

Biblical Covenants

James Smyda

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About a month ago, I gave a sermon covering specifically the differences between the old and new covenants. I mentioned in that sermon that there are numerous other covenants in the Bible. We tend to focus most often on what we call the old and the new covenants. Yet, God made several other covenants with people He was working with. What I'd like to do today is take a broader look at the subject of covenants. Let's do this to understand how covenants work as well as the differences between covenants and contracts, which we think of in our world today.

If you would like a title for this sermon, it is:

Biblical Covenants

As I mentioned, covenants are somewhat different from contracts in important ways. The reason I say that is that, we don't often use the term "covenant" in our day-to-day life other than maybe in a religious context. We do talk about contracts a lot. Contracts are a common concept in our world where two parties may come together and make a formal agreement. The details of the agreement are written down stating what each party has agreed to do. Then, they sign a formal contract confirming that each party will do as they agreed.

That type of contract doesn't include the idea that you are literally staking your life that you will follow through on your end of the agreement. In a contract situation in our world today there is a formal agreement involved. If one party violates what they promised to do, the other party might take them to court and sue them and there might be legal ramifications from that lawsuit. However, with a contract there isn't the concept of one staking his life and wishing death upon himself if he doesn't fulfill his end of the agreement.

The reason I'm pointing this out is if you look at how covenants were done in the Bible, pledging one's death is a very important concept involved in covenants. In ratifying a covenant, the parties involved literally would be staking their lives that they would fulfill their end of the agreement—wishing death upon themselves if they didn't fulfill their end of it.

What we're going to see today is the symbolism of animal sacrifices in covenants represented pledging one's death. Oftentimes, if you don't understand the significance of this, you can read over scriptures concerning covenants without really understanding what was happening. You may see a reference to animal sacrifices or language such as "the blood of the covenant." You'll see this with both the old and new covenants. That's the exact phrase used. If you don't understand the history of what that is about, the meaning goes over your head.

Let's start to notice that covenants were ratified using animal sacrifices. This was an important part of a covenant. Let's first establish that concept. Turn over to Psalm 50. We'll start reading in verse 4.

Psalm 50:4. *He shall call to the heavens from above, And to the earth, that He may judge His people:*
5) *"Gather My saints together to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." (NKJV)*

Notice that comment. God says, "Those who made a covenant by sacrifice." The important thing to realize here is when they ratified a covenant; the shedding of blood of an animal sacrifice was an important part of that covenant. In fact, they considered the animal sacrifice to be what made the covenant legally binding. Oftentimes, it wasn't just the fact that an animal was sacrificed. In a number of cases, an elaborate ceremony would play out that not only included an animal sacrifice, but also they would take the carcass of the sacrificed animal and literally split it in two from top to bottom, head to tail. Then they would take the halves of the carcass and lay them out with a gap in between them and they would literally walk in between the halves of the carcasses of the animal. This portrayed the symbolism of wishing death upon themselves if they did not fulfill their end of the agreement. We will see a couple of cases described in the Bible with the exact scenario I've just explained to you. Yet, if you don't understand the significance of this symbolism, when you see other covenants referred to with sacrifices briefly mentioned or you see the term "blood of the covenant," the meaning can go over your head if you don't understand what is happening.

To get a picture of this, let's turn over to Jeremiah 34. We're going to start reading in verse 17. Before we do that, let me explain some history so that you will understand the context of the subject addressed here.

I'm sure we're all familiar with the Mount Sinai covenant that we refer to as "the old covenant." God made an agreement with Ancient Israel that He would be their God and they would be His people. He laid out a number of His laws and judgments that He wanted them to fulfill in their end of the covenant. Included in the list of rules God gave them were His rules about indentured servitude. Indentured servitude was if a member of Israel had debts they couldn't pay, they would sell themselves into slavery. They would become a servant to those they owed. God's rules stated indentured servitude could not continue indefinitely. This was to be for a six-year period and on the seventh year was liberation. They would be set free and go back to their lives. God told Ancient Israel how they were to administer this type of agreement.

Typical of Israel, they agreed, "All that the Lord has said, we will do." We'll read that reference later today. Yet over time, Israel began breaking all God's rules they agreed to abide by. Indentured servitude was one of the many rules Ancient Israel cast aside and did what they wanted. One of the things they starting doing was keeping people as slaves indefinitely. They didn't let the indentured servants go free in the seventh year.

As you can imagine, God wasn't happy about this. Later in the time of King Zedekiah of Judah, Judah realizes that they have been flagrantly violating this law and not following their agreement with God. Judah repents of this sin. Then, Judah turns around to make another covenant with God specifically promising to be faithful to God's rule concerning indentured servitude. They pledged they would not cast this rule aside and that they would do what they agreed to do as a nation. Then they establish another formal covenant.

