

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Performed in Former Ages with Divine Approbation)

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

Question 1.—*Wherein does it first appear that the LORD approved of covenanting?*

Answer.—God approved of engagements made in personal covenanting; so, for example, the vow of Jacob at Bethel, at the distance of several years, was followed by a command from God to erect there the altar, which in that he had virtually promised to build, *cf.* Gen. 28:20 *with* 35:1. The vow of Hannah was acknowledged by the gift of a son, whom the LORD honored to be a signal blessing to Israel, *cf.* 1 Sam. 1:11, 19, 20 *with* 3:19. So, too, the vow of David to build the house of the LORD, though the duty was made to devolve upon his son, Ps. 132:2-5; yet, it was made with a clear record of the Divine approval, 1 Kings 8:18.

Question 2.—*Wherein does it secondly appear that the LORD approved of covenanting?*

Answer.—God approved of engagements made in social covenanting; thus, the covenant made with Noah was dictated by the LORD Himself, Gen. 6:17, 18. The patriarch and his family acceded to it, Gen. 7:5-7. He and they, along with the living creatures concerning which he had received instructions, entered the ark according as God had commanded, and the LORD shut him in, Gen. 7:16.

That covenant was renewed with the patriarch by the express words of God, Gen. 9:9; a promise of kindred to that delivered man in a state of innocence, but which, containing also the grant of animal food, and thereby affording an intimation of the exercise of feeding by faith on the flesh of the Redeemer, included a gracious grant which the other promise could not contain, was added at the renovation, Gen. 9:2-4; and the bow in the cloud was declared a token that the LORD would not forget the transaction, but while that emblem should continue, even to all ages should fulfill the promise made by Him, and accepted in faith by His servants, *cf.* Rev. 4:3.

The covenant with Abraham was graciously proposed by the LORD Himself, Gen. 15:18. And the faith of the patriarch, called into exercise at the ratification of it, was encouraged by the appointment of a special sacrifice, and the wondrous phenomenon of the smoking furnace and the burning lamp, Gen. 15:9-17.

The covenant was ratified a second time, while the LORD appointed the ordinance of circumcision as a sign and seal of it, to be extended to the descendants of the patriarch, not merely as the progenitor of the Israelites, but as the father of many nations, *cf.* Gen. 17:4 *and* Rom. 4:17, 18. The extension of the privilege to Ishmael, the descendants of whom observed the rite, and to the other males of Abraham's household, was a pledge that all the Gentile nations should in due time become interested, not merely in the outward advantages, but also in the spiritual privileges of God's covenant, and was a pleasing illustration of the manner in which the LORD, by a special appointment, is pleased to testify even through many ages, to the good of many, to the pleasure which He takes in His servants performing duty in the strength of grace afforded by Himself, Gen. 17:7-14, 20. When the covenant was about to be ratified for the third time, the LORD called His servant to a signal exercise of faith, Gen. 21:12. The giving of an enlarged view

of the promise followed upon the provision of a sacrifice, as a substitute for the once-devoted son, Heb. 11:17-19; and united with the oath of God, given for confirmation, in leading to the renovation of the covenant, as a sign of the LORD's approval of the vigorous exercise of that faith through which its conditions are accepted, Jas. 2:21-23. And the new pre-intimation of a Saviour to come, that was made in the ram caught in the thicket, gave to all who believed in God—and still more, the actual offering of the Lamb of God, gives to all now who follow their faith in covenanting, to use in confidence the patriarch's words,—“JEHOVAH-JIREH,” the LORD will provide, Gen. 22:1-18.

The covenant made with Israel, like the others made thereafter with the church of God, was a renovation of that established with Abraham, Ps. 105:8, 9. Like that, it was proposed by the LORD Himself, and besides, was in token of His enduring favor ratified by His oath, Gen. 26:3-5.

The covenant with Jacob was entered into after the LORD, by anticipating and encouraging the faith of His servant, graciously presented before him the vision of the LADDER, as an emblem of the glorious Saviour bringing men to communion with God, and in the accomplishment of His work directing the energies of unfallen angels sent forth by Him to minister to the heirs of salvation, *cf.* Gen. 28:11-22 *with* John 1:51.

