



1888 THE COVENANT ISSUE

DAVID BARRON

LIGHT FROM HEAVEN REJECTED

THE COVENANT QUESTION IS A CLEAR QUESTION AND WOULD BE RECEIVED BY EVERY CANDID, UNPREJUDICED MIND, BUT I WAS BROUGHT WHERE THE LORD GAVE ME AN INSIGHT INTO THIS MATTER. YOU HAVE TURNED FROM PLAIN LIGHT..." (ELLEN WHITE, LETTER TO UURIAH SMITH, MARCH 8, 1890)

THE THIRD ANGELS MESSAGE

“Night before last I was shown that evidences in regard to the covenants were clear and convincing. **Youself and...others are spending your investigative powers for naught to produce a position on the covenants to vary from the position that Brother Waggoner has presented. Had you received the true light which shineth you would not have imitated or gone over the same manner of interpretation and misconstruing the Scriptures as did the Jews... The covenant question is a clear question and would be received by every candid, unprejudiced mind, but I was brought where the Lord gave me an insight into this matter. You have turned from plain light...”**

(Ellen White, Letter to Uriah Smith, March 8, 1890)

“Now I tell you here before God, that the covenant question, as it has been presented, is the truth.”

(E. G. White, Sermon, March 8, 1890, Battle Creek.)

Revelation 14:9-13



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Who Ordained the Covenant of Bondage?

It has been said by some that “The Old Covenant was given in order to maintain discipline among the Israelites, to preserve order and to create a system which would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.” The Old Covenant has also been called a covenant of “bondage” as well as a covenant of “works”.

Think about this. Did God lead Israel out of “bondage” so that He could give them a “covenant of bondage?” Is this really how God operates? Or did he allow us to make a covenant of our own and did we reject a covenant that would set us free from bondage?

To understand this is important to understanding the true character of our Father in heaven.

The covenant at Sinai was a covenant of works and bondage as we shall see, however there has been a gross misrepresentation of the character of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This misrepresentation of God and his character has been plaguing Adventism since before 1888.

Since it is by beholding we become changed, what was made at Sinai is often put on our Father in heaven, when Father already had a covenant of grace that they merely had to accept by faith. A covenant made with Abraham 430 years before.

This confrontation point on the covenants in 1888 was the highlight of the 1888 message and an often overlooked point by many students of the 1888 message. E. J Waggoner wrote an entire book on this issue called “The Everlasting Covenant”. A.T Jones did a long article on this issue after his disfellowship from the church titled “The Everlasting Covenant” which he was not sure that any who had came out against them had accepted it even by 1907.

Accepting that the covenant of grace was all that God had offered, rather than a covenant of bondage was to accept that God has always required Righteousness by faith, and never did he ever require anyone to try to get righteousness by works, or by the law as Paul put it. Righteousness is a gift, not something we work at achieving.

This was really the theme and center point of the issue, showing that God has always worked the same way with his people from the beginning until today and that our Father was not an arbitrary Father who required righteousness by works before the cross.

This issue continued after 1888, and in 1890. Uriah Smith and others asking Ellen White to comment, she remained silent. However in 1890 Ellen White was given light from heaven on who was correct on this issue. Only a few today hold to the view that was given from heaven.

Two Schools of Thought on the Covenants

There are basically two ideas regarding the covenants, though there are variations. One which teaches that the New Covenant superseded the Old Covenant in AD 31, and another which teaches that the Covenants have ran simultaneously from the fall. The covenant of Grace through the blood of Jesus Christ being given to Adam.

Shortly before 1888 many of the brethren including the President of the General Conference G. I. Butler, as well as Uriah Smith, Dan Jones, and D.M Canright had a view concerning the covenants that taught that the Covenant's followed each other in two dispensations of time. The first dispensation of time was before the cross, and the second covenant or dispensation was after the cross.

View 1 – Covenants Follow each Other One Spanning the Time Before the Cross, the Other the Time After the Cross. D. M Canright who later became one of the greatest enemies to the testimonies of Sister Ellen White wrote the following regarding the dispensational view.