Human nature being as it is, Judah violated this covenant too. We're going to pick up in verse 17 of Jeremiah 34 where God expresses to them how unhappy He is that they violated this law yet again. I want you to notice the details of the description God gives Judah because the ceremony I've just described to you of the carcass being split down the middle and walking in between the halves, God mentions that exact scenario in what we're about to read.

Jeremiah 34:17. *"Therefore thus says the Lord: 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and every one to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim liberty to you,' says the Lord — 'to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine! And I will deliver you to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth.*

18) And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it — (NKJV)

Notice the details of that description. It's exactly what I described earlier. Continuing in verse 19:

19) the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf —

20) I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth. (NKJV)

Notice the exact description given here is taking a sacrificed animal, splitting it in two, laying out the carcasses with the halves on each side, and walking in between them. This was a ceremony often done to ratify a covenant. In fact, we'll see this exact symbolism play out when we look at Abraham's covenant. You'll see the same picture played out thereof dividing the animals and walking between them.

Again, what this meant was a symbolic death. They were saying, "I'm staking my life on this. I'm wishing death upon myself if I don't fulfill my end of the agreement." Now you understand that when God says, "Your bodies are going to be food for the birds." In other words, "You wished death upon yourself and you didn't fulfill your end of the agreement. Guess what? You're going to die and it's going to be ugly." God holds Judah to their word here.

In this example, I want you to see the significance of covenant ratification, which required the shedding of blood with an animal sacrifice. That was an important part of making a covenant valid. We'll see in Hebrews 9 the same concept addressed. Paul explains that legal ratification of a covenant, to put it into effect, involved animal sacrifice and the ceremonial death pictured of those involved in the covenant. We'll start here in Hebrews 9 reading verses 16 through 22. I'm reading from the New King James translation. The reason I point this out is that we will see that verses 16 and 17 are poorly translated in the New King James and a number of other translations. That really obscures the meaning of what these verses say. We'll read this and, then, I'll come back to explain those details. We'll look at a better translation to understand what these verses really say.

Hebrews 9:16. *For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.*

17) *For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.*

18) *Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood.*

19) *For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,*

20) *saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you."*

21) *Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry.*

22) *And according to the law almost all things are [purged] with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. (NKJV)*

Notice here, the author of Hebrews refers to Moses sprinkling the blood on the people and saying, "This is the blood of the covenant." You notice that specific wording used regarding the Mount Sinai covenant, which we refer to as "the old covenant." Also, that is part of the Passover ceremony. Think about when Christ gave the disciples the wine. He said, "Drink, this is My blood of the new covenant." We'll come back to the significance of that statement.

Notice here in verses 16 and 17, the use of the term "testament," which refers to a "testator." They used the word "testator" because they chose to use "testament." If you will notice, the verses prior to verse 16 don't speak of a "testament." Instead, they speak of a "covenant." And, the verses after verse 17 use the word "covenant." You only see the word "testament" used in verses 16 and 17.

To understand what's happening here, the Greek word used in all of these cases is the same word. The word can be translated as either a *covenant* or a *testament*. It can be correctly used in both contexts. However, the context of a testament does not belong here because the concept doesn't work. A testament is like a will. If you have ever executed a will or been involved with a will at all, you often see the language: The last will and testament of John Doe. A will is a legal agreement giving instructions how the

person wants his or her estate divided after his or her death, listing who will inherit his or her possessions.

This concept of a will (or testament) becomes mingled with the concept of a covenant and confuses the meaning of covenants. We think of the death of Jesus Christ. And we know His connection to the old covenant. That's how people become confused and put the concept of a will into this scripture. Hebrews 9 is not referring to a will. Yes, Jesus Christ died and He was the sacrifice connected with the new covenant, but He wasn't dying and dividing His estate amongst other people. That's not what happened here.

Also, notice verse 18 builds on verses 16 and 17. It says:

18) Therefore ... (NKJV)

In other words, based on this logic:

18b) ... not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. (NKJV)

The passage continues describing what Moses did in Exodus 24 in ratifying the old covenant. We'll just ask a simple question. Who died at the Mount Sinai covenant to start that agreement? Nobody. The concept doesn't work. A covenant is an agreement between living parties. A testament or a will is how someone's possessions are divided up after he or she has died. So, the translators confused the concept here by not realizing the history of what is taking place. Verses 16 and 17 should say, "covenant" not "testament." This is not the only translation error in this passage. Yet, verses 16 and 17 are difficult and poorly translated because of that confusion.

To read to you a better translation of these two verses, I'd like to quote from a translation called "The Holy Bible in Its Original Order." This is how it translates verses 16 and 17.

*16) Now where there is a covenant, it is obligatory to bring forth a symbolic sacrifice to represent the death of the one who personally ratifies the covenant;
17) Because a covenant is ratified only over the dead sacrificial animals, since there is no way that it is legally in force until the living ratifier has symbolically represented his death.*

This is the concept referred to in this passage. You always see the animal sacrifices connected with this and it refers to the blood of the covenant. The parties of the covenant went through this ceremony to picture the death of the individuals involved because each of them is stating, "I'm staking my life that I'm going to fulfill this."

