

# *Sacrificial Covenant*

**By Warren Zehrung – April 19, 2008**

Passover is a memorial of the New Covenant Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Everything in this sermon takes place on two days, Passover and the First day of Unleavened Bread.

I want to set the stage by looking at a **Covenant Sacrifice** in the Bible.

Understanding the Covenant Sacrifice will greatly aid our understanding of Passover and Unleavened Bread.

The sacrifice that I will be speaking about today is **NOT** the typical sacrifice we are so used to hearing about where those in the Old Testament brought animal sacrifices to the temple.

Definition: A *covenant* is an agreement between two people, entities, or parties.

A covenant, like a contract, is a **binding** [that is the general meaning of Covenant] agreement between the two parties, which creates obligations that each must perform.

Examples: Two people can enter a contract or covenant, or God can enter a covenant, as with the nation of Israel.

A covenant, like a contract, is an agreement between the two parties, which creates obligations that each must perform.

Example: Let's consider a covenant in which both contracting parties are men.

One man says, "I'll sell you my cow for \$100 dollars." When the buyer and seller **both agree** on the deal it becomes a contract or covenant. They can say it, shake hands on it, or formalize it in writing or even sign it before witnesses. A contract is an **exchange of promises** that bind the parties to each other - to perform their part. One party brings the cow; the other brings the \$100 dollars.

Paul wrote about a simple contract between two men – saying that neither man could *alter* the terms of the contract after the agreement was struck.

**Gal 3:15** Though *it be* but a man's covenant, yet *if it be* confirmed, no man disannuls it, or adds thereto.

## What is a **Covenant Sacrifice**?

A Covenant Sacrifice has some basic elements:

- ...An oath or solemn promise to do something
- ...The parties to the covenant
- ...And a dead animal, which has had its blood poured out.

An animal, or animals were slain by shedding their blood – then they were cut into two halves from top to bottom and laid on the ground with a little space between them.

When a contract was made in those days -- the word we will be using is "Covenant," - the covenant was validated or made binding, when the contracting parties **walked between the pieces** of a slain animal.

It was a way of saying, "**I'm putting my life on the line to keep this covenant.**" And going through such a dreadful and grisly ritual – no one could later say they didn't remember entering into the covenant.

To "**ratify**" a covenant means to approve of, agree with, confirm, put in force, sanction, validate or establish the covenant.

**The Covenant Sacrifice** required that the principal persons entering the Covenanting agreement must **pass between the parts of the slain sacrifice** – implying, that whoever broke the covenant, would be subject to the *same death*.

"May the One who breaks the covenant be cut in two as the calf is divided." Soncino, Jeremiah page 234

Soncino says that the purpose of these animals, represented here, was to enter into a covenant (same as an oath) which could not be annulled.

It was well understood that the **Life was in the blood**. (Leviticus 17:11)

Those entering the **Covenant Sacrifice** were saying, in effect, "If I fail to keep covenant, then let my blood be poured out like this slain sacrifice." – "If I break the covenant I am willing to be cut in two pieces."

To this day, people still speak of "cutting a contract" – from this common practice of cutting the **covenant sacrifice** in half.

The animal to be sacrificed was cut in two so that the contracting parties might pass between the pieces; therefore **cutting** the covenant and passing between the two pieces signified making the covenant.

There is a good example of this practice in the Book of Jeremiah:

In Jeremiah's day there arose a predicament in which the people of the land were in virtual bondage and servitude to those domineering public officials and powerful leaders who controlled the country.

The high prices, taxes, mortgages, rents, fees, obligations and tariffs – essentially made **slaves** of all the people.

God knows that without His financial laws in place, a few men soon end up with all the **wealth**, and the masses of the people end up with all the **debt**.

God told the overbearing Princes of Judah, priests and merchants to promise to "Give my people relief and freedom from that heavy oppression."

In fact, God had them enter into a **Covenant Sacrifice**.

They **did so** in the temple – with great fanfare – And King Zedekiah was first to pass between the halved carcasses.

Let's look at this example of a **Covenanting Sacrifice** in Jeremiah's day. All the leaders entered into a Covenant Sacrifice – promising to give the people their liberty and freedom.

