



THE GOOD NEWS FOR LAODICEA

Study Guide Seven

The Glorious Good News of the New Covenant

It's a pity when a fresh, new revelation of truth excites opposition and controversy among God's people. And it's doubly so when that newly revealed truth is especially sent by the kindness of the Lord to provide spiritual deliverance for them. To reject it is as tragic as for ancient Israel at Kadesh-Barnea to reject the good news brought by Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 13, 14).

The glorious Good News of the new covenant was an essential part of the 1888 message, but it aroused opposition and controversy. For many years the opposition has continued. But the apostle Paul says that the confusion of the old covenant brings spiritual bondage (Galatians 4:24). That bondage is one reason why we lose so many of our youth.

Ellen White several times says that she was shown by the Lord that the 1888 view of the new covenant was the true one, and that the brethren who opposed the message were making a mistake (Letters 30, 59, 1890). She considered the message not only to be authentic Biblically, but "most precious," a message beautiful in its clarity and motivating power.

In 1738 John Wesley chanced on a meeting where someone was reading what Luther wrote about righteousness by faith. Wesley said, "I did feel my heart strangely warmed." Many who have had the privilege of understanding the Jones and Waggoner presentations of the two covenants have testified the same. The Lord gave them a brilliant insight into a truth that is indispensable to happy, fruitful Christian living. In this study guide we wish to let the Bible unfold this precious message, accepting the insights that the Lord has given in the 1888 message.

May your heart also be "strangely warmed" by this beautiful truth.

The New Covenant Is God's Promise

1. When did the Lord originally make the promise that is in the new covenant? Hebrews 13:20, 21; Genesis 17:7; Revelation 13:8.

Note: The "everlasting covenant" was made before the foundation of the world, and is the same as the new covenant. It is God's promise to make His people "perfect in every good work to do His will...through Jesus Christ." That is a big project, because all mankind have not only sinned but have fallen into a slavery to sin and selfishness so deep that the roots of this evil seem to go down to our very toes. The new covenant is the news of how God will solve this problem and provide full healing.

There is no need to get confused by artificial definitions. Theologians talk about the Adamic covenant, the Noachian covenant, and the Abrahamic covenant; these are all the same "new" or "everlasting covenant" that God promised to different people under different circumstances. The principle and the promise were always the same. What He promised to Adam, Noah, and Abraham, the same new covenant promises to us.

2. See how this covenant (or promise) was made more distinct and far-reaching in the Lord's conversations with Abraham. Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-6, 18; 17:1-8, 21; 18:14.

Note: Every word is important! These staggering promises include: (a) Abraham's descendants will become the greatest nation in the world; (b) the Messiah will come through them; (c) they will bless every family in the world; (d) the land of Canaan will be their possession; (e) even more, the promise includes giving them the whole world, which must be the new earth (cf. Romans 4:13); (f) since the earth is to be an "everlasting possession," the "covenant" promises everlasting life as well (John 3:16); (g) moreover, since only righteousness can dwell in this new earth (2 Peter 3:13), the promise includes making righteous all who believe; (h) a miracle conception will take place, enabling Abraham's aged and sterile wife Sarah to conceive and bear a son whose name is to be Isaac ("laughter"). The world's Saviour is not to come through Ishmael, who is a symbol of a do-it-yourself works program. (i) Christ will come through Isaac, and this will forever demonstrate that Abraham's true descendants are those who have his faith.

3. These promises that God made are clear; what promises did He ask Abraham to make in return?

Note: If you read carefully, you will see that the answer is—none! The new covenant promises are entirely one-sided. God does not ask us to make promises to Him, for He knows that we cannot keep them.

4. But was Abraham expected to do nothing? What was his part in the bargain? Genesis 15:5, 6.

Note: To be honest, we must recognize that all the Lord asked for from Abraham was *faith*. This does not mean that the Lord did not *expect* obedience or that good works were not important. The Lord was teaching Abraham the principle of righteousness by faith. Once Abraham learned to *believe*, true obedience would follow as surely as fruit follows the blossom.

5. The ancient Jews seriously misunderstood the new covenant. How did the Apostle Paul get to the heart of the truth about it? Romans 4:1-12.

Note: Circumcision for the Jews became the symbol of their do-it-yourself, works-and-obedience program. Paul's point is neat: Abraham's faith "was counted unto him for righteousness" *before*, not *after*, he was circumcised. This is how the apostle proved that justification is by faith alone. Six times in this chapter we read that Abraham is "our father," the spiritual ancestor of all who exercise faith. No one will ever be saved except as one of his descendants.

But Paul is not putting down obedience, for the word "righteousness" means true justification or rightness according to the law, that is, genuine obedience. It becomes possible only by faith, but the Good News is that it is not only possible, but certain *if like Abraham we will believe God's magnificent promises*.

God's Covenant Is the Same as His One-Sided Promise

6. Read Galatians 3:15-18 to see how God's covenant is the same as His promise.

Note: "The covenant and promise of God are one and the same....God's covenants with men can be nothing else than promises to them...." After the Flood God made a 'covenant' with every beast of the earth, and with every fowl; but the beasts and the birds did not promise anything in return. Genesis 9:9-16. They simply received the favor at the hand of God. That is all we can do—receive. God promises us everything that we need, and more than we can ask or think, as a gift. We give Him ourselves, that is nothing. And He gives us Himself, that is, everything. That which makes all the trouble is that even when men are willing to recognize the Lord at all they want to make bargains with Him. They want it to be an equal,

"mutual" affair—a transaction in which they can consider themselves on a par with God....