To further back this up, I would like to quote from a commentary addressing this section of Hebrews. It's called The Word Biblical Commentary, written by William Lane. I'm quoting from Volume 47B, in a section from pages 242 and 243. It says:

In the Old Testament, ratification of a covenant based on sacrifice frequently entailed a self-maledictory procedure. The ratifying party invoked a curse upon himself when he swore commitment to comply with the terms of the covenant. In the transaction, the ratifying party was represented by animals designated for sacrifice. Their bloody dismemberment of the representative animals signified the violent death of the ratifying party if he proved faithless in his oath. Until the oath of allegiance was sworn and validated by the action of cutting the animals in two and walking between the pieces, the covenant remained merely tentative. It was legally confirmed on the basis of the dismembered bodies of the sacrificial victims. In this context, the unusual formulation on the basis of dead bodies refers to the bodies of representative animals used in the self-maledictory rite of covenant ratification. It finds an exact parallel in Psalms 50:5 where "by sacrifice" means on the basis of sacrificial animals. The thought is amplified with the strong negative assertion that a covenant is never operative while the ratifier lives. The formulation accurately reflects the legal situation that a covenant is never secured until the ratifier has bound himself by his oath by means of a representative death.

Again, the concept of what it's talking about here is staking your life that you will fulfill your end of the agreement. If you think about covenants, particular the new covenant that we enter at baptism, you literally are staking your life. That ends one of two ways. Either "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" and you inherit eternal life, or "I never knew you" and you go in the lake of fire. You literally are staking your life when you make that covenant. That's important to remember.

Now what I'd like to do is look in more detail at several of the major covenants in the Bible. We will see not only this concept we've covered play out in a number of these cases, but also to understand some elements of the covenants and how they interact with each other.

We'll start by looking at Abraham's covenant in Genesis 12. We're not going to take the time to go into detail about God's covenant with Noah where God promised that He would no longer flood the earth. Yet, when you read that account in Genesis, you will notice that right before they actually make the covenant and ratify it, there is a brief mention of Noah making animal sacrifices. Again, scripture doesn't explain all the details. It just mentions that Noah makes the animal sacrifices followed by God talking about the covenant they are making. So, you can see the connection between these two. In some cases, like in the case of Abraham's covenant, you will literally see the picture of the animals being split down the middle and walking in between them—that exact scenario playing out. In other cases, you won't necessarily see that detail, but you will see references to sacrifices or references to the blood of a covenant. This is the concept we're talking about.

We'll start with Abraham's covenant in Genesis 12. This is prior to ratification of the covenant. We'll read that in Genesis 15. In Genesis 12, God first refers to the promises

He will make to Abraham. I want you to see here the details of what God promised to Abraham. This covenant foreshadows what both the old and the new covenants looked forward to. I also want you to notice God made these promises prior to ratification of the covenant.

The reason I mention this is that as we go through chapter 15, we will see the details of how this covenant was ratified. Then, in chapters 17 and 22, we will see more details spelled out. Realize when you look at the chapters after Genesis 15, it is not an issue of God adding to the details of the covenant later or changing the terms of the agreement because you cannot do that with a covenant. One of the things we will see in a few minutes in Galatians is where it directly states that once a covenant is ratified, the deal is the deal. You cannot change the terms of the agreement after you have signed off on it. That's not allowed. Once you have made the deal, the terms stand. You cannot add to or take away from the terms of the covenant.

Let's start in Genesis 12 in verse 1. It says:

Genesis 12:1. *Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your [kindred] and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.
2) I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.
3) 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."* (NKJV)

What you'll see here is that this alludes to both the old covenant and the new covenant in terms of the ultimate fulfillment of this. I say this because when God says, "Your descendants will be blessed and become a great nation," this played out through the Mount Sinai covenant. That was an agreement in which God said, "I will be your God. You will be My people. I'll make a great, prosperous nation with you." This is one way God fulfilled this promise.

The last statement God made there—"And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you"—this looks forward to Jesus Christ being a descendent of Abraham and salvation being offered to all of mankind through Abraham's seed. I mention his seed because we'll see that comment again in chapter 22. There when God talks about your seed, God refers to Jesus Christ, who would be the descendent of Abraham, through whom all the earth would be blessed. We oftentimes in the past referred to this as "race and grace" promises as Mr. Armstrong used to refer to it. There were national success promises made. Also, there was the promise of salvation.

