

Am I in Covenant? (Part 2)

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

This week we are continuing our study that began last week, dealing with the question, “Am I in Covenant?”

This, it turns out, is a really critical question for truth seekers to ask in this generation. There are more sects, denominations, ministries, associations, and groups of various kinds than ever before, and yet the Bible tells us with little room for misinterpretation that there is A Bride. As Adventists, we have the additional benefit of the Spirit of Prophecy writings that underscore the unique nature of the Bride by telling us some characteristics of the final Remnant of saints.

Specifically, this group will be 1) Small, 2) Relatively unknown to the secular and religious world, 3) United in Spirit – and therefore in doctrine and purpose, and 4) Led by the Third Angel of Revelation 14, a symbolic representation of the message of resistance against the Mark of The Beast.

Some, who have heard CSDAs speaking about the Mark of The Beast and its relation to the Seventh-day Adventist Trademark persecutions, have sometimes (even while agreeing with us in principle) asked, “Why don’t you just focus on the Gospel – the Good News.”

Our response is that all Three Angels of this message bear the “Everlasting Gospel,” and that a part of the Good News is that we have not only been saved from sin individually, and given pure doctrines (as indicated by the First and Second Angels), but we have been brought into a Family, we have been given a specific Ministry of saving souls, and we have been given the identification of Satan’s last weapons against the Redeemed. Because of this, the message of Yahshua, the saving message of the Messiah, can be brought “home” to a people who are lost and drifting, unsure of where to turn and what to do. When the Spirit of Christ is within us, we know the way forward, we have an Angel leading us, and a decided testimony of reform and protest against evil to bear.

This truth, this message involving the Image of the Beast, is actually one of the most effective tests of a genuine messenger of Yahweh. If a messenger comes and has a testimony of “peace and safety,” we know that he is false. If a messenger comes and has a primary testimony of reforming doctrine, “fixing the Church,” believing this or that specific teaching – as strange as it sounds – if that is the messenger’s “primary” goal, then this is evidence that the messenger is false. It is certainly possible to have a correct teaching, and yet be a false messenger. We know from the Scriptures that Satan can appear as an “angel of light,” and this deception can be SO cunning that, unless the Spirit of Yah guides, and unless that Spirit guides in conjunction with the Third Angel, even the sincere, the educated, the devout, will be led away into darkness.

The only safety we have is knowledge the character of the Father and Son. This is told to us directly: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Yahshua the Messiah, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3)

Only by knowing what the Father and Son are “like” can we tell what their messengers are like... because they share a common Spirit, and speak as He would speak.

Now, this may be different than what our personal understanding might lead us to expect, which is why familiarity with the Scriptures is necessary to train our perceptions and conscience. We must be diligent in prayer and study in order to know holiness when we see it revealed.

One of the characteristics of our Creator, one of the “ways” in which He operates, is what we have been examining over the past couple of studies. I have pointed out (based on the testimony of both Old and New Testaments) that our Heavenly Father always works among human beings by means of a “covenant.” He always brings His people into a formal, clearly-defined arrangement, and then (after that) He sends them forth to do His work in the earth. The order there is important in an “apostle,” one sent out into the world to accomplish Yah’s purposes. First, he must be called, then he must be covenanted, and only after that must he be sent forth.

Perhaps, next week, we can see exactly how this worked with the actual “apostles” of the New Testament. In fact, I am certain that we will need a third week to cover this topic, and so we will do two more characteristics of the Covenant tonight, and then next week we will conclude.

And again, this is critical knowledge for us, because all messengers except for the true servants of Yah will invariably have a faulty understanding of His Covenant. They will say that Church membership is not important, or (at the other extreme) that you must remain even within a fallen Church, or that your tithes and offerings should go to them and not a divinely appointed storehouse, or that this or that set of diverse groups constitutes the spiritual “Church.”

Yahweh has A Church, a Bride who is blessed to be in unity, and to bear a doctrine that converts the soul, perfects the spirit, and brings fallen, erring man into harmony with a holy Creator. Moreover, the Bride is visible, not merely some “spiritual construct,” or she else is useless in reaching out to the world. The Gospel “net” may be designed to catch many different kinds of fish, but it is still only one net. (Mat 13:47, John 21:6) Furthermore, the Church is in loving covenant with Her Husband, and knows the nature of this binding commitment.

Last week, we saw that when the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come,” they are calling the searching to a well defined spiritual Home. There is nothing “independent” about this Home; it is wholly dependent upon the Father and Son, and conducted according to Their perfect Will. In examining the characteristics of this Home, of this Covenant, I have stated that it consists of five elements.

The first two we saw last week.

The Covenant of Yah will have a Foundation, which in this case is the Divine Law.

The Covenant of Yah will hold Promises for those who choose to partake of it, which involve freedom from sin, a sanctified and joyful life, the power to overcome all spiritual dangers, and ultimately everlasting life.

