

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Second Quarter 2022: *Genesis*

Lesson 7 “The Covenant *With Abraham*”

Read for this week’s study

Genesis 15–19:29; Romans 4:3, 4, 9, 22; Galatians 4:21–31; Romans 4:11; Romans 9:9; Amos 4:11.

Memory Text

“But Abram said, ‘Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ” (Genesis 15:2, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Faith of Abraham
- III. Abraham’s Doubts
- IV. The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant
- V. The Son of Promise
- VI. Lot in Sodom
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. With Genesis 15 we come to the crucial moment when God formalizes His covenant with Abram. This is the second time the word “covenant” is used by God in relation to a commitment he makes with someone, the first with Noah, the second with Abraham. Two key words in this section are fear and laughter. Both Abram and Sarai also undergo significant name changes. (Sabbath Afternoon’s Lesson)
2. As we noted last week, Abraham never saw the fulfillment of the three promises God made to him. This is one of the reasons he became a model of what it means to have faith. Read Genesis 15:1-21 and Romans 4:3-4 and 4:9-12. In what way does Abram reveal what it means to live by faith? What is the meaning of the strange sacrifice God asked Abram to perform? What does it mean that a lighted torch passed between the animal pieces? What does Paul do with this chapter in the book of Genesis? (Sunday’s Lesson)

3. Read Genesis 16:1-16. As far as Abram and Sarai were concerned, what did Hagar have to do with God's promise of a son to Abram? Why does God seem to support Abram and Sarai's bad behavior? Based on Genesis 16, what was God's attitude toward Hagar and Ishmael? How is this story a foretaste of the Exodus, and what does that tell us about God? What does Paul do with this story in Galatians 4:21-31? (Monday's Lesson)
4. Read Genesis 17:1-19. What is the significance of God changing the names of Abram and Sarai? What is the spiritual significance of the circumcision rite? How does it relate to both creation and the Sabbath? What does Romans 4:11 add to our understanding of the story? Read Genesis 17:20-27. What does the text suggest is Ishmael's role in the covenant (Genesis 17:20-21, 25)? What do you make of the rest of the Ishmael story (Genesis 21:12-20; 25:8)? What does this whole story tell us about God? (Tuesday's Lesson)
5. Read Genesis 18:1-15. What aspect of Abraham's character is crucial to this encounter with God? According to the lesson, "God is more identified with the hungry and needy foreigner than with the generous one who received them" (Matthew 25:31-46). What are the implications of that for us today? (Wednesday's Lesson)
6. Read Genesis 18:16-33 and 19:8-29. God has just confirmed the promise of a son to Abraham, yet he seems more concerned with his former "son" Lot in Sodom. How does 18:23 express one of the great questions of human existence? What do we learn about both Abraham and God from this story? What does the pillar of salt tell us about God? (Thursday's Lesson)
7. What does the intercession of Abraham for Sodom tell us about prayer? (Friday's Lesson)
8. What do the rainbow, circumcision, and the Sabbath all have in common? Exodus 31:12-17. (Friday's Lesson)
9. It turns out that while Abraham was a model of faith, he is far from a model of the character of God in many instances. How does God's behavior toward Ishmael and Sodom tell a different story of His character? (Friday's Lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Lou: Another question that has been asked before. "Why would God choose circumcision, for example, as an emergency measure?"

Graham: If you don't acknowledge that God is the Creator, then the mystery of life and reproduction may become the object of your worship. And it did in the fertility cults. And you read through the Old Testament, and one of the prevailing weaknesses of the Israelites was the temptation to up into the mountains, and as Hosea says, "Sacrifice with the cult prostitutes."

And so God gave them something. I don't know all the meanings, but this one appeals to me. God is very practical about things.

And what if a young Israelite has followed his eyes up into the mountains and he's there with a cult prostitute. At the last moment, maybe, she'd look down and say, "I see you are a Jew." And the young man would say, "I can't do it." And maybe he'd hurry home. I mean, I could see God doing something like that. Because that was something very much involved in their greatest indulgences, their greatest sins. Balaam couldn't curse them, but when the Midianite women came in, you know what happened. And so I think God chose something that would be particularly eloquent and useful.

Lou: A reminder of to whom we belong.