Also, notice we have an allusion to what the terms of the agreement are. Abraham's side of the agreement was to be obedient to God. We'll see in chapter 17, God says, "Walk before Me and be obedient." That was Abraham's side of the agreement. He had to obey God and be faithful in that. And, if Abraham did that, God's side of the agreement was that He would bless Abraham's descendants to make them very prosperous. God was also going to fulfill the promise of salvation through one of

Abraham's descendents, which was Jesus Christ being born as Abraham's descendent. Like most covenants, there were agreements on both sides. Each party agrees to fulfill certain things.

Turn over to Genesis 15. We'll actually read the story here of Abraham's covenant with God being ratified. Genesis 15:1.

Genesis 15:1. *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."*

2) *But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"*

3) *Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"*

4) *And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."*

5) *Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."*

6) *And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

7) *Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."*

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

9) *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."*

10) *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. (NKJV)*

Notice what we're talking about here. Abraham took the animals, split them down the middle, and put the halves of the carcasses down with a space in between them. That's exactly what we read portrayed in Jeremiah. Verse 11:

11) *And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

12) *Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him.*

13) *Then He 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.*

14) *And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.*

15) *Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.*

16) *But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."*

17) *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. (NKJV)*

Abraham sees a vision of a torch passing between the halves of the carcasses—the same type of ceremony we saw explained in Jeremiah. Verse 18:

18) *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 — (NKJV)*

Now turn over to chapter 17 and we'll see this explained in more detail here. This tells us what Abraham and his descendants' responsibilities were and what God promised to give Abraham. We will also see what God defines as the "sign" of a covenant. In a number of cases when God has made covenants with mankind, there is a sign attached to that covenant as well that signifies this agreement. We'll start in chapter 17, verse 1.

Genesis 17:1. *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.*

2) *And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."*

3) *Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:*

4) *"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.*

5) *No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.*

6) *I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.*

7) *And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.*

8) *Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."*

9) *And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.*

10) *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;*

11) *and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.*

12) *He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any [stranger] who is not your descendant.*

13) *He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.*

14) 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." (NKJV)

If you notice, there are several details here. As I mentioned, a covenant typically had responsibilities that both parties were agreeing they would fulfill. Abraham's side of the agreement requires him to be obedient, to do whatever God tells him to do, and be faithful in his obedience to God. Now this covenant was also with Abraham's descendents, but all that we see commanded at this point for his descendents is that they have to practice circumcision. If there are males among them and they are not practicing circumcision, they are in violation of the covenant—of what they agreed to through Abraham.

God has agreed to give Abraham and his descendents the Land of Canaan. God will make Abraham a father of many nations, making his descendents a very large group, but also a very prosperous group. As we're going to see here, much of this also foreshadows the old covenant at Mount Sinai because Ancient Israel descended from Abraham and that's how this covenant played out later.

Also, notice that there was a sign of this covenant. God said circumcision would be a sign of this agreement. You will see a number of cases in which God made covenants where there was a sign attached to it. We didn't take the time to go through God's covenant with Noah in detail, but there was a sign attached to that one as well. When God made the promise to Noah that He would no longer destroy the earth through flood, God established the rainbow as a sign of that covenant. God said, "When you see this rainbow, you will be reminded that I have promised to no longer destroy the earth through flood." Another unique part of the covenant with Noah is that you won't see anything that mankind was required to do as part of the agreement. God wasn't saying, "If you do this ..., I will not flood the earth." God simply promised, "I won't do this anymore. And, I'm not going to destroy the earth through flood anymore. When you see the rainbow, you'll be reminded that I'm not going to do this because the rainbow is the sign of the covenant." In this case with Abraham's descendents, circumcision was not only a sign of that covenant, it was also one stipulation that Abraham's descendents had to obey in order to comply with the covenant.

What we have read here in Genesis 17 is what we term "the national promises"—Abraham's descendents inherit the land and they will be prosperous. These things foreshadow the old covenant with Ancient Israel.

There was another aspect to this agreement as well. As we read in Genesis 12, God said, "All the families of the earth will be blessed through you." This is another part of the covenant, which is explained in more detail in Genesis 22. I'm going to summarize what's going on here. This is a famous story and I'm sure most of you are familiar with it.

God comes to Abraham and says, "I want you to sacrifice Isaac. I want you to take your son up to the mountain and make a sacrifice out of him." Of course, as you can imagine, this is a gut-wrenching experience for Abraham to go through, but it's the ultimate test of his obedience to God—Abraham is willing to obey anything that God asks him to do. Remember what was said in Genesis 17. Abraham's side of the agreement was "Walk before Me and be obedient." In other words, "Do everything I tell you to do. If you do that, I will fulfill these major promises through your descendants."

We'll pick up in verse 15. It's going to mention here "the Angel of the Lord" in verse 15. As a side note, most of the time when you see the phrase "the Angel of the Lord" used in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, it's a reference to Jesus Christ. Now, every time you see the Angel of the Lord mentioned it's not always the case, but oftentimes you can see from the context when it refers to the Angel of the Lord, it is the one who became Jesus Christ. You'll notice when He appears at the burning bush, it says, "The Angel of the Lord appeared to him out of the bush in the fire." Later, He tells Moses, "Take off your shoes. You're standing on holy ground." If you go through many Old Testament references where you find the Angel of the Lord, very often it refers to the one who became Jesus Christ. Pick up in verse 15.

