

Our Covenant God – Part Four

Abraham's fourth encounter with the Lord

Abraham had seven personal encounters with God. The middle of these, number 4, is where God cut covenant with Abraham. Seven speaks of completion. Four is the center point. It is therefore the most important. It is the mountain peak, so to speak. Therefore, the fourth encounter that Abraham had with God is the most important of all.

Genesis 15:1 (NKJV) 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."

God never said "Abraham, I give you a shield." No, He said: "I AM your shield". You are protected, not because you HAVE a shield, but because you hold it close to your body. They had full body shields in those days which protected from head to toe. In effect, God was saying: "I am your shield. I will protect you and fight your battles for you. I will be your strength. You can hide in Me! If anyone attacks you, they are really attacking Me. Your battles are mine. Put Me on as your full armor. When you go into battle, I will fight for you."

When God said that He was Abraham's exceedingly great reward, He was giving Abraham Himself. In effect, God was saying: "Abraham, here I am. I offer you Me. I am your reward. All that I am, I give to you. I am holy. I give you My holiness. I am righteous. I give you my righteousness. I give you My life, pledging to lay it down on your behalf if you will accept this covenant and enter into it with me."

Genesis 15:2-6 (NKJV) But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" 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." 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." And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

This is the first time we see Abraham answering God back! Perhaps he did speak to God previously, in fact, he probably did because we know that he had built altars and worshipped God before. One would assume that worship of God would incorporate some speech. However, this is the first time that it is written that Abraham spoke to God. I think that this was intentional. I think that the author wanted us to take note of this because it shows us that Abraham's trust in God had grown tremendously and that their relationship was now going to a new level of intimacy.

As you examine verse 2 further, you will see that Abraham speaks and then seems to pause, as if he is waiting for God to answer his question. But God remained silent, which made Abraham speak again, expanding on his request. God's brief silence was not indifference. Instead, it seems that this was God's way of drawing Abraham out and encouraging him to speak his mind openly and honestly to the Lord.

Abraham had never fathered a child. He was a wealthy man and had so much that he wanted to share with his own son. We also know that Abraham seemed to be a very kind and fatherly man from examining his relationship with his nephew, Lot. Therefore, Abraham presented God with his strongest desire: to father a son.

God's response was to promise Abraham that he would indeed father a son and have countless descendants.

Our Covenant God – Part Four

Homework Question # 1: Why do you think that God showed Abraham the stars in the sky in verse 5?

Genesis 15:7-11 (NKJV) 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.” And he said, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

God then went on to repeat His promise that Abraham would have the land of Canaan. When Abraham asked for some type of reassurance or proof that this would be so, God then told him to bring specific animals and birds to him. All of these animals were ‘clean’ animals. Abraham immediately cut them and set them opposite each other as was customary in a blood covenant.

In part two of this study, we learnt that, in cutting a covenant, often the parties would use an animal's blood as a substitute for their own blood (especially if they were entering into a covenant with God (or a god) because no god has blood so they would need something or someone to bleed on God or their god's behalf). This is what God was setting up with Abraham here in Genesis 15. The animals that God instructed Abraham to bring to Him would supply the blood for the covenant ritual. This was fairly common practice and is also mentioned in Jeremiah 34:18. When two parties cut covenant in this way they would pass between the pieces of the dead animals, walking through the blood as it splashed up onto their feet and legs. In effect, both parties were saying that if either was unfaithful to the covenant then it would be their own blood that would end up splattered on the ground.

How do we know that Abraham knew about blood covenants? How can we be sure that this was not simply a custom that developed later on in history, or in a different culture to Abraham's? This is an excellent question for us to consider. The answer can be found in Genesis 14:13.

Genesis 14:13 (NKJV) Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they *were* **allies** with Abram.

The word here that is translated as ‘allies’ in the New King James Version and ‘confederate’ in the King James Version is the word ‘berith’ which means to cut covenant. Thus, we know that Abraham was familiar with cutting covenant because before God ever approached him with His covenant invitation, Abraham had cut covenant with his friends. God approached Abraham on ground that was familiar to Abraham. Abraham knew all about covenant!

And so Abraham hunted and killed the animals as God requested and brought them to the Lord. He halved them and protected them from the vultures. And we can deduce that this all took at least a day because in verse 5 the stars were visible in the sky and in verse 12 we see the sun going down.

