

Abraham's Covenant and the Spring Holy Days

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As we all know, in just a few days we'll all start keeping the spring Holy Days. If you look at the spring Holy Days—whether it's from the Old Covenant perspective of Israel's exodus out of Egypt and going to Mount Sinai to make a covenant with God and then pursue the Promised Land, or from the New Covenant perspective of our process of repentance as we prepare and then are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit and pursue salvation. In either of those covenants, they have their roots in Abraham's covenant. The promises that God made to Abraham in a covenant, He made them to fulfill. So, what I would like to do today is to look at Abraham's covenant so we'll see the roots of the Mount Sinai covenant and the New Covenant and also some common themes that play out in how these covenants are fulfilled. Also, the meaning that is consistent in all three of them. If you would like a title for this sermon it's:

Abraham's Covenant and the Spring Holy Days

To start let's look at Genesis 12. This is where Abraham originally receives the promises. This whole process of receiving the promises and then later entering into a covenant, we're going to see the same process playing out in all three of these covenants. It's one of the interesting parallels we're going to see.

Genesis 12:1 *Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family 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)

These are the promises He makes to Abram and I'm sure this has been covered many times. This includes both the national promises to Abraham's descendants becoming Israel and prominent throughout the world and also the spiritual promises through Christ being a descendant through Abraham, with salvation being offered to all of mankind through this. We won't take the time to actually go there, but the *comment and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed*, you see that directly quoted in Acts 3. We don't have to guess at all that it's connected directly with the fulfillment of the New Covenant and salvation.

I want you to notice that after Abraham receives these promises, notice what he actually has to do. Notice in verse 4.

4) So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

5) Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.

6) Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.

7) Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.
(NKJV)

I want you to notice, God first comes and tells Abraham, "I've got plans for you, here's what I'm going to do for you." and lays out the general idea of what it's about. He never directly mentions making a covenant with him. You won't see the word covenant mentioned here at all; that doesn't happen until Genesis 15. He tells Abraham, "I want you to pack up your stuff, go that way, I'll tell you when to stop." Then later after Abraham has done this—this act of obedience—left his life behind, completely changed his life, obeyed God, totally uprooted everything and then moved off to Canaan—then God makes a covenant with him. The reason I'm making a point out of this, we'll see as we go through this sermon. This same pattern is in both the Mount Sinai covenant and in the New Covenant.

In the Mount Sinai covenant we're going to see He tells them, "You guys need to pack up and leave Egypt, head out towards the Promised Land." They make this journey out there. Then when they get out completely away from Egypt, they enter into a covenant after they have to do the obedience of packing up, leaving their whole life behind, uprooting everything about their lives. We do the same thing in the New Covenant. You have to first repent, show fruits of repentance, then you enter into baptism, into a covenant. You'll see this same pattern playing out again and again and that is what I want you to see in all this.

In Genesis 15 we see how God actually makes a covenant with him. To set the scene for this, the story is going to pick up in Genesis 12. God is basically telling him, here's all the things I'm going to give to you through your descendants. For all of this to happen, Abraham has to have some kids. If he doesn't have children, it's kind of hard for this to come about. All of this is attached to fulfilling all of this through the descendants. They are going to become this great nation, Christ is going to descend from him, salvation is going to be offered through all of this. A pivotal thing that has to happen for any of this to take place is Abraham has to have some kids. He hadn't had any kids yet. That's the context of what is taking place here when we pick up in chapter 15.

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?"* (NKJV)

So, this is what is on Abraham's mind as well. "All these promises all hinge upon me having kids and I don't have any kids." We have a link in the chain that is missing.

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?" (NKJV)*

Pay attention to the question he just asked and how God responds to the question. This is going to become pivotal to understanding what is happening here. He just asked the question, "How do I know for sure you're going to do this?" I want you to pay attention to how God answers the question. This is a puzzling picture in our modern-day culture to read what plays out after this until you understand the symbolism of what is taking place in this scene.

