

ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(Covenanting Enforced by the Grant of Covenant Signs and Seals 1)

“[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 purpose of signs and seals in covenanting?*

Answer.—We know that signs are given in order to be directive markers furnishing proof or warning, such as the lights in the firmament, Gen. 1:14. Miracles wrought on memorable occasions, were constituted signs or tokens of God’s universal government, Jer. 10:2. The gracious grants of covenant signs was made in order to proclaim the truth of the existence of God’s covenant with His people, to urge the performance of its duties, and to unfold its blessings, Num. 14:11, 22. A token deemed necessary to a covenant was sometimes freely given, as Jonathan, in token of his covenant with David, 1 Sam. 18:3, 4. At other times, it was requested, as Rahab sought a token from the spies in the camp, Josh. 2:12, 18. For all in covenant with God, without their entreaty, have tokens been provided, Ex. 8:23. None attempted to ask them in the depth, or in the height above, *cf.* Isa. 7:11, 12. The LORD of His good pleasure bestowed them, *cf.* Isa. 7:13, 14; Deut. 4:19.

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

Answer.—The first sign to consider is the rainbow which, in its announcement as a provision, appears to be merely an appointment of providence taking in the interest of all flesh, Gen. 9:12-15. Noah and his family were interested in the good promised, as a covenant blessing, because the LORD had established His covenant with Noah before the flood, Gen. 6:17, 18. Thus, it was for the benefit of the human family they were given certain instructions for passing through the flood, Gen. 6:18-21. After the flood, by the mandate of heaven, had retired, and left them in possession of the first fruits of the gracious federal grant made to him, Noah built an altar, Gen. 8:20-22. Then, having blessed Noah and his sons, and made sundry new grants to them, the LORD declares His confirmation of His covenant, giving His announcement of the bow in the clouds as its appointed sign, Gen. 9:11, 12. To mankind alone, of all flesh, that could prove a token and for their encouragement alone it was provided, Gen. 9:8-10. As if God had taken sure means that His promise should be fulfilled, He uses comprehensive language to express His purpose, Gen. 9:16. That a race of living creatures under the dominion of man, and for his advantage, should be continued throughout all time,—that the family of man, unvisited by the waters of another flood, should increase during the succeeding ages, it implied: and included that a people in covenant with God should be raised up and preserved; grace to perform the duties of His covenant granted; and the acceptance of their most solemn services, while they should present offerings of righteousness, be afforded to them, Gen. 9:17.

Before the flood, we are told of the wickedness of man’s imaginations, a word which in the Hebrew (*yēšer*; יִצְרָר) means not merely the conceptions of the mind, but also the purposes and desires of the heart, thereby pointing out that the human race, swallowed up by the flood, was unpossessed of the willing mind of God’s covenant people, Gen. 6:5. As sustaining the character of enemies unto Him, they are represented to have said to God,

depart from us, Job 22:15-17. The billows of Divine wrath threaten all in their condition, Ps. 42:7; 88:7; contrasted with the state of all such as was that of Noah, who is described as a just, or justified man, and perfect in his generations, or, in his generations attained to holiness in measure, and to covenant peace, Gen. 6:8, 9. To all such as he was, the bow in the clouds is a pleasing and encouraging sign, Gen. 9:14. That that sign may prove so to all, all are thus enjoined, to be acquainted with God, Job 22:21.

That the end of this sign might not be forgotten or overlooked, is the occasion of its appointment thus celebrated by the Psalmist in a tribute of praise, Ps. 104:5-9. By a reference to the promise given when this sign was appointed, and which it was designed in every season to bring again into view, is the sin of idolatry—a breach of covenant with God—thus condemned, Jer. 5:22-24. The practices of the people so addressed are also thus described by the prophet, Jer. 5:2, 7. And their consequent privations are in like manner introduced, Jer. 5:25.

That this token was to designate the continuance of a covenant, the blessings of which were not merely temporal, but spiritual and eternal too, and whose duties—incumbent on those who surround the altar of God, and swear by His name, should still be performed, we are taught by His own words, Isa. 54:9, 10.

To encourage the prophet Ezekiel in discharging the duties of his mission to the house of Israel, and also that many to whom his messages should be addressed might receive them, this sign, in vision, was presented before him, Ezek. 1:3. To expostulate with the rebellious house of Israel he was sent, Ezek. 2:3. The privileges enjoyed by that people he was called to describe in terms of covenanting, Ezek. 16:8, 59. He had been commanded to utter the corresponding denunciation of their idolatry as covenant breaking, Ezek. 11:21. However, he had also been charged with the promise to give them a heart to keep covenant, Ezek. 11:19, 20; and he was enjoined to give them a prediction that God would remember His covenant with them, Ezek. 16:60. But the glory of the God of Israel meanwhile had appeared—that glory which was seen by him at first, signified that his ministry was undertaken by the authority of a God in covenant, announcing the certain success which should follow his labors, in the conversion of some to be won by offers of mercy, and abiding tokens of reconciliation and peace, Ezek. 1:27, 28.

The prophetic part of the Book of Revelation—unfolding the history of the church of God, from the days of the apostles till the end of time, is introduced by a vision presenting this covenant sign, Rev. 4:3. To the whole period, therefore, of the church's later history, that sign was to apply, Rev. 5:2. The "four living creatures"—emblematical of the ministers of the Gospel, who are also present in that vision, by this are encouraged to exclaim praises to God, together they, with the four and twenty elders—emblematical of a people in covenant with God, are led to adore the Lamb, and seek to be enabled, as a race devoted to God, Rev. 5:9, 10.

And, finally, before the witnesses for Jesus, ordained to witness a good confession, and in opposition to ignorance and sin in the world, to abide by, yea even to renew, their confession and wonted vows, made by all the solemnity of an oath, the same sign is presented, Rev. 10:5, 6. There is a promise made to give power to these witnesses because their work was arduous and finishing of their testimony, in the eyes of the world, is not enviable, Rev. 11:3. But manifestly great was to be their gracious reward, when they should ascend up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies behold them, Rev. 11:12. The duty to which they were called, and their high enjoyments to follow, the little book which John was commanded to eat, contained and it appeared in the hand of that mighty

angel—the angel Jehovah—come down from heaven, to assure His servants of the stability of the covenant was clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow on His head, Rev. 10:1.

Beautiful is the bow in the cloud in the day of rain, Gen. 9:14. More beautiful than what is simply material, is it to the mind's eye as a covenant sign, Gen. 9:15. The colors of the bow, unfaded throughout all ages, have continued; and the security of God's covenant is without change, Gen. 9:16. Though the waters of another flood will not invade the earth, the flood of Divine wrath will swallow up the world of the ungodly, 2 Pet. 3:5-7. None of God's covenant signs stir them up to duty; and as to each covenant sign they continue willfully blind, to them no final sign of good will appear, 2 Thess. 1:8. But while by them no token of deliverance will be seen, to the righteous, the evidence of God's purpose to deliver them will be complete, 2 Pet. 3:13-15. And when His enemies, like the men of old time, who, while the flood's destructive waters advanced, may have fled to the mountains for safety, will in vain seek deliverance from Divine wrath, His people, contemplating the evidence of His gracious regard to them in triumph will acknowledge Him as their whole salvation, Jer. 3:23.