

# The Covenant *and the* Blueprint




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 24:1–18; 1 Cor. 11:23–29; Lev. 10:1, 2; Ezek. 36:26–28; Exod. 25:1–9; Exod. 31:1–18.*

**Memory Text:** “So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said we will do’ ” (*Exodus 24:3, NKJV*).

As their God, Creator, and Redeemer, the Lord desired to be with His people and to dwell in their midst. He created us to be in close fellowship with Him. Yet, if meaningful relationships with other people can be built only with time and effort, the same is true with our vertical relationship with God. It can be an uplifting and growth-filled experience, but only if we spend time with Him. In practical terms, this means studying His Word (God speaking to us), praying (opening our hearts to God), and witnessing to others about Christ's death, resurrection, and return (engaging in God's mission). As God blesses us, we will be a channel of blessings to others.

The focus should be on God, not on ourselves (*Heb. 12:1, 2*). By our connecting with Him, God can empower us to follow His teachings, which means obedience to His Word. No wonder the end-time generation of Christ's followers are described as people “who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*).

It's simple, really: we love God, and, out of that love, we obey Him.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 6.

## The Book and the Blood

**Read** Exodus 24:1–8. What roles do the reading of the Word of God and the sprinkling of blood play in the ratification of the covenant between God and His people?

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The living God of the Bible is the God of relationships. The important element for our Lord is not a thing or an agenda but the person. Thus, God pays close attention to people, and the primary purpose of His activities is to build a personal relationship with humans. After all, a God who “is love” would have to be a God who did care about relationships, for how can there be love without relationships?

Jesus said: “ ‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself’ ” (*John 12:32, ESV*). God is interested not only in our ethical behavior, right doctrine, or in a set of proper actions, but, above all, in a personal, intimate relationship with us. Both Creation institutions (*Genesis 1, 2*) are about *relationship*: the first about the vertical relationship with God (the Sabbath) and the second about the horizontal relationship between humans (marriage).

The ratification of the covenant at Sinai was to reinforce the special relationship that God wanted to have with His people. In the ceremony, the people twice shouted that they would obey God in everything that He required. “Everything the LORD has said we will do,” they proclaimed (*Exod. 24:3, NIV*). They meant it, too, but they did not know their brokenness, fragility, and lack of power. The blood of the covenant was sprinkled on the people, indicating that only by Christ’s merits was Israel able to follow God’s instructions.

We do not want to accept that our human nature is fragile, weak, and thoroughly sinful. We have an inherent tendency toward evil. To be able to do good, we must have help from outside ourselves. This help comes only from above, from the power of God’s grace, from His Word, and from the Holy Spirit. And even with all this at our disposal, evil still comes so easily to us, does it not?

That’s why a close personal relationship with God was as essential to the people then, at Sinai, as it is to us today.

**“Everything the LORD has said we will do” (*Exod. 24:3, NIV*). How many times have you said the same thing, only to fail? What is the only solution?**

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## Seeing God

**Read** Exodus 24:9–18. What amazing experience were the children of Israel given here?

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After the firm reestablishment of the covenant with God, Moses again climbed Sinai. In the beginning of this climb, Moses was not alone. He had the excellent company of 73 Israelite leaders. For the leaders, this was the pinnacle experience: they saw God (theophany), and twice the text underlines this amazing reality. It was also a time for the leaders, by eating together, to seal the covenant with God. This was a banquet, and the God of Israel was their Host. These leaders were deeply honored by God.

In the Middle East during biblical times (and to a certain extent today), eating together was a high experience, great honor, and privilege. It offered forgiveness and formed a bond of friendship. It implied being there for each other and staying together in times of crisis and problems. By eating together, they promised each other, without words, that if something should happen to one party, the other would be obliged to come and help. To be invited to a meal was a special treat that was not extended to everyone.

Meanwhile, to refuse an invitation was one of the worst kinds of insults. This insight helps us to understand the stories in the New Testament in which Jesus Christ was heavily criticized for eating with sinners (*Luke 5:30*). When believers celebrate the Lord's Supper, they also establish this close bond with other believers who are sinners like themselves. During this meal, we celebrate the forgiveness and salvation that we have in Jesus (*see Matt. 26:26–30, Mark 14:22–25, 1 Cor. 11:23–29*).

Tragically, some of the men who had gone up with Moses later fell into sin and lost their lives (*see Lev. 10:1, 2, 9*). Even though they had such a deep experience with God there, they were not transformed or converted by that experience. What a powerful lesson about how possession of truth and sacred privileges does not automatically mean conversion. Having experienced what they did, these men should have been the last ones to have done what they would later tragically do.