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.*

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.*

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—

19) the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”
(NKJV)

What happened here, for us in our modern-day culture, is an odd scene that takes place. He says to make these sacrifices, then cut the carcasses in half and lay them out and the torch goes in between them—what is this all about? This is a strange looking scene. If we understand the symbolism of what is playing out, there is a lot of meaning packed into this. If you don't understand the symbolism, it sounds like an odd scene of what is taking place. I have to admit, for much of my life, I would read over this, that God tells him to do these sacrifices and then later at the end it says God made a covenant with him that day. You see it as two different things; he did the sacrificing and then they made a covenant. It's like these two things that coincidentally happen at the same time. That's not the case at all, they are very intimately related to each other.

As I mentioned before, I said pay attention to the fact that Abraham asked, “How do I know you are going to do this? How do I know that I can count on this?” Then what happens right after that? God answers the question saying take these animals, cut the carcasses in half, lay them out and he sees this vision of going in between and asking what this is all about. Let me take a little tangent to illustrate some of this. This was an interesting insight for me as I was researching this particular sermon. This will be a little detour but you'll see in a moment why it makes sense.

If you're like myself you've probably heard this expression many times in your life and probably used it yourself. In American culture we often use the expression, “blood is thicker than water”. What we mean by that is that our blood relationship—our relatives, our family—should be stronger than all our others. That's typically how we use it. If we go back to what the original statement where that comes from was, we literally inverted what the original expression was and have the exact opposite meaning.

If you're like me and are an analytical person, I like to understand the logic behind things and try to connect the dots. Although I've used that expression numerous times in my life, understanding that the way we use it is emphasizing family relationships. I've looked at it and understood the blood reference. But what does water have to do with it? How does water make sense? That never made sense to me. Here's what the original statement was and why it ties into what we're talking about.

“The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.”

It was referring to the relationship that you've entered into is a covenant with someone and is a stronger bond than the water of the womb—the fact that you happen to be related to someone.

In my own example, I'm from a family of four kids, I'm the youngest of four and have three older siblings. That just came about because our parents decided to have four kids and we just happen to be born to the same parents. There is a family relationship

but it's completely different than a relationship you voluntarily entered into and that you've staked your life as a part of. The reason I say that is, what we're going to see is this whole symbolism of cutting a carcass in half and laying it out and walking in between the pieces. The symbolism intended for this is, a person staking their life—basically saying

“I wish death upon myself if I don't fulfill my end of the agreement.”

We're going to literally see this in the Bible as we go through this. This is symbolic which Abraham would have recognized and was how covenants were made. Covenants, when they were entered into, sacrificing was an intimate part of it. This wasn't a coincidental thing where they made sacrifices and then there was a covenant. That's how covenants were made and we're going to see that directly in the Bible.

Again, the symbolism here was, the parties involved were saying “I wish death upon myself if I don't fulfill the vow I'm making in this covenant.” That's why the expression would be, “The blood of the covenant is stronger than the water of the womb”. You're saying, because you voluntarily entered into this agreement staking your life, that's a more powerful relationship than you just happened to be related to someone. That's what the original statement was about.

To follow this, as I mentioned, we can see this directly in the Bible. In Psalm 50 I want you to see, first of all that sacrificing and covenants were intimately related. Sacrificing was how you did covenants.

Psalms 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 they made a covenant by sacrifice. That was part of how a covenant was made. We're going to see this mentioned a couple of times in scripture, this term, “blood of the covenant” and how that was intimately related to a covenant. In fact, we're going to see that specifically stated in regards to the Mount Sinai covenant and the New Covenant. We're going to see that the blood of Christ is referred to in the Bible as *the blood of the covenant*. We're going to see in the Mount Sinai covenant Moses sprinkles blood on them and says, “*This is the blood of the covenant*”. We're going to see what this actually pictures.

To get another biblical example of this, turn to Jeremiah 34. As I mentioned when we're talking about Genesis 15, which for us in our modern day is a very odd scene because most of us are completely divorced from agriculture. Most of us get our food from the grocery store, so the slaughter of animals is foreign to our world. The scene described in Genesis 15 of taking an animal, splitting the carcasses and then passing in between them was a very meaningful symbolism that took place. We're going to read an example

in Jeremiah 34 where this is specifically referenced. I'm going to set the scene of the context we're talking about here.

