

Faith Journey

*One man's life-long example
of experiencing the two covenants*



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Introduction to the Two Covenants

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Promises, Promises.

Preface

The subject of the covenants raises many opinions as to what is meant by the terms “old” and “new” covenant. Many believe that the two covenants represent two different dispensations or eras of the Gospel which are separated by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Believers prior to the cross are considered to be “under law”, while believers after the cross are “under grace.”

This booklet aims to provide a biblical introduction into a different understanding of the covenants – as a personal experience in our Christian walk, with an Old Covenant experience leading into a New Covenant experience. The aim is to show that the gospel is “everlasting”, *“for unto us [after the cross] was the gospel preached as well as unto them [prior to the cross]” (Hebrews 4:2).*

I personally consider an understanding of the covenants to be a vital ingredient in the gospel promise of righteousness by faith.

Introduction

This booklet aims to simply describe the way that mankind interacts with God at a personal level. There are times when we come very near to God and we experience the joy of an intimate connection with our Heavenly Father and His only begotten Son. However, when we choose to go our own way separate from God, we experience the consequences of the disconnection from God that is a consequence of our own choices. God is consistently trying to teach us as we constantly move between these two experiences, hoping that we would allow Him to develop His perfect character within us.

This is complicated because of our difficulty in distinguishing what is God's will for us and what we think should be God's will for us. Are we truly submitting ourselves to God and allowing Him to work in us? Or are we aiming to achieve His promises in a way we think is best?

How can we reach a point that we can truly say like Jesus:

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." (John 5:30)

All Christians have wondered at some point in their walk whether they are truly fulfilling the will of God. May this book bless you and help you certify your faith as true.

Promises

As a child, growing up, I met with many disappointments because promises were made to me which were not kept. Maybe you can relate to

this from your own personal experience. Mum, Dad or someone close to you promises you something and then they do not keep their promise. The disappointment sticks with you, and these memories cause distrust. Distrust of those in authority over you, distrust of those close to you. We are indirectly taught to protect ourselves from disappointment in many ways. One way in which I learnt to try to control my level of disappointment was to do things myself. At least this way the disappointment would only come from my failure to accomplish what I wanted to have come to fruition.

Consider the origin of the Family:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1:26)

As God spoke to His Son *"let us make man in OUR image..."* He revealed that the relationship God sustained to His Son was to be made visible on earth through the Man and the Woman in their marriage union. As God was the head of Christ, so the man was the head of the woman (1 Corinthians 11:3). As the head God was to bless the one under Him, Christ, which He did when He said: *"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11)

Adam in the same way was to take care of and support Eve. The words of Adam were to be a blessing and encouragement to Eve, and their relationship was to reveal more clearly the image and glory of God to the entire universe. The first words which Adam spoke over Eve are recorded in Genesis:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." (Genesis 2:23)

Though we would not refer to these words as a “promise”, they represent an intimacy between two individuals which would bind them in a close relationship of trust. Consider what these words would have sown in the heart of Eve. Such intimacy, love and care. In these words, Adam revealed to his wife her origin. She was from him, a part of his being and deeply loved. If love could be seen as a visible aura around them, what a beautiful picture it would have been! Fallen man struggles to grasp the pure unselfish love that existed there before evil blackened the human soul.

Let us contemplate the temptation and fall of mankind and its effect on the relationship between Adam and His wife. Please consider this carefully. First I will paint a very basic picture of what the Bible records of the fall of mankind:

- We have already discussed the creation of man (Genesis 1:26)
- God made man in His own image (Genesis 1:27)
- God establishes mankind in Eden and explains his diet, his work, how to rest and what it constitutes (Genesis 1:29-2:15)

God instructs mankind regarding His government. God’s government, being motivated by Love, cannot involve force and thus must be based on liberty of conscience. Thus God gave man the ability to disobey, ensuring his freewill. God explains to mankind that there is one tree in the Garden which has received a special name, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This tree represents the absolute freedom that Adam and Eve have been granted to decide for themselves which way they wish to go, whether to be dependent upon God and follow His guidance or to be independent and go their own way. Without this tree there would be no expression for freedom of choice as there would be no opportunity to demonstrate a desire to choose against God’s revealed will. Adam and Eve were created with perfect characters and therefore our natural fallen desire to rebel was not in them. We see here just how vulnerable God has

made Himself to His Creation as it is He who will ultimately have to pay the price if they choose rebellion. (Genesis 2:16, 17)

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An additional character is introduced into the scene, the Serpent which was "more subtle" than any other creature there present. This Serpent is Satan in disguise. He has possessed the animal and speaks through it to the woman who has wandered through the garden on her own and finds herself standing before the "tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil." His question strikes at the heart of the relationship which God has established with Adam and Eve. The Serpent says:

"Has God said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"
(Genesis 3:1)

This question is posed in a seemingly innocent manner and yet it contains the poison of doubt. "Has God said..." is an expression to call the words of God into question and sow doubt.