**Dwell more on the story of these very privileged men, even sons of Aaron. What warning should this give to us, as Adventists, who, with the light we have been entrusted with, are indeed privileged?**

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## Power to Obey

**Read** Ezekiel 36:26–28. How does obedience take place in our lives?

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On three occasions, the Israelites fervently declared that they would obey God (*Exod. 19:8; Exod. 24:3, 7*). Obedience is important, even if the Bible teaches that we humans are weak, broken, fragile, and sinful. This sad truth has been revealed not only through the history of ancient Israel but through the history of all His people.

How, then, are we enabled to follow God faithfully?

The good news is that what God commands, He empowers us to do. The help that is not inside of us comes from outside, enabling us to do what God requires. It is His work. In the core of his theological summary in Ezekiel 36:26, 27, the prophet Ezekiel makes this point very clear. Only God can perform a heart transplant, and He does so by removing our heart of stone and replacing it with a sensitive heart of flesh. As Joshua reminded his audience: “ ‘You are not able to serve the LORD’ ” (*Josh. 24:19, NIV*).

We can decide to follow God; that is our role. We have to make the choice, the moment-by-moment choice to surrender to Him. And that is because we do not have the power to fulfill even our conscious choice to serve Him. But when we give our weakness to God, He will make us strong. Paul says: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (*2 Cor. 12:10, NKJV*).

Notice the divine “I” in Ezekiel 36:24–30: God gathers, cleanses, removes, gives, puts, and moves you to carefully keep His law. What He is doing, you will do. He identifies with you, and if you associate closely with Him, His doing will be your doing. The unity between God and you will be dynamic, powerful, and lively.

Again, the emphasis in this passage is on God’s doing. The literal translation reads: “I will give my Spirit in you, and I will do that you will walk in my statutes and keep my laws, and you will do.” God commands people to obey and then gives the power to obey. What God requires of His people, He always helps them to do. Obedience is God’s gift (not just our performance or achievement), just as justification and salvation are His gifts too (*Phil. 2:13*).

**If we have been promised the power to obey, why do we find it so easy to fall into sin anyway?**

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## In the Midst of His People

God was teaching His people through various means, and one of them was through the sanctuary. All its services pointed to Jesus; they were object lessons in the plan of salvation, which would be wrought out through Jesus many centuries later.

**Read** Exodus 25:1–9. What crucial, practical, and theological truths are seen in these verses?

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Even though God was leading the Israelites and already was close to them, He instructed Moses to build a sanctuary:

“ ‘Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them’ ” (*Exod. 25:8, NIV*). God wanted to show them tangibly that He indeed was with them. Even though they had done wrong many times, He had not forsaken them, and “after they were again taken into favor with Heaven” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 343), they were given the divine command, and the process of building the sanctuary began.

The Bible assures us that God does not live in human-made temples and buildings (*Acts 7:47–50*) because He is bigger than the heaven of heavens, and heaven cannot contain Him. Paul at Areopagus in Athens states: “ ‘The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands’ ” (*Acts 17:24, NIV*). Also, King Solomon states: “ ‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!’ ” (*1 Kings 8:27, ESV*). The sanctuary was to be where God would manifest His presence to them.

The Israelites were to bring a voluntary offering for the building of the sanctuary. They were to give precious and expensive gifts, including gold, silver, bronze, acacia wood, various kinds of fine cloth, olive oil, and spices.

In Exodus 25:10–27:21, we are given many details about the tabernacle and its services. God provided Moses with a blueprint containing specific instructions on how to build and furnish the tabernacle, including the ark of the covenant, the shewbread table, the lampstand, the altars, the curtains, the colors, and the measurements.

Moses had to build the tabernacle according to the pattern God showed him (*Exod. 25:9, 40; Exod. 26:30*), which was a reflection of the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 8:1, 2; Heb. 9:11*). The earthly sanctuary had served a crucial function until the death of Jesus and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, which rendered the earthly sanctuary null and void, a truth symbolized by the rending of the curtain before the Most Holy Place at Christ’s death (*Matt. 27:51, Mark 15:38*).

## Filled With the Spirit of God

God instructed Moses on every detail in preparation for the tabernacle's services. Priests were to have priestly garments, but the high priest wore a special ephod, which contained the names of the sons of Israel. He also wore a breastplate, which contained the Urim and Thummim and was to be on his heart (*Exodus 28*). All priests were to be consecrated (*Exodus 29*). Other items to be carefully prepared were the altar of incense, the basin for washing, the anointing oil, and the incense (*Exodus 30*).