We continue from here with two of the other three elements. The first of these is:

3) Conditions

This is where the truth begins to really diverge from the deceptions. The closest of falsehoods will certainly praise the Law. They will obviously cling tightly to the promises, because these may be pleasing to the flesh as well as the spirit.

However, conditions involve warnings, boundaries, and obedience. They involve the right exercise of free will, and, while salvation is not of works, our response to the conditions of the covenant reveal the true state of our faith.

John explains to those seeking out and settling into the true faith that “His commandments are not grievous.” (1 John 4:3) Those who truly love Yahweh, and who love Yahshua, see only blessings in the things that They have commanded Their people to do.

Now, some might ask, “What is the difference between the foundation and the conditions? After all, the foundation of Yah’s covenant is the law, which has instructions for obedience.”

It is true that the Law contains the commandments, but the Law is more about revealing the principles of the character of Yahweh. The Law tells us what He declares to be righteousness, and holiness, and love. The conditions specific to the covenant reinforce the foundation, but also underline the conditional nature of the promises. More simply, the conditions of the covenant tell us that if we follow the Foundational Law, and perhaps other particulars, we may then lay claim to the Promises. However, if we reject the Law, and do not fulfill the other conditions of the Covenant, then the promises are passed on to others. The promises of Yah are never broken, never un-received; but He will only fulfill them to a people with whom He is ONE, and therefore there are times at which the Kingdom is taken from the unfaithful, “and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Mat 21:43)

True covenants are NEVER condition-less. Israel thought that Yah would never reject it, regardless of how disobedient and rebellious it became. But even though Yahweh will never break a covenant that He has made, neither will He honor a covenant that has already been broken by another. Consider the law of divorce and remarriage. According to the Gospel of Matthew, one who is married cannot divorce and then become remarried to another. However, if

one party to the covenant violates its sanctity, the innocent party is free to marry again. (Mat 19:9)

The true messengers of Yahweh – those who understand and honor His covenant – will be able to explain the conditional nature of Yah’s promises, and the conditional nature of prophecy. They will never say, as Israel did in its folly, “This Church/movement/organization can never fall away. We have the Temple of Yahweh, and therefore He will never abandon us.” This does not mean that we cannot have confidence, even assurance, of our salvation. But what we say instead involves our right use of the will, and our invincible testimony: “WE will never abandon Yahweh, and therefore – because of this – He will never abandon us.” It is true that Yahweh bears long with His people, but He also declares a point that His mercy does not pass... and the 144,000 do not approach unto that point by any means.

False messengers will say, “We know we aren’t doing what we are supposed to, but God is with us anyway.” Where is such a doctrine in the Scriptures? Where is such a gross error found in the holy writings, or the testimony of the saints?

Those who have accepted the testimony of false messengers will say, likewise, “We often abandon God, we fall short, and we fail. But despite this, He will never abandon us.” No, no... That is NOT a Biblical covenant. That is not even true mercy or love! What (even human) Father would say, “Continue to play in traffic, I will love you anyway.” The love our Father feels toward us is a separate issue entirely from our need to stop falling short, from the fact that we DO stop falling short the moment Yahshua truly enters our hearts.

Yahweh loves even the sinners, even the lost; therefore it is not the mere fact that we are loved that saves us. If it is true that Yah does not abandon us, then it is also true that we will not fall, for His presence is the very thing that “is able to keep you from falling.” (Jude 1:24) This is the science of salvation.

The declaration of the Biblical covenant is this: “God lives in us; therefore, we do always those things that please Him. Because of this, He will never abandon us.” All the “conditions” are met by the indwelling of our Father’s Spirit. Recall that one condition of being saved is having the Testimony of Yahshua. This is a condition of the covenant, and so, unless we have the testimony of Yahshua, unless we can say what He said, we are proven false. To those seeking the truth, I would say based on this element of Yah’s covenant, do not listen to anyone who claims to be a messenger of God, who cannot say with perfect sincerity that they are believers in the Covenant. They must say, as Yahshua did, “He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.” (John 8:29)

If they do not say this, if they compromise with sin, if they cannot claim to be faithful to their baptismal vows every moment through the indwelling Spirit of God, there is no life in them. Reject them completely in the name of Yahweh. Testify boldly against them, indeed, so that perhaps they themselves might repent and be saved.

4) Tokens

As I've mentioned earlier tonight, the "Church" must be "visible," or it is useless. If it is the ambassador of Yahshua to the world, it must be every much as "real" as His physical body when He walked the earth two thousand years ago.

Thus the signs of the Church's presence, and Its connection with the Almighty, must likewise be visible; as it is written, "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Cor 14:8) If there is not a clear indication, in the doctrines, in the practices, in the character of its members, then how can the Three Angels' Message be given to the world?

The testimony of the believers cannot be anything less than flawless, or the trumpet would give an uncertain sound.

With regard to the relationship between the Church and Yahshua, there must be a "token," a visible sign, of their Covenant. The testimony of the saints, which I have mentioned, is one such visible sign, but there are others as well.

