

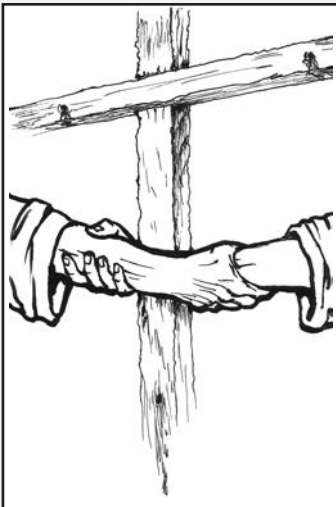
# A Quick Look at Special Agreements in the Bible



## SABBATH—APRIL 3

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Genesis 17:2; Genesis 12:1–3; Galatians 3:6–9, 29; Exodus 6:1–8; Jeremiah 31:33, 34.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘ “So now I tell you to obey my commands and keep my agreement. So if you do this, you will be my own special people. The whole world [the earth and everything in it] belongs to me, but I am choosing you to be my own special people” ’ ” (Exodus 19:5, ERV).



All the Old Testament agreements show us the Cross.

**LAST WEEK**, we studied how sin started. This week, we will look at the topic that will be our study for the whole quarter. We will take a short look at the first agreements that God made with His people in the Old Testament. Each of these agreements shows us present truth. Present truth is the truth people need most for their time. All the Old Testament agreements show us the Cross. At the cross, Jesus makes a new agreement with His people. Jesus promises to save His people from sin. His blood shows us that He will keep His promise. As Christians, we enter into this new agreement with God by our faith in the blood of Jesus.

Each day this week, we will look at a different agreement in the Old Testament. We will start with the agreement that God made with Noah to save him and his family from the Flood. Then we will look at the agreement God made with Abraham. This agreement is full of promise for us all. Next, we will look at the agreement at Sinai. Finally, we will finish with a look at the new agreement.

## THE BASIC PARTS OF ANY BIBLE AGREEMENT (Genesis 17:2)

“ ‘And I will keep My agreement between Me and you. I will give you many children’ ” (Genesis 17:2, NLV).

“The Hebrew word written as ‘agreement’ is **‘berith.’** **‘Berith’** shows up 287 times in the Old Testament. **‘Berith’** also can be written as ‘covenant.’ ‘Covenant’ is another word for the special agreement between God and His people. **‘Berith’** also can be written as ‘will.’ A will is a special legal paper. This legal paper shows what someone wants done with his property and money after he dies. No one really knows for sure where the word **‘berith’** came from. In the Bible, **‘berith’** means ‘something that joins two people or groups together.’ **‘Berith’** is the name for many different contracts between humans and between humans and God. In the Bible, **‘berith’** often showed the agreement made between two people. **‘Berith’** also showed a religious agreement between God and man. This religious agreement was really a word picture. It showed the same things as an agreement between two humans. But the religious agreement had a deeper meaning.”—J. Arthur Thompson, “Covenant (OT),” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, new edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), volume 1, page 790, adapted.

When they get married, a husband and wife agree to love each other and be loyal to each other. In the same way, a Bible agreement also shows us things about the people who make the agreement: (1) their connection to each other and (2) the promises they make. This second part of the Bible agreement has three basic parts. They are:

1. **An Oath.** God says an oath, or special promise. His oath shows that He accepts the agreement (Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 6:13, 17).

2. **Obedience.** Humans have a part to do, too. They agree to obey the law of God (Deuteronomy 4:13).

3. **Proof.** God gives proof that He will keep His part of the agreement. The proof He gives is Jesus. God will send Jesus to die on the cross to save humans from sin (Isaiah 42:1, 6).

**Look at the three parts above: the promises of God, our obedience, and Jesus. How do you see these three things at work in your own life right now?**



**A husband and wife agree to love each other and be loyal to each other when they get married.**

**THE SPECIAL AGREEMENT WITH NOAH (Genesis 6:18)**

**“ ‘I will make a special agreement with you. You, your wife, your sons, and their wives will all go into the boat’ ” (Genesis 6:18, ERV).**

The first time we see the words “special agreement” in the Bible is in Genesis 6:18. What is happening in this chapter? God tells Noah that He will destroy the earth because sin has become so bad. But God is not going to turn away from the human family. God offers Noah the chance to accept a special agreement with Him. God offered Adam the same chance after he sinned. God also promises to protect the family members of Noah who agree to love and obey Him.



