
CHAPTER 2

MAJOR COVENANTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE IMPORTANCE OF BLOOD

We will spend some time in the Old Testament looking at examples that illustrate the importance God places on our understanding of covenant. For those who are new to this subject, a covenant can be made in one of two ways. The first way is through a verbal agreement. The very first covenant from the pages of Genesis is generally a verbal one. The force of this type of covenant is based on the character and integrity of the one who initiated it. The second type of covenant is one that is made by blood. This is where we get the name "blood covenant." It involves making a "blood oath," which if broken is punishable by death. In the pages of the Bible, blood is not brought into the covenant process until after the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. From that time on, blood is shed every time God makes a covenant with man. Why is blood important? The book of Leviticus (chapter 17 verse 11) says, "**...the life of the flesh is in the blood.**" It reminds us that someone or something had to give up its life as the result of our sin and rebellion toward God. It is a reminder that the sin of man always has consequences—and death is one of them. Our sins are what actually crucified Jesus at the cross. The price for man's rebellion had to be paid. Justice demanded it. For this reason the sinless Lamb of God died on the cross and shed His blood, not for Himself, but for us. The tragedy is most people have decided to reject what Jesus freely did on their behalf and, as a result, have chosen to die for their own sins. Our focus will remain on Jesus and His blood as we continue our study.



"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

THE ADAMIC COVENANT

In Genesis chapters 1-3 we read of the creation and the fall of mankind into sin. Everyone has heard the story of Eden. When Adam and Eve were originally created the Bible says

"they were both naked and were not ashamed." (Genesis 2:25)

Immediately after the sin was committed, God went looking for Adam in the garden where they had once walked and fellowshiped in the cool of the day. God called out to Adam,

"Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) Adam replied, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (Genesis 3:10) God said to Adam, "Who told you that you were naked?" (Genesis 3:11)

This is a very revealing question. One of the consequences of sin is that it removes the glory and presence of God. We feel "naked" and in need of some kind of covering. This "nakedness" causes us to run and hide from God much like Adam did in the garden that day. Throughout the Old Testament you will find the word "atonement" used repeatedly. The primary meaning of this word is "to cover" and is usually applied to the "covering of sin" through the sacrifice and blood of an animal. This animal sacrifice was a type and shadow in the Old Testament of the sacrifice that was to come through the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, in the New Testament.

God's original covenant was for Adam to have **dominion** over all the earth (Genesis 1:26). The covenant remained in force under one condition. God told Adam that except for one tree the whole earth belonged to him. God told Adam, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, **for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**" We know the story—the serpent (Satan) deceived Eve and she convinced Adam that eating the fruit from this tree was a good thing. They ate of the tree and spiritually died. The entire future human race died with them.

THREE TYPES OF DEATH—SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL & ETERNAL

It's obvious that Adam did not immediately die upon eating the forbidden fruit. The Bible says that he lived to be 930 years old. What did God mean when He said, "you shall surely die"? The death being spoken of here is not physical death. There are three kinds of death being talked about in Genesis. The type of death God is talking about is "**spiritual death.**" This type of death occurs when man's spirit dies. When man dies spiritually, physical death soon follows. Spiritual death means separation from God, who is the source of all life. If you are separated from the life source long enough, **physical death** will occur. An example that illustrates this principle could be the rechargeable flashlights you can buy at a hardware store. They plug into an electrical outlet at home. You can use the flashlight for a few hours as long as you always remember to put it back in contact with a power source for recharging. If the flashlight remains separated from its charging receptacle, it will continue to work for 2 or three hours—but will eventually die. This is a poor analogy when talking about the human condition. When Adam and Eve sinned, a break occurred between man and God that could not be immediately corrected. The result—930 years later Adam physically died. Adam was not originally created with a body that would die. Adam's body was designed to last forever. The Bible shows us that as time went by man began to die at a faster rate. Today we have a lifespan of about 70 to 80 years.

The third type of death is **eternal**. This is the most fearful type of death because it is an eternal separation from God with no hope of pardon or parole. This type of death occurs when a person dies physically having received no solution for his or her condition of spiritual death. A person in this condition is confined to a place called "hell," which was not originally made for man but for Satan and his angels.

God never leaves us hanging without hope. The focus of this study is on God's solution for man's problem. That solution is found in a person, Jesus Christ.

THE CURSES AND PROMISES OF THE ADAMIC COVENANT

In the story of Eden, God gives us the first promise of a redeemer who was to come. This redeemer would restore everything that Adam's sin had destroyed. In I Corinthians 15:45 Jesus is referred to as the "**last Adam.**" In Genesis 3:14 God begins to pronounce some curses and some promises that resulted from the breaking of the covenant. To Satan God said...

