



Week 17 – The Blood Covenant

Last week we introduced this idea of “How Does God Deal With Humans” and we said that it is through “Covenant.” What is a covenant?

The word covenant means a binding agreement between two parties.

The Hebrew word for covenant is Berith. The Greek word is Diatheke. It actually means to “cut covenant.”

By definition, it is an agreement to “cut a covenant by the shedding of blood and walking between pieces of flesh.”

So the two divisions in the Bible are about an Old(er) Blood Covenant and a New(er) Blood Covenant.

A blood covenant between two parties is the closest, the most enduring, the most solemn and the most sacred of all contracts. It absolutely cannot be broken. When you enter into blood covenant with someone, you promise to give them your life, your love, and your protection forever ... till death do you part.

Marriage is a blood covenant.

We don't honor marriage as a blood covenant but God says it is.

Malachi 2: 14 But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Proverbs 2: 17 who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God;

When the bride and groom feed each other the wedding cake, they are saying symbolically, "I'm coming into you and you into me. The two of us are becoming one." This symbolic union is made complete by the physical act of marriage when the groom and bride come together as husband and wife.

The blood covenant is consummated the first night of the marriage and bleeding happens.

You see now why God says pre and extra-marital physical intercourse is a sin.

The reason we wear the wedding ring on the third finger is because man believed that the third finger had a nerve leading to the heart. And since the heart is the central part of the body that keeps the blood circulating, it became the symbol of life.

We use the word "heart" to represent the total person. It stands for your whole being, your whole nature, your whole life. When you love someone with all your heart, you love them with all your being. When you give your heart to someone, you are giving them your total life. This is the essence and spirit of the blood covenant which God ordains in the Bible and that man has always recognized.

The Jews were and are not the only "makers of covenant."

In 1869, the New York Herald newspaper sent their overseas news correspondent, Henry Stanley, to find the Scottish missionary and explorer, Dr. David Livingstone. Dr. Livingstone had disappeared for six years and Stanley was sent to prove he was not dead. In 1871, Stanley found Livingstone.

During his expedition, Stanley came in contact with a powerful African tribe, but he was in no condition to fight them. When his interpreter suggested he make a covenant with the tribal chieftain, Stanley did so which required days of negotiations with the chief. After the terms of the covenant were reached, an exchange of gifts ensued. The chief wanted Stanley's goat and nothing less in exchange for his seven-foot spear. Stanley reluctantly yielded, but felt he got the lesser end of the deal. The goat had provided Stanley's much-needed milk for his health, so what good would a spear be to him? More than he realized.

Next, the tribal priest brought forth a cup of wine. The old chief selected one of his sons, a prince, and required Stanley to select an Englishman. Both became substitutes for the covenant-makers and representatives of the two parties. The priest made an incision in each man's wrist and let their blood drip into the wine. The cup was stirred and they each drank from the mixed blood and wine. Then the priest pronounced terrible curses over Stanley. Then Stanley's interpreter pronounced curses over the chieftain, his family and tribe; curses that would come upon anyone who broke the covenant. Finally, the two men rubbed their cut wrists together, along with gunpowder, to mingle their blood and become blood brothers. The gunpowder remained as a visible mark of their covenant.

This act not only bound Stanley and the chieftain together, it included the tribal warriors with the company of Englishmen. The blood brotherhood became permanent and a tree was planted as a memorial of the covenant. After the covenant ceremony, the chieftain declared to his people, "Come, buy and sell with Stanley, for he is our blood brother." From then on, Stanley

and his men no longer guarded their possessions. Nothing was touched. To steal from Stanley and his men was to break the covenant and steal from the chieftain himself—an act which brought the penalty of death.

Everywhere Stanley went in Africa, the spear proved to be more powerful than the goat. That copper-wound spear carried the old chieftain's authority and everybody bowed to him and submitted to him. Blood covenant was so sacred it was never broken by anyone. Neither Stanley or Livingstone ever witnessed anyone breaking it. No one could remain alive in Africa who broke a covenant. The curses would overtake them, carried out by the people bound to the covenant. Covenants were so revered that children to the third and fourth generations would keep it.¹

In that time, African tribes were not the only people who "cut the Covenant." Arabs, Syrians, and the Balkins in the southern peninsula of southeastern Europe, also practiced this ceremony. They did so for three reasons:¹

- 1) A weaker tribe entered into a covenant with a stronger tribe to keep from being destroyed.
- 2) A business partnership between two men to insure neither would take advantage of the other.
- 3) Two men would devote themselves to each other and their families because of their strong affection for each other as life-long friends.

Henry Stanley, on his explorations through Africa, cut covenant 50 times with various chieftains. And we can certainly understand why.

Anytime he would come across an unfriendly tribe, he would just hold up that right arm with those 50 scars and any would be attacker would take off running in the other direction.

Today, when we meet friends, we don't show scars, we shake hands.

THE HEBREW RITUAL

The Hebrews had a blood covenant ritual that was similar to the other nations around them.

All nations practiced blood covenant because man instinctively sought this relationship. So this practice was not unique to the Hebrews.

All ancient blood covenant rituals have certain common elements. We can organize these common elements into the following nine steps along with a Scripture reference for each step.

When two Hebrew males entered into a blood covenant, they went through a very specific ceremony.

STEP 1- TAKE OFF COAT OR ROBE (1 SAMUEL 18: 1 –4)

The first thing I do is take off my coat or robe and give it to you. Now to the Hebrew, in a blood covenant ritual, a person's robe represents the person. By taking off my robe and giving it to you, I'm symbolically saying, "I'm giving you all myself. My total being and my life, I pledge to you." And then you would do the same to me.