Graham: And all of that. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #11 with Lou Venden, "God's Emergency Measures" recorded April 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/11MMCAG>

But doesn't the Bible specifically state that sin is breaking the rules? How about the key text we've learned from childhood up, "Sin is the transgression of the law" 1 John 3:4. Actually, that's a rather free translation. Not all free translations are in *The Living Bible*, there are some in the *King James*; that's one of them. The Greek word that John used, if you'll forgive pronouncing the Greek, is anomia, a-n-o-m-i-a, and it means literally, lawlessness, rebelliousness. In other words, sin is described as a state of mind. And anyone in that state of mind is a continuing threat to the peace and security of the family. I would say that sin has not been dealt with until our lawlessness has either been changed or eliminated. And that's why I chose the translation I did for this Bible Reference Sheet. You notice the first verse there; it's the familiar verse, 1 John 3:4. But I'm using Williams' version, which I like very much: "Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." (*Williams*)

That's precisely the word. Sin is lawlessness. Now the hazard of regarding sin as primarily breaking of the rules is that it tends to encourage an impersonal, even fearful relationship with our God. This is what he wishes to eliminate. If we regard sin as primarily a breaking of the rules, God's commandments may be regrettably misunderstood as arbitrary regulations designed to show his authority and test our willingness to obey. If we obey, we're rewarded. If we disobey, we're destroyed. Do you want to live under those circumstances?

Since we all have sinned, should we be fearfully awaiting the execution of the sentence? Unless perchance God should find some legal way to give us yet another chance? And if we turn down that second chance, oh will he punish us with even greater severity for our ingratitude! Would

this understanding help produce the peace and the freedom, and the freedom from fear that God desires so much in his universal family?

Actually though, I believe if rightly understood you can say that sin is a breaking of the rules. But look again at the rules. Look at God's commandments, the ten in particular—The Decalogue. All those Ten Commandments require is that we love God, and we love each other. And if we really did that we would have peace and freedom. In fact in the tenth of the Ten Commandments it says that we should not even want to sin. If we lived in that state of mind, not even wanting to do anything unloving, we would have freedom to be sure, and all kinds of peace and good will.

But can love be commanded? Or produced by force or fear? To put it vividly, has God said to us children, "You either love me, and love each other, or I'll have to kill you. Do I make myself clear?" Have you husbands ever tried that on your wives and children? Did it work? If you husbands should see your wives and children standing trembling in front of you, and all saying in unison "Oh, yes, daddy. We love you very much," would you be pleased? Would you be satisfied? Then you're a brute. And the God some of us worship would never settle for that.

But now, we all must admit the Bible is full of references to law—and to discipline and punishment and rewards, even final fiery destruction. And since our purpose during this series is always to take the Bible as a whole, not "here a little" and "there a little," but everything in the scriptures; we must look at all these other passages. And so we shall these twenty Friday evenings. In fact, we'll spend several evenings on God's wide use of law. And talking about why Jesus indeed had to die. And how God's law is no threat to our freedom! To understand that is really the truth that sets us free. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #2, "What Went Wrong in God's Universe" recorded January 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/2MMCAG>*

Suppose you had to keep rat poison. (We're having a lot of trouble with rats now.) So you had to keep rat poison in your house, and you have a young son. And if he touches it and then eats it, he could be very sick, even die. So you say, "Son, don't touch that rat poison." I'm going to put it on the highest shelf, the high and locked cupboard. A little later you hear a crash in the garage, and you run out, and there's your son lying on the floor. He's taken the rat poison and he's dying. Would it do any good to say, "Son, I forgive you, I forgive you!" He would just die forgiven, that's all. It wouldn't keep him from dying. Nor would it do any good to say, "Son, I don't want you to die, so let me drink the rat poison." And you both die. The boy doesn't need forgiveness. He needs an antidote. He needs healing.

But God didn't wait for that. God has said, "You really don't take me seriously, do you, that sin is like a poison and will lead to your death. Let me take the poison." And Jesus dies. And we, like the son, say, "Dad, it's real, isn't it! And nobody's killing you. Sin is really a poison, and you are dying. I will take you seriously from here on."