Eve explains what she understands about God's instruction given to her. She says:

"...We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." (Genesis 3:2, 3)

The Serpent's response reveals the intention behind the first question. Notice carefully what was spoken through the Serpent:

And the Serpent said unto the woman, "Ye shall not surely die:"
(Genesis 3:4)

With these words the Serpent has opposed the words of God by calling God a liar. God had explained to Adam and Eve that they were dependent upon Him for Life, therefore to turn away from their source of life would naturally cause their life to end as they had no life in themselves (Genesis 2:9, 16, 17).

Satan, by saying that they would not die, perverted the words of God and made it appear that they wouldn't die of natural causes. If they were to die it would be because God Himself would remove the life which they had now been caused to believe was inherently in them.

Because Adam and Eve now believed that life came from somewhere other than God, for God's word to come true ("in the day that you eat, you shalt surely die") would mean God would have to exterminate their life by active force, in other words, killing them. This lie of the Serpent would cause mankind to mistrust the words of God and cause them to see Him as a tyrant. The Serpent continues his stealthy attack:

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."
(Genesis 3:5)

These words now suggest that God is holding something back from the married pair which would actually be for their good and positive development, thereby further distorting the view of God's character. Having believed the lie that they can live disconnected from God, it suggests a motive for why God would kill them for disobeying Him – God doesn't want them to "be as gods."

The story goes on to reveal that the lies told by the Serpent had the desired effect of convincing Eve to eat of the fruit from which she was

bidden not to eat. Amazingly nothing happened. What the Serpent had said appeared to be true! She did not drop dead as she supposed would happen.

The Hebrew, which is the original language of the old testament, provides some wonderful insight into the phrase *“for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”* (Genesis 2:17). Another method of translating this would be; *“in the day that you eat thereof, dying you will ultimately die.”* God never suggested that Adam and Eve would drop dead when they ate of the fruit, but that on the day of their eating the irrevocable process of dying would begin which would ultimately end with death.

Eve now grows bold as she has experienced no ill effects from her disobedience and picks another fruit to take to her husband Adam. Adam is mortified when he sees his wife with the fruit in her hand and her testimony that she has already eaten and is still alive. Adam believes that God will punish those who eat the fruit and take Eve’s life. He now has a struggle going on in his mind as he loves his wife so much but he loves God also. According to his understanding one of his relationships will end on this day, so he makes the decision which plunges the entire human race into the darkest of histories. He chooses Eve over God and eats the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6).

“They would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies.” (Proverbs 1:30, 31)

What happens next is God’s desire to reveal to mankind who is at the source of all this disappointment and misery. God comes to the pair

and to speak to them. They have already concluded that God will kill them and so they run and hide themselves. Very gently and patiently God now proceeds, through a line of questions, to reveal to Adam and Eve what has taken place in their minds. Their fear stems from a wrong understanding of God's character because God has no desire to hurt them. (Genesis 3:7-11) God asked the question:

"WHO told you that you were naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (Genesis 3:11)

Adam's response rips through the heart of God:

"... The woman YOU put here with me —SHE gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." (Genesis 3:12, emphasis supplied)

I can just imagine the walls crumbling around Eve's world. What pain must have torn through her heart as she heard these words from Adam, "the woman you put here with me...." What had happened to the intimacy? What effect would the first words have now? (referring to "*you are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh...*"). She was crushed. The words of Adam were marred with lies and deceit. Could she believe anything he had ever said? Was it all a lie? Did he even love her at all? Distrusting the words of God had caused distrust between the married couple. What would be the future impact of Adam's words of self-defence ("*the woman whom you gave to be with me...*") upon his wife? Could she believe anything that would come out of Adam's mouth? Could Adam forgive himself for what he had done in virtually offering up his wife as a Scapegoat to supposedly protect himself from guilt and the fear of death?

