

Consideration of the Covenants in the Sabbath School Quarterly
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in Light of Seeing the Two Covenants in Two Dimensions
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Brief Review of the Two Dimensions

	Faith	Unbelief
Reality	1: Reality of the New Covenant Anchored in the Father-Son commitment, the reality of God's promise is seen in His creative word that convey His faith to His creatures. This word is primarily and ultimately the Word Jesus Christ. The Word brings life to the dead; thus Isaac was a type of Christ, being born from dead parents, the son of promise.	
Symbol	2: Symbols of the New Covenant These were to be used "by faith" in the reality behind the symbols. Confusion frequently occurs because these at times became "old" when they were not embraced "by faith" as the cell to the right explains. Also in a dispensational manner, a whole system of symbols became "old" when the Reality of Jesus Christ came. To persist in clinging to them after that time was a denial of the reality, an expression of unbelief. But observe that there are eternal symbols of the New Covenant, which were not dispensational at all, and also note that Christ gave new symbols of the New Covenant, which are for us to use clearly "by faith" until He returns. These are given as the sinner's path back to the reality.	3: Symbols of the New Covenant Whenever we use the God-given symbols of the New Covenant with no faith in reality behind the symbol we are in the Old Covenant. This is trust in ourselves rather than in God. This denies the reality behind the symbol, making the symbol the reality. Ishmael serves as an example of this experience, Abraham's attempting to produce a son (symbol of Christ) by his own self dependence.
No Symbol		4: No Symbols The extreme of unbelief is rejecting also the symbol. This is the ultimate of self-dependence and bondage in the Old Covenant. Thus Cain's offering illustrates this, as does the prayer of the Pharisee in the temple.

Brief Overview of the Bible's Covenant Passages (explicit or implicit) in light of the above table:

- Jer. 31: God again promises that the reality (#1) will be experienced yet in His people, that the experience of symbols dating back to the Exodus (#2) which was perverted by the unbelief of His people (#3) will be replaced by the law written in hearts (#1).
- Mt 26:28; Mr 14:24; Lu 22:20; 1Co 11:25: Covenant Lord's Supper: Christ's giving symbols (#2) in the very context of the reality of His life being poured out (#1).
- John 8: Abraham saw (by faith, #2) Christ's day (#1).
- Rom. 4: Abraham's faith (#2) was in the reality(#1), the promise. The symbol (sign) of the covenant was given in circumcision, following after the reality of justification by faith. The fruit of combining the promise (#1) with faith (#2) produces life from the dead in the birth of Isaac. But that example was exceeded by the reality of the faith of God expressed in the resurrection of Christ from the dead (#1) which we are called to believe (#2).
- 2 Cor. 3: Contrast is made of the reality (#1) with the symbol (#2), with the Sinai excursions into unbelief (#3). Sinai is seen in it double light. (a) The New Covenant, faith experience (#2) is portrayed in seeing events at Sinai as God-given, and faith-enabling: law on stone, glory on Moses' face from his communion with God. (b) The Sinai experience is also shown as revealing unbelief: law as ministration of death when not seen as promise, inability to see Christ in the law, veiled face).
- Gal. 3: Abraham was given covenant (#1) long before the law was given (#2). The law (all law, #2) was to lead us to Christ (#1). Seeing Him, His faith ("the faith of Jesus") (#1), we are lead to believe as did Abraham (#2).
- Gal. 4: Abraham illustrates both columns, in Ishmael (#3) and in Isaac (#2).
- Hebrews: Major emphasis is made of the better nature of the reality (#1) than the symbol (#2). Warning after warning of failing to see the symbol (#2) as pointing to the better reality (#1), and of moving by such failure into unbelief (#3 and even #4).

Sabbath School Lesson Extracts and Reflections

Numbers are references to the numbered cells above with their described condition.