*"Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. **And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.**"*

It is here we see the first promise of the coming of Jesus Christ, who would bruise Satan's head. In the Bible, the head is the symbol of authority. The coming redeemer would bring an end to Satan's domination of man that had been initiated through Adam's sin. The Bible opens with the promise of the Messiah's coming and ends with His completed redemption of man in the book of Revelation.

You see, Adam messed things up and gave God a big problem. God loves man; He says so in John 3:16. However, this love could not be demonstrated through the simple act of just forgiving man for his disobedience. It is here we must go back to the discussion about the ways of God at the beginning of this study. God has certain characteristics and ways that He will not violate. If God could go against His own nature, He would have done so here. One of God's character traits is that of love. Another of God's character traits is that He is a God of justice. Justice demands that a payment be made for man's rebellion. God's problem was, "How can I forgive man who I love without violating My justice?" The Bible once again calls the answer to this dilemma a mystery. God's solution was not an easy one. We get some insight, however, in the example set forth in the Adamic covenant.

THERE ARE SIX PRONOUNCEMENTS BY GOD IN THE ADAMIC COVENANT:

- 1) **The serpent is cursed**—it must crawl on its belly and eat dust all the days of its life.
- 2) **Satan is judged**—the first prophecy of the coming Messiah who will destroy Satan's authority.
- 3) **The woman will have pain in childbirth**
- 4) **The woman is made subject to her husband**
- 5) **Man sweats in labor to live**
- 6) **Man dies spiritually**—causes physical death and decay.

In Genesis 3:20-21 we see the first blood spilled as a result of man's sin...

"And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them."

An animal had to spill its blood to provide these tunics of skin so that man's nakedness was covered. Even though Genesis 3:21 is a small, one sentence verse, it gives a big preview of the unfolding of God's redemption in the pages to follow in the Old Testament. Over and over animal blood would be spilled to "atone" for man's sin and nakedness until that point in history where God Himself would come on the scene as a man, Jesus Christ, to shed His own blood, ending forever man's sin and spiritual death. This was God's solution to man's problem—He paid man's penalty of death Himself. It's the innocent choosing to die for the guilty—the righteous dying for the unrighteous. It demonstrates how far God will go for those He loves.

TWO SYSTEMS OF BELIEF EMERGE

In Genesis chapter 4 we read the story of two brothers who were sons of Adam. Their names were Cain and Abel. Starting in verse 3 the Bible says that a time came when both brothers decided to bring an offering to the Lord. The offering in those days was an expression of worship. Because he was a farmer, Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground. The Bible says that Abel brought his offering of the firstlings of his flock and of their

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fat. In other words, Abel brought a blood offering. The Bible says that God had respect for Abel's offering but did not respect the offering of Cain. The story of Cain and Abel ends in tragedy because Cain killed his brother because he was angry over his offering being rejected.

Some facts "stand out" in this story. First of all, Cain offered God a "bloodless" sacrifice. From a human point of view, there wasn't anything wrong with Cain's sacrifice. Cain worked hard at tilling and farming the land. By bringing a sacrifice of his hard work, it should have been pleasing to the Lord, but was rejected instead. On the other hand, Abel was a shepherd and brought the Lord something that he didn't really labor that much to produce. After all, humans can't give birth to sheep—only sheep give birth to sheep. The real sacrifice in Abel's offering was made by the sheep that gave its life and its blood. Yet, the Lord accepted Abel's offering. This response by God flies in the face of human reason. But, to the one with an understanding about the importance of blood in relating with God, it makes perfect sense. Abel related to God in his offering through the blood. It demonstrated that he understood that a relationship with God was only possible by the spilling of blood because of sin.

*"...according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission."
(Hebrews 9:22)*

This story reveals two "belief systems" that exist within the institutional church and explains why so many have so little reality of God in their lives. I have heard these beliefs referred to as "**the religion of Cain**" and the "**religion of Abel.**" The religion of Cain looks good and has its foundation in hard work. A person involved in the religion of Cain is considered a model Christian in most church congregations. They're energetic and zealous for the things of God and work tirelessly to further the kingdom of God. They're always present when the church door is open. Their relationship with God is founded on the things they have done and the sacrifices they have made. Human reason is the guiding principle behind the religion of Cain. This reasoning sounds something like this, "The more I do for God, the more He will accept me and the bigger my reward in heaven will be." Blood has little to do with the religion of Cain.