**Read** Exodus 31:1–18. What special assistance did God give so that all the tabernacle's details and related services would be prepared and built in a beautiful and proper way?

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For the first time in the Scriptures, one reads that God would fill a person with the Spirit of God. What does that mean? Bezalel was empowered to work artistically on the tabernacle. He was filled, i.e., equipped with new skills, understanding, and knowledge on the needed craftsmanship. Additionally, God gave Aholiab and many other craftsmen the same Spirit to assist in this work.

In the midst of all this creativity, God's Sabbath is presented as a sign between God and His people that the Lord makes them holy. It means that the observance of the fourth commandment is associated with sanctification. Ezekiel later observed: " 'I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them' " (*Ezek. 20:12, ESV*).

The Sabbath is a reminder that the Lord is not only our Creator (*Gen. 2:2, 3*), Redeemer, and God (*Deut. 5:15; Mark 2:27, 28*) but also the Holy One. He transforms people by His presence; through His Spirit and Word, they grow to reflect a loving, kind, unselfish, and forgiving character.

The culminating present that God gave to Moses was the Decalogue (*Exod. 31:18*). God Himself wrote and gave the two stone tablets with the ten precepts (*Exod. 31:18, Deut. 9:9–11*). These tablets were to be placed in the Most Holy Place and inside the ark of the covenant, which was under the mercy seat (*Exod. 25:21*).

**The phrase "mercy seat" comes from one Hebrew word, whose root meaning is "to atone." Why, then, would this "mercy seat" be set right over God's law? What hope should we see in this fact?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 343–353, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

The tabernacle was a special place where atonement was accomplished for the confessed sins of God’s people. It was the place where, indeed, the entire plan of salvation had been revealed, and in some detail, too, to the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness. Justification, sanctification, and judgment were all taught there. Every animal sacrifice pointed to the death of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and, eventually, the blotting out of sins. And, too, along with the sacrifices was the presence of God’s law, the standard of righteousness.

“The law of God, enshrined within the ark, was the great rule of righteousness and judgment. That law pronounced death upon the transgressor; but above the law was the mercy seat, upon which the presence of God was revealed, and from which, by virtue of the atonement, pardon was granted to the repentant sinner. Thus in the work of Christ for our redemption, symbolized by the sanctuary service, ‘mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.’ Psalm 85:10.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 349.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How many times have you said, “All that the Lord tells me to do, I will do”? How successful were you in your efforts?
- ❷ At the end of Moses’ 40-day stay with the Lord on Mount Sinai, God emphasized that the Israelites must observe His Sabbath, because it would be a sign between God and them that it was the Lord who would make them holy. What role do holiness and sanctification play in keeping the Sabbath?
- ❸ The Lord wanted them to make a sanctuary so that “I may dwell among them.” How fascinating that this place was the center of salvation for Israel. It was here—in this sanctuary, where God dwelt among His people—that the plan of salvation was wrought out in types and shadows. What does this tell us about our total dependence upon God for salvation?
- ❹ What does it mean that through the blood all their sins were brought to the sanctuary, God’s house? How does this amazing truth reflect, even if dimly, what Jesus did on the cross for us and what He is doing for us now in the heavenly sanctuary?

# Knowing an All-Knowing God

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Iqbal didn't know anything about Jesus when he traveled more than 600 miles from his home to learn English at a Seventh-day Adventist boarding high school in southern Asia.

He had been raised in a non-Christian family, and his parents sent him at the age of 20 to join his sister at the school. She was studying there and excelling in her English classes.

Iqbal attended all the school's morning and evening worship services. He went to all the Sabbath services. An interest began to beat in his heart to know Jesus. He read the Bible, looking for information about Jesus. His eyes were drawn to Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you" (NKJV).

He thought, *I want to know Jesus personally because He knew me personally before He formed me in my mother's womb.*

Weeks turned into months, and Iqbal learned more about Jesus. He thought, *Could it be that Jesus brought me more than 600 miles from my home not only to learn English but also to learn about His love?*

He began to experience Jesus' love in his own life, and two and a half years after arriving at the school, he decided to give his heart to Jesus and be baptized.

After graduating from the school, Iqbal went on to receive a Bachelor of Computer Applications from Lowry Adventist College in Bengaluru, India, and to join its staff, where he works in campus ministry activities. Jesus is his life.

"Now, I'm happy to live with Jesus," he said. "Day by day, Jesus leads me and takes care of me. Whenever I face a problem, Jesus Christ is my refuge and brings me out of the problem."

Iqbal expressed astonishment at the omniscience of Jesus, the idea that Jesus not only knew him before forming him in his mother's womb but also knows the needs that he has before he himself is aware of them.