One can only imagine what kind of relationship their children were born into. When the first children, Cain and Abel, were born into the world, would the broken trust between Adam and Eve have led to influences

which affected the characters of both boys and all subsequent generations? I believe that the Bible reveals the answer to this:

The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. (Numbers 14:18)

The text reveals that God allows situations to play out that often take a number of generations to manifest how damaging the impacts of our actions and failings are. This is certainly true when we consider how often we behave in a manner so very similar to Adam even though our present circumstances may be vastly different. We inherited his sadly changed nature that produces a character so unlike God's character that does not change (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8). Adam and Eve's natures were passed on to their children and further generations.

However, God had promised a solution. As I reflect upon my upbringing and its impact upon the development of my own children, I have often encountered and been personally responsible for broken promises. As Fathers and Mothers we stand in the place of God to our children. Much of a child's development and ideas of God are developed through the relationship of the children to their parents. If we can't trust mum and dad to keep their promises, then why would we trust God?

The Promise of God

As Adam and Eve beheld their failure by eating of the fruit from the tree of good and evil, their minds could experience only confusion, darkness, worthlessness, and hopelessness. They had been deceived by the Serpent, and by believing the Serpent they had chosen him as their master. God knew their plight and would open a door of hope. God made a promise that He would send a Messiah who would be able to overcome the Serpent:

“And I will put enmity between you [the Serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

God knew that mankind was in a very difficult situation. The Serpent’s lies had caused mankind to mistrust the words of God. Adam and Eve were full of confusion. Who was telling the truth? God or the Serpent? God promised to put hatred between the “woman” and the “Serpent.” What does that mean, putting hatred between the woman and the Serpent? What does the woman represent in this case?

*“I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate **woman**.” (Jeremiah 6:2)*

*A great sign appeared in heaven: a **woman** clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The **woman** fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (Revelation 12:1,5, 6)*

*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a **chaste virgin** to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2)*

*For the husband is the head of the **wife** as Christ is the head of the **church**, his body, of which he is the Savior. (Ephesians 5:23)*

*The great **dragon** was hurled down—that ancient **Serpent** called the **devil**, or **Satan**, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Revelation 12:9)*

*He seized the dragon, that ancient **Serpent**, who is the **devil**, or **Satan**, and bound him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:2)*

The woman represents God's church or His people. God had promised that He would "put" a hatred in the minds of His people for the things of Satan. God would place in man an ability to say "no" to the temptations of the Devil.

*"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."
(Revelation 12:17)*

This process is a journey for every member of the human family to consider this promise of God and, in turn, believe that God's words are always reliable and that He accomplishes everything that He said He would do. God did not ask Adam or Eve to produce this hatred themselves, He merely stated that He, God Himself, would place this hatred in them. When we grasp this principle it becomes clear that a hatred of Sin can also be expressed as a love for God and the things of God. Consider the following texts:

*We love **because** he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)*

*For God **so loved** the world that **he gave his one and only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

God gave us a witness of His great love for us in that He gave us His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the visible expression of the Love of God toward this World. But wait, there's more.....

*Even so we, when we were children, were in **bondage** under the elements of the world: But when the fullness of the time was come, **God sent forth his Son**, made of a woman, made under the law, **To redeem them** that were under the law {under the condemnation of the Law}, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son **into** your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. (Galatians 4:3-6, comment in brackets supplied)*

Please note that the gift which God gave to mankind was not merely the coming of Christ into the world, but also the coming of Christ into the heart. Paul expresses this also in the following manner:

*I have been crucified with Christ and **I no longer live, but Christ lives in me**. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians2:20)*

Paul is clarifying the promise which God made to Adam when He said to the serpent “*I will PUT enmity between you and the woman...*” God’s promise remains the same, and He desires to put this promise into action in every person living on the face of the earth. God does not ask us to accomplish anything on our own. He knows we cannot accomplish anything good on our own. To ask us to accomplish anything good on our own would be to set us up for failure. This is where our faith in the character of God becomes crucial. If I do not trust God and His word, then His promises will have little or no impact upon me. The words of God to us will have no weight if we do not believe that He is the source of every good thing and that nothing evil comes from him.

***Every good and perfect gift** is from above, coming down from **the Father** of the heavenly lights, **who does not change** like shifting shadows. (James 1:17)*

“I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.” (Malachi 3:6)

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; **in him there is no darkness at all.** (1 John 1:5)*

As God only gives good gifts and always fulfills His promises to the willing recipient (which God hopes would be all humanity), consider how deceitful and deeply entrenched the lies of Satan must be in the minds of mankind to cause men and women to doubt the words of God.

*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not **also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** (Romans 8:32)*

But how can we have such faith in God when we naturally doubt Him? It is not possible for man to produce such a faith. We must look to Jesus both for a clear example of what faith is and that we might receive His faith.