The covenant of Sinai was confirmed in a manner the most encouraging, as well as condescending and glorious, *cf.* Ex. 19:9-15. By fire, the LORD intimated not merely His power to punish, but also His gracious presence, *cf.* Ex. 19:16-18. By the voice of speech, though the people were afraid, He afforded in kindness an indisputable evidence of the truth of His gracious intercourse with them, *cf.* Ex. 19:19-21; 20:22-26. And when it was renewed, the LORD added to the tokens which He had given of His regard for His people drawing near to serve Him, while He passed by before His servant Moses, and proclaimed, Ex. 34:6, 10.

That the LORD approved of Israel making a vow at Hormah, appeared from the fact that He granted to them the object of it, Num. 21:2, 3.

The covenant made on the plains of Moab was confirmed by the oath of God, *cf.* 1 Chron. 16:15; and the encouragement of it, that the LORD would be unto Israel a God, afforded additional evidence that their act of laying hold upon it was well-pleasing to Him, Deut. 29:13.

The covenant made at Shechem was shown to be approved of God, not merely by His command to Israel to enter into it, but by the strength which He gave to them to serve Him, and consequently to keep that covenant all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, Josh. 24:25, 31.

Of the covenant between God and Israel, entered into through the instrumentality of David, the LORD testifying His approbation, in fulfilling to the house of Judah its promise of a race of kings in David's line, which should be consummated in Him who, being David's Son and David's Lord, should reign forever, 2 Sam. 7:11-22; 1 Chron. 28:8.

The tokens of the LORD's acceptance of Israel covenanting with Him in the reign of Asa were, that He, whom they had sought with their whole desire, was found of them, and that He gave them rest round about, 2 Chron. 15:15.

Israel covenanting with God, in the reign of Hezekiah, were visited with special tokens of Divine favor, *cf.* 2 Chron. 29:10 *with* 30:20. The LORD gave them one heart to perform the service, and bestowed His blessing afterwards upon them, 2 Chron. 30:12, 27.

As to Israel under Joshua and the elders that overlived him, so to the people covenanting under Josiah, the LORD showed His favor, by enabling them to keep covenant with Him, 2 Chron. 34:33.

Though there is less explicitly said to intimate that the covenanting of Israel under Ezra was approved of God, than what is recorded in commendation of other like exercises, yet their work was acceptable to Him, Ezra 10:1-5, 10-14. Were there nothing else to show this, the prayerful frame of mind, in which they engaged it, were sufficient, Jer. 50:4, 5.

The covenant between God and His church, in the days of Nehemiah, was made and followed with signal marks of Divine favor, Neh. 9:32, 38; 12:47. The transaction had been predicted, Israel shall return in the time of the "consumption," or destruction, of the Assyrian empire, Isa. 10:22. The return referred to, was the restoration of Israel from Babylon, *cf.* Isa. 44:28; 45:1-4. And the overflowing with righteousness adverted to, would appear to have been the exercises of engaging in covenanting under Ezra and under Nehemiah, and the consequences thereof, Ezra 1:1-11; Neh. 10:29-31. And manifold were the benefits that followed from these engagements, *cf.* Neh. 8:9-12. Copies of the law of God were increased, *cf.* Ezek. 43:11; the people were accordingly much more abundantly instructed than they had been before, Neh. 8:1-4, 8; and they no more returned to idolatry, *cf.* Neh. 8:13-18.

And what is said by an apostle, in reference to the churches of Macedonia engaging in the exercise, we have no reason to suppose to be inapplicable to the other churches in the apostolic age, that performed the duty, 2 Cor. 8:5.

Hence, in conclusion, though the canon of Scripture is now closed, we have encouragement to make vows, the engagement of which are lawful, *cf.* Acts 11:23. A material difference that obtains between the former and the present dispensation of Divine grace is, that what was vouchsafed under the former, was fitted to afford the principles according to which, all under the latter should judge of the attainments from the hand of God, made by them in every given exercise, *cf.* Jer. 13:11 *with* 1 Pet. 2:9. Did He, in former times, manifestly approve the performance of the duty? He will substantially do so now, *cf.* Rom. 1:31, 32. Did He favor His people taking hold on His covenant then? He will do so still, *cf.* 2 Tim. 3:3.