I'm sure you're all familiar with the Mount Sinai covenant that God makes with Israel. There were numerous laws he lays out for them to follow as a part of this agreement. Part of God's instructions involved indentured servitude, often referred to as slavery. Slavery—which was really more indentured servitude in the Old Testament—was a very different concept than what we think of slavery today. The way God defined this was, if a person was indebted to someone else and couldn't pay their debts, they would become a servant to someone they owed and become their slave you might say. But this was a for a six-year period. In the seventh year, the instructions were that they were to be set free, their debt was paid. They didn't stay indefinitely as a slave for the rest of their life in this regard. This was how God had laid out the instructions for them to do. What had happened was, the people of Judah—human nature being what it was—started taking advantage of this and abusing these rules, not letting people go free in the seventh year. There was a point where people realized they had been messing up and had not followed God's instructions. Then they make it another individual covenant over this subject and promise that they are going to be faithful now and follow the instructions that they were supposed to do. Human nature being what it was, over time they started violating this one as well. That's what this chapter is addressing. We're going to read through and I want you to notice the details that specifically mention taking calves, cutting them in half, laying out the carcasses and walking in between them. This is what they did as part of the agreement.

Jeremiah 34:8 *This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them:*

9) that every man should set free his male and female slave—a Hebrew man or woman—that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage. (NKJV)

The issue is not letting them go free in the seventh year like they were supposed to. That's the pivotal issue here.

10) Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go.

11) But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves.

12) Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

13) Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying,

14) At the end of seven years let every man set free his Hebrew brother, who has been sold to him; and when he has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you.' But your fathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear.

15) Then you recently turned and did what was right in My sight—every man proclaiming liberty to his neighbor; and you made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name. (NKJV)

They had started doing it right, then made a covenant that said they were going to be faithful and do it like they were supposed to and human nature being what it is, reneged on that one.

16) Then you turned around and profaned My name, and every one of you brought back his male and female slaves, whom you had set at liberty, at their pleasure, and brought them back into subjection, to be your male and female slaves. '

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)

This is the same thing we see in Genesis 15. Taking an animal, sacrificing it, cutting the carcass in half, laying it out and walking in between the pieces.

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— (NKJV)

Again, walking between the pieces of the carcass to picture their own death.

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)

He's basically saying,

"You staked your life, wished death upon yourself if you didn't fulfill your end of the covenant and I'm going to give you the death that you wished upon yourself and it's going to be ugly."

That's basically what He's telling them.

21) And I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army which has gone back from you.

22) Behold, I will command, 'says the LORD, 'and cause them to return to this city. They will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant'" (NKJV)

He's telling them, "You pictured your own death, wishing death upon yourself if you didn't fulfill your end of the covenant and you completely reneged on your end of the covenant, so I'm giving the death that you wished upon yourself." I just want you to see a biblical example of what you see in Genesis 15. If you're like myself, I would read over Genesis 15 and think that this is a really odd situation. He's cutting these carcasses and laying them out and then a torch comes in between them and I don't know what that is all about. Then you say, they made this covenant and focus on that, but don't really know how to connect those two together; they are intimately tied with one another.

This is how covenants were entered into. This is why when Abraham asked the question, "How do I know you're really going to do this?" God enters him into a covenant and shows him this symbolism; Abraham is going to know what this means. God is showing him that this is solid, this is wishing death upon yourself if you don't fulfill it. This promise is solid. That's basically what He is communicating to him because that's when they made the covenant.

You'll see this same concept talked about in the book of Hebrews—Hebrews 9—and we'll see this expounded on a little more. Then also, attached to both are the Mount Sinai and the New Covenant. I'm going to start in verse 15 to get the total context as I'm going to explain in a minute that there are significant translation errors in verse 16 and 17 that confuse the subject. I want you to follow the theme of the context so you'll see what I'm getting at.

Hebrews 9:15 *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)*

I'm reading from the New King James translation that will become significant in just a minute.