In Psalm 2:7 Christ the Son has proclaimed His Father’s declaration of truth that He (Christ) had come forth from His Father:

I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. (Psalm 2:7)

Jesus rests in the assurance of His Sonship through the words spoken by His Father. The nature of the relationship which they share is such that Jesus has never doubted the words of His Father

The Bible does not reveal that God “showed” His Son any evidence of how he came forth from His Father. The words of truth from the Father were sufficient for Jesus. He believed His Father’s words and it was accounted

unto him for righteousness. This is the covenant of faith that exists between God and His Son. Jesus rests in the assurance of His Sonship through the words spoken by His Father. The nature of the relationship which they share is such that Jesus has never doubted the words of His Father. Jesus has absolute faith in every word which proceeds from His Father (Matthew 4:4).

*I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever **I say is just what the Father has told me to say.** (John 12:50)*

*And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; **for I do always those things that please him.** (John 8:29)*

*But **without faith it is impossible to please him:** for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

We may take this truth for granted, but this is the New Covenant. Jesus is our example of true faith, and as He was begotten before there was anything else He is the originator of Faith and therefore the originator of the New Covenant. Jesus was the first one to express faith.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

You will notice that most Bibles express this text with the words “*of our faith,*” but the original Greek text actually states only “*of faith.*” Therefore, what this text is actually telling us is that Jesus is the first one to exercise faith and that is why He is the author of faith, and because He is the author He is also the one who knows how to give this faith (His faith) to us, making Him the finisher of faith.

*...and the righteousness of God [is] through **the faith of Jesus Christ** to all, and upon all those believing,--for there is no difference. (Romans 3:22)*

*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by **the faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by **the faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16)*

*Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and **the faith of Jesus**. (Revelation 14:12)*

Without this precious faith of Jesus we are unable to believe the words of God. Without His faith in us by His Spirit, we will continue to doubt the words and promises of God. This is the New Covenant; Christ dwelling in us by His Spirit believing the Word of God:

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:4-7)

When we believe in the person of Jesus, we can receive His faith, the faith of Jesus that reconciles us to God.

*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have **believed in Jesus Christ**, that we might **be justified by the faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16)*

This process of moving from trusting ourselves and doubting God to doubting ourselves and trusting in God alone is the path from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant and is best described in the life of Abraham who is the father of the faithful. Abraham shows us how the two covenants work to bring us to faith in God completely.

Man's response to the promise of God

*The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. **"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** (Genesis 12:1-3)*

When God spoke these words to Abram the man had not produced a single heir (Gen 15:3). God asked him to leave his own country with his wife and additional family members and go to a place that God would show him. At this time the Bible says that Abram was 75 years old (Gen 12:4). I have witnessed friends of mine who were not able to have children. I saw the sorrow upon the face of my friend's wife as she beheld other mothers joyfully cuddling their babies. I saw the grief in my friend's face as he tried to comfort his wife. So many questions must pass through the minds of couples who are not able to bear children. What have I done to deserve this? Have we done something wrong? There is an immense amount of pressure that exists in a family with this burden. No doubt, Sarai would have wrestled with feelings of worthlessness. Would Sarai's insecurities have impacted Abram also? Notice Abram's response as God speaks to him:

*After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And **Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I***

*go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And **Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed:** and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. (Genesis 15:1-4)*

Is it possible for us to hear, in the responses of Abram, his temptation to disbelieve the promise of God? “Lord you said you would make of me a GREAT nation and I do not even have ONE offspring!” Is it possible that Abram had some doubts? The visible evidence before Abram would suggest that the word of God was not being fulfilled as it had been promised. Of course God had not said that He would make of Abram a great nation that day, but as with all of us, patience does not appear to be an attribute of mankind in his fallen state. The Lord reiterated to Abram that the heir to his kingdom would be from his own body. By this explanation, God was also explaining to Abram that this would naturally include Sarai because God instituted marriage and said:

*“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: **and they shall be one flesh.**” (Genesis 2:24)*

Sarai was considered a part of Abram’s flesh and thus the promise to him must involve Sarai as she was his only wife. There would be no heir to the promised kingdom who was not a son of Abram’s own flesh. Abram was bidden, through these words, to believe that what God had said was to be understood literally and not figuratively. Abram was invited into a position where his relationship of faith with God was being brought back into the foreground. The son of Abram would be a miracle which would require Abram to believe in the promise of God to give him a son.