**God promises to save Noah and his family.**

**Does God do all the work in this special agreement? Remember, a special covenant in the Bible always includes more than one person. Is there anything Noah must do? What lesson do we learn from the answer to these questions?**

God tells Noah that He will send a Flood. The earth will be destroyed. But God makes a deal with Noah first. God promises to save Noah and his family. In a way, Noah takes a big risk trusting God. What if God does not keep His promise? Then Noah built the ark for nothing. He wasted his time trying to save his family and friends. They will all die in the Flood with the rest of the people on the earth.

God says He will make a “special agreement” with Noah. The words “special agreement” tell us that the person who makes a promise will not break it. So, a special agreement is not an empty promise. The words “special agreement” show us that God will do what He says He will do. What if “special agreement” did not have this strong meaning of someone who keeps his promises? How will that change what God says to Noah in Genesis 6:18? It will change His words a lot, right? What if God says to Noah, “Look, I am going to destroy the whole earth with water. Maybe I will save you. Or maybe I will not. In the meantime, do everything right, and then we will see what happens. But I am not making you any promises.” Do you think these words will make Noah feel safe? Not at all! They do not show us the feeling of safety and trust that we are meant to feel when we read the words “special agreement.” That is why these two words are so powerful. They show us that we can trust God to keep His promises.

### THE AGREEMENT WITH ABRAM (Genesis 12:3)

Read Genesis 12:1–3. List the promises that God makes to Abram.

Look at this powerful promise that God makes to Abram: “ ‘I will use you to bless all the people on earth’ ” (Genesis 12:3, ERV). What does this promise mean? How does God use Abram to bless all the people on the earth? For the answer, read Galatians 3:6–9. How is Genesis 12:3 a promise about Jesus the Savior (read Galatians 3:29)?

In Genesis 12:1–3, God shows Himself to Abram for the first time that we know about. God promises to be the Friend of Abram. God says they will have a close, lifelong friendship. God promises all these things to Abram before He even talks about their making a special agreement. God will talk about a special agreement later (read Genesis 15:4–21; Genesis 17:1–14). For now, God offers Abram His friendship. This is a surprising offer. Think about it. A sinner gets the chance to be close, personal friends with the God who made him and everything else there is! Wow! Every time God says “ ‘I will’ ” in Genesis 12:1–3, we get a hint of how much God offers Abram. The offer of friendship and the promises of God are powerful and mighty.

There is more. God gives Abram a command. This command is a test: “ ‘Go’ ” (Genesis 12:1, NIV). Abram shows his faith by obeying (Hebrews 11:8). But Abram does not obey because he wants to get the blessings from God. Abram obeys because he trusts and loves God. Abram wants to be friends with God, too. That is why Abram obeys God. Sure, Abram already believes in God and has faith in His promises. Of course, Abram does! That is why he leaves his family in the first place and goes to a strange land. The obedience of Abram shows his faith both to humans and to angels.

Abram shows us the connection between faith and works. We are saved by our faith in the mercy of God. Our faith causes us to be obedient. God promises to save us first; our good works come next. Obedience is our answer to the things God already has done for us. This faith shows the important rule in 1 John 4:19: “We love Him because He loved us first” (1 John 4:19, NIV).



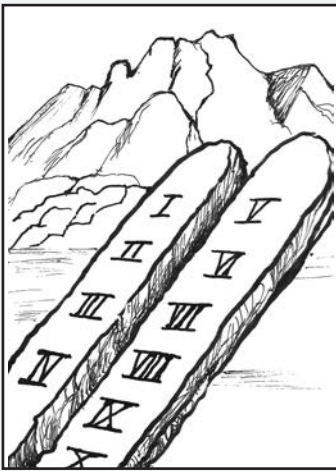
**God gives Abram a command. Abram shows his faith by obeying.**



## THE AGREEMENT WITH MOSES (Exodus 6:1–8)

Read Exodus 6:1–8. Then answer the questions below:

1. What agreement before this time is the Lord talking about? (For the answer, read Genesis 12:1–3.)
2. The Lord promises to make His people free from slavery in Egypt. How is this promise part of His agreement?
3. What does the Lord promise His people? Compare this promise with the promise the Lord makes Noah before the Flood. What is the same about these two promises?