"I thank Jesus that He takes care of my needs long before I even know about them," he said. "Before I ask, He knows what to give and through whom to give it. This is the reason I trust in Him and love Him more each day."

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*Lowry Adventist College received part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2024 to open an English church. Thank you for your mission offerings that support vital projects around the world.*



## ***Part I: Overview***

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**Key Text:** *Exodus 24:3*

**Study Focus:** *Exod. 24:1–31:18*

**Introduction:** The Lord saved His people from the power of Egypt, gave them freedom, brought them through the wilderness to Himself at Sinai, and established His covenant of love with them (*Exod. 19:3–6; Deut. 7:9, 12; Neh. 9:32*). His grace and care for His people were astounding. In a powerful display of His glory at Sinai, He spoke the Ten Promises (the gift of the Decalogue, pronounced in Exodus 20) and explained them in more detail in the Covenant Code (*Exod. 20:22–23:19*). Now the Lord ratifies this covenant with Israel in an important ceremony that is rooted in animal sacrifice, which points to Christ’s sacrifice, and is sealed with blood.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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### **The Ratification of the Covenant**

The ratification of the covenant involved several important elements:

- Moses’ oral presentation of the Lord’s words and laws (*Exod. 24:3*);
- Moses’ writing of the Book of the Covenant (*Exod. 24:4a*);
- building an altar (*Exod. 24:4b*);
- setting up 12 stone pillars, representing the 12 tribes of Israel (*Exod. 24:4c*);
- burnt and peace offerings (*Exod. 24:5*);
- Moses’ sprinkling half of the sacrificial blood on the altar (*Exod. 24:6*);
- his reading of the Book of the Covenant (*Exod. 24:7a*);
- the people’s affirmative responses (*Exod. 24:3, 7b*);
- Moses’ sprinkling another half of the sacrificial blood on the people (*Exod. 24:8a*);
- Moses’ pronouncement: “ ‘This is the blood of the covenant [phrase occurring only here in the Hebrew Bible; *compare with Zech. 9:11, Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24*] that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’ ” (*Exod. 24:8b, NIV*);
- a covenantal meal, with 74 leaders, on Mount Sinai (*Exod. 24:9–11*).

In the setting of the covenant, God’s people responded three times in the same way to God’s gracious words: “ ‘We will do everything the LORD has said’ ” (*Exod. 19:8, NIV; see also Exod. 24:3, 7, NIV*). What was

wrong with such a promise? Namely, their self-confidence, their shallow understanding of the power of sin and of their own sinful nature, and their failure to acknowledge the need for God's assistance. In reality, just a few weeks later, many of them were dancing around the golden calf. The proper answer would be: "With the help of the Lord and by the power of His grace, we will do everything the Lord has said."

Joshua, a very faithful servant of Moses and later an excellent leader of God's people, personally heard these well-meant promises and knew how fragile, weak, and easily broken they were. Several times he witnessed the apostasy of the Israelites. When they again repeated at a later time, "'We too will serve the LORD'" (*Josh. 24:18, NIV*), Joshua decisively told them that they were "not able to serve the LORD" (*Josh. 24:19, NIV*) because their decision was not firm, as they still cherished some pagan idols (*see Josh. 24:14, 23*) and were not depending upon God's help but on their own strong will. However, Joshua personally declared: "'But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD'" (*Josh. 24:15, NIV*).

God invited Moses, along with Aaron and two of his sons, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 elders to meet with Him on Mount Sinai (*Exod. 24:9, 10*). By His close presence, God wished to reveal more fully who He was. It is purposely mentioned that they were eating and drinking on that occasion. It is not explained who prepared the banquet, although it most likely was the Lord Himself. Eating together was another form of sealing a covenant, so this was a covenantal meal. In biblical times, the very act of eating together established a deep friendship and a bond of family and brotherhood. If something was not right between those who shared a meal together, it was forgiven, and the promise was given by those feasting that they would stand by each other forever (*see, e.g., Jacob and Laban's meal, in Genesis 31:54*).

We experience a similar covenantal fellowship when we celebrate the life and death of Jesus during the Lord's Supper, the Communion. God is inviting believers to have a close relationship with Him and with one another by eating and drinking together. Those who participate in this commemorative ceremony form one family with Christ because it actualizes and makes tangible what He did for us. Communion is the time when His church is reestablished and a community of faith reformed, showing that He is their Lord, King, and Friend. Church members are united with Him and to one another. They are sanctified by His being with them. The bond is sealed by His presence and Word.