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. (NKJV)

You get the whole context, if you read through this chapter. The first half of chapter 9 is describing the Atonement ceremony. It directly tells you that the High Priest could only go into the Holy of Holies once a year, that was specifically on the Day of Atonement. It's describing the Leviticus 16 ceremony and it directly states the meaning of what the High Priest and Lord's goat pictured. It explains it to you that they both picture Christ and His role. What I want you to notice first, is we are talking about a covenant in verse 15 and then in verse 18 it says, *Therefore, not even the first covenant was dedicated*

without blood. It's talking about covenants as well. But in the New King James, in verse 16 and 17 it's talking about a testament. So, it doesn't logically follow.

Here's where the problem is: The Greek word that is used can be translated as *testament* or as *covenant*. It can be used as both and you have to depend upon context to translate it. They put *testament* and *testator* based upon that and they have really confused the subject.

A *covenant* is an agreement that is entered by two living parties.

A *testament* is like a last will and testament.

If someone has a will for when they die—if you've ever looked at a will it typically says, "The last will and testament of John Doe". What's the purpose of that? It's when John Doe dies, it becomes into effect because that's what you are going to do with John Doe's stuff after he's gone and who it's supposed to go to.

That's not what is being discussed, it's talking about covenants. If you follow the whole context, even the verses afterward, we're talking about Christ died and then His stuff was given to other people. No, He's the sacrifice that was used to put a covenant into force. Let me read to you verse 16 and 17 from a Bible translation called The Holy Bible in Its Original Order. I think it translates these verses much more accurately.

*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 it is legally in force until the living ratifier has symbolically represented his death. (HBOO)*

In other words, just like the example we read in Jeremiah, they are symbolically representing their death;

"I'm basically staking my life, if I don't fulfill my end of the covenant, I'm wishing death upon myself. "

To further expound on this, let me read a section of a commentary addressing these couple of verses. This is from The Word Biblical Commentary by William Lane. I'm quoting from Volume 47B and pages 242-243.

In the Old Testament, ratification of a covenant based upon 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. The 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 had been sworn and validated by the action of cutting 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 this 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 a 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 representative death.

If we just read then the rest of the context, we'll see how it fits. I'm going to read verse 16 and 17 again out of this other translation and then the verses that follow in the New King James and we'll see how the logic totally fits.

*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 it is legally enforce until the living ratifier has symbolically represented his death. (HBOO)*

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

See the logic completely fits.

*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 purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. (NKJV)*

It's showing you that this blood was necessary, as the blood of the covenant for the ratifying of the Mount Sinai covenant and it's also getting at the concept that the blood of Christ is the blood for the covenant of the New Covenant. We'll see later in this sermon that's directly stated in the Bible. No speculation or interpretation required. It directly tells us that the blood of Christ is the blood of the New Covenant. It's that same concept of picture your death if you don't fulfill the covenant.

We're going to see these same themes play out in both the Mount Sinai covenant and the New Covenant. But before we do that, let's just take one interesting tangent just to cover some details in Genesis 15 that often get misinterpreted and confused at this time year when we are talking about the spring Holy Days. The spring Holy Days—the foundation of it all—is based upon the story of Israel. Their exodus out of Egypt, out of

slavery, to make a covenant at Mount Sinai and head towards the Promised Land. Understanding that whole story and the sequence of events is the foundation to understanding the spiritual meaning of the spring Holy Days. There's a verse that often times gets misinterpreted and then creates an inaccurate scenario of how things played out. I'm referring to Genesis 15:13.

Genesis 15:13 *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. (NKJV)*

If you're like myself, I grew up as a kid seeing some of the Exodus movies and things that we put on TV depicting this. You would see the phrase commented, "They were slaves in Egypt for 400 years". In fact, I've even heard that stated in Church of God circles a number of times—400 years in slavery. That's not exactly what this verse is saying. If you put together the genealogy of the people—the generations between the time they all actually went to Egypt and then to the exodus, you can't get 400 years in there. The key to understanding this is if you read verse 13 in the New International Version, it's worded a little more clearly.