Works-based faith is a close counterfeit to the Bible faith needed for salvation. It looks good and might even have supernatural miracles occurring, but it is based in **performance and work**.

Abel's religion is different. People who are of Abel's religion approach God **through faith in the blood**. These people may not necessarily have a high level of performance. They might not always be held up as a "model" church member, yet they will be zealous for "good works"—but for totally different reasons. They approach God with no reliance upon the sacrifices they have made or the works they have performed. They put priorities on things that the believers in Cain's religion wouldn't bother with. When approaching God, they come boldly before the throne of grace to obtain the help they need (Hebrews 4:16). Their only defense and claim is the righteousness they have received as a result of the shed **blood** of Jesus. I have discovered in my walk with the Lord that many more are of Cain's religion than of Abel's.

A good scripture to quote in defense of Abel's religion is...

*"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. **But to him who does not work** but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness **apart from works**: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.'" (Romans 4:3-8)*

Another scripture is...

*"But you have come to mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to **Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.**" (Hebrews 12:22-25)*

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In the Genesis chapter 4 story, Cain kills his brother Abel. This is the first murder recorded in the Bible. The religion of Cain **always** persecutes and tries to discredit the religion of Abel. Some of the bloodiest persecutions in church history is found in these two groups. The religion of Abel will not be the persecutors nor will they take the initiative in spilling blood. The religion of Cain is always the aggressor in these matters. In America today, little blood is being shed in disputes within the institutional church. Most persecution comes as a result of slander and verbal attacks. If you take a close look at the ones who are slandering (in the name of God's truth of course) and making accusations of heresy, you will many times find the religion of Cain at the root.

THE NOAHIC COVENANT

In Genesis chapter 6 verse 18 we see God moving to establish a **covenant** with a man named Noah. After Adam and Eve were created, man was fruitful and multiplied upon the earth. Because of Adam's disobedience, man's sinfulness multiplied with him. In Genesis 6:5-6 the Bible says...

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the Earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the Earth, and He was grieved in His heart."

It is for this reason that God decided to destroy all life on the Earth except for a remnant. God made a **covenant** with Noah and instructed him to build a ship that would carry him and his household, along with animals of every species, through a great flood for the purpose of destroying all flesh that dwelt upon the Earth. After the flood ended in Genesis 8:20 it says that Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings of every clean animal and of every clean bird to the Lord. Again, we have a covenant through animal sacrifice.

In Genesis chapter 9 we read the provisions of the covenant made with Noah and the Earth:

- ◆ The command to re-populate the Earth is repeated
- ◆ The fear and dread of man is placed on the animal kingdom

- ◆ Man is now permitted to eat meat, but must not eat the blood
- ◆ Whoever, whether man or beast, sheds man's blood it must die
- ◆ This **everlasting** covenant is established with Noah, his descendants, and the animal kingdom.
- ◆ God promises never again to destroy the Earth with water
- ◆ God gives a rainbow as a sign of this everlasting covenant and His promise never to destroy the Earth by a flood again.

In Genesis 9:13-16 God says...

*"I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be **for the sign of the covenant** between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and **I will remember My covenant** which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it **to remember the everlasting covenant** between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."*

The Noahic covenant is still in force today. God called it "an everlasting covenant." God promised never again to destroy the earth with a flood; but other scripture in the New Testament clearly says that the earth will be destroyed again in the last days—not with water, but with fire.

Even though some people consider this covenant "minor" in comparison with some of the other major covenants in the Bible, it illustrates perfectly the nature of God in initiating a covenant and binding Himself to it. Why does God do this? So that man through **covenant** can **know** what God's will is and what He will do in a given situation. God initiates covenant so man can have something on which to base his faith. The Noahic covenant shows us that God will bind Himself to a covenant that "defines" what He will and will not do. God does not "do whatever He wants", as some would have us believe. God will never again destroy the earth with a flood. You have His word on the matter—and you can bet He'll never break his oath, yet God still remains "sovereign!"

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Earlier, we covered the meaning of the word "testament" and its Greek meaning that also meant "covenant." The Old "Testament" can also be called the Old Covenant, and the New "Testament" can be called the New Covenant. These two covenants divide the Bible into two parts with the cross of Jesus Christ providing the transition between them. The Old Testament is understood to be primarily made up of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant was originally made between God and Abraham but is actually fulfilled by Christ thousands of years later. Both of these Old Testament institutions are **blood covenants**.