February 21 Friday	"God's law was an integral part of the covenant. Yet, it was a true covenant of grace. Grace, however, never nullifies the need for law. On the contrary, law is a means by which grace is manifested and expressed in the lives of those who receive grace."	God's law was the covenant, His word of promise to fallen sinners to restore them to His likeness. To tell a paralyzed man to rise and walk either mocks his condition or has power to accomplish the command. Such power in the word is the grace of God to hopeless sinners. Thus grace is the means by which law is manifested in the lives of those who receive the law.
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Sabbath March 1	"The basis of the covenant, the basic hope that it has for us, the basic conditions of it, are the same as what was found in the old covenant. It has always been a covenant of God's grace and mercy...."	The old covenant here must refer to the dispensational use under #2 in the table, those symbols of the New Covenant, that from our perspective this side of the cross, have become "old." This is easily confused with the old covenant of #3 and #4.
March 2 Sunday	"It is clear: the <i>new covenant</i> is not something much different from the <i>old covenant</i> made with Israel on Mount Sinai. In fact, the problem with the Sinai covenant was not that it was old or out-moded. The problem, instead, was that it was broken."	Without showing both #2 and #3 at Sinai, we leave much confusion. In an attempt to validate the law at Sinai, we tend to ignore all of the negative comments of Sinai in the New Testament. Without clarifying why the covenant was broken at Sinai, we fail to draw the contrast between #2 and #3, between faith and unbelief. The faith of Abraham (#2) keeps the covenant, while the unbelief (of Abraham, of Eve, or of any human) (#3) cannot keep it, so breaks it.
March 2 Sunday	"...Many facets of the 'old covenant' remain in the new one. The 'new covenant' is, in a sense, a 'renewed covenant.' It is the completion, or the fulfillment, of the first one."	This makes sense as #1 being "completion, or the fulfillment" of #2, that is, the reality being what the symbol but points to. But this does not make sense in light of the other dimension (Gal. 4), contrasting the unbelief covenant with the belief covenant. The facets of #1 in relation to #2 are drastically different from that of #2 in relation to #3. That is, the law in Christ and in our hearts (#1) is the fulfillment of the law in stone (#2) perceived by faith. But the law in stone perceived by faith (#2) is a promise in contrast to the law in stone not seen by faith (#3), which is a ministry of death. Many other facets can be seen in the same light (including the Sabbath).
March 2 Sunday Teachers Comments	"Indeed, there was nothing wrong with the old covenant; it failed because ancient Israel had failed repeatedly to abide by its conditions. Unfortunately, a callous form of worship called ritualism had barricaded Israel's heart."	In what way then was the new covenant "better" in the language of Hebrews? (Heb. 8:6) What specifically was the fault found with Israel in that "first" covenant? (Heb. 8:7, 8) Why had they "failed repeatedly"? What was at the root of their ritualism? (See both #3 and #4.)

March 3 Monday	"At moments in history when God's plans for His covenant people were hampered by their rebellion and unbelief, He sent prophets to proclaim that the covenant history with His faithful had not come to an end. No matter how unfaithful the people might have been, no matter the apostasy, rebellion, and disobedience among them, the Lord still proclaims His willingness to enter into a covenant relationship with all who are willing to repent, to obey, and to claim His promises."	"Rebellion and unbelief" are the dimension of #3 and #4. We must be certain that the "obey" is that of faith, the only true obedience (#2). His promises are indeed the foundation (#1). True faith in those promises, as Abraham demonstrated, is the heart of the "covenant relationship" on man's part.
March 3 Monday	"The Lord will provide 'a heart to know that I am the Lord'.... This work of God is the foundation of the new covenant."	We are confusing here the foundation with the fruit. The foundation of the covenant is the faithfulness of God, and the Father and the Son completed the agreement. When as a sinner I grasp and enter into that by faith, the heart change mentioned occurs, again as the fruit. The unanswered question is whether this fruit was possible under the "old covenant"?
March 4 Tuesday Teachers Comments	"The Sinaitic covenant was not a covenant of works! ... In Exodus the covenant was based on two possible motivations. The first related to whether Israel would do what God had spoken, out of her own strength. The second related to whether Israel would obey the covenant obligations by faith through the empowering grace, mercifully provided by the supernal I AM ."	The first sentence is true in view of God's intent. But as the other statements point out, Sinai must be explained in the light of Gal. 4:24. The "first" motivation correlated much with how Scripture pictures the "first covenant" while the "second" motivation likewise parallels the "second" or "new covenant."
March 4 Tuesday	"...The Hebrew nation, as a whole, had been given the covenant promises.... Yet, it was not done in exclusion to anyone else."	There are two ditches to avoid, but it appears here in avoiding one, we have fallen into the other. However, that which will protect against one extreme, rightly applied, prevents as well the

