

The Two Covenants (Part 2)

Rod Reynolds

Why was the Old Covenant given? According to the Bible, because of sin. Find out what that means!

The Old Covenant, we are told, was enjoined to Israel because of transgressions: "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator" (Galatians 3:19).

Note that this tells us the Old Covenant - termed here "the law" - was added - or enjoined - "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." The seed being spoken of in this context is Christ. As Paul affirms: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

So the "law" spoken of here, which is the Old Covenant (see Part 1 of this series), was intended from the beginning to be temporary, as having been "added," or enjoined, to Israel alongside the covenant with Abraham. And why was it "added," or enjoined? Again, "It was added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19).

But transgressions of what? To find out we must go back to the beginning -- the creation of mankind.

After God created Adam He set him in the Garden of Eden. "And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The **tree of life** was also in the midst of the garden, and the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**" (Genesis 2: 9). God commanded Adam to eat of the trees of the Garden -- which included the **Tree of Life**, representing God's Spirit by power of which Eternal life is given.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat'" (Gen. 2:16). The Hebrew is more correctly translated "eating you shall eat," as it is a command to eat of the trees of the garden, including the tree of life. "Lit. 'eating thou shalt eat.' an idiom constantly occurring, as again in ver. 17, 'dying thou shalt die.'" (*Notes to J.N. Darby's translation; see also Treasury of Scripture Knowledge on Genesis 2:16*).

While the trees of the garden apparently were literal trees, they were more than that. They had spiritual significance in what they symbolized. The "tree of life" is a symbol of eternal life, a gift from God which he was offering to Adam and Eve. They were not created immortal, but they could have been given the gift of immortality had they obeyed God's commands.

Note that following Adam and Eve's transgression: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest

he put out his hand and **take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**" (Genesis 3:22).

It is through God's Holy Spirit that eternal life is made possible. Hence, the tree of life is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit: "But if the Spirit of the *One* having raised Jesus from *the* dead dwells in you, the *One* having raised the Christ from *the* dead will also make your mortal bodies live through the indwelling of His Spirit in you" (Romans 8:11, Green's Literal Translation).

Eternal Life a Gift for Those Who Obey

Having that gift requires **willing obedience** to God's commandments. "And we are *his* witnesses of these things, and the Holy Spirit also, which God has given to those that **obey** him" (Acts 5:32; Darby translation). A better rendering of the aorist tense of the Greek verb *didomi* (give) in this verse is as follows: "We are witnesses to these declarations, as well as the holy spirit which God **gives** to those yielding to Him" (Acts 5:32; Concordant Literal New Testament).

That the gift of eternal life is contingent on obedience to God is confirmed also in the following: "Blessed are those who **do His commandments**, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

The other trees in the garden of Eden represented the prerogatives of and the benefits of living under God's government.

Biblical prophecy informs us that at the end of this age Jesus Christ will intervene in the world's affairs, to save mankind from utter destruction, and to bring peace and justice to the earth (Matthew 24:21-22, 29-30; Psalm 98:9; Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:4). Jesus Christ will establish his throne in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16). From his throne in Jerusalem living waters shall flow (Zechariah 14:8; Ezekiel 47:1-11). Alongside the river will be trees for food and healing: "Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine" (Ezekiel 47:12; cf. Revelation 22:1-2).

These are trees watered by living waters flowing from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and forming a river as it flows to the east. Trees are often used in the Bible as symbols of a government, or a kingdom, and its fruits:

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a vision in a dream concerning a great tree: "These were the visions of my head while on my bed: I was looking, and behold, A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great. The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves were lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it was food

for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it” (Daniel 4:10-12).

Nebuchadnezzar, not knowing the meaning of the vision, sought the interpretation from the magicians, astrologers, etc. These demon influenced practitioners of the occult were unable to interpret the dream.