A whole book could be written on the covenant of Abraham. Our purpose, however, is not to look at this incredible happening in an exhaustive way but to see the different elements of the blood covenant, the way it established Abraham's faith, and the authority it carries.

In Genesis chapter 12:1-3, we see the Lord beginning to deal with Abram (his name before the covenant was made) concerning this covenant by making certain pledges and promises...

"Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

In Genesis chapter 15, some ten years later, we see the events that led up to the actual "cutting" of the Abrahamic Covenant. The covenant of Abraham was made in one day, but the entire outworking of it covered many years.

God appeared to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceeding great reward." Abram goes on in the vision to talk with God about his need for an heir from his own body. God promised him an heir, a son in his old age, and took him outside and showed him the night sky saying, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be." God

continues to talk to Abram, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to inherit it."

In Genesis 15:8, Abram asks the key question that sets the whole Abrahamic covenant into motion...

*"And he said, 'Lord God, **how shall I know that I will inherit it?**'"*

At this point some of today's Bible teachers would say to Abram, "You can never know what God's going to do. Just trust Him to do the right thing and you'll be all right. God might change His mind about giving you the land. He might decide it's not wise for you to have it." Thank God that's not what happened.

To answer Abram's doubts, God says in Genesis 15:9...

*"Bring Me a three-year old heifer, a three year old female goat, a three year old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' Then he (Abram) brought all these things to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. Now when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold a horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He (God) said to Abram: **'know certainly** that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there was a smoking oven and a burning **torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying: To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates...**"*

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Notice in verses 17 and 18 that God appeared as a "smoking oven and a burning torch" which passed between the pieces of the sacrificed animals. This is the "walk of blood" discussed earlier when the two covenant heads walk between the animal pieces and stand face to face, making their promises and pledges to each other in a pool of blood. We should notice something very important here. **Abram was put to sleep and God took the "walk of blood" alone.** By putting Abram to sleep, God is clearly indicating that the promises and pledges He made to Abram and his descendants depend entirely on Him and not on Abram. Abram was to **rest** in God's ability to keep His promises. This is a very important characteristic of the New Covenant where we are called to cease from our own works and enter into God's rest (Hebrews 3:7 through 4:11).

THE NAME CHANGE

In Genesis 17:4-5 God says to Abram,

"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations."

As we said earlier, there is usually a change of names included in a blood covenant as an outward evidence of the union that takes place between the two covenant heads. Abram's new name is Abraham. In the name Abraham, the two letters "ah" have been added to Abram's name. In ancient Hebrew, God's name was considered unpronounceable. The closest pronunciation could only be described as the sound someone makes when exhaling. If you have ever blown your breath on a mirror to clean it, this would be the approximate sound someone would make if they were pronouncing God's name. As a result of this addition, Abram's new name has the name of God within it.

The name change is also extended to Abraham's wife, Sarai. In Genesis 17:15 God says, "...As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but *Sarah* shall be her name." Sarai's name is modified to include God's name, like her husband.

To complete the change of names, God also took Abraham's name upon Himself. From that time forth, God was often referred to as "the God of

Abraham.” (Genesis 26:24, 28:13, 31:42, 31:53, Exodus 3:6, 3:15, 4:5, I Kings 18:36, I Chronicles 29:18, Psalms 47:9)

THE "MARK" OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

In Genesis 17:10-11 it is now Abraham's turn to participate in the covenant. God instructs Abraham about the mark of the covenant that he and all his descendants after him will carry if the covenant is to be in force on their behalf.

"This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you."

This was the "mark" of the Abrahamic Covenant. The location of this mark was not some kind of joke on God's part. It was symbolic of a covenant that had far reaching effects on generations to come, since the foreskin was the place where the male seed emerged from the body. Circumcision was the "cutting" away of the male foreskin causing blood to be spilled.

In Genesis 17:14, God gives a warning...

*"And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; **he has broken My covenant.**"*

Those among Abraham's descendants who failed to circumcise their male children as God instructed would be guilty of breaking a blood covenant. The nation of Israel took circumcision very seriously. The practice of circumcision in this text is a type and shadow of something yet to come in the New Testament, as we shall see.

THE COVENANT MEAL

In Genesis 18:1, the Lord appears to Abraham again in the form of three men at the terebinth trees of Mamre. The Bible uses the word "hastened" to describe Abraham's anxious state of mind in preparing this meal for the

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Lord. He didn't want to neglect this opportunity. In verses 7 and 8 the Bible says...