"The gospel was as full and complete in the days of Abraham as it has ever been or ever will be. No addition to it or change in its provisions or conditions could possibly be made after God's oath to Abraham. Nothing can be taken away from it as it thus existed, and not one thing can ever be required from any man more than what was required of Abraham" (Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, pp. 71-73).

7. Read Romans 4:13, 14, 16-18 and note how the new covenant promises us blessings we may have thought are too good to be true, and far beyond what we deserve.

Note: Nothing could be more difficult than making dead people come alive. But that is what the One specializes in who promises us the new covenant. He "calleth those things which be not as though they were." In other words, He already counts as reality for you blessings that you have not yet even begun to see. When we learn to believe His Good News, we too will "call those things which be not as though they were," because the Word of God declares that these apparently impossible blessings will be.

How the Old Covenant Came In

8. When the Lord brought Israel out of Egyptian slavery, what did He want to impress on their minds? Exodus 19:3, 4.

Note: To "bear...on eagle's wings" is the meaning of the Latin word from which we get our word "succor." We read that Christ "is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). The deliverance from Egypt was designed to teach this same glorious new covenant truth—that the Lord saves us like a mother eagle saves her young. Israel did nothing to effect their deliverance from Egypt except to *let* the Lord do it for them, as a baby eagle lets its mother succor it. But the people did not learn the lesson. They wanted a works program.

The two covenants are not matters of time, but of condition. Abraham lived under the new covenant long ago, yet many professed Christians are living under the old covenant today. An intelligent, comprehending faith makes the difference.

9. Read how the Lord wanted to renew the same "new" or "everlasting covenant" with Israel as He did with their father Abraham. Verses 5, 6.

Note: The Hebrew expression "obey My voice" means to *listen* to His voice. Obedience is largely a matter of listening. Since God's covenant is always His promise, to "keep My covenant" means to cherish and to appreciate the promise He made to their forefather, Abraham. In other words, if Israel at Sinai would *believe* the Lord as Abraham did, they would become a "kingdom of priests, and an holy nation," the greatest on earth for all time. The whole world would beat a path to their door to learn about righteousness by faith which solves all human problems.

10. Note how their unbelief caused them to misunderstand and to forfeit the new covenant blessing, because their minds were obsessed with a works program. Verses 7, 8; compare Galatians 3:17-19.

Note: This promise of "all the people" became the famous old covenant. The new covenant is *God's promise*, and the old covenant is *the people's promise*. It was a detour occasioned by their unbelief. If the people would not keep step with Him, the Lord must now humble Himself to keep step with them. He must ratify their old covenant. He must show them the futility of their self-confidence and legalism. Now must come the terrors of Mt. Sinai, which were completely unnecessary for Abraham.

The word "added" in Galatians 3:19 means "emphasized" or "underlined." "The law was given to show them [Israel] that they had not faith and so were not true children of Abraham, and were therefore in a fair way to lose the inheritance. God would have put His law into their hearts even as He put it into Abraham's heart, if they had believed. But when they disbelieved, yet still professed to be heirs of the promise, it was necessary to show them in the most marked manner that their unbelief was sin....They had the same spirit as their descendants, who asked, 'What must we *do*, to be doing the work of God?' (John 6:28)....Unless they saw their sin, they could not avail themselves of the promise. Hence the necessity of the speaking of the law." (*Ibid.*, p. 74).

11. Under the new covenant, what was the Lord prepared to write in the hearts of His believing people? Hebrews 8:8,10.

12. Since the people had now instituted the old covenant by making their arrogant promise, how is the Lord obliged to communicate His law to them? Exodus 19:16-18; 20:1-20.

Note: The Lord did not need to frighten Abraham with "thunders and

lightnings" and earthquakes, for He wrote His holy law in his believing heart. The old covenant depends on fear as its motivation to produce "the works of the law." For example, to refrain from illicit sex because of fear of AIDS is old covenant legalism. To keep the sabbath because of fear of being lost is also legalism. It is good to refrain from illicit sex, and to keep the sabbath, but the motive that is truly effective is supplied only by the new covenant.

How does the Lord write His law in human hearts? By the way of the cross of Christ. Under the new covenant, the ten commandments become ten glorious promises. For example, says the Lord, *believe* that "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," and "thou shalt never fall into adultery," or any other sin.

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."

An appreciation of that cross of Christ cleanses those deeply buried motivations of sin and selfishness that have such deep roots. When "the love of Christ constraineth us" we become new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). The cold stony heart we were born with becomes melted; a new spirit fills the heart. We learn to hate the sins we once loved, and we love harmony and reconciliation with God.

The fruit is not the cold "works of the law" that are motivated by fear, but a selfless devotion to Christ which is true obedience. "*Agape* is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). "God's precepts are promises; they *must* necessarily be such, because He knows that we have no power. All that God requires is what he *gives*. When He says, 'Thou shalt not,' we may take it as His assurance that if we but believe Him He will preserve us from the sin against which He warns us" (*Ibid.*, p. 77).

13. Why is it so wrong to lead young Christians into the old covenant? Galatians 4:21-24.

Note: It's a terrible thing to drag unsuspecting young Christians into spiritual "bondage." But this is what happens when we lead them to make these vain promises to God. They cannot keep them, and their sure-to-come failures alienate them from the grace of God. Some few find their way back from the bondage of the old covenant into the liberty of the new, but many others fall and never rise again. Many

teach the same view of the covenants as of those who rejected the 1888 message a century ago. There are still lethal injections of old covenant teaching in literature for children and youth, and the "bondage" thus ministered is one reason why we lose so many of our youth.

"You are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. 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 [this is what Paul means when he says that the old covenant 'gendereth to bondage']....What you need to understand is the true force of the will....Everything depends on the right action of the will....You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can *choose* to serve him.... Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 47).