Genesis 22:15. *Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven,*

16) and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son —

17) blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.

18) In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (NKJV)

Notice first of all, as I mentioned before, "Because you have done this"—because Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac—"all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." I want to point out that God is not coming back saying, "I'm going to make this addition to the promises I gave you." That is not what is happening here. As we're going to read in just a minute in Galatians 3, once you ratify a covenant, a deal is a deal. You can't go back to change, add to, or take away from the terms of the agreement. When God refers to "the seed" here, God is talking about Jesus Christ being a descendent of Abraham. That's how this would be fulfilled. God talks about the promise of salvation being offered to all mankind. That's how all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's descendent.

Realize God was making an agreement with Abraham. God is perfect as He says in Malachi 3, "I am the Lord. I do not change." When God made His agreement, He could be trusted that He would do it. That was never in question. The only thing that might be theoretically in question was if Abraham, the fallible, carnal human being, would fulfill his end of the agreement. Abraham's end of the agreement was to walk before God, be obedient, and do everything God commanded Abraham to do.

God has given Abraham the ultimate test here. "You've waited all these years to have this son. You finally have him. Now, go kill him." That had to be the most gut wrenching trial Abraham could go through and he successfully does it. That's why God says, "Because you have done this—you fulfilled your end of the agreement—We're going to do our end of the agreement."

Turn over to Galatians 3. I've said several times now that once you ratify a covenant, you can't go back to change the terms of the agreement. You can't turn around and say you're going to take away or add to the terms of the original agreement. It doesn't work like that. We'll see this directly stated here in Galatians 3, where we'll start reading in verse 15.

Galatians 3:15. *Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. (NKJV)*

You can't change the terms of the agreement after you've made it. If we keep reading here, it specifically references Abraham's covenant and the Mount Sinai covenant concerning this concept. Verse 16:

16) 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. (NKJV)

I mentioned we would read that there was no question about what was promised in Genesis 22. God directly tells us here in Galatians 3:16 that when He said "Seed," He was referring to Christ. We don't have to guess. We know exactly what God meant there. Verse 17:

17) 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.

18) For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. (NKJV)

Notice it refers to "the law, which came 430 years later." What this refers to is the Mount Sinai covenant. Notice Paul says that this covenant, which came 430 years later, did not annul Abraham's covenant. It didn't take that away.

Another thing I want to point out here. In my last sermon, I talked about differences between the old and new covenants. One of the points I made was the mutually exclusive nature of the old and the new covenants. It's an "either/or" situation. It's not an "all of the above." You are either under one or under the other. You are not under both at the same time.

I also referred to the fact that God has made numerous covenants throughout the Bible. We've talked about Noah's covenant. We talked about Abraham's covenant. God also made a covenant with David that promised David's line would be king and that there would always be someone to sit on his throne throughout time. Yet, as I mentioned in that last sermon, you don't ever see anything mentioned that claims Abraham's covenant took away Noah's covenant. Or, that God's covenant with David took away the covenant with Abraham. You never see that language mentioned. And, as it says here, the Mount Sinai covenant did not annul the covenant with Abraham. These work in conjunction with each other.

What we see about the old and new covenants are comments similar to those in Hebrews 10. Referring to Jesus Christ, Paul says, "He takes away the first that He may establish the second." In other words, one is removed to take on the other. Later in this sermon, we'll look into the details to see how this works. What I want you to see is this is unique because here in Galatians, it directly states that the Mount Sinai covenant did not annul Abraham's covenant. They worked in conjunction. In fact, one is almost a fulfillment of the other. It wasn't a situation where one covenant removed the other covenant. We'll come back to learn how that works with the old and new covenants—how one is taken away for the other.

With all this in mind, let's look at the old covenant, the Mount Sinai covenant. Turn over to Exodus 19. We're going to see there are many common threads in terms of the components of covenants, such as how they worked and how they were ratified. A covenant was an agreement between at least two parties. Both parties had their own part that they promised to do. It was, "If this party does this, then the other party will do their part." In regards to the Mount Sinai covenant, we get an overview of the details in Exodus 19 beginning in verse 1.

Exodus 19:1. *In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.
2) For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the [Desert] of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.
3) And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:
4) 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.
5) Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.
6) And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."* (NKJV)

This is the proposal. God is saying, "I'd like to make a deal with you. The deal is you have to obey Me. I'm going to give you My law, My instructions, and you have to obey. You have to live this way, and faithfully keep this. If you do this, I will be your God and I will look after you and make you very prosperous. You will be an example nation to the whole world if you continue to obey Me." As we will see here in a minute, God makes a

marriage agreement with Ancient Israel. In other scriptures, this agreement is described as God being the husband and Ancient Israel being His wife. Later, when Ancient Israel is not faithful to their end of the agreement, God refers to their behavior as "You cheated on Me and I put you away," in terms of a divorce. This was looked at as a marriage agreement that took place. Again, there were two sides to this agreement. God gave Israel all His law, His statutes, and His judgments, which Ancient Israel was commanded to keep. That was Israel's part of the agreement.