*"And Abraham **ran** to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he **hastened** to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate."*

In most ancient cultures, the covenant meal concludes a blood covenant ceremony. Many times bread and wine are used but not in Genesis 18. In Genesis 14 we see the encounter Abram had with Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High. In this case, Melchizedek brought out bread and wine. Melchizedek blesses Abram by saying...

*"Blessed be Abram of God Most High, **possessor of heaven and earth**; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.."*

Some believe that the account in Genesis 18 is the covenant meal that concludes the Abrahamic covenant ceremony. I believe that Abram's encounter with Melchizedek, the mysterious priest of the Most High, is the actual covenant meal. Since the meeting with Melchizedek happened in Genesis chapter 14 (before the cutting of the covenant in chapter 15), I believe, in this case, God began his dealings with Abram with the covenant meal by sending Melchizedek to meet him. The important thing to understand is that Abraham participated in a covenant meal. Whether it happened before or after the actual "cut" of the covenant does not change its meaning.

The Bible does not give us much information on the identity of Melchizedek. You can read more about him in the book of Hebrews. Some Bible scholars believe that Melchizedek was actually Jesus Christ before the incarnation. No one knows for sure but, in the account of Genesis 14, it is clear that Melchizedek is representing God.

COVENANT AUTHORITY IS TESTED

In Genesis 18 we discover that the Lord is about to visit Sodom and Gomorrah. God makes a very important statement in verse 17...

"And the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing...'"

In this statement and the events to follow, we discover that something of monumental importance has happened in God's authority structure. Before He cut a covenant with Abraham, God had no need to involve anyone else in His decisions. Now things are different. God took it on Himself to initiate a blood covenant with a mortal man. This covenant formed a **union** between man and God...something that never existed before. Because of this union, God would not exclude Abraham from the decision making process. Starting in verse 22, Abraham begins to exercise his covenant rights with God by interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah. It is clear that Abraham is not comfortable in his newfound position. He knows that the authority of his covenant with God is territory that mortal man has never stood on before. He starts out by saying to God, "Would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

About this time modern day theologians would say, "Now wait a minute Abraham. Don't you understand who you're talking to. You have no right to tell God what is right and what is wrong. God does whatever He wants because He is sovereign. Who do you think you are? You need to leave this decision in the hands of God and just believe that He will do the right thing. God knows what's best. It might be in the wisdom of God to destroy the righteous and the wicked together. Who are you to question God?" It is interesting that Abraham didn't see it that way and neither did God because the whole incident occurs on **blood covenant** terms. Very few modern day Bible teachers approach a Christian's place in God from a **covenant** understanding, and when they do, its real meaning is usually watered down and distorted to protect cherished traditions and pet doctrines.

Abraham continues to intercede by taking God to task one step at a time. "Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would you also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?" Examine Abraham's language here. He's not pleading and begging. Abraham is confrontational with God over this issue. Where did this faith and boldness come from? It came from covenant authority that God Himself initiated.

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God said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Abraham continues by asking God to spare the city for the sake of forty righteous, then thirty, then twenty....then ten. Someone once said that God probably would have agreed if Abraham had went on to say, "Spare Sodom and Gomorrah for Lot's sake," but he didn't. God agreed to Abraham's last request and said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten. So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham..."

When we understand the principles of a blood covenant, a story like this will cease being just a good Sunday school lesson and will take on a whole new meaning.

THE LAW OF MOSES

Bible teachers refer to the "Law of Moses" as the Mosaic Covenant. The giving of the Law—involves a covenant made with blood. It is the dominant theme throughout the Old Testament—and remains in force through the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

In Exodus chapter 24:1-8 Moses is called up to the Lord. In verse 3 Moses tells the people what God had said...

"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.'"

Starting in verse 6, the Bible tells us that Israel is making a blood covenant with the Lord...

"And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.' And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.'"

Remember that the penalty for breaking a blood covenant is death. Israel had just made a blood oath to do **all that the Lord had said and to**

be obedient. If they failed to keep this promise, the covenant would be broken and God, motivated by His nature of justice, would carry out the corresponding penalty—death. If you can grasp what is going on here, you can understand why God did what He did in the Old Testament. Some think that God was unfair in his dealings with Israel. Yet, much of the death Israel experienced was the result of a broken blood covenant. God set up the priesthood with animal sacrifice so Israel could continue to live by being covered (atoned) by the blood of an animal. The life in the animal blood was substituted for the life of the one who sinned (broke the covenant). Through the blood of an animal, Israel continued to be God's people, even though they had broken the covenant and was worthy of death.