**Jeremiah 34:18b** ...The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem had Covenanted to perform [middle of verse :18] the words of the covenant which they had made before Me [God says], when they **cut the calf in twain** [two halves], and **passed between** the parts thereof,

**Jeremiah 34:19** The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which **passed between the parts of the calf**;

The princes of Judah Covenanted to give the people their liberty – and they did free them – but only for a very short time – then they soon reverted back to their high taxes, mortgages, – followed by foreclosure and debtors jail - again denying the people their liberty.

What happened when they **broke the covenant** by treating the people harshly?

God **required their blood of them**. They had covenanted to spill their blood if they broke their promise – they broke the covenant and God allowed their blood to be spilt.

**Jeremiah 34:18** And I will give the men that have **transgressed** my covenant, which have **not** performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me... when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof,

**Jeremiah 34:19** The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which **passed between the parts of the calf**;

**Jeremiah 34:20** I will even give them [King Zedekiah and the Princes and leaders] into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that **seek their life**: and their **dead bodies** shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.

One other example of **"Cut a covenant"** for your notes brethren:

In **Genesis 21:25-32** there was a conflict between Abimelech and Abraham over who had dug and owned a water well at Beersheba (*well of oath*). Abraham **"cut a covenant"** (Genesis 21:27) using sheep and oxen in the covenant as a witness to Abimelech. For seven ewe lambs Abimelech admitted under oath that the well belonged to Abraham.

Pictures of Passover and timing of Passover:

**Genesis 14:18** *Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth **bread and wine**: and He was the priest of the Most High God.*

We will see in a moment that Melchizedek brought this **bread and wine** forth, on the same day, Passover, and at the same time, beginning of the 14th, as when Jesus instituted the New Testament **bread and wine**.

Then as this Passover with Melchisedec and Abraham comes to an end, we come to the Night to Be Much Observed: [before it is called that.] It is the night portion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Unleavened Bread.

Remember that the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures **coming out of sin** – and we understand that, "I will put sin out of my life..."

Let's understand that that there is only one way to come out of sin – and that is by Jesus Christ,

God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and made promises to him – but they were **conditional promises**. Abram would have to do certain things – leave home and go elsewhere... (Genesis 12:1)

**Genesis 12:3** And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee: and in thee shall all families [kindreds], of the earth be blessed. [Nations are families grown large.]

There is a hint how far reaching God's spiritual blessings will extend...

Again, **Genesis 14:18** Melchizedek King of Salem brought forth **bread and wine**: and he *was* the priest of the Most High God.

The timing of this act by Melchizedek was just as Passover began on the evening beginning the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib.

In Genesis 15 we will see – not the covenant with Physical Israel – but with Spiritual Israel.

**Genesis 15:1** *After these things* [bread, wine, blessing Chapter 14] *the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision,*

**Genesis 15:2** *And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?* [What about your promise, Lord?]

God had promised children to Abraham: {**Genesis 12:7** And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, **Unto thy seed** [children] will I give this land:

Jesus was pleased to give Abraham a sign that He would perform His promise to give Abraham children.

**Genesis 15:4** And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. [First, Isaac -> then in due course Jesus Christ]

(If you are a Christian, Paul explains, you are Abraham's seed and an heir to the promises that God made to Abraham four thousand years ago.)

**Galatians 3:16** Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

**Galatians 3:26** For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

**Galatians 3:27** For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

**Galatians 3:29** And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's **seed**, and heirs according to the promise.

Christ is the "Seed" that will bring **Spiritual Salvation** to the multitudinous children of Abraham.

Abraham understood that Christ would work out the **salvation** of the entire world through him.

God promises Abram, who is childless at the time, progeny as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

God also told Abram that the covenant He was making with him was to be an everlasting covenant.

Pick up on the timing here – we now move into the evening of Abib 14<sup>th</sup> – then it becomes real dark. [This is the same time that Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17 the night before He died.]

**Genesis 15:5** *And the LORD brought Abram forth a broad [high field], and said, Look now toward heaven, and **count the stars**, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed [children] be.*

This is the great promise – Abraham does not have even one child – and God tells him that his children will be countless.

These children are not all Abraham's Physical children – but also those Spiritual children –through Christ.

Perhaps we cannot see the spiritual aspect of Genesis 15:5 – but just so we do not miss the implication here – Paul spells it out for us.

**Galatians 3:29** And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's **seed**, and heirs according to the promise.

