

The Two Covenants and the Faith of Jesus
Galations 2-4
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The overarching theme of the Bible, the golden thread touched with crimson, that permeates its pages revolves around the promise of the Seed and the plan of redemption.

The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. From the first intimation of hope in the sentence pronounced in Eden to that last glorious promise of the Revelation, "They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4), the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme,—man's uplifting,—the power of God, "which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57. {Ed 125}

The promise of a Seed was first given to Adam and was repeated to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and through his lineage down to David. So that in the fullness of time God would send forth His Son born of a woman, born under the law in order that He might redeem those under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons. This promise of a Seed, referred to as the Everlasting Covenant, is the essence of the Edenic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants, all of which find their fulfillment in the New Covenant. Christ is the Covenant (Is. 49:8) and the Ten Commandments — a transcript of character of God (Dt. 28:9-10) --- are the covenant (Ex. 34:28). The promise of the restoration of the image of God in fallen humanity was fulfilled in Christ, the Covenant, who was to be given to the world (Is. 42:6). The covenant given to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 19:5, the so-called Mosaic covenant, is simply a repetition of the Everlasting Covenant embodying the promise of the Seed and Nationhood that was given to Abraham. So how did the Old Covenant evolve out of Covenant given to Moses at Sinai? For answer to that question we turn the Paul's epistle to the Galations.

Although not readily apparent in most modern translations of the Bible, the "faith of Jesus" is a dominant concept and is a literal rendering of the Greek phrase that repeatedly occurs in Romans and Galations. The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from "faith unto faith" (Rom. 1:17) and moreover the righteousness of God is revealed through the faith of Jesus in Rom. 3:22. God is not dependent on man's faith to reveal His righteousness and justice. Righteousness and justice all are of God which is accomplished through His faithfulness and the faith of Jesus. For a comprehensive treatise on this theme refer to *The Faith of Jesus* by Hays¹.

¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus* (2002, Wm. B. Eerdmans).

The Faith of Jesus: The following exposition is based on a literal rendering Greek in Galations 2-4. The faith which Paul preached (Gal. 1:23) is the faith of Jesus. Ellen White refers to the “faith of Jesus” as the gospel itself.² The three-fold repetition in Gal. 2:16 disappears with a literal rendering of the Greek: know then “that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but **from the faith of Jesus**, even **we have believed in Christ Jesus**, that we might be justified **from the faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” The basis of all righteousness is grounded in the redemptive act of God through “the faith of Jesus.” Thus when the Galations received the Spirit, it was not by the works of the law but by the hearing of faith, i.e., the faith of Jesus, when Paul portrayed Him as crucified (Gal. 3:1-2). So when Abraham believed God (3:6) it was the result of “the hearing of faith.” Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad.” The only way to be a son of Abraham is to be “from faith” (3:7), i.e., the result of “the hearing of faith.” The only way “God could justify the nations” (3:8) was from “the faith of Jesus.” This must of necessity be a corporate justification, since the nations never believed; nevertheless by means of the promised Seed, the covenant to be given to nations, God would accomplish redemption and justification for the world. The ones who then are blessed with believing Abraham (3:9) are those who embrace “the faith of Jesus” and respond to the “hearing of faith.”

Anyone who attempts to be justified by the works of the law will discover it to be futile, because the law curses anyone who does not obey the law perfectly (3:10-11). Only one Man is just in the sight of God. And that Righteous Man lived from faith. “The Just One shall live from faith.” This must be of necessity a *Messianic* reference to Habk. 2:4 and quoted in Heb. 10:36-38. Why must this so? Because the Just One who lived from faith “has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘cursed is everyone hangs on a tree’” (3:13). Thus the blessing of believing Abraham, who received the Spirit, might come upon the nations in Christ, literally “through the faith” of Jesus (3:14). It is evident that “the faith of Jesus,” not our faith in Jesus, is bedrock of Paul’s gospel.

² See 2SM385, 3SM 172, 184, 5MR 205, 290, 8MR 224, 12 MR 193, 16 MR 230, 1888 Materials 367, 375, 430.

The Faith of Jesus and the Covenant: The faith of Jesus is the basis of God's promise and covenant to Abraham. The covenant promise was given to Abraham and His Seed (3:16). But Abraham could not receive the promise unless the promise would be accomplished ultimately through the Seed. But Seed must accomplish the promise from faith. The law that was given 430 years after Abraham cannot annul the covenant promise *given to Christ*. The promise of the inheritance was given to Christ because the promise was embodied in the Seed that was promised to Abraham (3:17-19).

Now Paul gives the good news. The promise of the inheritance is also given to those who believe (3:22). But this promise of the inheritance is based on the faith of Jesus that it might be given to the ones believing. (Literally in 3:22: "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, in order that promise from the faith of Jesus might be given to those believing." If the text is rendered: "that promise is by faith in Jesus so that promise might be given to those believing," we have unnecessary redundancy and confusion.) So before "the faith" (of Jesus) to come, we were guarded under the law until the faith of Jesus would be made clearly evident for those willing to accept the evidence. We were locked up to "the faith" (the faith of Jesus) being about to be revealed (3:23).