We're going to skip over a number of these chapters. Through Exodus 20 and the next several chapters, God gives Ancient Israel the Ten Commandments and He gives them many of His statutes and judgments. God lays out for Ancient Israel the terms that they are to agree to fulfill by obedience. Let's skip over those and go to chapter 24, which is when Israel agrees to these laws and they ratify the covenant. What you'll notice here are references to sacrifice and the blood of the covenant. Again, I want you to understand the history that we addressed previously. The symbolism taking place here is that Israel is staking their lives. They are saying, "We're staking our lives, wishing death upon ourselves if we don't fulfill our end of the agreement." Let's pick up here in chapter 24 and verse 1.

Exodus 24:1. *Now He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. 2) And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him." 3) 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." (NKJV)*

Notice, this is like a marriage ceremony. Ancient Israel is saying, "I do. I've heard all the terms and I do. I agree." They are making their vow. Verse 4:

4) And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5) Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who [sacrificed] burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. 6) And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7) 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." (NKJV)

Notice Ancient Israel is saying, "I do" just as in a marriage agreement. They agree to follow faithfully God's law and all His statutes and judgments. Now, notice verse 8.

8) 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." (NKJV)

Here you see the same symbolism that we looked at numerous times of how animal sacrifices and the blood of a covenant figured into these agreements. Also, think of this symbolism when you think of the Passover ceremony, which we'll look at in a minute. When Christ gave them the wine at His last Passover, He said, "Drink. This is My blood of the covenant." When a covenant was ratified, again, typically, a sacrifice was involved and that blood was part of the ceremony. You'll see this as a theme in covenants throughout the Bible.

Also, as I mentioned, a covenant is oftentimes referred to as a marriage. We'll look at this a little bit more in just a minute, but I want to point out one unique thing about this marriage that took place at Mount Sinai that is different from what we today think of in terms of a marriage. The reason I mention this is that when we think of a marriage, we think of husband and wife making an agreement at the ceremony. We think in terms of only the two people standing up at the ceremony are involved in the marriage—the two that say, "I do."

This is somewhat different in the aspect that God is making a marriage agreement here with Ancient Israel—and this is with the nation of Israel. The reason I mention this is the covenant didn't only apply to the people standing there in Exodus 24 who said, "All that the Lord has said, we will do." The covenant also included the generations that followed.

Think about it. By the time Ancient Israel conquered the Promised Land, the majority of the people making the covenant have died. They spent forty years wandering in the wilderness. Only those under age twenty and Joshua and Caleb survived to enter and conquer the Promised Land. By that time, the majority of people, who said at Mount Sinai that they would obey God, had died. It was their children, who have now grown up, who were not alive to ratify the covenant made at Mount Sinai. This covenant didn't include just the people making the covenant. It included all the people born into the nation in the generations to come. They were considered a party to the covenant as well. Yes, Ancient Israel had their responsibility to be obedient, etc. However, don't think of the Mount Sinai covenant in terms that a person had to be present at the formal ceremony to be a part of this marriage. That isn't how this worked.

Let's also briefly notice in Exodus 31 that there was also a sign to this covenant as well. Remember that I mentioned in God's covenant with Noah, there was a sign associated with that covenant. It was the rainbow. With God's covenant with Abraham, the sign was circumcision. We'll see here with the old covenant that the sign was the Sabbath. You're going to see here that it is more than one Sabbath. It's Sabbaths with an "s," which refers to the Sabbath and the holy days. Let's notice here in Exodus 31:12.

Exodus 31:12. *And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,*
13) "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths ... (NKJV)

Notice it has an "s" on it. It's plural.

13b) ... you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.

14) You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.

15) Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

16) Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.

17) It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

18) And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (NKJV)

Notice God establishes the weekly Sabbath and the holy days (because He says "Sabbaths" with an "s") as a sign of this covenant. If you think about it, following God by keeping God's Sabbath and His holy days makes you different. It makes you stick out from everybody else. It's just like circumcision. It's something unique and different. It makes these people stand out and that's why it's a sign of the covenant.

Let's also turn to Isaiah 50. As I mentioned previously, the old covenant is also referred to in the Bible in terms of a marriage. You don't see that with Abraham's covenant or with God's covenants with David or Noah. You don't see those covenants spoken of in terms of a marriage. Yet, with the old covenant at Mount Sinai, it's definitely referred to in the context of a marriage. Isaiah 50:1, here God expresses His unhappiness with Israel for being unfaithful in fulfilling their covenant requirements.