*He took him outside and said, “**Look up at the sky and count the stars** —if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “**So shall your offspring be.**” **Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.** (Genesis 15:5-6)*

Righteousness was credited to Abram because he believed in the promise of God to make the offspring of Abram as countless as the stars of the heavens, even though Abraham did not yet have a single begotten child. How did Sarai respond to all this? Did she have the same experience?

*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "**The Lord has kept me from having children.** Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. (Genesis 16:1-2)*

Sarai concludes that as it has been about ten years (Genesis 16:3) since God first made the promise and still nothing has happened, maybe God needs some help. There is a deeper level to Sarai's grief as it pertains to her own relationship to God. She accuses God of having "kept her from having children." Is this really the truth? Did God make her barren? If she thinks that God has done this to her, will she trust God when He makes a promise?

It would be wise at this point to remember that a vulnerability may enter a woman's mind when she is unable to bear children. Coupled with the experience in which Sarai was brought into the harem of Pharaoh of Egypt through a lie of Abraham when he told Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister (Genesis 12:12,13). It is a sense of worthlessness that is driving Sarai and in her desperation she speaks to her husband.

After this she instructs her husband to go sleep with her handmaid Hagar with the idea that this would "technically" fulfil the promise of God. Remember that God had only said "*he that shall come forth out of **thine** own bowels shall be thine heir.*" Sarai figures that she is not an integral part of the equation and Hagar can be the vessel that bears a child on her behalf, thereby "helping" God to "accomplish His promise."

Abram heard the words of God, a promise of good things to come, and now a new stream of words was heard by Abram from his wife which is offering a different way to see the promise of God come true. This alternative way was not going to be a way of faith but rather a way in which the promise of God would be accomplished through the work of man. Abram follows the counsel of his wife and sleeps with Hagar, who gets pregnant, and it becomes evident that the inability to conceive was due to Sarai, not Abraham.

Hagar, being with child, now feels quite superior to her mistress Sarai and starts acting disrespectfully to her. The home environment becomes toxic because two women are striving for the heart of one man. Sarai begins to see that her idea was not good after all. Her plan to “help” God has backfired. Sarai holds Abram responsible for the problems which have now come into the home:

*He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, “**You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.**” (Genesis 16:4, 5; NIV)*

As Abram is the head of the home, the responsibility for the introduction of another wife into the home ultimately rests upon his shoulders. The peace and harmony of their home had been destroyed because of their attempt to make the promise of God happen their own way and not allowing God to fulfil what He had promised, in His own time. It grieved Abram to hear the fighting in the home. Abram gave Sarai the power to do as she wished with Hagar, and Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar who then fled from the home (Genesis 16:6). Can you imagine the pain that must have been felt in the heart of Abram, Sarai and Hagar? What had looked so promising to Abram and Sarai now revealed how foolish it is to take control out of God’s hands.

When Hagar finally gave birth to Ishmael, the Bible reveals that Abram was 86 years old (Gen 16:16). This means that it had been about ten years since the promise of an heir had first been made. What a challenge to be asked to wait ten years by faith for a promise of God to come true. God now had to allow Abram to see that their idea of “helping” God was not actually in God’s plan and instead had brought sorrow and pain. Abram would now have to live in a home that was torn while young Ishmael grew as the anticipated heir of the inheritance of the kingdom.

*The Old Covenant condition is trying to fulfil
God’s promises in your own way and causing
self-inflicted pain and sorrow instead*

This situation revealed their lack of faith and the pain that this causes. It is an example of living in the Old Covenant trying to fulfil God’s promises in your own way and causing pain and sorrow instead. God was teaching Abram through this and shortly after God visited Abram and reiterated His promise of providing an heir with the further detail that the promised heir would be born of Sarai:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I **have** made you a **father of many nations**. God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. **I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”** (Genesis 17:1, 5, 15-16)

The Bible story reveals that God’s promise did eventually come true, just as God had promised:

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. (Genesis 21:1-3)

The Son of promise had finally come and what a miracle it was. This child had come through the faith of Christ reaching out to Abram's weak and helpless faith. Sarah was too old to have children by human terms. Consider the grace of God that is here revealed. Even though Abraham had failed to act in perfect faith to the promise which God had given him, God still fulfilled His promise as was His intention. In this process, Abram learned of the weakness of his faith and thus through the help of Christ, Abram took hold of the faith of Jesus.

Now there were two sons in the house, one by Hagar which was born first and one by Sarah which was born second. Though born second, it was the son Isaac of whom God spoke when He originally made the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2.