Abraham believed God!!! (Romans 4:20)

**Genesis 15:6** And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness.

We are told that God knew **for sure** that Abraham believed the Lord when he did not withhold his son Isaac – but we will not see that until Chapter 22.

What happened in the meantime to convince Abraham of God's faithfulness? **Why did Abraham believe God?**

Abraham asks for confirmation of God's promise:

**Genesis 15:8** *And he said, Lord GOD, **whereby shall I know** that I shall inherit it?*

Abraham is asking God for some **reassurance** – after all, Abraham knows that he is getting pretty old to have children.

To show Abraham that His promise is sure – God makes a **Sacrificial Covenant** with Abraham – **God swears** to Abraham – but God doesn't raise His right hand to heaven, or swear on a stack of bibles. Paul says that God **swears on "Himself."**

Jesus binds Himself to this oath: That makes it unchallengeable, immutable and unalterable. Jesus has bound Himself **not** to say, "I changed my mind" – the oath is certain.

What is the oath that Jesus Christ [God of the Old Testament] made to Abraham?

**Hebrews 6:13** *For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, **He swore by Himself,***

**Hebrews 6:14** *Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.*

When John the Baptist was born – the people of God were *still* looking for the fulfillment of this OATH.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied in the NT!

**Luke 1:72** To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his **Holy Covenant;**

**Luke 1:73** The **oath which he swore to our father Abraham.**

The people of John the Baptist's day did not consider this oath that God had made to Abraham to be fulfilled in either the birth of Isaac, the children of Israel, or the possession of the Promised Land.

Where does God swear?? – Today, almost everyone misses this point...

Most theologians point back to where Paul quotes Jesus as having sworn.

**Genesis 22:16** Where Jesus said: "By myself have I sworn [ but that is **past tense**], saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*: [Isaac]

**Genesis 22:17** That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which *is* upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

Jesus had said something very similar **already** back at Genesis 15:5 "If you are able to number the stars - So shall thy seed be.

Then God tells Abraham to get some animals for a **Covenant Sacrifice**:

**Genesis 15:9** *And the Lord said unto Abram, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a female goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.*

Please understand that this is not like most of the Old Testament sacrifices.

This was for a **Covenant Sacrifice** – it was for an oath by God Himself:

**Genesis 15:10** *And he [Abram] took unto him all these, and **divided** them down the middle, and laid each piece opposite the other: [Abraham does this during the daylight portion of Passover – it is okay to work on Passover Day.]*

This happened about 3 pm on Passover day.

**Genesis 15:11** And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

That is still daylight – when the buzzards are flying.

Jesus makes the **unilateral Sacrificial Covenant** and then becomes the victim.

Satan is gleeful when Jesus is dead.

**Genesis 15:12** *And when the sun was going down, a **deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.***

Abraham's **deep sleep** corresponds to, and symbolizes **Jesus death** and burial in the tomb as the First Day of Leavened Bread begins at sunset.

**Genesis 15:13** And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

**Genesis 15:14** *And also that nation [Egypt], whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.*

This happened on the Night to Be Much Observed / Remembered, just as it was prophesied on the Night to Be much Remembered.

**Exodus 12:35** *And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they required of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: [much physical wealth]*

We need to understand the meaning of the **smoking furnace** and the **burning lamp** of Genesis 15:17.

God, Himself, passes between the pieces of the Sacrificial Covenant – that is, **He makes** and enters into **the covenant** that only He can bring to pass.

Abraham did not pass between the pieces, but the Lord did: This was a *unilateral* agreement. God promised to do something.

Jesus said in effect – “I will give my life to bring this Covenant to fruition.”

**Genesis 15:17** And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a **smoking furnace**, and a **burning lamp** that passed **between** those pieces.

The **smoking furnace, and a burning lamp** - that was **Jesus Christ** – the God of the Old Testament passing between those pieces. Jesus is often represented by a column of fire, a fire from heaven, and The Shekinah Glory a visible manifestation of God's abiding presence (Exodus 24:16, 40:35, Numbers 9:17-18).

What Abraham saw was like a **blast furnace** – loud and bright – a **brilliant beam of light** that passed between those pieces! Jesus Christ made a very emphatic point of passing through the pieces – the halves – of the **Sacrificial Covenant**.