Isaiah 50:1. *Thus says the Lord: "Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce, Whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, And for your transgressions your mother has been put away. (NKJV)*

Notice God refers to this in the context of a divorce—terminology only used in terms of a marriage. Notice also over in Hosea 2 that God uses language referring to Himself as the husband and Israel as the wife.

Hosea 2:2. *"Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, And her adulteries from between her breasts; (NKJV)*

Again, this is stated in the terminology of a divorce. Yet, notice the concepts of "husband" and "wife" referred to here. This is looked at as a marriage covenant.

Realize that a covenant, as I mentioned before, is an agreement between living parties. A will or a testament, once a person dies, describes how a person's estate is divided amongst others. A covenant is between living parties.

There is a mutually exclusive nature when you are dealing with the Mount Sinai covenant, which we call the old covenant, and the new covenant with the New Testament church. How does that work? Think of this again in terms of a marriage covenant. If you have ever been married or been to a wedding, you see, as they make the agreement with each other, at one point in the conversation, the words will be used "until death do us part." This is because it is a covenant between living parties. If one of those parties dies, the other party is free to remarry. If one spouse dies, the other party can remarry and there is no problem with that because the first marriage covenant is no longer standing.

This concept is covered over in Romans 7. Please turn there to see that Paul refers to this concept specifically in reference to the old and new covenants. We'll skip to verse 4, but the first three verses of this chapter particularly refer to human spouses saying that if one party dies, the other is free to remarry. And there are no Biblical issues with that because that marriage covenant was severed at the death of the one spouse.

I want you to notice something interesting when you read verse 4. We oftentimes read this verse in reference to the concept of transition from the old to the new covenant. Yet, oftentimes we read this verse with a different focus in mind than what the words on the page actually say. Let's just read the words on the page for what they say. Romans 7:4.

Romans 7:4. *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another — to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. (NKJV)*

The reason I mention this is we oftentimes read this verse with our thoughts focused on Christ and His death. In the focus of "you may be married to another," the "you" is the church; the "you" is the people. Paul says that you died, through the body of Christ (through His death), so that you may marry another. The focus here is on the people being able to marry another. Jesus Christ is the "another" referred to here.

Of course, this is tied to Christ's death because it says, "You have died to the law through Christ." When you make the new covenant, you go through the baptismal commitment. You are baptized, repenting of your sins, and agreeing to be faithful in obeying God for the rest of your life. As you know, baptism is a ceremonial death. That's why you must go completely under the water with everything submerged and, then, come back up because that symbolizes the death of the old person and the start of a new life. Baptism by immersion is the ceremonial death that symbolizes being dead to the law through Christ. Paul is saying that you spiritually die through baptism, which enables you to marry another. This is what takes away the old to establish the

new. You can see the connection between these two. This is how the transition happens and shows the mutually exclusive nature of the old covenant and the new covenant.

With that in mind, let's briefly look at the new covenant. Turn over to Matthew 26. This is when Christ established the symbols of the new covenant Passover. I'm sure you are familiar that the old covenant Passover involved sacrificing a lamb and eating it on Passover night. Jesus Christ says that He is the Lamb of God and He fulfilled that sacrifice. With the symbolism here, keep in mind everything we've covered about how covenants work. You will see there are multiple purposes God accomplished with Jesus Christ's sacrifice. Matthew 26, we'll start reading in verse 26.

Matthew 26:26. *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed [it] and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."
27) Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.
28) For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (NKJV)*

Again, here we have a covenant being ratified through a sacrifice, through the shedding of blood. When the new covenant is ratified, Jesus Christ is that sacrifice. We oftentimes refer to Passover as a restatement of our commitment that we made at baptism, recommitting ourselves every year. We're going through that same symbolism when Christ says, "Take this wine; drink this. This is My blood of the new covenant." When you make a covenant, that sacrifice was the symbolic death of the individual making the covenant—staking his life that he would fulfill his side of the agreement. Again, when we make the new covenant, we are literally staking our lives that we will fulfill this because if we don't fulfill our end of the agreement, we die. And, we die permanently because it is a spiritual death. This plays out through the whole process.

Realize that multiple purposes were accomplished in the sacrifice that Jesus gave of Himself. Turn over to Hebrews 9. This time we'll start in verse 11.

Hebrews 9:11. *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.
12) 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.
13) For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,
14) how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, [purge] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
15) And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (NKJV)*

Multiple purposes were accomplished through Jesus Christ's sacrifice. Not only is He the sacrifice; His blood ratifies the new covenant. He also takes away the old. He takes away the first that He may establish the second. Not only is Christ's death the sacrifice that covers our sins, which enables us to have a relationship with the Father. Christ's sacrifice enables us to have forgiveness of sin and reconciles us to the Father. When Christ died, the veil over the holy of holies in the temple was rent in two. The symbolism of the rent veil was access to the Father. The throne being described—between the cherubim and the mercy seat—is the throne of God the Father. As Jesus Christ fulfills the wave sheaf ceremony, He performs the role of Aaron the high priest before the mercy seat. Christ goes before the throne of God the Father and Christ's sacrifice is accepted. Christ's sacrifice not only covers our sins but also reconciles us to the Father. This is why Hebrews says that Christ is the mediator of the new covenant. If you are the mediator of an agreement, you are not one of the parties signing the agreement; you are the facilitator. You are the middle man.