Homework Question # 2: What was the significance of Abraham chasing the vultures away?

Our Covenant God – Part Four

Suddenly, the whole mood becomes dark, solemn and very serious... as God cuts covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 15:12-21 (NKJV) Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 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. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete." **And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.** On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Types and Shadows

Before we go further, we need to introduce the concept of 'types and shadows'. The Old Testament is full of 'types and shadows'. Things in the Old Testament are shadows of things that apply to our own lives today. This is something that is really cool and it is KEY in understanding Scripture.

Someone once explained it this way:

"The New is in the Old contained; the Old is in the New explained.
The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed;
The New is in the Old enfolded; the Old is in the New unfolded!"

An example of a 'type' would be Joshua, who led the Israelites into the Promised Land. He was a 'type' of Christ. Just as Joshua led them into the Promised Land, Jesus leads us into OUR promised land. In fact, Joshua and Jesus are even the same name!

The New Covenant that we have with God through Jesus today is hidden in the Abrahamic Covenant. In order to start to understand the covenant that WE have with God, we really do need to study both the principles and examples of covenants that we find in the Word of God.

And so now let us re-examine Genesis 15:17 very closely: It says "And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces."

The Covenant Walk – Someone else walked in Abraham's stead!

As we said before, the two parties making the covenant would have to both walk between the animals. They would actually walk in a set pattern, being a figure of eight which is the infinity symbol because it has no beginning and no ending. This was because a covenant was never meant to end. But something very different happened when God cut covenant with Abraham. Read verse 17. Abraham never walked between the animals!

Abraham was in a daze, in a semi-conscious state when he saw someone else walking where he was supposed to walk. Someone was saying "I am giving up my own rights to My own life. I'm beginning a

Our Covenant God – Part Four

new walk with my covenant partner unto death." Remember that the Covenant partner here is God. So someone is saying, "Not My will, God, but yours be done as my covenant partner"

It was such a brilliant glow that Abraham saw walking in his place that he could only describe the two parties as a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, meaning a bright light. What WAS it that Abraham saw?

Homework Question # 3: After considering these Scriptures, what was it that Abraham saw? Who were the two parties cutting covenant as they walked between the animal pieces?

Matthew 17:2 (NKJV) and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

Revelation 1:14-15 (NKJV) His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

John 8:12 (NKJV) Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

1 John 1:7 (NKJV) But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The two parties walking between the animal pieces were God the Father who appeared as the burning furnace that was smoking, and God the Son as the lamp (light).

How could Jesus be walking around in Abraham's day when He had not yet been born? Yes, it is true: He had not yet been born, but indeed he is an eternal, pre-existing being and, as God, He is not bound by time. In fact, Jesus appears quite a few times in the Old Testament and He is the focus of all thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

In John 8:56, Jesus said the following to the religious leaders of his day: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." " (NKJV)

Abraham thought of seeing Jesus' day, so it was in his future ... and yet, he saw it... because he saw Jesus walking in his place!! Our thinking is so limited by the confines of time and space - but God is not confined to either! We have to remember that!

And so, we see in this, that already in the Abrahamic Covenant, Jesus was standing in for us just like He stood in our place when he went to the Cross. Abraham saw Christ walking in his place. Christ, the eternal Son of God, in His pre-existing glory, cut covenant with God the Father and stood in for Abraham. And all of Abraham's unborn children were included in the covenant because they were in Abraham.

That is why the Bible talks about US being IN Christ because when Christ walked that walk you and I were IN Him! And so we, as believers in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, are included in the covenant that God made with Abraham!

The sacrifice was always symbolic of the flesh and blood of the one who made the walk. So this sacrifice pointed to Christ Himself who would, someday in the future, come as the 'Lamb of God' to take away the sins of the world. As God walked between those dead animals and their blood splashed up on His feet, He knew that if Abraham or his descendants ever broke the covenant (as He knew they would) that one

Our Covenant God – Part Four

day He would be the One lying in His own blood ... dead! He committed Himself to die to save His beloved Mankind.

Homework Question # 4: How does the fact that someone else walked between the animal carcasses in Abraham's place take away the fear of the death penalty from Abraham if he (or his children who were included in this covenant) was unfaithful to God?

Homework Question # 5: If this covenant was broken, who would die the death penalty for that broken covenant?