The king then called upon Daniel to interpret the vision. Daniel said: “The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which could be seen by all the earth, whose leaves were lovely and its fruit abundant, in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home -- it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth” (Daniel 4:20-22). So we see here a kingdom, in this case a great empire, personified in its king, Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Daniel 2:37-39; 4:26; 7:17, 23), represented by the symbolism of a tree, and its fruits.

We see a similar metaphor in relation to the New Jerusalem that will be the capital of God's government after the Father himself comes down to earth to “tabernacle” with his family of human beings given eternal life in his family and kingdom.

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1-2).

God, as we read earlier in Genesis 2:16, commanded Adam to eat of **every tree** in the garden, which included the tree of life, representing the gift of eternal life. But **one tree** God preserved for Himself. The one forbidden tree represented an **office** and **prerogative** of God which He **alone** is qualified for and capable of filling.

God's Purpose for Mankind

Before discovering what that OFFICE is Let's go even further back in history to review THE PURPOSE for which God made mankind in the first place.

Both Scripture and the discoveries of modern science reveal that the physical universe is not eternal, and that it came into existence at a point in time.

Before the universe existed, there was God. And the Bible reveals that in the godhead were two separate personalities, two beings were God (see “Origins of the Trinity,” for more details), the Elohim, the Mighty Ones, who were Eternal -- having no beginning of life nor end of life.

“In the **beginning** was the **Word**, and the Word was **with God**, and the **Word was God**. He was in the **beginning with God**. **All things were made through Him**, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4).

*"Now this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him. To him also Abraham apportioned a tithe of everything. His name first means king of righteousness, then king of Salem, that is, king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, **he has neither beginning of days nor end of life but is like the son of God**, and he remains a priest for all time.*

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“and in one case tithes are received by mortal men, while in the other by him who **is affirmed to be alive**” [Hebrews 7:1-3, 8 (NET); cf. Psalm 110:4].

These two Beings each have perfect character. They live according to living spiritual principles which produce joy, peace and abundance of life. They enjoy life! Because of the joy these Beings possessed -- and because their minds were characterized by a Spirit of Giving -- they conceived a plan to **share** with others the life of supreme happiness and joy they were experiencing! They conceived a great master plan for the creation of a great family -- NATIONS -- of beings after their own image (Revelation 21:7, 24). Beings - children of God, sharing their nature -- who would also share with them the joys of Eternal life lived according to the spiritual laws which govern intelligent living beings.

All that God has done in dealing with mankind has the ultimate aim of fulfilling this supreme Master plan for sharing the joy of Eternal life with His Family (cf. our article “Citizens and Sons of the Kingdom of God”).

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

“But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13).

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

The fulfilling of **God’s Plan** for mankind requires the development of perfect spiritual character in each one who is to share in the gift of Eternal Life. This involves willing submission to the Eternal Law of God and His Government. In

terms of obedience to his laws, all members of the family and kingdom of God must be of one mind. All must come to willingly adhere to the same standard of love as expressed in God's law and all must become totally subservient to the will of the Father -- the supreme Ruler -- as administered through His law and his Government. This is why Jesus Christ revealed to John that "Blessed are they that **do His commandments**, that they may have right to the **tree of life**, and may enter in through the gates into the city [the New Jerusalem]" (Revelation 22:14). God's perfect character is expressed in His Spiritual Eternal Law -- which includes His commandments. Since the Law is **spiritual**, it must be **spiritually discerned**.

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Romans 7:14).

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Man, made of the dust of the earth in God's physical image, cannot fully discover this law or fully obey it of himself, in part because, as Paul said, man cannot of himself "know," or discern, the things of the Spirit of God, "because they are spiritually discerned." Without the Spirit of God, human beings are **incapable of properly discerning right from wrong**.

God Is the Lawgiver

Because of this fact, and because the Father is the **Supreme Ruler**, sharing that Office with Jesus Christ, God reserved for Himself the OFFICE and PREROGATIVE of LAWGIVER.