		other. Since it is by faith that any can be included, even those not the literal descendant of Abraham, so it is only by faith that any of the literal descendants of Abraham received the covenant promises. Thus the nation "as a whole" were given the promise in no other way than the whole human race received it, and that was in Christ, or as God put it to Abraham, "in Isaac shall thy seed be" (Gen. 21:12; cf. Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18), Isaac being a type of Christ, the promised Seed. Thus God also said to Abraham, "in thy seed" the blessing would come (Gen. 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; cf. Acts 3:25), the Seed being Christ (Gal. 3:16).
March 4 Tuesday	"Though the new covenant is called 'better'..., there really is no difference in the basic elements that make up both the old and new covenant."	March 1 comment applies.
March 5 Wednesday	"The problem with the old covenant was not the covenant itself but with the failure of the people to grasp it in faith (Heb. 4:2). The superiority of the new to the old lies in that Jesus—instead of being revealed only through the animal sacrifices (as in the old covenant)—now appears in the reality of His death and high-priestly ministry."	The failure "to grasp ... in faith" the animal sacrifices changed the faith symbol (#2) into a mere ceremony (#3). The "reality" of Christ (#1) makes the new covenant superior to the symbol (#2) as the old. However, the symbols and shadows had (and have) no intrinsic value whatsoever, so we must be cautious how we equate them with the reality in saying the old (#2) and the new (#1) are the same. Thus we should also say, "The problem with the old covenant was that it was in itself but a shadow." (See March 6 extract.) We should also see that we can have a problem with the new covenant, if with the same unbelief we reject the reality. This is the reason for the strongest warning in Hebrews (12:14-29).
March 6 Thursday	"The Old Testament sanctuary service was the means by which the old-covenant truths were taught. It centered around sacrifice and mediation.	The sanctuary services (#2) were the means by which God wanted to teach new covenant truths (#1). If we say "old covenant truths", that would be saying the symbols (#2) taught only symbolic

	Animals were slain, and their blood was mediated by the priests. These, of course, were all symbols of the salvation found only in Jesus. There was no salvation found in them and of themselves."	truth or ceremonialism (#3). Unless the symbols taught the reality of the new covenant, faith was missing. The statement that the "symbols" were "of the salvation found only in Jesus" is clearly and accurately new covenant in focus.
March 9 Sunday	"One point should be clear by now: Whether in the <i>old</i> covenant or the <i>new</i> covenant, the Lord seeks a close, loving relationship with His people."	March 1 comment applies. God never sought a relationship with His people based on unbelief.
March 10 Monday	"The Divinely appointed way for the Old Testament sinner to rid himself of sin and guilt was through animal sacrifices.... Sacrifices, with their rites, were the God-appointed means to bring about cleansing from sin and guilt.... The Old Testament animal sacrifices were the divinely-ordained means for ridding the sinner of sin and guilt."	These repeated statements are over the line in making the symbol the reality (#3). The lesson admits "there was a sense in which the animal sacrifices were prophetic in nature." Heb. 10:4 is quoted, which contradicts all the statements of "way" and "means." It must be strongly affirmed that the symbols have meaning <i>only</i> as they are expressions of faith (#2) in the reality (#1) behind them, which reality <i>is</i> the "way" and "means" of cleansing.
March 12 Wednesday	"This whole service, however, was only a shadow, a symbol, of what Christ would do for the world."	This true statement refers to #2 and avoids the slippage into #3 that the March 10 statements suffered from.
Wednesday March 12	"Just as there was an earthly sanctuary, priesthood, and ministry under the old covenant, so there is a heavenly sanctuary, a heavenly priesthood, and a heavenly ministry under the new covenant. What were, however, only symbols, images, and a shadow (Heb. 8:5) in the old covenant became a reality in the new."	This captures a major theme in Hebrews of comparing and contrasting #2 with #1.