### **The Tabernacle of God**

Almost one-third of the book of Exodus deals with the tabernacle, thus indicating its importance. Exodus 25 to 31 provides the detailed

blueprint, instructions about its design, and the materials used, while Exodus 35 to 40 narrate how to build it and the actual consecration of the sanctuary for its holy functions. What is the significance of this narrative?

The most important thing in the sanctuary is not the furniture, even though it cannot be overlooked because it set the stage for what was to take place in the tabernacle. The crucial thing is the drama, the actual play that takes place there.

It is like going to the theater to see a play with different scenes. What is on the stage tells the audience if the story will take place during the day or at midnight, if it is occurring in a town, palace, cemetery, or wedding banquet, who the main players are, and many details in between. The setting is important for understanding the plot and the play. In the same way, our focus related to the tabernacle must always be on the play itself, not just on the background, the furniture, and type of sacrifice, so that we may recognize what is being portrayed. We need to understand the meaning of all of it. The tabernacle is a monumental object lesson of God's plan of redemption.

The services in the sanctuary present the drama of God. In a dramatic way, they document who God is; what He stands for; the values He upholds; how He saves the repentant sinner; how He deals with sin and stubbornly wicked people; how He judges, and brings, a final solution to the problem of sin, so that one day evil will be eradicated. This drama demonstrates, ultimately, that peace, reconciliation, and harmony will be reestablished.

God wanted to dwell with His people. The tabernacle was His earthly dwelling place, not that He was not already with them, or could be contained by it, but because He wanted to demonstrate His actual tangible presence to His people, showing that they were not alone, abandoned, or forsaken, and that He was taking care of them.

The apostle Paul plainly states that the Lord does not live in temples made by human hands (*Acts 17:24, 25*), and Solomon solemnly declares, after building a marvelous temple for Him in Jerusalem, that even the heavens could not hold the Lord: " 'But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!' " (*2 Chron. 6:18, NIV*). Then Solomon continues: " 'May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. . . . Hear from heaven, your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive' " (*2 Chron. 6:20, 21, NIV*). God in His love and mercy condescends to our level and breaks into our time and space to be with us.

God's visible presence is behind His desire for Israel to build Him a tabernacle in the center of the camp. The Lord declares: " 'Have them

make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among [you]’ ” (*Exod. 25:8, NIV; see also ESV, NKJV*). Do not overlook the conjunction “and” in this phrase (good translations have “and,” not a causative “that,” even though it is also a proper translation), for this “and” is exegetically and theologically crucial. God did not need the sanctuary in order to be, or dwell, with His people. His presence was with them all the time, as the principal theme of the book of Exodus is God’s presence with His people. However, God later uses the Hebrew preposition *lamed* (“so that” or “that”) in Exodus 29:46b, so everyone will be clear that the purpose of the sanctuary is for Him to closely dwell with His people and demonstrate His visible presence (*Exod. 29:42–46*).

When Israel’s glorious Solomonic temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the people were sent into exile as a result of their unfaithfulness (*Dan. 9:4–20*), God through the prophet Ezekiel assured His people that He would be “a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone” (*Ezek. 11:16, NIV*).

God tells Moses that he must build the sanctuary, according to the model of the heavenly sanctuary shown him on Mount Sinai (*Exod. 25:9, 40; see more on this in the Commentary section of lesson 13*). The most important space in the sanctuary was the Most Holy Place, with its central piece being the ark of the covenant, also called the ark of the testimony (*Exod. 25:16*), because God’s words of the testimony or the Decalogue were to be placed inside the ark (*Exod. 40:20*). On the top of the ark, an atonement cover made of pure gold was placed, a mercy seat (Hebrew *Kaporet*, from the root *kapar*, “atone”; in the Greek, *hilasterion*). It was the place where final reconciliation took place and the confessed sins of God’s people were blotted out. Here God provided the ultimate solution to the problem of sin and evil (*see Lev. 16:15, 16, 30*). Jesus Christ is the *hilasterion*, the mercy seat, the atoning Sacrifice who atones and purifies us from our sins (*Rom. 3:25, CJB; 1 John 2:2, NIV*).

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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1. After Solomon built the temple, God said to him: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (*2 Chron. 7:14*). How can we carefully implement and practice as a community of faith this divine advice? What hinders our prayers, keeping God from hearing, and responding to, our cries for help?

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2. How do we renew the covenant of love with the Lord during Communion? Do we need a special ceremony to do so? Explain.

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3. Jesus Christ “became flesh and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14, ESV*). In the Greek language, it is literally stated that He “tabernacled with us.” How can the incarnation of Jesus and His life on earth assure you that He is with you and understands all your troubles, problems, and life’s challenges?

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