Note that Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of God [the Father], and **all things** are placed under him:

"...which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And **He put all things under His feet**, and gave Him to be **head over all things** to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Even so, the Father is ultimately supreme in authority over Jesus Christ, as well:

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under

Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

As head over all things God is the supreme ruler of the entire creation, and he is the lawgiver.

Hence, the tree God reserved for Himself in the Garden of Eden represented the OFFICE of LAWGIVER. It was the tree of the knowledge (or designation) of GOOD and EVIL (Genesis 2:9, 17).

The root ($\gamma\delta\alpha$, *yada*) of the Hebrew word translated "knowledge," as in the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" includes the meaning of to "designate" or "appoint" (*Mickelson's Enhanced Strong's Dictionaries of the Greek and Hebrew Testaments*).

God's Laws Define Good and Evil

The laws of God tell us what is good and what is evil:

Paul writing to the Jews said to them: "[You] and know His will, and **approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law.**

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"[And are] an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, **having the form of knowledge and truth in the law**" (Romans 2:18, 20).

Furthermore: "... by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for **by the law is the knowledge of sin**" (Romans 3:20).

"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you **do well**; [could as well be translated 'you do good,' note the law tells us what is good].

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"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law [the law tells us what is evil]" (James 2:8, 10).

"Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4; Updated King James Version).

Godly love is defined by his commandments:

"For this is the **love** of God, that we **keep His commandments**. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

God, in the persons of the Father and of Jesus Christ, is the supreme lawgiver, according to Scripture.

“There is one Lawgiver” (James 4:12). While human governments may administer laws, no ruler or government has the authority to abrogate or nullify the laws of God.

The choice given to Adam and Eve, and the choice given to each of us, as far as God is concerned, is to obey or disobey his laws. And each will bear the consequences of his or her choice. But we are not given the authority to decide what the laws are. We are not given the authority to legislate in violation of God's laws, but only to carry out the principles of God's laws in accordance with his will.

God's Office Usurped

But Adam and Eve, not being satisfied to **obey** God, and receive His blessings, lusted for His prerogative as Lawgiver, slandered God in their hearts and usurped His Office as Lawgiver:

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."

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"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know [designate - see explanation above] good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (Genesis 3:1-6, 22).

By his actions Adam rejected the opportunity for Eternal Life God had given him at that time - represented by the tree of life. He may yet have an opportunity in the general resurrection (Revelation 20:11-15) -- only God can judge.

In yielding to Satan, instead of obeying God, Adam and Eve earned the death penalty. And they also chose Satan's rule over that of God.

Satan Is the God of This World

So Satan, for the time being, has remained the "god of this world," by the choice the progenitors of humankind made. Adam and Eve, had they chosen to obey

God, and had they received the Holy Spirit and with it the gift of eternal life, may well have replaced Satan, ruling the earth directly under God's authority.

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the **ruler of this world** will be cast out" (John 12:31). Satan is the ruler of this world, the god of this world, or this age (Luke 4:5-7; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

It's God's purpose, however, in due time to remove Satan as ruler of this world, and replace him with a human being. One who is obedient to God and responsive to his will.

"For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor" (Hebrews 2:5-9).

We're told that Adam is a type of Christ, in certain respects. Jesus Christ came, in a sense, to undo what Adam did by his wrong choice.

"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

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"For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:14; 17-18).

Satan through deceit (it was through Satan's influence that Adam was led to reject God's government) retained his rulership over the earth. Under his rule "death reigned." Satan's reign is a reign of death. Had Adam not sinned there apparently would have been no reign of death over mankind (Hebrews 2:14).

Death Reigns

Adam, until he sinned, had access to the tree of life – immortality. Though not created immortal, he could have been given immortality like that of Jesus Christ when he was resurrected. But because Satan overthrew Adam **death** has awaited

every human being. Mankind for six thousand years has lived under a regime which produces death as its final reward. And the great ruler behind this regime is Satan.

Even those who have not sinned after the same manner as Adam -- that is, who have not rejected God's government as Adam did -- have had to succumb to death: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam" (Romans 5:14).