“The new covenant, or the gospel, then, began to be preached by Jesus Christ. . . . The mediator of **the new covenant had now come to supersede the old covenant**; but Jesus was careful to have the new covenant offered only to the Jews; because the Lord had promised that this new covenant was to be made with the house of Israel.”(D. M. Canright, The New Covenant,” GS 1, 10 (June 15, 1886), pp. 76, 77)

D. M. Canright rejected the 1888 message, and shortly after this became one of the greatest enemies of Ellen White. He said above that he believed

the gospel was not even preached before Jesus Christ came in the form of a man.

Uriah Smith believed the same and said: “The conclusion is therefore clear, that these two covenants embody two grand divisions of the work which Heaven has undertaken for human redemption, and cover two especial dispensations devoted to the development of this work.” p.1, Para. 3,

They believed that the first covenant ended at in AD 31, while the second began in AD 31.

The second view which Ellen White called “light from heaven”, is the view that both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant ran simultaneously from the fall. That “The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden. . .”(PP 371) This was the view E. J. Waggoner was sharing.

View 2. E. J. Waggoner and Ellen White – Both Covenants Run Simultaneously From the Fall.

“ . . . The “Christian dispensation” began for man as soon, at least, as the fall. There are indeed, two dispensations, a dispensation of sin and death, and a dispensation of righteousness and life, but **these two dispensations have run parallel from the fall.**



God deals with men as individuals, and not as nations, nor according to the century in which they live. No matter what the period of the world’s history, a man can at any time pass from the old dispensation into the new.” E. J. Waggoner, “The Day of Rest,” PT 9, 23 (September 7, 1893), p. 356.

Christ was crucified from the foundation of the world we are told by the sin of Adam. The dispensation of time that the gospel and the cross were preached was from 4000 B.C – Present.

February 17, 1890

Uriah Smith Clings to an old Statement about J. H. Waggoner

A couple weeks before Ellen White received light from heaven on the topic of the covenants. Uriah Smith was not appreciating what was being

distributed to the people by E. J. Waggoner. The date was February 17, 1890

“As it looks to me, next to the death of Brother [James] White, the greatest calamity that ever befell our cause was when Dr. Waggoner put his articles on the book of Galatians through the Signs. I supposed the question of the law in Galatians was settled away back in 1856. . . . I was surprised at the articles, **because they seemed to me then, and still seem to me, to contradict so directly what you wrote to J. H. Waggoner. . . .**” (Uriah Smith, Letter to E. G. White, February 17, 1890, Battle Creek, Michigan. MMM pp. 152, 153.)

The articles to which Elder Smith referred were E. J. Waggoner’s nine-part series “Comments on Galatians 3,” ST 12 (July 8-September 2, 1886). Back in the early 1850’s Ellen White put the brakes on J. H. Waggoner. J. H. Waggoner was teaching that the law in Galatians was the moral law. E. J. Waggoner adapted this same teaching that it was the moral law in Galatians. However, Uriah Smith and G. I. Butler were teaching that it was the ceremonial law which was being spoken of in the book of Galatians.

Uriah Smith continued regarding Waggoner’s “. . . position on Galatians, which I deem as erroneous. . . . He [E. J. Waggoner] took his position on Galatians, the same which you had condemned in his father [J. H. Waggoner].”(Uriah Smith, Letter to E. G. White, February 17, 1890, Battle Creek, Michigan. MMM, p.154.)

Now, I’d like to clarify something that is highly misunderstood. Ellen White wrote back to Uriah Smith within 3 weeks of this letter from Uriah. In the letter she spoke **regarding both E. J and J. H. Waggoner’s view on the law and she said this:**

“As to the law in Galatians, I have no burden and never have.” Ellen White, Letter to Uriah Smith, March 8, 1890

That was not her issue with J.H. Waggoner, Ellen always accepted Waggoner’s position regarding the law in Galatians. She actually said “I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I answer: Both the ceremonial and the moral code of Ten Commandments.”(EGW Manuscript 87, 1900)

She accepted both of the Waggoner's views regarding the Ten Commandments. Some say she corrected Waggoner on this issue, but there is no evidence of this. There was no burden with their view on the law.