13) Then Yehovah said to him, know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated. (NIV)

Notice it's referring to a country not their own and talks about two things—*enslaved and mistreated*. I'm giving you the preview of where we're going. Also keep in mind that Abraham's descendants were sojourners for years before they ever even went to Egypt, they are still in a land not their own. That's one of the keys to understanding this. Just to show you some of the genealogies of how we can prove that you can't even get them in Egypt for 400 years, let alone for being slaves for 400 years. We can dogmatically prove that from the Bible. So, we're just going to take an interesting tangent in Genesis 46:8. This is the account of when Jacob and all of his descendants packed up the whole family and moved to Egypt to join Joseph who was already in power there. It's listing for us the individuals who came when they actually moved there, so we can then take their life spans and get the maximum number of years we can stretch out of this.

Genesis 46:8 *Now these were the names of the children of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt: (NKJV)*

So, this is a list of folks who, when they packed up the family and moved to Egypt. Who was included? Jump down to verse 11.

11) The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. (NKJV)

The reason I skipped down to this is, as you know, the Levitical priesthood were all descendants of Aaron. So, you know Moses and Aaron were Levites, you know they were brothers and descendants of Levi. Kohath is Moses' grandfather. Notice that

Kohath has a younger brother. What we're going to do for illustration purposes, as we look at the lengths of their lives, is to make some assumptions we know are not correct simply for easy math to show the maximum number of years we could possibly stretch out here. We know that Kohath didn't come to Egypt in the first year of his life because he has a younger brother who has already been born. So obviously he is older than that. Let's assume for easy math he comes to Egypt in the very first year of his life. Now let's turn to Exodus 6 and we'll see how long his life was.

Exodus 6:16 *These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were one hundred and thirty-seven. (NKJV)*

Now skip down to verse 18.

18) And the sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath were one hundred and thirty-three. (NKJV)

Again, we're assuming that Kohath moved to Egypt in the very first year of his life which we know is not the case. Amram, as we're going to see is Moses' father. We know Amram had several younger brothers but we're going to do easy math and assume Amram was born in the last year of his father's life which is obviously not the case because there were several more sons born later. Now jump down to verse 20.

20) Now Amram took for himself Jochebed, his father's sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram were one hundred and thirty-seven. (NKJV)

Now we're going to make another obviously flawed assumption that Moses was born in the last year of Amram's life—just for easy math. If we take 133 and 137, we're going to get 270. Now let's look at how old Moses was when the Exodus happened. Turn to Exodus 7:7.

Exodus 7:7 *And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh. (NKJV)*

So, when Moses and Aaron are having interactions with Pharaoh—*let my people go* and trying to have that negotiation—Moses is 80 years old. So, if we take his father's maximum life, his grandfather's maximum life and how old Moses was and add that all together, the most we can stretch that out to is 350 years. We know we've stretched it longer than it possibly could have been because we made assumptions that we know are not true. My point is, you can't get 400 years in there, you just can't do it. So, you have to realize they weren't slaves for 400 years because you can't even get them in Egypt for 400 years. When they moved there, Joseph is still in power. Joseph lived out the rest of his life and you know they don't get enslaved until a Pharaoh comes into power who doesn't know Joseph and then decides that the Israelites are a threat and enslaves them. The years they are in slavery is significantly less than that. The key to

understanding Genesis 15:13 is realizing *enslaved and mistreated in a land not their own*. That's not specific to Egypt.

Now let's look at one other issue, turn to Galatians 4:28.

Galatians 4:28 *Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.
29) 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.
30) 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."
31) So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*
(NKJV)

So, the focus here is more on the spiritual analogy associated with this. Notice it's referring to Ishmael persecuting—in other words “mistreating”—Isaac and they were in a land not their own. This is where they are sojourning. Both the time that they are sojourning and the time that the Israelites are in Egypt, both of these times are in a land not their own.

Let's notice another detail of the story being referenced in Genesis 21 and notice an interesting detail about this story that Galatians just referenced. Start in verse 8.