God saves His people from slavery in Egypt. Then God makes an agreement with His people at Sinai.

God saves His people from slavery in Egypt. Then God makes an agreement with His people at Sinai. This agreement shows us that God makes His people free from slavery and sin (Exodus 20:2). The agreement also shows Israel the plan of God for the sin problem. God shows His people what to do if they sin and how to seek His forgiveness. So, this agreement is the same as the other agreements we studied. All the agreements show the mercy, forgiveness, and power of God to overcome sin.

The Sinai agreement in many ways shows us the same things that God promises to Abraham:

1. God offers His people a special friendship with Him (compare Genesis 17:7, 8 with Exodus 19:5, 6).
2. God promises to make His people mighty on the earth (compare Genesis 12:2 with Exodus 19:6).
3. God commands His people to obey Him (compare Genesis 17:9–14 and Genesis 22:16–18 with Exodus 19:5).  
“Do you see what happens first? The Lord **saves** Israel. Then God gives them His law to **obey**. God does the same thing later on with the Good News: Jesus saves us from sin first (read John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 15:3; and Galatians 1:4). Then Jesus lives in us and gives us the power to obey His law (Galatians 2:20; Romans 4:25; Romans 8:1–3; 1 Peter 2:24).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 1, page 602, adapted.

In Exodus 6:7, the Lord says that Israel will be His people. He will be their God. So, Israel will be special to God, and God will be special to Israel. Does God want us to be special to Him today? If yes, explain how and why?

## THE NEW AGREEMENT (Jeremiah 31:31–33)

**“ ‘Look, the time is coming’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new agreement . . . with the people of Israel. . . . I will put my teachings in their minds. And I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people’ ” (Jeremiah 31:31–33, ICB).**

The first time that we read about the “new agreement” in the Old Testament is in Jeremiah 31:31–33. Jeremiah talks about the time in the future when the people of God will come back to their own land after living in Babylon for many years. Then Jeremiah talks about the blessings that God will give His people at that time. God leads the way in the new agreement with His people, just as He did with His earlier agreements. God will keep His promises, too.

Look at the words that Jeremiah uses: God is a husband to His people. God wants to write His law on their hearts. Do you see that God uses the same words that He uses in His agreement with Abraham? God says that He will be the God of His people, and Israel will be His people. These words help us to see that this agreement is not just a legal contract on a piece of paper. This agreement is something more wonderful.

**Read Jeremiah 31:33. Compare it with Exodus 6:7, which talks about the agreement God made with Israel. What does Jeremiah 31:33 show that God wants with His people?**

**Read Jeremiah 31:34. Compare what is being said in this verse to John 17:3. What does the Lord do in Jeremiah 31:34 to make a connection with His people possible?**

In Jeremiah 31:31–34, we see the ideas of mercy and obedience. We saw these ideas in the earlier agreements, too. God will forgive the sins of His people. God wants a special friendship with them. God will show His people mercy. The people obey God because of these gifts. The people do not obey God as if they are robots that cannot think or feel. They obey God because they know Him, love Him, and want to serve Him. This idea helps us understand the special heart connection God wants with His people.

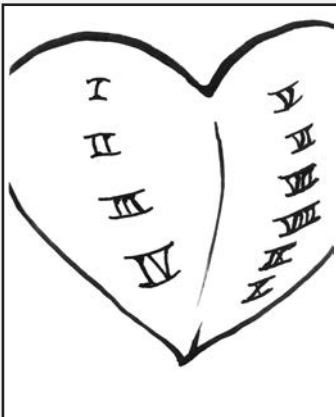
**God wants to write His law on our hearts. What does that mean to you?**