In Yahweh's covenant with Noah, the token was the rainbow. As it is written, "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." (Gen 9:13) Here again we see that it must be a visible sign, as its purpose is to remind those in the covenant of the promises and conditions of the agreement. Even the Father, speaking as a man, says, "And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between Elohim and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." (Gen 9:16)

Yah's Covenant with Abraham had the following token: "And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you." (Gen 17:11)

When Jacob made a vow to the Almighty, he – knowing the elements of a true covenant – made a visible sign: "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it." (Gen 28:18) The word "pillar" is a term that means a monument, a memorial token.

The token of circumcision was reconfirmed with Israel through Moses, and as far as Biblical tokens go, this was perhaps the most dramatic. It endured from Genesis all the way down to the New Testament, and continues in the Jewish religion even to this day, although it is now only a dead form.

But consider how valuable it was in the days when Israel was surrounded by pagan nations, many of which practiced open fertility rituals in forests and on hilltops. Any Hebrew, tempted to participate in these idolatrous rites, need only look upon himself to see – visibly – the sign that his body, his fertility, was dedicated to the Creator. Circumcision, as with every instruction of Yahweh, was not an arbitrary command. It had a specific purpose in preserving the integrity and

safety of His people, separate and pure from the sexual immorality with which they were surrounded. The visibility of a token is necessary for it to accomplish this purpose... its presence has an effect on the spirit, the mind, and sometimes even the body of those who observe them; and, in the right context of Yah's worship, it is a powerful tool of sanctification. A man beholding his circumcision, and knowing its significance, was protected against many evils of his day.

In the New Testament, we have corresponding signs. We have baptism. We have Church membership rolls that correspond to many Old and New Testament symbols. We have visible aspects of our behavior that identify us as Christians. We have a name given to us by Yahweh that identifies us as member of a particular covenant. These things are our tokens, a visible set of signs, visible reminders of our faith, just as circumcision was to the Hebrews. The tokens of our faith are those identifying beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that mark us uniquely as Yahweh's. They are a vital part of our Covenant with Him.

Now, with that in mind, and with the example of circumcision before us, I want to share a quote with you from an Adventist pioneer, and perhaps you will understand the significance of a part of the CSDA message in a renewed way. In 1895, Adventist author A. T. Jones wrote, "...a Christian cannot start any procedure in connection with civil government. And of all Christians, Seventh-day Adventists cannot do it. The very keeping of the Sabbath forbids it." [A. T. Jones, 1895 General Conference Bulletin, page 28]

Consider what the Sabbath is. Yes, it is a Law. Yes, it is one of the 10 Commandments. Yes, it was, and continues to be, "a shadow of things to come," and a blessing that teaches us "more fully" about Spiritual rest. But it is also this: "Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign [Hebrew – oth: a distinguishing mark, banner, or token] between me and them, that they might know that I am Yahweh that sanctify them." (Ezek 20:12)

Although some might argue against applying this verse to Christians, we who are of the faith know that we are Israel "in spirit and in truth," and that this token has been passed down to us along with the conditions and promises of the New Covenant.

But now, consider what Jones is saying there – of all Christians, Seventh-day Adventists cannot initiate a procedure in conjunction with civil government. Why? Because we have a "token" that forbids it. We have a "covenant," symbolized by that token, which disallows it.

Circumcision was a token, a visible sign, designed to forbid Yah's people from partaking in the disgusting and soul-destroying ceremonies of the world. Similarly, the Sabbath, and the other principles of our faith, is designed to forbid Yah's people from partaking in the modern (but no less disgusting and soul-destroying) version of idolatry and spiritualism that worships the will of men, and violates Biblical and Protestant principles.

Why would A.T. Jones say that, of all Christians, “Seventh-day Adventists” cannot do these things? It is because avoidance of such things is a distinctive element of our faith. Beyond foundations, promises, and conditions... the fact that Adventist Christians rely on Yahweh for their protection, and not on the secular courts, this is a sign – a token – of our particular covenant with Him. He has promised us what He has promised to no other people or nation on the earth: safety, protection, and salvation. We rely on Him for this, not our own strength, or the strength of another... certainly not the strength of a sword that He has specifically told us to “put up,” lest we ourselves perish by thereby. (Mat 26:52)

In violating their token, most who have claimed the name “Seventh-day Adventist” have cast off their high and noble character. They have cast off the “circumcision” that marked them as members of Yahweh’s covenant. This is only one example of the power of tokens to identify the true faith, and I will not go overly long on it tonight, but I urge you to take this matter to prayer and meditation if you haven’t yet fully settled into the principles that explain the relationship of the Church to Christ, the Beast, and the SDA Corporation. Our position on the Trademark Law, which we call the Mark of The Beast for our generation, is easy to understand if one knows what a Biblical covenant is.

In general, those who are in covenant relationship with Yahweh are easy to identify... if one knows what a Biblical covenant is.

I will end here tonight, and we will conclude next week with the fifth element of a covenant, and an application of what this means to the search for truth in the last days, Church membership, and the sealing of the last generation of saints.

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