So then, why did Ellen put the brakes on J. H. Waggoner in earlier years, and not on E. J. Waggoner? Why did she take issue with J. H. Waggoner's view on Galatians? Well, J. H. Waggoner had taken a dispensational view on the covenants similar to that of Butler and Smith which was very different to what E. J. Waggoner was teaching.

J. H. Waggoner said: "We know that the New Testament, or covenant, dates from the death of the Testator, the very point where the first covenant ceased." J. H. Waggoner, "The New Covenant," RH 4, 1 (May 26, 1853), p. 3.

Ellen put the brakes on J. H. Waggoner. His view on the covenants was different than E. J. Waggoner, not his view on the law in Galatians. The brakes however were coming off for E. J. Waggoner. Clearly that was contrary to the teaching of E. J. Waggoner that:

"The "Christian dispensation" began for man as soon, at least, as the fall." (E. J. Waggoner, "The Day of Rest," PT 9, 23

(September 7, 1893), p. 356)

March 8, 1890

Ellen White Receives Light from Heaven Concerning the Covenant's – E. J. Waggoner is Right

Shortly after receiving Uriah Smith's letter from February 17th, of 1890, Ellen is given light from heaven regarding the issue of the covenants. She explains that the covenant view presented by E. J. Waggoner is the truth and that this issue on the covenants is clear and will be received by every candid, unprejudiced mind. The light is plain and these men including Uriah Smith, G. I. Butler, Dan Jones, Brother Porter had rejected this plain light from heaven:

"Night before last I was shown that evidences in regard to the covenants were clear and convincing. **Yourself, Brother Dan Jones, Brother Porter**



and others are spending your investigative powers for naught to produce a position on the covenants to vary from the position that Brother Waggoner has presented. Had you received the true light which shineth, you would not have imitated or gone over the same manner of interpretation and misconstruing the Scriptures as did the Jews. What made them so zealous? Why did they hang on the words of Christ? Why did spies follow Him to mark his words that they could repeat and misinterpret and twist in a way to mean that which their own unsanctified minds would make them to mean. In this way, they deceived the people. They made false issues. They handled those things that they could make a means of clouding and misleading minds. **The covenant question is a clear question and would be received by every candid, unprejudiced mind, but I was brought where the Lord gave me an insight into this matter.** You have turned from plain light because you were afraid that the law question in Galatians would have to be accepted. As to the law in Galatians, I have no burden and never have.” (Ellen White, Letter to Uriah Smith, March 8, 1890, Battle Creek, Mich., Letter 59, 1890, op cit., p. 604.)

God gave her insight into this matter which we will read about in Patriarchs and Prophets shortly. The book Patriarchs and Prophets came into print shortly after the light was given to her on the covenants. But she was not done speaking to Uriah Smith on this matter. She said:

“You have strengthened the hands and minds of such men as Larson, Porter, Dan Jones, Eldridge and Morrison and Nicola and a vast number through them. All quote you, and the enemy of righteousness looks on pleased.” (Ellen White, Letter to Uriah Smith, March 8, 1890, Battle Creek, Mich., Letter 59, 1890, op cit., p. 605.)

Today we have men who are teaching very similar and strengthening the hands and minds of many men. Many who have not studied this topic quote these men and the enemy looks on pleased. Uriah Smith did not want to accept this light, because he knew that by accepting this light he would have to accept Waggoner’s view on the law in Galatians as well as his view on “Under the law”. Because of misconceptions Uriah Smith was not ready to repent of this error, even with the light from heaven on this issue.

“If you turn from one ray of light fearing it will necessitate an acceptance of positions you do not wish to receive, that light becomes to you darkness, that if you were in error, you would honestly assert it to be truth.” (Ellen White, Letter to Uriah Smith, March 8, 1890, Battle Creek, Mich., Letter 59, 1890, op cit., p. 604.)

Some men today who take this line call error “the plain truth of the bible” and Ellen foresaw all of this. There is nothing new under the sun, and we see these very things happening today.

She likened standing in the way of this view on the covenants to standing in the way of the angel that is to give the loud cry message and lighten the earth with God’s glory.(Rev 18:1-4). Again she insists that the covenant view presented to her only a couple nights before was “truth” and was “light from heaven”. A few months later Patriarchs and Prophets was released.