**This agreement is not just a legal contract on a piece of paper. It is something far more wonderful.**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “Abraham in Canaan,” pages 132–138, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Prophets of God Helping Them,” pages 569–571, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“The law of God shows us our duty. The law of God is love. God taught His law of love to Adam and Eve in Eden. Later, the Lord announced His law of love on Mount Sinai. This law of love is part of the new agreement. God wants to write His law on our hearts. This law shows the human worker the plan of God for his or her life. What if God left us alone to decide for ourselves what we should do? Then Satan will take control of us. We will become the same as Satan is in our hearts. That is why God commands us to serve Him. His plan for our lives is good. It will make us better people. God wants us to be wise and patient workers. God wants us to do the work He gives us. Jesus showed us how we should work when He came to this earth. Jesus says, ‘“My God, I am happy to do whatever you want. I never stop thinking about your teachings.”’ Psalm 40:8 [ERV]. ‘“I came down from heaven to do what God wants, not what I want.”’ John 6:38 [ERV]. Jesus came to this earth because He loved God and sinners. Jesus also came here because He wanted to show God honor and to praise Him. That is why Jesus suffered and died. Love for God and humans controlled everything that Jesus did. Jesus asks us to let this same love control our lives, too.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 329, 330, adapted.



“God wants to write His law on our hearts.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Was the agreement that God made with Noah, Abram, Moses, and us the same agreement He made with Adam? Or was it something new? For the answer, compare Genesis 3:15; Genesis 22:18; and Galatians 3:8, 16.
- ② Why is friendship an important part of the agreement? You can have a contract with someone that you do not feel close to, right? But that is not what God wants with us. The Lord wants to be close to us. Why is that so? Talk about it in class.
- ③ Why is a wedding or marriage a good word picture for the agreement between God and His people?

**Summary:** Sin destroyed the connection between God and Adam and Eve. God wants to heal that broken connection.

## FARMER PLANTS CHURCHES

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor asks Huang Wen-Ming to help start a church. Wen-Ming is surprised. He is only a farmer. True, he worships God every Sabbath in his village in Southern Taiwan. But he is not a church member yet! How can he hope to start a church? Also, the village is more than two hours away from where Wen-Ming lives. How can Wen-Ming build a church so far away? In the end, Wen-Ming agrees to help. Wen-Ming talks to a church member in his town whose family member lives in the other village. The name of the village is Ba-Eao. No Adventists live there. The family member in Ba-Eao agrees to let Wen-Ming start a house church in her home.

Wen-Ming and the pastor take turns preaching in the house church every Sabbath. Six months later, six people get baptized. Six months after that, Wen-Ming himself is baptized.

Adventist pastors are surprised at the success of Wen-Ming in Southern Taiwan. For a long time, the leaders tried hard to start a church in another village in Southern Taiwan. But they failed. So, the leaders ask Wen-Ming to start a church there. The name of the village where they want Wen-Ming to start the church is Santi. Six years later, the church is a big success. Then church leaders ask Wen-Ming to reopen a church in the town of Siateya. For the first time, Wen-Ming is worried. He is not a pastor. How can he hope to have any success? He prays to God for help.

Two people show up on the first Sabbath when Wen-Ming opens the church again in the town of Siateya. Wen-Ming asks the two people to invite their neighbors to their homes for Friday-evening meetings and to church the next day. After eight years, the church grows from two members to 72 members.

Wen-Ming starts new churches for 17 years. He says the secret to his success is doing what Jesus did. Ellen White says, "Only the plan of Jesus will give us success in touching hearts. The Savior spent time with people. He wanted only the best for them. He showed them He cared. He took care of their needs. He won their hearts. They trusted Him. Then Jesus invited them to 'Follow Me.'" —*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143, adapted.

Today, Wen-Ming is 75. He says he tries to meet the needs of people the same as Jesus did. At Siateya, Wen-Ming brought mangos, watermelon, and other fruit from his farm for a fellowship meal every Sabbath. After three years, church members started to bring food to church, too.

A young pastor replaced Wen-Ming as leader at Siateya. The young pastor asked Wen-Ming, "How did you grow this church? How can I start a church and help it grow the same as you did?"

"Show mercy. Be patient. Have a heart not filled with pride. Love other people," Wen-Ming said. "Just be the same as Jesus."

## INSIDE Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**"Show mercy. Be patient. Have a heart filled with no pride. Love other people,"** Wen-Ming said. **"Just be the same as Jesus."**