No one can be justified unless that justification comes from "the faith," namely the faith of Jesus. The law is simply our tutor pointing us to Christ. But with "the faith" (of Jesus) having come (aor. ptc.) and having been embraced, we are no longer under a tutor (3:24-25). All become sons of God through "the faith," which was manifested in Christ. This constitutes the basis for becoming a son of God. Personal sonship to God results from being baptized into Christ (3:25-26). You may become an heir with Abraham only as you renounce self and embrace Christ, the Seed to whom the covenant promise of inheritance was made by God. Christ became Heir of the world through "the faith." The promise that he would be heir of the world was not to Abraham and to his Seed through the law, but through a righteousness of faith (Rom. 4:13).

Old Covenant Evolution: The covenant promise in Galatians 3 is everlasting covenant given to Abraham and repeated to Moses at Sinai. So how did the old covenant evolve? Paul explains that those who desire to be governed by the law for salvation (4:21-26), are ones who are falling into the trap of the old covenant which was typified by experience of Abraham and Hagar. Abraham mutated the Everlasting Covenant of a

promised son through Sarah by doubting God's promise and attempting to fulfill the promise by his own effort through the works of the flesh with Hagar. By so doing Abraham exemplifies the old covenant experience of *faith plus works* which is equivalent to *doubt plus works*. Abraham's experience with Hagar and Sarah are symbolic of the Two Covenants: "the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar---for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is bondage with her children---but the Jerusalem is free, which is the mother of us all.---Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise" (4:24-28).

The Old Covenant experience is not something that was initiated at Sinai with the giving of the *law*, which in fact was embodied in the Everlasting Covenant and which was repeated to Moses at Sinai. The Old Covenant has been repeated time and time again in the history of God's people. Cain and Abel gave us the first contrasting examples of the Old and New Covenant worship experiences. Abel's sacrifice typified the *worship of faith* whereas Cain's sacrifice typified the *worship of doubt* embodied in the Old Covenant experience of faith plus works. The Old Covenant experience permeates the history of Israel, being manifested at Sinai where they responded to God's promise with: "all that you have said we will do." It was repeated again and again prior to and following their Captivity. And it continues to plague the church today just as when Paul admonished the Galatians. Paul's descriptive and despairing language in Romans 7 exemplifies the Old Covenant Christian experience. Its essence the Old Covenant is not a matter of time but relates principally to the condition of the heart.

The Significance of Circumcision and the Old Covenant: At 99 years of age, Abraham was told to circumcise himself as a reminder of God's promise of an heir through Sarah. Through the promised Seed, Abraham would receive the inheritance of the world. As sign of the Covenant promise, Abraham was told to circumcise himself and all the males. Why was circumcision required many years after the time when Abraham first believed and it was accounted to him for righteousness? Abraham, at 75, believed God when He was called out of the land of the Ur of the Chaldees. When he thought Eliezer would suffice as the heir, God repeated His promise again and signified through the common cultural practice of the Suzerain Treaty, where God bound Himself to fulfill His promise to Abraham or Himself suffer destruction. But at 85 years

Abraham fell prey to doubt and took Sarah's maidservant as a wife in order to produce the promised son. Through the work of the flesh, Abraham produced Ishmael and his Arab posterity ultimately resulting in the rise of Islam. After 14 years at 99 years of age God repeated His promise of the Seed and the inheritance to be given to Abraham. But now he must go and circumcise himself as a sign of the covenant. Circumcision was to be a reminder never to doubt God's promise and that the works of the flesh can never fulfill God's promises.

God's promises are fulfilled by God Himself. He does the impossible. God would cause barren Sarah to conceive and He would restore the image of God in fallen flesh through the promised Seed.

Through time circumcision came to be regarded as the covenant itself rather than the sign of the covenant. If you had circumcision you had the promise. But circumcision was nothing in and of itself. It was only a sign of the promise. The promise could be received only like believing like Abraham finally believed. In other words circumcision was a reminder not to doubt God's word. It was a reminder not to depend on the works of the flesh or the works of the law. It was a reminder to believe that God would fulfill His promises and then to act in accordance with that faith.

Although Abraham is a prototype of righteousness by faith, it was Abraham who originated the Old Covenant for Israel 400 years before Sinai. Although the Old Covenant has been associated with the giving of the law at Sinai, it should be recognized that the Old covenant is not a matter of a point in time, but it is rather a matter of the condition of the heart.

So what is the significance of circumcision? It was of no practical benefit or immediate spiritual benefit to the infant being circumcised, unless it first meant something to the parents of the infant. It was a painful reminder to the parents to believe the promise of God's word like Abraham finally believed. The parents were to transfer the significance of circumcision to the child and to all their children that they were to remember, believe and act on the promises of God. Circumcision was a reminder not to fall into the Trap of the Old Covenant like Abraham when he doubted God's word resulting in the experience with Hagar. Circumcision was a constant reminder to children of Israel that they were to be a peculiar people distinct from the surrounding nations.

Circumcision was also a reminder that the promised Seed would come and conquer their archenemy, sin itself and the originator of sin.

This is why Jesus is identified as the Covenant that would be delivered not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles to restore the earth (Is. 49:8; 42:6). The fulfillment of the Everlasting Covenant is embodied in the New Covenant Promise: “I will put My laws in their mind and write on their hearts.” The promise was fulfilled in the promised Seed, through the faith of Jesus, in whom the restoration of the image of God was accomplished in fallen flesh. And all who embrace the faith of Jesus will receive the inheritance embodied in that same restoration.