Genesis 21:8 *So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.
9) And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing.
10) Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac."
(NKJV)*

As the story goes from here, Hagar and Ishmael are told to pack their stuff and get out and move away. This is the story that was referenced in Galatians. If you're like myself, for much of my life I would read this story and think, “Isn't this a severe over reaction?” The way that this is translated, one brother was scoffing at the other and then they just kicked him and his mother out and sent them off on a journey. As I mentioned previously in this sermon, I grew up with several older siblings—I have two older brothers—and I can tell you, growing up with three boys in the house it was just a common thing that we would scoff and make fun of each other, poke at each other and sometimes just be downright cruel with each other about it. That's just what siblings do and particularly with boys. They find a way to make fun of the other one or mock them and get under their skin; with human nature being what it is, that is just a common occurrence. I don't know that I've ever known any group of brothers who grew up and that didn't happen. That they didn't find ways to poke and make fun of the other one and try to get under each other's skin—that's just part of growing up with siblings. So, if you read this story, you think, “Isn't this a severe over reaction to this situation?” The

problem here is a translation error. The Hebrew word used for *scoffing* can mean “to laugh, to make fun”. But it can have a different meaning as well. If we understand that, it sheds a whole new light on what took place here.

The Hebrew word that is translated as *scoffing* in the New King James is sahaq, Strong’s #6711 and the definition I’m going to read is out of The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter. You’ll notice a lot of the definition does match with the idea of scoffing or making fun of, but you’re going to see it can have a totally different meaning as well. The definition they give is:

A verb meaning to laugh, to make jokes, to mock. It is used as an expression of joy or humor but it also can be used to mock or make light of something serious, sometimes in jest. It also expresses an attitude towards something that is claimed but seems impossible to realize, e.g. Abraham and Sarah’s laughing responses to God’s promises.

But also notice this last statement gives as a possible meaning.

It may have sexual licentious overtones.

In other words, it is kind of similar to how in English, we will use the phrase “fooling around”. Because think about it, you can say, “Oh those kids are just fooling around; they are just horse playing, they’re just having fun, it’s just an innocent thing.” Or you could be referring to a couple of adults and say, “Those two are fooling around.” You see how different that is? It’s the same English words and one is just some innocent kids playing around and the other is, they are fooling around in a sexual nature.

Let me give you a biblical example of where this word is used in that very manner in Genesis 26:6.

Genesis 26:6 *So Isaac dwelt in Gerar.*

7) *And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, “She is my sister”; for he was afraid to say, “She is my wife,” because he thought, “lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold.”*

8) *Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife.*

9) *Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Quite obviously she is your wife; so how could you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I said, ‘Lest I die on account of her.’” (NKJV)*

The Hebrew word here for *showing endearment* is the same Hebrew word as *scoffing* when it was referring to Ishmael and Isaac. Obviously, if Abimelech seeing Isaac here was thinking, “That’s not the kind of affection you show to your sister. She’s got to be your wife if you’re showing that kind of affection.” Obviously, he is talking about affection of a sexual nature. I won’t take the time to turn there, but if you read the Exodus 32

account of the golden calf where it refers to what they were doing that day when Moses comes down and witnesses the scene, it says *they rose up to play*; that's how it's worded in the New King James in English. It's that same Hebrew word. They rose up to have an orgy, is what it's referring to. That's why Moses has the reaction that he does; he sees they are involved in idolatry and having a pagan orgy. If you place this in the story with Ishmael and Isaac with that insight as to what the word would mean, now this scene makes a lot more sense. If you just have a couple of brothers just making fun of each other and laughing at one another, you don't have the response of, "Throw him and his mother out, send them packing, I don't want them living here anymore". That's not the reaction you would have. Imagine if Sarah goes and sees Ishmael and he's molesting Isaac, that would be a response that she would say, "Pack his stuff, get him out of here, I don't want him around my son anymore!" that would make sense. Think about what you have now, and it fits with what was being referred to in Galatians 4. Notice it made a whole point of the *son not of a promise* mistreating the *son of a promise*. It was making a spiritual analogy of those who were being called to salvation, how we get persecuted by those in the world. Would an analogy of that make sense if all that was happening was making fun of a brother? That's not the kind of persecution. But if you're talking about being molested, that makes sense.