As Isaac grew and was weaned from his mother, Abraham held a great feast to celebrate this event. Sarah beheld as Ishmael mocked the event. Ishmael was not her son even though his existence was the result of her desire to have a son through another woman. She couldn't bear to see Ishmael being a competitor to her rightful son's inheritance. She wanted Ishmael and Hagar gone. If they were gone from the family home then she would not have to fear that her son would miss out on the inheritance of Abraham and everything that this would entail.

She demanded of Abraham that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. Can you imagine how Abraham must have felt? Although Ishmael was not Sarah's son, he was Abraham's son and it broke the father's heart to think of losing his firstborn son:

...and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. (Genesis 21:10, 11)

What a heart wrenching experience. If Abraham had waited on the Lord, all this pain and suffering would not have been a part of his life. However, consider how long it took for the promise to be realized. It took from the age of seventy five until Abraham was one hundred years old before the child of promise was born. Twenty five years is a long time to patiently wait on the Lord. However, the consequences of Abraham's lack of faith, in that he tried to fulfil the promises of God through the works of the flesh by taking Hagar although she was not his wife, caused Abraham a lifetime of grief. What a painful yet valuable lesson to learn through this story. How much would be gained in peace and joy if he would have allowed God to fulfil His plans in His own time and way.

Why did Abraham not simply wait for God to fulfil His promise? It revealed Abraham's lack of faith. If we had to wait for many years for a promise to be fulfilled then we may also find ourselves in similar situations to Abraham. This is a very important point in the life experience of Abraham and our study of it. Let us consider how the life events of Abraham and his two wives, Sarah and Hagar, relate directly to us.

The promise of inheritance

When God offered the land to Abraham He offered it to all the families who would be blessed through Abraham.

*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: **that he might be the father of all them that believe**, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: **And the father***

*of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For **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 4:11-13)*

*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end **the promise might be sure to all the seed**; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; **who is the father of us all**. (Romans 4:16)*

*Now it was not written for his [Abraham's] sake alone, that it was imputed to him; **But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him [God] that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.** (Romans 4:23, 24)*

Although Abraham never realized this inheritance of the land personally during his life (Acts 7:5), he and all the faithful will receive it in the end when the earth will be renewed. In order for this to take place, however, Abraham had to enter into a relationship with God which was based upon faith and not works.

The same is true for us. We are accustomed to hearing instructions and trying to carry them out in our own way and with our own determination (the focus here being dependence upon self). God is inviting us into a relationship where our dependence is entirely upon Him. This is a very vulnerable experience. To be totally dependent upon someone else is something we are generally not comfortable with. By nature we do not mind if someone does something for us; but we do not want to acknowledge our dependence on anybody else and thereby submit to an authority.

*True justification by faith is the work of God
in laying the glory of man in the dust, and
doing for man that which it is not in his power
to do for himself*

Consider what the Apostle Paul writes about the experience of Abraham in Galatians Chapter 4:

*Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, **that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.** But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for **these are the two covenants**; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. (Galatians 4:21-26, KJV)*

Paul explains that the two sons of Abraham symbolize the two covenants that were competing with each other within him.

For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. (Galatians 5:17)

The natural spirit of independence in Abraham warred against the Spirit of Christ that came into Abraham when he first submitted to God and left his homeland.

By the Spirit of Christ, Abraham received a promise from God and his faith was accounted to him as righteousness because he simply believed the

words which God had spoken. After a while, however, he waivered in his faith that was given him and surrendered to the flesh by listening to the suggestions of Sarah to take another wife and receive the child of promise through an independent manner which God had not instructed. This was an act of unbelief and was expressed as being in the “Old Covenant.” Paul connects this act with Israel at Mount Sinai. At Sinai God had spoken through Moses to the people of all the things He would do for them:

*And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, **All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.** And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, **Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.** (Exodus 24:7, 8)*

We see no record here of the people of Israel responding with a heartfelt “Amen” to the words of the Lord, but instead they made their own independent promise which was a way of trying to fulfil God’s promises their own way. Israel, as a people, promised to be obedient and gave no consideration in their promise to any provision for the possibility of a mistake. They did not recognize their own sinfulness and inability to be obedient in their own strength; not seeing their deep need of God to work in them as they could not do it on their own. There can be no experience for the sense of a need for grace if we think we can obey the law in our own strength, because we don’t understand our true sinfulness. Because Israel promised to be obedient without any consideration for failure, there can be no forgiveness in the Old Covenant. In the Old Covenant there is only failure and death, until we recognize our need and call upon our Saviour and enter the New Covenant. Notice what the Bible says:

*Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that **the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.** (Romans 7:9, 10)*

