy and Satan's constant demands for fairness, does God have to step back from those who refuse to follow His directions and allow Satan to have control of them? Could that be described as God punishing them or God killing them?**

16. Think back to Noah. We have already discussed him; but, he and his family had to build a boat and get on it if they wanted to be saved. **All the evil in our world begins with thoughts in someone's mind.**

Genesis 6:5: When the LORD saw how wicked everyone on earth was and how evil their thoughts were all the time....—*Good News Bible*.*

17. As we noted earlier, God had promised the children of Israel that they would rule the land from Egypt to the Euphrates. Only briefly under David and the early years of Solomon was that promised territory under their control.

18. How did God describe His relationship with Israel later in their history?

Jeremiah 3:1,20: ¹ The LORD says, "If a man divorces his wife, and she leaves him and becomes another man's wife, he cannot take her back again. This would completely defile the land. **But, Israel, you have had many lovers, and now you want to return to me!**..."

²⁰ "But like an unfaithful wife,
you have not been faithful to me.

I, the Lord, have spoken."—*Good News Bible*.*†

19. A number of Old Testament prophets, including Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel implied that God wants us to be His beloved bride even to be in a relationship with Him as

close as that of a husband and wife. This is not just some kind of business agreement; it is a very personal relationship. Thus, when Israel broke that relationship with God, it was not just a breaking of some kind of business proposition; it was like breaking up a marriage.

20. So, how do you feel about your relationship with God? Is that commitment as deep and abiding and meaningful as a good marriage relationship?
21. God was always looking out for them despite Israel's repeated rebellions and going off and worshiping idols and, then, when disaster struck, trying to return to God.

Micah 4:6-7: ⁶ "The time is coming," says the LORD, "when I will gather together the people I punished, those who have suffered in exile. ⁷They are crippled and far from home, but I will make a new beginning with those who are left, and they will become a great nation. I will rule over them on Mount Zion from that time on and for ever."—*Good News Bible*.* [After the Babylonian captivity, any Hebrew could go back to their homeland if they wanted.][‡]

Zephaniah 3:12-13: ¹² "I will leave there a humble and lowly people, who will come to me for help. ¹³The people of Israel who survive will do no wrong to anyone, tell no lies, nor try to deceive. They will be prosperous and secure, afraid of no one."—*Good News Bible*.*

22. What group do you think those prophets were talking about? Did each of God's Old Testament prophets know of some among the people of Israel or Judah who had remained faithful?
23. Think of Daniel and his three friends, growing up in Jerusalem in that terrible apostasy that we read about. How did they manage to continue to be so upright and faithful to God after growing up in that environment? Prophets like Isaiah and Zechariah talked about God's plan for us and His ultimate hope for us. (See Isaiah 66:19; **Zechariah 14:16**.)
24. God has always had a few faithful ones. At times, as in the days of Noah, the number must have been very, very small. But, God is always looking after those faithful ones. Think of God's relationship with Elijah. Can you imagine yourself going through the experiences that Elijah went through? Would you dare to march into the throne room of wicked King Ahab that you knew would be very happy to cut off your head and denounce him and, then, turn around and walk out and disappear so no one could find you? To review the larger story of Elijah, see 1 Kings 18-19.
25. So, what were the distinguishing characteristics of those few faithful people in contrast to the broad masses?

John 10:27-28: ²⁷ "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me."—*Good News Bible*.* [Does this mean once saved, always saved?][‡]

26. Unfortunately, there have been many people down through the generations who have looked at some unfaithful church members and said: "I don't want to have anything to do with those people!" What is wrong with that approach?
27. God's ultimate answer to that whole problem was sending His own Son in New Testament times. And apostles like Paul spelled out in the New Testament as clearly as they could what God expects of us.

Galatians 3:26-27: ²⁶ It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus. ²⁷You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself.—*Good News Bible*.*

28. So, what is it in that passage that is the key to a right relationship with God? The word we use to describe that right relationship with God is *faith*. Summarizing much of what the Bible and Ellen White have said on the subject, A. Graham Maxwell concluded, as he stated many times:

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. [We cannot say “will be” because we remember the story of Lucifer!]