The Bible calls this "The covenant of bondage." It's called "bondage" because the law of the covenant cannot be perfectly obeyed. Total obedience to this covenant law is impossible, which makes death inevitable. The purpose of the law was to demonstrate to fallen man the obedience level that was necessary to be righteous before God was beyond his abilities. Israel boldly proclaimed their ability to keep God's law. This is human pride at its best! You can see this same pride in religious people. They try to be acceptable to God by keeping some kind of law—whether it is the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, or a system of religious laws and traditions created by their church. The law was given to drive us to **faith in Jesus Christ** (Galatians 3:19-26). This is where true righteousness is found—and the New Testament says that Christ's righteousness is now a free gift.

THE COVENANT IS BROKEN

Remember Israel's high sounding words..."All that the Lord has said we will do?" Well, Moses had barely been on the mountain forty days when these words became worthless. Israel grew weary because Moses had been on the mountain for so long. They went to Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron then gave himself to the task of making a golden calf. After its creation they said, "This is your god, O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt!" The people built an altar before the golden calf and made offerings to it. (Exodus 32:1-6)

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Keep in mind that the priesthood had not yet been established. No animal blood covering was available to Israel for atonement. This was a great sin against the covenant and we will now see how God responds to it. In Exodus 32:7 the Lord said to Moses...

*"Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of **the way** which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."*

In Exodus 32:11, Moses pleads with the Lord for Israel. Moses reminds the Lord of His covenant with Abraham and the fact that He swore by His own self that Abraham's descendants would multiply. Moses also said that the Egyptians, from whom Israel was delivered, would boast that God had brought them out just to kill them. You cannot find many places in the Bible where it says that God repented, but that's what it says in verse 14 (In the KJV of the Bible). God repented from the destruction He was going to bring on the people of Israel. But, that's not the end of the story. Moses came down from the mountain to confront disobedient Israel. In verse 27 we see the result of breaking a blood covenant.

"Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.' So the sons of Levi did according to the words of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day."

God kept His word in not destroying the whole nation of Israel, but there were still consequences to their sin. How would you like to be in the tribe of Levi, having just been given an order by Moses to slay your friends, companions and countrymen? Remember what we discussed in Chapter 1 on "Understanding Covenant Basics," a person who broke a blood covenant is hunted down and killed by members of his own family. This was the experience of Israel that day when about three thousand people were slain

due to a broken covenant. We learn from this example that God takes His covenants seriously, even when we don't. Even under the New Covenant, hardship, sickness and death can result in a Christian's life when we fail to walk in the provisions of covenant. The New Covenant is much different than the "covenant of bondage" Israel was under. The New Covenant is called "a better covenant" by the author of Hebrews. But, as we shall see, some of the principles remain the same.

THE TWO BELIEF SYSTEMS EMERGE AGAIN

Earlier, we talked about two belief systems that began with Cain and Abel. One system is "Cain's religion" based on **works**. The other system is "Abel's religion" based on **faith** in the blood. We need to look at something of great importance when analyzing both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. These covenants represent two different spiritual "systems" or methodologies when relating to God. One way is by faith, and the other is through keeping the Law of Moses. The scriptures says in Genesis 15:6...

"And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord, and He (God) accounted it to him for righteousness."

Righteousness is the state of possessing "right standing" or total acceptance before God. Righteousness results from fulfilling the requirements of the covenant. In Genesis 15:6, God declared Abraham "righteous" because he believed (had faith in) the Lord. Abraham's blood covenant with God was satisfied only by his faith. Abraham didn't perform works or deeds having to do with any covenant law (or any other law for that matter) at this point. Yet, God declared him righteous because of his faith—in other words, because he "believed God". In Exodus chapter 24, the Mosaic Law is initiated and established by another blood covenant. Yet, this covenant is vastly different. We see the nation of Israel take a "blood oath" to keep all the law which God had given them. They promised to keep the covenant by being obedient to all of God's commandments—and they sealed it with a blood oath. This means that they agreed to have a "righteousness" which came from the works of the law. If they failed to be perfectly obedient—their life is forfeit. It's here that we see the two types of righteousness. The first is a righteousness by faith in covenant blood alone (Abel's religion). The second type is righteousness through works of the Law (Cain's religion). Cain's religion is called self-righteousness because it comes through "self" effort.

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The Bible states in Galatians 3:16-18...

