

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Enforced by the Grant of Covenant Signs and Seals 2)

“[P]ublic, social covenanting, is an ordinance of God, obligatory on churches and nations under the New Testament.”—Fourth Term of Communion.

Question 1.—*What is the second sign to be considered which the LORD bestowed?*

Answer.—The next sign given was the sign of circumcision, Gen. 17:10-14. This rite, thus described, having been instituted on the occasion of a renewal of God’s covenant with Abraham, *cf.* Gen. 15:18; signified at least God’s acceptance of the patriarch in this service, and the acceptance of all who, when suitably called to it, should, in renewing their engagements to the Most High, imitate his example, Gal. 3:15-17. And hence obviously, were encouraged thereby to seek privilege, by endeavoring individually and socially to renew their vows to the LORD, Isa. 55:3.

Benefit was to be enjoyed through the reception of this sign, Deut. 4:7, 8. The reception of it did not imply the attainment of grace; but as a sign, it was appointed to denote grace received, Rom. 4:11. To the enjoyment of all other privileges of the visible Church of God, it was introductory and necessary, Ex. 12:48. To the Hebrew people, as an inestimable privilege, were committed the oracles of God, Rom. 3:1, 2. And to them was delivered the command, so indicative of good, that they should appear before the Lord GOD, Ex. 23:17. Thus all access to all the means of spiritual advantage was secured, and opportunities of being fully addressed by the most varied and powerful motives to duty, were provided, Deut. 16:16; 31:11.

That the efficiency of this rite as a sign might be most complete, attention to it was enjoined under the greatest penalty, Ex. 4:24-26. Every man that was circumcised was debtor to do the whole law, Gal. 5:3. And till the Mosaic dispensation should come to an end, throughout life his obligation could not decrease, Jer. 4:4. As a member of the Church and nation of Israel, by the solemn covenant engagements of that people to God, and to one another, he was bound, Jer. 9:25, 26. To fear the LORD, to swear by His name, and to perform his vows, was required of him, Deut. 6:13; Ps. 119:106. And to testify to the truth of his profession he bare the sign of God’s covenant upon him, Acts 7:8. When Israel under Joshua, had entered the promised land, the use of this sign became peculiarly manifest, Josh. 5:2, 3. The same individuals were not circumcised twice, Josh. 5:5. The young of the people had not been circumcised in the wilderness, Josh. 5:7. Their fathers—who had been circumcised in Egypt, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua—died before reaching the land of promise, Josh. 5:4. Though the people, while they were in the wilderness, having no immediate intercourse with the heathen, neglected that duty without being specially reprov'd for it; yet when they came to Canaan, where idolaters abounded, their non-observance of it was not to be permitted, Josh. 5:5, 6. In reference to these heathens the command had been given to not covenant with them, Ex. 23:32. And when they came among them in their idolatrous rites, in order to be constantly reminded of their own separation to the service of God, the duty was re-enjoined, and on its performance it was declared that the reproach of Egypt was removed from them, Josh. 5:9.

Circumcision was given, not merely as a sign to denote God's covenant, but as a seal to give assurance of its benefits, and also of the performance of its duties, Rom. 2:28, 29. Abraham by receiving it as a seal of the righteousness of faith had confirmed to him the promises on which in believing he relied, and was recognized as permanently set apart to perform the duties of faith and obedience, *cf.* Gen. 17:21. Every blessing promised in the word of God as if sealed by His own seal, to him and to his spiritual seed was thus made sure, *cf.* Gen. 12:3, 7; and every act of obedience enjoined on them, and to which by solemn vow they should become engaged, as secured by the seal of His approbation and acceptance, thus were they assured, they should by His grace endeavor to perform, *cf.* Gal. 3:14.