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] [Job, (Job 42:7-8)] and Moses, [Exodus 32:5-14; Numbers 14:11-25] God’s friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, “Why?”—[Sentence in brackets was also stated parenthetically many times by Dr. Maxwell. Job and Bible citations in brackets are added.][‡]

29. **By baptism we choose to align ourselves with the heritage of Abraham.** We claim the rights and privileges offered by Jesus Christ through His life and death.

The gift to Abraham and his seed included not merely the land of Canaan, but the whole earth. So says the apostle, “The promise, that he should be the *heir of the world*, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Romans 4:13. And the Bible plainly teaches that the promises made to Abraham are to be fulfilled through Christ.... [Believers become] heirs to “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away” [1 Peter 1:4, KJV]—the earth freed from the curse of sin.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 169.4-170.0.^{‡§}

30. That promise has never been fulfilled; but, we have a glorious future to look forward to when it will be fulfilled. See Daniel 7:27.

31. Why do you think it was so important in Paul’s mind to make those very strong statements recorded in **Galatians 3:28-29 about all humans being equal?**

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 369.3-370.0. [First published in 1917 before women could vote in the USA and at a time when African-Americans were usually not accepted in white society.][‡]

Exodus 19:5-6: 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, ⁶a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as priests.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

32. Those must have been precious words to the faithful among Israel. Compare 1 Peter 2:9-10. There are two parts to obedience: (1) Listen and understand, (2) Follow God’s Word.
33. Clearly, Peter felt free to take the application of that promise to the Israelite people given at the foot of Mount Sinai and apply it to all Christians down through time.
34. When we study the Old Testament system, we realize that there were many, many sacrifices to be offered. **Why do we no longer offer animal sacrifices like that?**

1 Peter 2:5: Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests **to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Romans 12:1-2: So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: offer yourselves as **a living sacrifice** to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. ²Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but **let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind.** Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

35. There are many things we can learn from the history of the Israelites. God tried to set them apart, using many different techniques to help them realize that they were to be a light to the whole world. But, **all that God asks of us is that right relationship with Him that we call faith.** That is true now just as it was in the days of Moses.
36. God finally decided to take that ultimate step, and He sent His only Son to this earth as a human being to be born as a baby Boy in the very heart of the enemy’s territory to appeal to them and to us to return to a right relationship with Him. Through the life and the death of Jesus, we must learn many lessons.
37. Why have human beings down through the generations found it so difficult to establish such a loving, trusting relationship with our divine Friend?

Deuteronomy 4:40: “Obey all his laws that I have given you today, and all will go well with you and your descendants. You will continue to live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to be yours for ever.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Isaiah 1:19: [The LORD said:] “If you will only obey me, you will eat the good things the land produces.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*††}

38. How do you feel about a God who says obey and live or disobey and die? Does that make you want to love Him?
39. Have you ever wondered how the angels who are gathered around the throne of God in heaven view our experiences? What do they think of the whole history of the Bible? What do they think of us? Amazing as it might seem, **God is still looking for a faithful group of people to finish the gospel.** Do we need any help? He provides us the Holy Spirit to work with us.

Joel 2:32: “But all who ask the LORD for help will be saved.

As the LORD has said,

'Some in Jerusalem will escape;
those whom I choose will survive.' ”—*Good News Bible*.*

Zephaniah 3:12-13: ¹² “I will leave there a humble and lowly people, who will come to me for help. ¹³The people of Israel who survive will do no wrong to anyone, tell no lies, nor try to deceive. They will be prosperous and secure, afraid of no one.”—*Good News Bible*.* [Compare Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 11:16-21.][‡]

40. Why do you think God mixed up those wonderful promises with what appear to be threats?
41. But, those prophets had some wonderful things to say.