By one man -- the physical father of mankind -- death entered: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

"For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

"For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

So, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Death is the **penalty** for breaking God's Spiritual law -- and God has allowed every human who's ever lived for the Last six thousand years to DIE -- to drive this lesson home!

After Adam was put out of God's presence in the Garden of Eden he began to sire sons and daughters. As mankind multiplied on the face of the earth, it became more and more corrupt. "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Genesis 6:11-12).

Only a very few men chose to obey God. When God finally determined to destroy humanity 1656 years after He had created the first man, only one man was found faithful to Him and therefore worthy of salvation in His sight. That man was Noah.

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. ...Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:8-9).

As through one man, Adam, humanity was condemned to death, so by one man was humanity preserved alive. The salvation afforded Noah and his family is a type the ultimate salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ.

"... when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through

water. There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 3:20-21).

After the flood mankind once again began to multiply and once again the great bulk of humanity became rebellious and corrupt, the various families of mankind refusing to separate themselves to their own habitations as God had ordained (Deuteronomy 32:8). God had to confuse their languages and force them to comply with His will.

"And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'

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"So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:4, 8-9).

As the years went by mankind as a whole became further and further separated from the knowledge of God and His way of life. As we read through Genesis we find glimpses of man's continuing degeneration. In chapter 20 we find a certain knowledge of God's ways still evident among the nations in Abraham's age. But by Joseph's time wanton murder, and birthday celebrations, a custom rooted in false worship and superstition, are accepted practices of rulers.

"Now it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them" (Genesis 40:20-22).

By the time of Moses all but remnants of the knowledge of God had been forgotten. The descendants of Israel were living under the oppression of slavery in Egypt -- serving strange gods in a foreign land.

"Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord!" (Joshua 24:14).

Rampant Lawlessness

The law of God -- those eternal principles which together comprise the Way of Life -- was being universally transgressed. Egypt, the most powerful kingdom in the world before the Exodus, was typical of what was going on worldwide at that time, as was the land of Canaan.

Rank idolatry -- a way of life embracing every perversity and wicked evil under the sun -- was being practiced. Years before God had told Abraham that He would not give his descendants the land of Canaan as an inheritance *until* the iniquity of the peoples of that region had progressed to the extreme limit (Genesis 15:16; the word "Amorite" used here is in this case a generic term for all the nations of Canaan, the Amorites being the most powerful, and probably the most wicked, of them).

"Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve **I will judge**; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the **iniquity** of the Amorites is not yet complete'" (Genesis 15:13-16).

This indicates what conditions on earth were like by the time of the Exodus. Archeology and history, as well as the Bible record, teach us that such abominable practices as adultery, fornication, prostitution, sodomy, murder and cannibalism were all a part of commonly accepted customs of the day. All these things, interestingly enough, were being done under the guise of religion.

Why then was the law -- the Old Covenant - given?

Because of universal TRANSGRESSION of those very principles given expression in the law. The giving of the LAW was a MAJOR STEP IN LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE RESTORATION OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT ON THE EARTH. God had determined to give man six thousand years in which to experience first hand the misery of living contrary to His law. The flood had demonstrated the ultimate end of man made society apart from any restoration of God's government. Now man had corrupted himself almost as much as he had before the flood.

The overall reason the "law," or Old Covenant, was given was because of transgressions:

"What purpose then does the law [the Old Covenant] serve? It was added because of transgressions..." (Galatians 3:19).

Or, as it is rendered in the Bible in Worldwide English version: "Why then was the law [the Old Covenant] made? God gave it... because so many people were doing what was wrong" (Galatians 3:19).

In order to deal with the circumstances at hand due to transgressions, God instituted the Old Covenant.

It was time for God to begin laying the groundwork for the restoration of His government by SEPARATING and PRESERVING A PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF. This brings us to the first of FIVE MAJOR REASONS FOR THE INSTITUTION OF THE OLD COVENANT -- all related to the problem of sin.

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