Compare Jesus' appearance in Revelation which is similar:

**Revelation 1:14** His [Jesus'] head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; [brilliant white]

**Revelation 1:15** And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. [molten metal]

When Abraham witnessed this phenomenal spectacle – he believed!!! He knew, without any doubt at all, that Jesus would keep His Promise and perform his word! This is why Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, – because he knew that Isaac would live again!

Jesus Christ was saying in effect, "I will give my life to bring this Sacrificial Covenant to fruition."

This event that Abraham witnessed is what Paul meant when he said "*because He could swear by no greater, **He swore by Himself**, Jesus is first [and only] party to the covenant.*

This sacrifice which Abraham prepared – these animals – corresponds to, and **symbolizes Jesus'** body, who is the sacrifice killed on Passover, and the One who makes the covenant:

This was a tremendous event in that Jesus, not only made the Sacrificial Covenant by passing between the pieces, He also **prophesied His own death**. Jesus was also the slain sacrifice that shed its blood. This is how Jesus would bring salvation to all men.

Jesus, in passing between the pieces of the sacrifice, prophesied His own death – in order to bring all men to salvation.

Spiritual children – spiritual seed – require a Savior who can give His life to pay for the sin of the world. {We will see this in John 1:29 later}

**Ephesians 5:2** *Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath **given Himself** for us [as] an **offering and a sacrifice** to God for a sweet-smelling savour.*

Jesus is the Lamb of God and the Covenant Sacrifice.

Notice the **specific day** the covenant is made:

"Made a covenant," [in the Hebrew is 'karath'- to cut] is actually, "**Cut a Covenant.**"

**Genesis 15:18** *In the **same day** the LORD made a covenant with Abram,*

We are told that this is an **oath** that God entered into with Abraham.

**Galatians 3:17** *And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed [ratified] before of God, **in Christ**, the law, which was **four hundred and thirty years** after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. [God's promise to Abraham is still in effect.]*

Paul makes it clear that the Sinai covenant with Moses and Israel that came 430 years *after* the **Sacrificial Covenant** of Genesis 15 that Abraham witnessed cannot annul God's oath.

The laws and sacrifices of the Levitical Priesthood that Moses delivered could be changed – but they have nothing to do with the **Sacrificial Covenant** that Jesus Christ unilaterally made with Abraham in Genesis 15.

This foreshadowed the fact that only Jesus could make an everlasting **Sacrificial Covenant** for us.

The **Covenant Sacrifice** originated when **Jesus swears** to Abraham – that is why Abraham had the faith to offer his only son Isaac – he **believed** Jesus.

The **Sacrificial Covenant** was the sign or miracle that Jesus would surely keep His oath to Abraham to provide him with children that would be in number as the stars in the sky and the sand of the seas.

This was an unilateral **Covenant Sacrifice** by Jesus – Abraham realized that even if he came humanly short in some area – Jesus was SURE to fulfill His oath to Abraham.

### **The Night to be Much Observed**

We saw today that this is the exact time that Abraham was in a deep trance on that night of the **Sacrificial Covenant** in Genesis 15.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins with the Night to be Much Observed.

The Night to be Much Observed / Remembered took place on the evening as Passover Day came to a close.

Exodus 12:42 It is **a night to be much observed unto the LORD** for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that **night** of the LORD **to be observed** of all the children of Israel in their generations.

It is the Night which much re-occurs – or as we might say – “It is a night with a meaning that transpires *often* in God’s Plan.” It is a night that figures prominently in God’s chronology of events.

This exact night marks the exact time that Israel ate the old corn as they came into the Promised Land.

**Joshua 5:10** And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.

**Joshua 5:11** And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the Passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the **selfsame day**.

The **selfsame day** as what? The **selfsame day** as Abraham’s vision and many other important dates.

The Night to be Much Observed is the exact time that Joseph of Arimathaea laid Jesus body to rest at the end of Passover Day:

**Mark 15:43** Joseph of Arimathaea, an honorable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.

**Mark 15:46** And he bought fine linen, and took Him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulcher.

The Children of Israel gained their independence from Egypt on The Night to be Much Observed as they came out of Egypt.

We, brethren, gained our victory over sin – it marks our point of salvation – our victory over bondage and over death as Jesus was laid in the tomb just as The Night to be Much Observed began.

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