So, what do we have? We have Abraham's descendants—*the son of a promise*—in a land not his own and he's being *mistreated*. It's way before the time of when they actually moved to Egypt. My point is, if we understand that correctly, they weren't slaves in Egypt for 400 years. What it's referring to there, is that for 400 years they would be *in a land not their own* and that includes the sojourning in the land they didn't know—it was in Canaan that they had not inherited yet—and in Egypt and that combined is the 400 years. That was kind of a long tangent but I thought that would address some things associated with the story.

To pick up back where we were, turn to Exodus 3 and we'll pick up with the story of the exodus. As I mentioned before when we were in Genesis 12, I said to notice the "them" of Genesis 12 and 15. What happened initially was, God comes to Abraham and says,

"Here's what I'm going to do for you; I'm going to make your descendants a great nation, Christ is going to descend from you, all the world is going to be blessed through you, here's all the plans I have for you".

He doesn't specifically mention a covenant, that comes later and is part of the fulfillment of this. But He tells Abraham, "Here's the plan I've got for you, but I want you to pack your stuff, head out this way, uproot your whole life, change everything, leave everything behind that you're used to and completely alter your life and once you've done that"—then He enters into a covenant and proceeds with fulfilling the rest of it. This exact same theme plays out in the story of the exodus. We're going to see that not only plays out with the Mount Sinai covenant but also with the New Covenant in picturing our spiritual salvation.

Let's notice in the burning bush story of Exodus 3:16.

Exodus 3:16 *Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt;*

17) and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.' "

18) Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, 'The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.'

19) But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand.

20) So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.

21) And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed.

22) But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

(NKJV)

God lays out these plans for them— "I'm going to deliver you from this; going to make you a great nation; give you this nice land"—but it doesn't say anything about a covenant. It's part of the story, and is what plays out, but He doesn't lay all that out at this point. He just tells them, "Pack up all your stuff, I want you to uproot your life, go out on a journey to wherever I tell you to" and then later introduces the covenant. In Exodus 19, this is the third month of the year when they arrive at Mount Sinai and is where He first introduces the concept of directly stating making a covenant with them.

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 Wilderness 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."

7) So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him.

8) Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. (NKJV)

They had to obey God's commandments, packed up all their stuff, completely changed their lives, walked away from everything they had known, got to Mount Sinai and now He's filling in the details that He's going to make a covenant with them and officially make this arrangement. In Exodus 24 we'll see where this is actually ratified. Notice, as we read in Hebrews before, how Moses sprinkled the blood upon them and said "This is the blood of the covenant." They explained the significance of picturing your death if you don't fulfill your end of the covenant and that you have to have that blood and the sacrifice to make a covenant. We'll see that played out in the story. If we pay close attention to the details as we read through several verses in Exodus 24, you'll notice that there are two days involved in this. I'm going to summarize this because I have gone into this in previous sermons in a lot more detail.

If you take all the biblical evidence of the story, you can lay out the timeline of how things took place. What plays out is, you find out when you lay out all the details, that God appearing to them in Mount Sinai and speaking the Ten Commandments and giving Moses all the details, happened on the Sabbath prior to Pentecost and they actually ratify the covenant on Pentecost. One of the ways you'll see that, is if you read through this and notice where it talks about Moses getting up the next morning. You'll see how one day has ended and the next day has started, so two days involved.

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." 4) And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, [so we're on the next day] 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 offered 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." 8) And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people [the blood of the covenant], and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words." (NKJV)*

