

“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, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.’” (NKJV)

Those words that are underlined in the verses above are of course very similar to those that Jesus spoke shortly before His death on the cross.

“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:28 NKJV)

From these words it’s apparent that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was the blood that was shed in order for God to “cut” a new covenant with His people. The covenant had to be ratified or “cut” according to the same pattern that God had begun as far back as Abram. There had to be a shedding of blood. Hebrews 9:22 states:

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (NASB)

So the *gravity* of making a covenant becomes more apparent when we understand the use of the word “*karath*” by the writers of the Old Testament. It’s also more apparent that blood had to be shed at the time the New Covenant was enacted. The whole system of offering animal sacrifices throughout the Old Law — and the shedding of the blood of those sacrifices was a precursor of the shedding of the blood of Christ that would eventually be the *perfect* sacrifice that would “cut” the new Covenant into existence. We might even go a step further and say that we “pass through” the blood of that sacrifice (Jesus) when we “pass through” the water as we are buried in the watery grave of baptism — thereby allowing us to be in a covenant relationship with God through Christ’s blood.

One final thought before we conclude this issue — The death of Jesus Christ broke the covenant that God had with the Jewish Nation. They could no longer relate to God through that Old Law. From the Resurrection of Jesus forward, the Jewish Nation had to relate to God in the very same way that the Gentiles did. That’s why Jesus said “*this is my blood of the new covenant...*” The Old was declared obsolete (Heb. 8:13). Zachariah 11 is an interesting prophecy of that very event. In that chapter it’s clear that any estrangement or covenant breaking between God and man begins because of the faithlessness of man — not because God changed His mind.

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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Covenant

There was a time when a handshake was all that was needed to bind an agreement. When two individuals “shook on it,” it was an assurance that neither party would renege on the “deal.” It used to be that “one’s word” was all that was needed to *know* that the agreement *would* be carried out. Unfortunately, that’s no longer the case. In *these* times, even a signed and witnessed contract frequently ends up in the courts because one of the parties is no longer willing to honor the agreement. It seems today, that there is a way out of just about *anything* — no matter how binding the original contract or agreement seemed to be. In today’s world, all too often, it takes only a change of one’s mind and a good attorney to break a binding agreement. That wasn’t the case in Bible times. Throughout the pages of Scripture, we read about a number of binding agreements that were made. Those agreements were called “covenants” and a covenant was binding until death.

The word “covenant” appears 292 times in the King James Version of the Bible. The Hebrew word used for covenant is “*beriyth*” which Strong’s defines as a pledge, or divine ordinance with signs or pledges. Since covenant isn’t a word we generally use in our day to day speaking, our familiarity with it may be limited to the knowledge we have of its use within the Scriptures. So in this issue, we’re going to focus on the impact of “making a covenant” as it is used in the Bible and what it meant to God when He made covenants with His people.

For many of us the first thing that comes to our mind when we think of “covenant” in the Biblical sense is that the Old and New Testaments are really the Old and New Covenants. We may also think of the covenants that God made with Patriarchs such as Abram or Noah. In fact, the first mention of covenant in the Bible is in Genesis 6:18, when God was instructing Noah to go into the ark.

“I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark — you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.” (Genesis 6:17-18 NIV)

In Genesis 9:12-17, God tells us that this covenant was not *just* for Noah and those of his time but was for *all* generations to come.

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“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.’ So God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.’” (Genesis 9:12-17 NIV)

Notice that the covenant was forever! Now, think about that for a moment. In these verses, God made a pledge (a *binding* agreement) to all mankind that would ever live on the face of the earth. That binding agreement or covenant would *never* end. It would be binding on God forever. What? — Binding? — on God? God obligated Himself to man — forever? Yes! He obligated Himself to keep a promise forever — no matter what. There were no conditions placed on it. Noah was not given any requirements that had to be kept in order for the covenant to remain in effect. It was a “covenant.” A covenant is a *binding* agreement — forever — until death — no matter what. A covenant doesn’t allow a way out. God couldn’t change His mind. He made a covenant and it was forever. He put the rainbow in the sky to remind Him of the covenant He had made. It *would* be kept — forever — no matter what. A covenant is a covenant is a covenant and it is *binding*.

The second covenant mentioned in the Scriptures is in Genesis 15:18 and it was the covenant God made with Abram. This time however, the Hebrew writer uses an additional word when referring to the making of a covenant. Remember that the Hebrew word for covenant is “*beriyth*.” This time, the Hebrew text includes a second word that is very significant. Instead of just “*beriyth*” the text now uses “*karath beriyth*” which is translated in almost all versions of the Bible as “**make a covenant**.” The meaning of this word — “*karath*” — is to cut, cut off, cut down, or cut off a body part. So we can now see that God’s idea of **making** a covenant with His people involves cutting or the shedding of blood. From this point on in the Old Testament, *karath beriyth* is always used for the phrase “*make a covenant*.” So anytime we read “*make a covenant*” in the text, we should remember that the Hebrew writer is saying “*cut a covenant*.”

Let’s read those verses that tell us about the covenant that God made with Abram.

“Then He said to (Abram), ‘I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.’ And he said, ‘Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?’ So He said to him, ‘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 brought all these 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.... 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, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates’” (Genesis 15:7-10 and 17-18 NKJV)

Notice that the covenant was in response to Abram’s question “*how shall I know...?*” To Abram it was *clear* that if a covenant was made, there would be no backing out, not even by God! He *would* inherit that land because a covenant is a covenant — no matter who makes it.

Before moving on with our general discussion of covenants, let’s take just a moment to notice the sign God chose to use that would identify those who were a part of that covenant that He made with Abram. Remember that we noted earlier that the covenant God made with Noah did not include the word “*karath*” and that God placed the rainbow in the sky as a sign of that covenant. This covenant, made with Abram, and all the covenants that followed it, did include the word “*karath*.” So it’s interesting to take note of the fact that the symbol God chose as a sign of this covenant involved the cutting of flesh. Let’s read these verses about the sign He chose for this first “cut” covenant.

“And God said to Abraham: ‘As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 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....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.’” (Gen. 17:9-11 and 14 NKJV)

Now back to our general discussion — Jeremiah 34:18 references another covenant that was made in a manner very similar to the covenant God made with Abram in Genesis 15.

“The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces.” (NIV)

Covenants were ratified by the sacrifice of a victim (the shedding of blood) and then by passing between the pieces of flesh. Without an atonement (or blood), there could be no communication (or salvation) from God to man. We see this further demonstrated by these words and actions of Moses in Exodus 24:6-8.