*"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ. And this I say, that **the law**, which was four hundred and thirty years later, **cannot annul the covenant** that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; **but God gave it to Abraham by promise.**"*

This text says that the type of righteousness that comes through the Law, does not replace the type of righteousness that Abraham had through faith and by promise. Both types of righteousness operate in the earth, but God accepts only one. We see the same thing again in Galatians 2:16...

*"knowing that a man is not justified **by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; **for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.**"*

These two types of righteousness are written about constantly in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. Listen to Galatians 4:21-31...

*"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. **For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who do not travail! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.'** Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh **then persecuted him***

who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.' So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free."

The two "religions," the two types of righteousness and the two covenants show us a thread that is woven throughout the Bible. This thread sounds a solemn warning. The warning is that righteousness with God does not come through our efforts. It seems logical, however, that righteousness should come this way. Why wouldn't God accept me if I try hard enough, if I sacrifice enough? The Bible says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12) The "way of death" is found in a counterfeit righteousness based on works and self-effort. Earning the favor of God seems so "right" and feels good to our ego. Every major world religion (except Christianity, which is not a religion,) is firmly grounded in some kind of perceived righteousness that results from performing certain religious works. Often when I ask someone the question, "are you a Christian?", I get the response, "I try to be." When you hear this response, you're probably in contact with someone who has the appearance of being a Christian but is actually walking in "the way of death." Remember that Cain and Abel were both godly men who wanted to give the Lord a pleasing offering. They both wanted to please God. They had good intentions. The **way** they chose to give their offering made the difference between acceptance and rejection in the end. Their good intentions were not the deciding factor. The religious man believes that God will somehow make allowances for his good intentions. God does not and will not base His actions on the changeable intentions of man. God has unique and specific **ways** that do not change. When we cooperate with His ways, we get His acceptance. When we put our faith in good intentions, we get His rejection.

THE COVENANT OF DAVID AND JONATHAN

In I Samuel chapter 17, David had just defeated Goliath, setting the stage for Israel's complete victory over the Philistines. In chapter 18, we see an interesting development in the relationship between David and Jonathan, Saul's son.

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*"And it was so, when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a **covenant**, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt." (1 Samuel 18:1-4)*

Some people in the homosexual community attempt to use this section of scripture to prove that the Bible supports the gay lifestyle. Yet, this story is not about a sexual encounter between Jonathan and David. It is talking about the making of a **covenant**. In today's modern culture very little can be seen of a "healthy" male love demonstrated in this example of Jonathan and David. This type of love is **not sexual** in nature. It occurs when two men care for each other in the same way as they care for themselves. This kind of love is also known as "covenant love." Satan has successfully changed covenant love by perverting it into the counterfeit of homosexuality. I believe the problem men have in relating to one another, especially in the church, can be traced to the social acceptance of homosexuality as being "normal" male behavior. I believe that men still have the capacity to care for one another in the context of covenant love but usually resist expressing it for fear of being "misunderstood." In today's culture, the word "love" seems to always carry a sexual connotation. We need to understand that this is the work of Satan who has made it his objective to distort and pervert God's character.

In the Biblical account of the covenant between David and Jonathan, we are not given all the information about the ceremony that took place. Notice the **union** that existed between them; "Jonathan loved him **as his own soul**." We see how this union was expressed in the exchange of the coat (in this case it was a robe) and his armor, sword, bow and belt. These exchanges match the model of the historical covenant ceremony we looked at earlier.

A covenant does not just join the two "heads," but also joins the two families they represent. The covenant between David and Jonathan included Jonathan's household—which included Saul, Jonathan's father. As you read about the tragic events that occurred between David and King Saul in the days and years that followed, you may be puzzled at why David acted the way he did. Even after Saul vowed to hunt him down and kill him,

David spared Saul's life on several occasions. Saul made David's life difficult for years. Why did David respond to Saul the way he did? The Bible gives us two reasons. First, Saul was anointed by God as King over Israel. David respected God's authority more than his own life. David refused to take King Saul's life because he was still technically "God's anointed." David would rather forfeit his own life than to kill Saul, even though he is rejected by God as king of Israel and was walking in sin. Secondly, there was a covenant between David and Jonathan, Saul's son. If David did anything to harm Saul, it would represent a denial of the covenant with Jonathan.