God desires to fulfil His own promises in us but we interfere with this process when we take control of our own lives. This will only lead us away from God and consequently away from life. It is for this reason that living according to our own ideas will bring sorrow and destruction. Living according to our own ideas is often referred to as the “carnal nature” or “the flesh” in the Bible. Notice what the Apostle Paul states:

*Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. **But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.***
(Romans 7:13, 14)

So there is a spiritual experience and a carnal experience. The spiritual experience is one in which we trust that when God promises something to us He will also fulfil that promise. The carnal experience, or the experience in which we do everything our own way, is the experience where the promises of God are doubted and we seek for signs to confirm them and try to fulfil these promises of God according to our own incomplete understanding. The spiritual experience is being referred to by Paul in Galatians chapter 4 as the “New Covenant” and the carnal experience is referred to by Paul as the “Old Covenant” experience.

*It is important to note that the two covenants
are occurring in the lifetime of one man.
The covenants do not represent eras that cover
large spaces of time*

When we connect this back to Abraham we can see that the children which he bore through both women (Sarah and Hagar) were based on one promise of God to Abraham. Therefore, the two children, namely Ishmael

and Isaac, are the visible manifestation of two experiences which Abraham had. One experience was based on the works of man, which is the relationship to Hagar that produced Ishmael. The other experience was based on the impossibility in man and the miracle of God's word completing what He had promised, which is represented by the relationship to Sarah that produced Isaac, the son of promise.

It is important then to note that the two covenants are occurring in the lifetime of one man. The covenants do not represent eras that cover large spaces of time. As we study the life of Abraham we see that his acceptance of the promises of God revealed his willingness to enter the New Covenant into which he had been invited. When Abraham rejected this invitation he was simply revealing what is by nature in the heart of man, namely, a rebellious desire to do everything ourselves. The life of Abraham demonstrates that this process occurs many times in mankind. This is because the Old Covenant is the manifestation of the natural heart of mankind and God condescends to use this to show us what we are really like because mankind does not, by nature, have the capacity to be obedient to God.

It is when we see ourselves as we truly are and are overwhelmed with a sense of our failing and we expect God to condemn us that He reveals His grace to us and invites us to accept His promise of redemption. Every act of self-will and selfishness was a visible expression of being in the Old Covenant therefore every time Abraham "believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness" he acknowledged his own human weakness and accepted that God would fulfil His promise in him by the faith of Jesus, which is the New Covenant. What therefore are the implications for us as we consider this information? Has a promise been given to us?

The New Covenant

The Bible records God's promise to us to enter into His rest, which is left for us. The term "rest" is intended to convey the idea that we are to cease from trying to accomplish this promise in our own way but rather to trust that, through our consent and willingness, God will accomplish His promise in us. Notice the following text:

*While it is said, Today if ye will **hear his voice, harden not your hearts**, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? **So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.** Let us therefore fear, lest, **a promise being left us of entering into his rest**, any of you should seem to come short of it. **For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them:** but the word preached did not profit them, **not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.** (Hebrews 3:15-4:2)*

If we believe in the words of God and allow Him to fulfil His promises, then we are entering into rest. We are not worried about how WE are going to accomplish this, but we will trust Him who is faithful. What then is the promise He has left us?

*But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.** And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: **for they shall all know me**, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: **for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.** (Jeremiah 31:33, 34)*

This amazing covenant, the New Covenant, is a promise to bring forth from us something which is impossible for us, by ourselves, to accomplish. It is the promise of a perfect character. God has promised that He will do this. If we try to accomplish character perfection according to our own understanding and strength, then we will fail again and again. Every time we fail we reveal the Old Covenant revealing our sin and bringing pain, sorrow and death to our old nature and we are encouraged to hold onto the New Covenant promise realized by faith, just as Abraham was. Both the Old and the New experience work in us together at the same time until finally we give up our independence and we cast out the bond woman of the old nature and rest in the New Covenant experience completely.

“Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” (John 6:28, 29)

It is supposed, by some, that once you have entered into the New Covenant you cannot fall back into the Old Covenant and if you did discover that you have had an Old Covenant experience, it would only prove that you never actually had a New Covenant experience in the first place. We can see from the life of Abraham that this assumption is not true. Abraham believed God and received the gift of Christ’s righteousness, only to find himself later exercising unbelief at the promises of God and have an Old Covenant experience concurrently.