You see that same symbolism playing out; the picturing of a death and the whole process just like with Abraham. He has to pack up, leave his whole life behind, have

faith in God and follow this. Then he enters into a covenant that starts with a sacrifice and blood put in there. It's about the picturing of a death. If you understand this foundation, you can see this is exactly what plays out in the New Covenant. For us as Christians, this same basic process plays out in all of this. For us it's not the physical journey of packing up your stuff and moving to a different land but the symbolism is about repentance. That's the core meaning of what unleavened bread is about. If you look at the historical story—that's the whole key to understanding the spiritual meaning of the spring Holy Days. It is following the details of the story. What did they have to do? They had to be unleavened and walk away from Egypt and then after doing that they were able to enter into a covenant with God. The covenant took place in Mount Sinai. If they didn't leave Egypt and make the journey to Mount Sinai, they couldn't have entered into the covenant because that is where it takes place. The same thing happens with us but on a spiritual level. In Matthew 3 we see the same thing happens with us, but for us, it's on a spiritual level and its repentance. We have to show fruits of repentance before we are able to enter into a covenant with God.

Matthew 3:1 *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,*

2) and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

3) For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight." "

4) Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

5) Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him

6) and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

7) But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8) Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,

9) and do not think to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

10) And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11) I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (NKJV)

Notice what he is saying. John starts off his preaching saying, "Repent and then be baptized." In other words, you have to have repentance first. He has people showing up wanting to be baptized and he tells them they haven't repented yet or changed their lives. Go show "fruits of repentance" and then we'll talk about baptism. Baptism is

actually entering into the covenant. That's where you picture your death to enter into a covenant. What happens first? Like the Israelites did and like Abraham did, we have to walk away from our old lives. We have to show fruits that we are willing to recognize that was wrong and we have to make a change and show evidence of that. We can't totally overcome until we have the Holy Spirit and have that help but we have to take that action and show that repentance and that we're serious about this before we can enter into a covenant with God. That's the same symbolism that played out with Abraham, the same thing we see with Ancient Israel. They had to leave Egypt, they had to delevaten themselves, walk away from this whole life and get out of that pagan environment and get to Mount Sinai and then they could enter into a covenant with God. It's the same thing for us.

In Romans 6 we see again this symbolism of picturing your death is a part of our covenant as well. When we go into baptism, one of the things we are picturing is our death and there's a lot of meaning packed into this. We are picturing the death of our old life and we have to keep in mind that we are staking our life because we are literally are. Our eternal salvation is at stake; if we fulfill our end of the covenant, we receive eternal life but if we don't, we go into the lake of fire. So, we are literally wishing death upon ourselves if we don't fulfill our end of the covenant. To understand the symbolism read Romans 6:1.

Romans 6:1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*

2) Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

3) Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (NKJV)

In other words, this is the picturing of a death.

4) Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5) For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

6) knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

7) For he who has died has been freed from sin.

8) Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

9) knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.

10) For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

11) Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

13) *And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

14) *For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.* (NKJV)

We see that same basic symbolism of picturing our deaths and just like what happened with Abraham's covenant and the Mount Sinai covenant there was also the blood of the covenant involved. If you look at Hebrews 10, it directly tells us that Christ was the sacrifice and His blood was the *blood of the covenant*.

Hebrews 10:26 *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

27) *but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*

28) *Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

29) *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?* (NKJV)

It tells us that Christ's sacrifice—He's the sacrifice because sacrifices are always involved in a covenant—and His blood is the *blood of the covenant*. We see the same themes that started in Abraham's covenant, play out in the Mount Sinai covenant, and play out in the New Covenant. The main lesson for all of us in all of this, just like I mentioned about what took place in Genesis 15 and as we saw in Jeremiah, the concept of taking the sacrificed animals and walk in between the carcasses. All that was picturing was symbolically representing one's own death if they don't fulfill their end of the covenant. When we all went into the baptismal waters, we made a covenant and promised that we were faithfully going to obey God and put Him and everything that He wants from our lives as more important than anything else in our lives. We would forsake anything else that would come up in our lives that would get in the way of obeying God and realize we pictured our death and wished death upon ourselves if we don't fulfill our vows. It literally is a life and death matter.

As we go forward in a few days in keeping the feast of Unleavened Bread, it is about our repentance, about unleavening our lives and finding those areas that we need to put away, that we need to overcome and step away from and realize that just like any other covenant, we pictured our death in doing it. If we don't fulfill that we are wishing upon ourselves our death. If we don't fulfill it, we will receive that death and it will be the second death in the lake of fire.