Zechariah 9:7: “They will no longer eat meat with blood in it, or other forbidden food. All the survivors will become part of my people and be like a clan in the tribe of Judah. Ekron will become part of my people, as the Jebusites did.”—*Good News Bible*.*

Zechariah 14:16: Then all the survivors from the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go there each year to worship the LORD Almighty as king, and to celebrate the Festival of Shelters.—*Good News Bible*.*

42. How will God feel about all those people that He called to be His faithful followers but who rebelled against Him and who will be lost in the end? God never rejects any group *en masse*.
43. How do you understand the words in Romans 3:1-4?

Romans 3:1-4: ¹Have the Jews then any advantage over the Gentiles? Or is there any value in being circumcised? ²Much, indeed, in every way! In the first place, God trusted his message to the Jews. ³But what if some of them were not faithful? Does this mean that God will not be faithful? ⁴Certainly not! God must be true, even though every human being is a liar. As the scripture says,
**“You must be shown to be right when you speak;
you must win your case when you are being tried.”**—*Good News Bible*.*[†]

44. There are many who claim to be Bible scholars who believe that nothing that we do on this earth could impact God in any way. But, notice Romans 3:4. What does that tell us? **God has put His reputation on the line**, saying that He will be able to save a significant number of people in the final end because they have chosen to be faithful to Him. God wins His case by providing the evidence in the form of saved and transformed lives.
45. Do the Jews in our day have any spiritual advantages? Do you wish that you could read the Old Testament in the original Hebrew? Or, even the New Testament in the original Greek? Do those who can do so have an advantage?
46. Is it an advantage to be a literal, physical descendent of Abraham? If you say so, remember that millions and millions of Arab Muslims are also descendants of Abraham.
47. God went way out of His way to try to impress the children of Israel that He wanted to be their Friend.

Exodus 40:34-38: ³⁴ Then the cloud covered the Tent and the dazzling light of the LORD’s presence filled it. ³⁵Because of this, Moses could not go into the Tent. ³⁶The Israelites moved their camp to another place only when the cloud lifted from the Tent. ³⁷As long as the cloud stayed there, they did not move their camp. ³⁸During all their wanderings they could see the cloud of the LORD’s presence over the Tent during the day and a fire burning above it

during the night.—*Good News Bible*.*

48. Something similar happened with the dedication of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

49. Think of the experience of Paul—the Pharisee of the Pharisees—who had, at one time, been a member of the Sanhedrin while he was still a young man. And yet, later in his life, he found himself being followed by Jewish Christians who believed that if one did not fully follow the Jewish rules, one could not be a Christian or be saved. Paul became so concerned when some of the churches began to believe these ideas that he wrote the following words to the church at Corinth:

2 Corinthians 11:16-31: ¹⁶ I repeat: no one should think that I am a fool. But if you do, at least accept me as a fool, so that I will have a little to boast of. ¹⁷Of course what I am saying now is not what the Lord would like me to say; in this matter of boasting I am really talking like a fool. ¹⁸But since there are so many who boast for merely human reasons, I will do the same. ¹⁹You yourselves are so wise, and so you gladly tolerate fools! ²⁰You tolerate anyone who orders you about or takes advantage of you or traps you or looks down on you or slaps you in the face. ²¹I am ashamed to admit that we were too timid to do those things!

But if anyone dares to boast about something—I am talking like a fool—I will be just as daring. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. ²³Are they Christ's servants? I sound like a madman—but I am a better servant than they are! I have worked much harder, I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often. ²⁴Five times I was given the 39 lashes by the Jews; ²⁵three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent 24 hours in the water. ²⁶In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. ²⁷There has been work and toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. ²⁸And not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress.

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast about things that show how weak I am. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus—blessed be his name for ever!—knows that I am not lying.—*Good News Bible*.*

50. Those people were following Paul and making all kinds of claims about how they were superior to Paul because they were faithful Jews and faithful Christians! What do you suppose they could say after hearing those words of Paul?

51. Would we be willing to undergo some of those trials and experiences Paul went through?

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