The beauty is that God then was able to take his life back and come out living. I've made my point. There's still no legal requirement in that. There's an awesome truth to be revealed. There's nothing arbitrary in this thing. God does not want us to poison ourselves. We need healing. Better heed the warning. The results of sin is death, and don't do this thing. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #12, "God's Law is no Threat to Our Freedom" recorded April 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

Still the patriarch begged for some visible token as a confirmation of his faith and as an evidence to after-generations that God's gracious purposes toward them would be accomplished. The Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement. {PP 137.1}

It is God's pleasure and will that the blessings bestowed on man shall be given in perfect completeness. He has made provision that every difficulty may be overcome, every want supplied through the Holy Spirit. {7BC 932.5}

God's work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development and different manifestations of His power, to meet the wants of men in the different ages. Beginning with the first gospel promise, and coming down through the patriarchal and Jewish ages, and even to the present time, there has been a gradual unfolding of the purposes of God in the plan of redemption. {PP 373.2}

The salvation of the human race has ever been the object of the councils of heaven. The covenant of mercy was made before the foundation of the world. It has existed from all eternity, and is called the everlasting covenant. So surely as there never was a time when God was not, so surely there never was a moment when it was not the delight of the eternal mind to manifest His grace to humanity. . . . {AG 130.2}

By the grace of Christ, perform every duty that has been made plain to your understanding, and you will be enabled to understand and perform those of which you are now in doubt. {SC 111.2}

There is an evidence that is open to all,—the most highly educated, and the most illiterate,—the evidence of experience. God invites us to prove for ourselves the reality of His word, the truth of His promises. He bids us “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Psalm 34:8. Instead of depending upon the word of another, we are to taste for ourselves. He declares, “Ask, and ye shall receive.” John 16:24. His promises will be fulfilled. They have never failed; they never can fail. And as we draw near to Jesus, and rejoice in the fullness of His love, our doubt and darkness will disappear in the light of His presence. {SC 111.3}

It is Satan’s work to fill men’s hearts with doubt. He leads them to look upon God as a stern judge. He tempts them to sin, and then to regard themselves as too vile to approach their heavenly Father or to excite His pity. The Lord understands all this. Jesus assures His disciples of God’s sympathy for them in their needs and weaknesses. Not a sigh is breathed, not a pain felt, not a grief pierces the soul, but the throb vibrates to the Father’s heart. {DA 356.2}

Constantly the heavenly agencies are communicating with men and women on the earth. We cannot see personally the angels of God round about us; nevertheless they are with us, guiding and directing. We are to be so fully under the influence of the Spirit of God that we shall be susceptible to His leadings. {HP 322.4}

Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet. {MH 481.2}

It is not the will of God that His people should be weighed down with care. But our Lord does not deceive us. He does not say to us, “Do not fear; there are no dangers in your path.” He knows there are trials and dangers, and He deals with us plainly. He does not propose to take His people out of a world of sin and evil, but He points them to a never-failing refuge. . . . {TMK 225.2}

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. {PP 364.2}

Christ came to this world as the expression of the very heart and mind and nature and character of God. He was the brightness of the Father’s glory, the express image of His person. But He laid aside His royal robe and kingly crown, and stepped down from His high command to take the place of a servant. He was rich, but for our sake, that we might have eternal riches, He

became poor. He made the world, but so completely did He empty Himself that during His ministry He declared, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." {MM 19.1}

Christ stood at the head of humanity in the garb of humanity. So full of sympathy and love was His attitude that the poorest was not afraid to come to Him. He was kind to all, easily approached by the most lowly. He went from house to house, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the distressed. He took the little children in His arms and blessed them, and spoke words of hope and comfort to the weary mothers. With unfailing tenderness and gentleness He met every form of human woe and affliction. Not for Himself, but for others, did He labor. He was willing to humble Himself, to deny Himself. He did not seek to distinguish Himself. He was the servant of all. It was His meat and drink to be a comfort and a consolation to others, to gladden the sad and heavy-laden ones with whom He daily came in contact. {MM 19.3}

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. {PK 369.3}

A guardian angel is appointed to every follower of Christ. These heavenly watchers shield the righteous from the power of the wicked one. This Satan himself recognized when he said: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" Job 1:9, 10. The agency by which God protects His people is presented in the words of the psalmist: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Psalm 34:7. Said the Saviour, speaking of those that believe in Him: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father." Matthew 18:10. The angels appointed to minister to the children of God have at all times access to His presence. {GC 512.2}