We see proof of David's commitment to this covenant in II Samuel 4:5-12. After Saul's death a war began between the household of Saul and the household of David. Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, is an enemy of David because of this war. In the account of II Samuel chapter 4, there are two stories related to each other. The first story has to do with the two men (Rechab and Baanah) who killed Ishbosheth, thinking they had done a good thing for David. The second story reveals the details of Saul's death and the messenger responsible for giving David the information—once again thinking this was good news to David. Anyone in David's position would have agreed that the death of an enemy was indeed "good news." However, we have one little detail that had been overlooked. David and his "enemies" had a covenant in operation. The fact that Saul's family failed to honor this covenant did not release David from keeping its conditions. Saul's death was not good news to David because he deeply respected his covenant with Jonathan and his household. Can you imagine the emotional struggle David experienced; being at war with a family you are in covenant with? We see the same situation when David is faced with the murder of his "enemy" Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons. In both cases, David orders the execution of those who thought these deaths were welcomed news. David honored his side of the covenant to the point of putting his own life in jeopardy, even though nobody else cared. You will find that God will go to these same extremes in honoring His covenant with us. Is there any wonder why the Bible calls David "a man after God's own heart?"

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DAVID EXTENDS THE COVENANT TO MEPHIBOSHETH

During the war between the household of Saul and the household of David, we are introduced to another character. The person's name is Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. Mephibosheth's story starts in II Samuel 4:4 and continues in II Samuel chapter 9, which is completely devoted to the subject. To understand this story, we need to get a sense of the situation that existed between these two warring households. Saul is guilty of disobeying God, Who rejected him as King over Israel. In Saul's place, David was chosen and anointed by God as King. The favor of God on David's life, along with Saul's knowledge of being rejected as king, contributed to the growing rivalry between these two men. After Saul and Jonathan's death, David was made King over Judah, while Ishbosheth, Saul's son, was made King over Israel. The war that followed was being fought over the right to rule. Remember that Saul was king. We see the same kind of wicked ambitions found in modern politics—Saul's family wanted to retain the power to rule, even though God had different plans. David was hated in the household of Saul. False rumors were common. Saul's family believed that David hated everyone and, if given the opportunity, he would kill them all. With this in mind, let's explore Mephibosheth's story.

In II Samuel 4:4 we read that at age 5, Mephibosheth falls and is hurt in an accident while fleeing with his nurse shortly after receiving the news of Saul and Jonathan's death. As a result of his injury, Mephibosheth is lame. While the Bible does not give specifics here, we might speculate that David indirectly received the blame for this injury. All of Mephibosheth's life he is told of David's hatred toward Saul's family and how he wanted to kill them. You could imagine the fear and the hatred that had been growing in Mephibosheth toward David over these years.

In II Samuel chapter 9 David makes an incredible statement:

*"Now David said, 'Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness **for Jonathan's sake?**'"*

If you do a study on the word "kindness" in the scripture above, you will find that its real meaning is "**covenant faithfulness.**"

After talking with Ziba, one of the servants of Saul's family, David learns of the existence of Mephibosheth and that he is dwelling in a place

called Lo Debar. David immediately sends his men to bring Mephibosheth to Jerusalem. Can you imagine how Mephibosheth felt when he saw David's men coming after him? The fear that must have gripped his heart to think that David had finally found him and that his death was now at hand. As Mephibosheth stood before David, he heard words that shattered all the lies he had believed during his life. II Samuel 9:6-8 tells the story.

"Now when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. Then David said, 'Mephibosheth?' And he answered, 'Here is your servant!' So David said to him, 'Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually.' Then he bowed himself, and said, 'What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?'

Mephibosheth's reaction is typical of religious people that do not understand covenant. Notice his words, "What is your servant that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?" David could have responded by saying, "Mephibosheth, I'm not blessing you with all these things because of who you are. There is really nothing you have to offer that I want. I'm blessing you because of my love for your father Jonathan. You see, Jonathan and I cared so much for each other that we made a covenant. Since Jonathan is now dead, you get to experience the benefits of that covenant. You can live with me in Jerusalem and eat at my table anytime you want. You're welcome in my house, Mephibosheth, because of Jonathan, my covenant friend."

This story is a type and shadow of our position in God through Jesus Christ. Most Christians are ignorant of Christ's covenant that places us in a similar position with God as Mephibosheth was with David. All over the Church you hear Christians say, "Who am I that God should love me?" or, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace." These are statements made by a vast majority of Christians who do not understand covenant. They live far below the blessings of God because they think He deals with them according to who they are in themselves. God does not deal with us on the foundation of who we are or what we've done. God deals with us according to who Jesus Christ is and what He did. This is the "covenant faithfulness" of God.

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Stay with us as we explore the incredible blood covenant of Jesus Christ in the chapters to follow. Enjoy God's great adventure as we travel from Lo Debar to the privilege of dining at the King's table.

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