Question 2.—*What is the third sign to be considered which the LORD bestowed?*

Answer.—Under the NT dispensation, instead of circumcision as a sign and seal, has been instituted the ordinance of baptism, Eph. 4:5. All that the other was, as a sign and seal of God's covenant under the former dispensation, this is under the present, Phil. 3:3. To these two ordinances, as symbols each of newness of life, and of the forgiveness of sin, the apostle in writing to the Colossians, makes reference, Col. 2:11-13. And writing to the church of the Romans, who were not circumcised, but had been baptized, he declares that Abraham had received the like sign and seal, Rom. 4:11. Moreover, this was enjoined by Divine authority, as is apparent in the Saviour's command, Matt. 28:19. Christ was circumcised according to the law, Luke 2:21; and at the hand of His servant, John, He received baptism, Matt. 3:13. And baptism along with repentance and faith was preached by the apostles, Mark 16:15, 16. To the enjoyment of other outward privileges, as circumcision was, this is the first step, Acts 8:12. When any acceded to the offers of the Gospel, baptism was administered to them, John 4:1, 2. The cases of the Ethiopian eunuch, Lydia and her household, many of the Corinthians, and others, are instances, Acts 8:36-38; 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:13-16; of spiritual blessings in all their extent this is a sign and seal, 1 Cor. 12:13. This the apostle Peter adverted to, when he said, "repent, and be baptized," Acts 2:38. And this truth, no less emphatically these words of the apostle declare, Gal. 3:26-29. And finally, of covenant duties, it appears to be the sign and seal, too, 1 Pet. 3:21. Baptism is a sign of the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ, Acts 10:45-48. His effusion on the day of Pentecost was in fulfillment of the prophecy, Joel 2:28, 29. And His influences by another prophet are thus promised, Isa. 44:3. And if, of such benefits as these, baptism is an appointed token and security, can it be less a sign and seal of these their glorious effects, Isa. 44:4, 5.

Question 3.—*What is the fourth sign to be considered which the LORD bestowed?*

Answer.—After circumcision, the sabbath was appointed as a sign, Ex. 16:23. Like the rainbow, the sabbath had been from the beginning, *cf.* Gen. 2:3. At a period of the world when many habitually disregarded it, it was given as a covenant sign, Ex. 31:13, 16. That the end of keeping the sabbath was to cherish the conviction that the LORD sanctified His people, these words of institution declare, Ex. 20:8-11. But by taking them into covenant with Himself, and causing them to keep His covenant, the LORD sanctified them, Deut. 26:18. To vow unto Him singly, or unitedly, was a duty of His covenant, Ex. 19:5, 10. To do this His people were sanctified, Deut. 5:12. And hence, of this, as well as of each other religious service, the sabbath was a sign, Deut. 5:13-15.

Those who keep the sabbath will enjoy the privileges of God's people, Isa. 58:13, 14. But covenanting is one of the privileges of the heritage of Jacob, 1 Chron. 11:3. Those,

therefore, who keep the sabbath, that they may enjoy in full the gracious benefits promised to them, will have it put into their hearts individually, and often in a social capacity, to enter into and renew, solemn covenant engagements with the Most High, 2 Kings 11:4-7.

The institution of the sabbath itself has afforded calls for engaging in the practice of vowing to God; thus, moved by a sense of duty, Nehemiah and others returned to Jerusalem, contemplating the evils to which they were exposed from the example of the heathen, engaged in a solemn covenant with God to keep the sabbath, as well as discharge other bounden duties, Neh. 10:29-31.

The continuation of the sabbath is a provision for the observance of every religious service, 1 Chron. 23:31. In opposition to the worldliness of men's hearts, by the arrangements of a beneficent providence, first the seventh-day sabbath, and afterwards the Christian sabbath, was granted and preserved to the church of God, Ex. 16:26; John 20:1, 19. That the ordinances of religion should not fail to be dispensed or waited on, the sabbath was given; and for this end, throughout every age, it will be kept, Acts 20:7. On that day especially, the worship of God is conducted in His sanctuary, and through the preaching of the Gospel are the blessings of God's covenant freely offered, and its duties illustrated and enjoined, 1 Cor. 16:2. Where there is no sabbath, religion is unknown; where the sabbath is not kept, the benefits of religion are not enjoyed, and the law of God as a rule of duty is not regarded, *cf.* Lev. 26:2, 34, 35, 43. The insensibility of conscience that permits to condemn the injunction to keep holy the sabbath, will not, because of the authority of God, condemn the breach of any other of His commands, *cf.* Neh. 9:14. The ungodliness, and not infrequent immorality of sabbath-breakers, fearfully show how dangerous it is to trifle with or despise any Divine precept, and especially exhibit the evil to which they expose themselves, who refuse to sanctify this day, Ezek. 22:26. When the sabbath is not kept, the ordinary duties of religion are not performed, the sign of God's covenant is dishonored, and no blessing of His covenant can be enjoyed, Ezek. 22:8. And when a restoration to the privileges of the sabbath is foretold, regard to them as a people in covenant is promised, Ezek. 20:40, 41. In connection with this, there is the assurance they shall be brought under the rod of the Shepherd and brought back into covenant, Ezek. 20:37. The good promised to those who keep the sabbath, whether viewed as positive privilege, or as a disposition and fitness to obey the Divine injunctions, is most extensive; while the evil threatened for the desecration of it is appalling indeed, Jer. 17:24-27.