Patriarchs and Prophets - Released Aug 26, 1890

When was the New Covenant made with man? At Eden.

“The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden. . . . This same covenant was renewed to Abraham. . . . This pro-mise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it (see Galatians 3:8, 16), and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness. The covenant with Abraham also maintained the authority of God’s law. . . .” (E. G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 370)

Today many are insisting that the law was not binding in those days before Sinai. Which is another great mistake. The law was repeated at Sinai, and will be binding as long as time should last.

“In consequence of continual transgression, the moral law was repeated in awful grandeur from Sinai. Christ gave to Moses religious precepts which were to govern the everyday life. These statutes were explicitly given to guard the Ten Commandments. They were not shadowy types to pass away with the death of Christ. **They were to be binding upon man in every age as long as time should last.** These commands were enforced by the power of the moral law, and they clearly and definitely explained that law.” (E. G. White –The Review and Herald May 6, 1875 –The Law of God.)

So clearly the law was given at Mount Sinai, however, it was repeated at Sinai. Some today have been teaching that the law began at Sinai and that from Sinai to the cross was a dispensation where people were under the law. But God never intended that the people should be brought into an old covenant. Ellen White calls this covenant a covenant of bondage that the people did irrationally because of unbelief. And the promise of the people was a promise that they would fulfill God's law by their own power which was a useless promise.

Did God lead them into a System of Bondage?

God did not intend to bring them from bondage into a covenant of bondage. The people did not believe the promise of God that he would do in them everything by their faith in His promises. All that they need to say was "Amen" and accept that God would do that which he had promised in his law. That is the new covenant experience.

"Another compact—called in Scripture the "old" covenant—was formed between God and Israel at Sinai, and was then ratified by the blood of a sacrifice. The Abrahamic covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, . . . But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. In delivering them from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. He brought them down to the Red Sea—where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible—that they might realize their utter helplessness, their need of divine aid; and then He wrought deliverance for them. Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage. . . ."

Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, **their utter inability, in themselves**, to render obedience to God's law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught. . . . (E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371)

Notice here that God is attempting to give them a knowledge of Him and His covenant of grace. God had promised the New Covenant which he had made already with Adam and Abraham.

Exodus 6:2-8 And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: (3) And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them. (4) **And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan,** the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. (5) And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and **I have remembered my covenant.** (6) Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, **and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments:** (7) And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (8) **And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.**

This covenant was a covenant where God would establish them, not of themselves, but rather by grace through faith. This was the covenant God intended to renew with them. But because of their misunderstanding of God's requirements, they thought that this fulfillment of the law was something that was of themselves. They didn't accept that God would work in them and they entered into a covenant established by their own promise, rather than the promises of God. Notice what Ellen says:



“God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: “If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Exodus 19:5, 6. **The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God's law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their**

own righteousness, they declared, “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.” Exodus 24:7.” (E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 2)

So here they entered into a covenant of works. One which they believed they could fulfill. Many understand this covenant to go from Sinai to the cross. But this covenant of works lasted only a few weeks before they broke it. Then they were prepared to “appreciate the blessings of the new covenant” which was made with Adam and Abraham.

God leads Israel to Accept the New Covenant

“Only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. **Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant.**

The terms of the “old covenant” were, Obey and live: . . . **The “new covenant” was established upon “better promises”**—the promise of forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God to renew the heart and bring it into harmony with the principles of God’s law.” (E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.)

Rejection of the Covenants as Revealed from Heaven led to a Rejection of the Testimonies

Many today are saying “Waggoner was wrong, and Ellen White was wrong to support him in that aspect of his teaching” regarding the covenant being given to Israel. Brother Dan Jones had come to this conclusion that Ellen was wrong.

“Brother Dan Jones then spoke. He stated that **he had been tempted to give up the testimonies;** but if he did this, he knew he should yield everything, for we had regarded the testimonies as interwoven with the third angel’s message; and he spoke of terrible scenes of temptations. I

really pitied the man.”(E. G. White, Letter to W. C. White and Mary White, March 16, 1890,Battle Creek,Michigan. EGW 1888, pp. 629.)