The covenant, as we're going to see here, we make with the Father. One of the terms of the agreement is to marry His Son. We'll see this in a minute explained in detail in Matthew 22. Not only do we die in Christ through the baptismal death, but we are baptized into His death and we come up out of the water saved by His life. What happens in baptism is the death that takes away the old because we die through Christ that we may marry another—and the resurrected Christ is the "another." Christ's sacrifice is the blood of the covenant that ratifies the new agreement with us. Christ fulfills multiple purposes through His sacrifice.

To understand what the new covenant is, turn over to Matthew 22. We'll see here that the analogy of a marriage is used to describe this. You will notice as we read this, that Matthew uses the term "kingdom of heaven." That's a term unique to the gospel of Matthew. He uses kingdom of heaven the majority of the time. There are a few times He uses the term "kingdom of God." In the parallel accounts of Mark and Luke, if you compare them, you will oftentimes see Matthew using the term kingdom of heaven and Mark and Luke using the term kingdom of God. They are talking about the same thing. It's the same concept addressed but they use different terminology. What's described here is the kingdom of God. Matthew 22:1.

Matthew 22:1. *And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:*

2) *"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,*

3) *and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.*

4) *Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."*

5) *But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.*

- 6) *And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.*
- 7) *But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.*
- 8) *Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.'*
- 9) *Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'*
- 10) *So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.*
- 11) *"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.*
- 12) *So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.*
- 13) *Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*
- 14) *"For many are called, but few are chosen." (NKJV)*

Notice here the references to weeping and gnashing of teeth, bind him, and cast him into outer darkness. The king in this parable commands the man without a wedding garment be thrown into the lake of fire. When you make the new covenant for salvation, we are literally staking our lives. This is a do or die deal. You either fulfill your end of the agreement and be born into God's family (the kingdom of God), or you end up thrown in the lake of fire for not fulfilling your end of the agreement. That's how it works. This thoroughly explains the new covenant for us. Notice it says that there was a Father. He's the King. He's arranging a marriage for His Son. His Son is Jesus Christ. The agreement is if you follow through and obey Me, you will marry His Son.

Whom does the Church of God wind up marrying? Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5, Paul describes the roles of husband and wife. Then Paul says, "Behold I speak of a mystery. I'm talking about Christ and the church (the *ekklesia*). That's who I'm referring to." This is the marriage agreement.

The new covenant works very similar to the old covenant. The old covenant was a marriage between the physical nation of Israel and God. The new covenant is an agreement with spiritual Israel, the Church of God—those who were converted and successful make it into the kingdom of God. We marry Jesus Christ. We become the Bride of Christ. This is how the new covenant works.

Brethren, as I said, my purpose today was to give an overview of a number of covenants so that we can see the components of how covenants work and to understand how covenants interact with each other. Also, to understand the relationship that animal sacrifices and blood played in ratifying covenants. I think oftentimes that we read over those things. If we don't understand the history and the symbolism involved, we don't realize why the term "blood of the covenant" is utilized.

Understand that means that covenants were much more serious than what we think of as contracts in our world today. We enter into all sorts of contracts. Yet, if someone violates his or her terms of the agreement, typically the worst that happens is you may be taken to court and sued. You may have some financial and legal consequences from breaking the contract, but you are not staking your life.

In our situation when we make a covenant with God, literally you are staking your life, particularly with the new covenant. In that case, you are literally staking not only your physical life, but also your spiritual life. You are wishing death upon yourself that if you don't fulfill your agreement, you will die. And, that is, literally, what will happen. As it explains in the parable of the wedding, which we just read, those who successfully answer the call and fulfill their end of the agreement marry the Son, Jesus Christ. Those that didn't fulfill the agreement are cut off from the marriage. The King said, "Bind them and destroy them. Cast them into outer darkness."

That's the important thing to realize for us. When it comes to making covenants, it is a much more serious agreement than a contract. Think about that when you go to Passover to recommit to your agreement. And when you take that wine, realize what you are saying. It's more than the sacrifice that enabled us to have a relationship with God and enabled us to have forgiveness. Yes, it certainly accomplishes that. Remember you are also stating, "I stake my life that I will take this seriously and fulfill my end of the agreement, because if I don't, I'm wishing death upon myself." And that death you are wishing upon yourself, isn't just physical death, it's spiritual death in the lake of fire.