Oftentimes we are struck by a promise of God and believe it fully in faith, believing with all our heart it will come true. But as time passes and environmental circumstances change, or we are pressured by outside factors, fear and doubt can enter in, and our faith can falter. This is what

happened to Abraham, and this is what happens to us. There is a time when both Hagar and Sarah lived with Abraham, when he was stuck in two minds, flipping back and forth between the two types of covenant experiences. This is the same for every man, who also “walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham” (Romans 4:12).

The two covenants reveal what mankind’s and God’s character are really like. God never changes and therefore the promises of God in both covenant experiences are the same. Mankind, in his fallen state, has a vacillating character; he is the one who changes and the choice he makes determines which experience he will encounter, whether Old Covenant or New Covenant. Because mankind is, by virtue of his fallen and deceived nature, in league with Satan, his natural tendency is to want to do things himself and not rely upon God. This guarantees that mankind will always be in an Old Covenant relationship when he first begins his relationship with God.

When man comes into a better understanding of God and his dependence upon Him becomes clearer, then he will begin to experience the New Covenant. We see then that the Old Covenant leads to the New Covenant, not because this is the will of God but because the mind of mankind always begins in a state of confusion and ignorance in relation to God.

When we trust in God’s promises to be fulfilled as He has promised, then we will experience true rest, for we will not worry about how these promises will be fulfilled. We will believe that what God has said He will also accomplish.

*He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And **being fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he [God] was able also to perform.** And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. (Romans 4:20-22)*

*But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in **because of unbelief.** (Hebrews 3:17-19)*

The covenants therefore are a beautiful revelation of how God brings a person from unbelief into a relationship of intimate faith in His promises, and ultimately to see these promises revealed when all things shall be fulfilled by the word of the Lord.

I hope that this contemplation has been of benefit to you as you contemplate the lengths to which God will go to rescue every one of His children from sin and its wages.

Let us not fear when we fall and make mistakes, but realise that we are still trying to fulfil God's promises in our own way. God does not abandon us when we fall; His New Covenant is still true and there for us. If we humbly accept our faults and mistakes when we fail and trust in the Lord's forgiveness and mercy we will come closer and closer to the character of Christ for we will not trust in ourselves but more and more on God to fulfil what He has said He would do.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. (Romans 5:20)

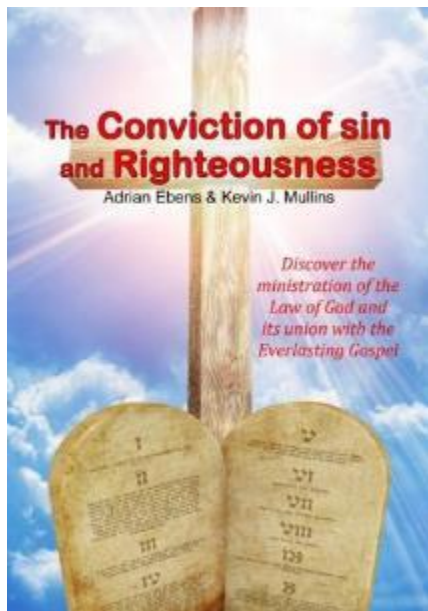
When you fail, in the very place of failure, is grace available to you in the New Covenant that you might go forward in faith. Your failures actually can help you to trust more fully in God. It is not that God desires us to fail but He knows our independent hearts and that this is the path we will all walk unto perfect faith.

Let us walk in the steps of our Father Abraham and overcome as he overcame and rest in the promises of God.

For more information on what you've just read see the book:

The Conviction of sin and righteousness

Discover the ministration of the Law of God and its union with the Everlasting gospel



“Nevertheless I [Jesus] tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:7, 8)

What do you think of when you hear the word “conviction”? Do you think of condemnation? If so, from whom? The one doing the convicting, or yourself?

While you ponder your answer, think of this question: How does the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), convict of sin and righteousness? Does a Comforter bring condemnation, or comfort? Paul describes it this way:

“But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?” (2 Corinthians 3:7, 8)

How can a “ministry of death” be “glorious”? When the Comforter brings conviction of sin, the glorious “ministry of death” leads us to “the ministry of the Spirit, which is more glorious” because it leads us to a life of righteousness.

“And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Romans 8:10)

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Faith Journey

Understanding the subject of the two covenants is an important part of understanding the gospel and reading the Scriptures in a correct framework. This booklet introduces this subject in a simple manner to provide the reader with essential elements to understand this subject.

There is much confusion on the subject of the covenants because of misunderstandings which took place within Christianity many centuries ago.

The simplicity of the covenants is expressed in the life of Abraham and this is what Paul tells us in the book of Galatians:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants... (Galatians 4:22-24)

May your faith journey be blessed as you read...