

The Secret of God's Covenant

✖ In a Gentile or non-Jewish society, businessmen speak of contracts and agreements. However, the word covenant was used in ancient times and was more than just a binding agreement signed on a parchment or sealed with a wax impression from a signet ring.

To the ancient cultures, a covenant was sealed in blood. To the Hebrews, the biblical covenants are also connected to blood covenants. The first time the word covenant is used in the Torah is in Genesis 6:18 when God made a covenant with Noah to spare him and his family during the Flood. The second reference is with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-2). Originally named Abram (meaning "high father"), he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, located six miles from the Euphrates River. He was the third of three sons born to Terah (Gen. 11:27).

Jewish tradition reveals that Abram's family had served idol gods (Josh. 24:2, 14-15). But the almighty God appeared to Abram in a vision, instructing him to leave Ur and move to the land of Canaan. At age 75, Abram followed this vision. During Abram's journey, God progressively appeared to Abram, revealing His divine purpose for Abram and his future children.

God told Abram he would become a "great nation" (Gen. 12:2); the "father of many nations" (Gen. 17:4); nations and kings would come out of him (Gen. 17:6); he would become a "mighty nation" and bless all nations (Gen. 18:18); and that "all nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 22:18).

With each step of obedience that Abram took, God increased the magnitude of His promises—from just a nation, to a great nation, to nations of kings, to a nation that would bless the entire world! The master key to release the fulfillment of these promises was obedience to the instructions demanded by

God in His covenant.

The Secrets in the Covenant

The Hebrew word for covenant is *b'rit*, and it is used 280 times in the Old Testament. According to *W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the word *b'rit* is frequently the object of the verb *karath*, "to divide or to cut in two."

In Genesis 15, when God and Abraham "cut covenant," Abraham provided a heifer, a female goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon as offerings, dividing the larger animals into two halves (Gen. 15:9-10). This was an ancient ratification ceremony, which invoked oaths and binding agreements. God passed between the pieces, sealing the covenant in the sacrificial blood.

Genesis 15: 17-18 says: "And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram."

From the arrangement of the dividing of the parts of the sacrifice came the expression that literally denoted "to cut covenant" (similar idioms are found in Greek and Latin). The very Hebrew word for covenant, *b'rit*, carries the implication of an agreement made with blood since the cutting symbolism involves a cutting and dividing of an animal sacrifice. The division of the animals into two parts represented the agreement between the two parties.

Ancient legal contracts (or covenants) had an official seal attached to the parchment. From the time of the Egyptians to the Roman Empire, rings with specific emblems (called signet rings) were used to seal legal documents by pressing the ring onto hot wax. In Genesis 15, God entered a binding covenant with Abraham and sealed the agreement when a flaming torch

passed between the pieces of the sacrifices.

The Jewish commentaries note that in the ancient east, normally the weaker party in a covenant would walk between the pieces, indicating that person's fate if he violated the conditions of the covenant. Yet it was God, the stronger one, who was sealing the covenant with Abraham, the weaker, by passing between the sacrifices!

According to one rabbi I spoke with years ago, during the ancient Middle East marriage covenants the father would hold a torch, indicating that breaking the marriage vows would lead to a fiery conclusion to the unfaithful partner (as seen in Judges 15:4-6).

God was revealing that He was sealing the covenant at that moment, and if a descendant of Abraham broke the covenant, that person would be "cut off" from God and His covenant (Gen. 17:14). This "cutting off" theme was revealed to Abraham in Genesis 17:14.

From Genesis 12 to Genesis 17, the Abrahamic covenant was ratified and fully established. However, the real secret of Abraham's covenant with God was hidden from Abraham for 24 years. This seal involved the shedding of blood, making this covenant an official blood covenant. If the secret to all spiritual and material blessings originated in the Abrahamic covenant, then the secret of all covenants is linked to blood.

Many ancient nations recognized blood pact agreements. In pre-Islamic times, ancient Syria acknowledged a blood pact called *M'ahadat ed-Dam*, or Brotherhood of the Covenant. In the agreement, each party must provide guard from treachery, protection in time of danger, and provision for the wants of the others' family members if one covenant partner passes away prior to the other. Many African tribes have used covenants for centuries.

Often a tribal leader would send his chief representative to

shed his blood on behalf of the chief. This is the imagery of the new covenant, in which: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16, KJV). Christ was God's representative, using His own blood to redeem mankind; thereby giving redeemed man access to God.

Hebrews 9:12 says, "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption"

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