

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Gospel in Galatians
Lesson 10. The Two Covenants

Have you ever taken a detour, a shortcut that took more time than if you had gone the long way around the mountain by the established route? That was the choice of the ancient church of Israel by making their old covenant promise (Ex. 19:8; 24:7). Modern Israel is repeating their history. It's time to learn the Bible and our own modern history and mature in our glorious "day-of-at-one-ment" truth of God's everlasting covenant.

Aside from Jesus, the first Jew to understand the long national nightmare of the Jewish church's ups and downs of revival and reformation failures ending in the rejection and crucifixion of Christ was the Apostle Paul. Paul told the story of the two covenants in Israel's history to the Galatians. They had fallen into the old covenant "works of the law" trap (Gal. 4:21).

The pressing question of the Galatians was: Who are the legitimate children of Abraham? The circumcision party from Jerusalem claimed that they were Abraham's children because of their "works of the law" (4:21). Paul says that Abraham's legitimate descendants "are the children of promise" (4:28).

Galatianism is an old covenant "under the law" relationship with God. It is wholly man-made. The Galatian concept is saying over and over, "we must be more faithful, we must read our Bible more, we must pray more, we must do more missionary work, we should witness more, we should watch less TV and spend less time at sports, we should watch our diet more, etc., etc." But it is to such self-centered egotists who take the Lord's name upon their lips in the final judgment by saying, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" that Christ declares the shocking news, "I *never* knew you" (Matt. 7:21-23).

As the two covenants' story goes, Abraham had two sons: one by a bondwoman and the other by the freewoman. The one son "born after the flesh" (Gal. 4:23) with Hagar the bondwoman was Ishmael. The other son born of Sarah the freewoman was Isaac "by promise."

The birth of Ishmael was wholly a man-made scheme. Through *unbelief* Sarah and Abraham repudiated God's promise of a son. They permitted a third party to enter their marriage and Abraham declared to God that Ishmael, the fruit of that union "born after the flesh [unbelief]," was the legitimate son of promise (Gen. 17:18). But God said, No! "I will establish my covenant with" Isaac (vs. 19).

Finally, Sarah and Abraham repented, chose to believe the new covenant promise of God, and Isaac, “the child of promise” was born (Gal. 4:28; Heb. 11:11). Ishmael’s disposition was “a wild-ass man, his hand against every one” (Gen. 16:12, *Young’s Literal Translation*). Isaac’s character was Christlike (Gen. 26:13-22). “These” two women and their two sons “*are the two covenants*” (Gal. 4:24).

The two covenants are not two plans of salvation: old covenant “obey and live” before the cross, and new covenant believe and live after the cross. The two covenants are not matters of two dispensations, one before and one after the cross. The two covenants are *two understandings of God’s people* through the ages, two opposite perceptions of God’s plan of salvation, not two time “dispensations” that He has used as experiments to save sinners.

The covenant at Sinai was the fruit of the flesh, of distrust and unbelief in God, just as was the plan that introduced Hagar and brought forth Ishmael (Gal. 4:24). And just as Hagar and Ishmael, the bondwoman and her son, had to be cast out, and the whole scheme that brought them in had to be utterly repudiated, *so the covenant from Mount Sinai had to be cast out*, and all that brought it in had to be utterly repudiated (4:30).

The covenant at Sinai was faulty because of its promises (Heb. 8:7). The people promised “all that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). The “fault [was] *with them*” and their promises (Heb. 8:8). He who promises the righteousness must produce the righteousness. For sinners motivated by egocentric concerns, righteousness is impossible.

Why should we fasten upon the necks of our children the whole old covenant scheme of making promises to God which “gendereth to bondage” (Gal. 4:24)? [1] It teaches them self-dependence. It’s directly responsible for the numerous backslidings that occur in the church, the loss of youth, the spiritual confusion that produces Laodicea’s “wretched” lukewarmness (Rev. 3:14-21). Teach them to choose to believe God’s promises.

Paul says that the whole scheme of salvation by works coming out of old Jerusalem is a covenant in which people, knowing only the natural man and the birth of the flesh, seek, by their own inventions and their own efforts, to attain to the righteousness of God. It can only produce “bondage with her children” (Gal. 4:25). That is because old Jerusalem is married to her husband, the “old man” of the flesh (Rom. 7:3; 6:6).

There are good sincere people who believe in old covenant principles of revival and reformation in God’s church. They cite the reformations of Kings Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah as a good ideal, not stopping to realize that they all failed ultimately. God’s true “church,” the church of Old Testament times, the church of those good kings, immersed as it was in the old covenant, ended up crucifying the Lord of glory.

Trust motivated by egocentric concerns masquerades itself as the worship of Christ. Self-centered trust manifests its true character just as Ishmael "*persecuted* him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now" (Gal. 4:29). The old covenant spirit of self-sufficiency hates the *agape*-love of one who identifies with the Crucified One.

The 1888 message teaches us to make a choice and "cast out" the old covenant (Gal. 4:30). Utterly repudiate it. By choosing to glory in the cross, the "old man" to whom we have been married "is crucified unto me" (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 6:14). We become a part of the "Jerusalem which is above" "the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). This is the "wife [that] hath made herself ready" for her marriage with the Lamb (Rev. 19:7).

The joyous news is that the ancient and modern church which has been mired down in her marriage to old covenant unbelief for so long; and apparently has borne so many like children of bondage; has finally grown up out of her infantile ways of making promises to do everything just right. She has finally learned to believe God's promises of love. Joined to her new Husband, Christ, she "hath many more children" than she ever had with her former "husband" of "the flesh" (Gal. 4:27, 23).

—Paul E. Penno

Endnote:

[1] "The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you" (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 47).

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/Vt3puslSE1E>

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