Sadly when rejecting this understanding of the covenant issue, many were coming to reject that the Testimonies were from God himself. The same thing is happening today to those who are ready to say “Waggoner was wrong, and Ellen White was wrong”. She went on to state:

“The law in Galatians was their only plea...Why,” I asked, “is your interpretation of the law in Galatians more dear to you, and you more zealous to maintain your ideas on this point, than to acknowledge the workings of the Spirit of God? You have been weighing every precious heaven-sent testimony by your own scales as you interpreted the law in Galatians.” Nothing could come to you in regard to the truth and the power of God unless it should bear your imprint, the precious ideas you had idolized on the law of Galatians.

These testimonies of the Spirit of God, the fruits of the Spirit of God, have no weight unless they are stamped with your ideas of the law in Galatians. I am afraid of you and I am afraid of your interpretation of any scripture which has revealed itself in such an unchristlike spirit as you have manifested and has cost me so much unnecessary labor. If you are such very cautious men and so very critical lest you shall receive something not in accordance with the Scriptures, I want your minds to look on these things in the true light. Let your caution be exercised in the line of fear lest you are committing the sin against the Holy Ghost. Have your critical minds taken this view of the subject? I say if your views on the law in Galatians, and the fruits, are of the character I have seen in Minneapolis and ever since up to this time, my prayer is that I may be as far from your understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures as it is possible for me to be. **I am afraid of any application of Scripture that needs such a spirit and bears such fruit as you have manifested.** One thing is certain, I shall never come into harmony with such a spirit as long as God gives me my reason. . . .

Now brethren, **I have nothing to say, no burden in regard to the law in Galatians.** This matter looks to me of minor consequence in comparison with the spirit you have brought into your faith. It is exactly of the same piece that was manifested by the Jews in reference to the work and

mission of Jesus Christ. The most convincing testimony that we can bear to others that we have the truth is the spirit which attends the advocacy of that truth. If it sanctifies the heart of the receiver, if it makes him gentle, kind, forbearing, true and Christlike, then he will give some evidence of the fact that he has the genuine truth. But if he acts as did the Jews when their opinions and ideas were crossed, then we certainly cannot receive such testimony, for it does not produce the fruits of righteousness. **Their own interpretations of Scripture were not correct, yet the Jews would receive no evidence from the revelation of the Spirit of God,** but would, when their ideas were contradicted, even murder the Son of God.”(E. G. White, Letter to W. C. White and Mary White, March 16, 1890, Battle Creek, Michigan. EGW 1888, pp. 631,632)

Some even when the Spirit of prophecy and the testimonies have shown that they were wrong would not give up their own interpretations even when given by revelation of the Spirit of God.

Ellen White had become afraid of them, because of their misinterpretation of Galatians. Paul said in Galatians “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in

vain.”(Galatians 4:11). Paul had become afraid of them because of their rejection of the gospel. They believed what they were teaching on the covenants was the truth. But this belief turned God into a monstrosity who put people under a system of bondage before the cross, and thus this monstrous character was becoming their own towards their own brethren as revealed in 1890.

The Spirit of Christ rejected and the Spirit of Devils Accepted

“By failing to cherish the Spirit of Christ, by taking wrong positions in the controversy over the law in Galatians—a question that many have not fully understood before taking a wrong position—the church has sustained a sad loss.”(E. G. White, “Sermon,” March 8, 1890, op. cit., pp. 596, 597.)

“I am forced, by the attitude my brethren have taken and the spirit evidenced, to say, God deliver me from your ideas of the law in Galatians. . . .”(E. G. White, Diary Entry, February 27, 1891. EGW 1888, p. 894. Emphasis added.)

Sadly God was not in this work, and many men were taken from the true work that could have been done had leading men followed the light.

“The Lord’s work needed every jot and tittle of experience that he had given Eld. Butler and Eld. Smith; but they have taken their own course in some things irrespective of the light God has given.” (E. G. White, Letter to S. N. Haskell, June 1, 1894. op. cit., p. 1248.)

And history is only repeating itself one more time today. What side of history are you going to be on?

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