STEP 2- TAKE OFF BELT (1 SAMUEL 18: 1– 4)

The next thing I do is take off my belt and give it to you. Now I don't use my belt to hold up my pants, but to hold up my weapons. My belt holds my armor together; my dagger, my bow and arrow, my sword. So symbolically I'm giving you all my strength and pledging you all my support and protection. And as I give you my belt, I'm saying, "Here is my strength and all my ability to fight. If anybody attacks you, they are also attacking me. Your battles are my battles and mine are yours. I will fight with you. I will help defend you and protect you." And you do the same to me. This is similar to a compact nations might make today. But this one cannot be broken.

STEP 3- CUT THE COVENANT (Genesis 15: 1– 9; JEREMIAH 34: 18– 19)

The next step is to actually "cut the covenant" by taking an animal and splitting it right down the middle. In the Bible, an animal is only cut down the middle and split in two in a covenant ceremony.

After we split the animal, we lay each half to the side of us and stand in between the two bloody halves of flesh, with our backs to each other. Then we walk right through the bloody halves, making a figure eight, and come back to a stop facing each other.

In doing so we are saying two things.

First, we are saying that we are dying to ourselves , giving up the rights to our own life and beginning a new walk with our covenant partner unto death. You see, in this covenant, each half of the dead animal represents us.

And second, since the blood covenant is the most solemn pact, we each point down to the bloody animal split in two and say, “God do so to me and more if I ever try to break this covenant. Just split me right down the middle and feed me to the vultures because I tried to break the most sacred of all compacts.”

STEP 4- RAISE THE RIGHT ARM AND MIX BLOOD (Isaiah 62: 8)

Then we raise our right arms, cut our palms and bring them together. As we do, our blood intermingles. Then we swear allegiance to each other. As our blood intermingles, we believe our lives are intermingling and becoming one life. This is because our blood is our life and to intermingle blood is to intermingle life.

So we are putting off our old nature and putting on the nature of our blood covenant partner. We two are becoming one. Man has always believed that intermingling blood is intermingling life. This symbolically shows the two of us becoming one.

STEP 5- EXCHANGE NAMES (Genesis 17: 5,15; 32: 18)

Then as we stand there with our blood intermingling, we exchange names. I take your last name as part of my name, and you take my last name as part of your name.

STEP 6- MAKE A SCAR (Isaiah 49: 16)

The next step is to rub our blood together and make a scar as a permanent testimony to the covenant. The scar will bear witness to the covenant we have made. It will always be there to remind us of our covenant responsibilities to each other. It is the guarantee of our covenant.

If anyone tries to harm us, all we have to do is raise up that right arm and show our scar. By that we are saying, “There’s more to me than meets the eye. If you’re coming after me, you’re also going to have to fight my blood covenant partner. And you don’t know how big he is. So what are you going to do? Are you going to take your chances or back off?” If the would-be attacker has any sense, he’s going to back off. So the scar is our seal that testifies to the covenant.

There are many trappings of blood covenant in our modern society, we’ve just eliminated the blood.

STEP 7- GIVE COVENANT TERMS (Genesis 31: 52– 53; 21: 23; JOSHUA 9)

Then we stand before witnesses and give the terms of the covenant. I say, “All my assets are yours. All my money, all my property and all my possessions are yours. If you need any of them, you don’t even have to ask. Just come and get it.

What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine. And if I die, all my children are yours by adoption and you are responsible for my family.

But at the same time, you also get my liabilities. If I ever get in trouble financially, I don’t come ask you for money. I come to you and say, “Where’s our checkbook?” “We are in covenant. Everything I have is yours and yours is mine, both assets and liabilities. So we stand there and read off, before witnesses, our list of assets and liabilities.

STEP 8- EAT MEMORIAL MEAL (Genesis 26: 28– 30; 31: 44– 54)

Then we have a memorial meal to complete the covenant union. In place of the animal and blood , we have bread and wine.

In the Bible, wine is called the blood of the grapes (see Gen. 49: 11) and it represents our own lifeblood. The bread represents our flesh. We take a loaf of bread and break it in two and feed it to each other saying, “This is symbolic of my body and I’m now putting it in you.” Then we serve each other wine and say, “This is symbolic of my lifeblood which is now your blood.” And now, symbolically, I’m in you and you’re in me. We are now one together with a new nature.

STEP 9- PLANT A MEMORIAL (Genesis 21: 27– 33; 31: 44– 54)

We now leave a memorial to the covenant. We want to always remember it. We do this by planting a tree that we have sprinkled with the blood of the animal.

The blood-sprinkled tree, along with our scar, will always be a testimony to our covenant.

From now on, we are known as friends. In Bible times, one didn’t use the word friend loosely as we do today.

You became friends only after you had cut covenant.

And all our children are included in this covenant, even the unborn ones. They are in covenant because they are in us. Later, when they are born and come to an age of understanding about our covenant, they can choose to stay in it, or reject it.

IDENTIFYING THE COVENANT

Now, anytime you see these happenings or these words referenced in the Bible, either actually or symbolically, you know the parties are entering into a blood covenant.

You won't find all the details spelled out step by step as I have given them to you, because in Bible days everyone knew all the details and it wasn't necessary to record it all.²

Things to Mull

1. How much understanding did you have about covenants before this teaching?
2. How is the concept of covenant used in our modern world today? Does it have any application today?
3. Why is there so much symbolism used in this "ritual/ceremony?"
4. When looking at Christ's life and ministry where did He fulfill each step? What verses in the New Testament show each of the steps?
5. In step number 7, what are some of the terms of our New Covenant?
6. When we talked about the theology of Jesus we asked the question, "Why does Jesus still have the scars of the crucifixion?" What would be your answer now?
7. When you read 1 Kings 8:23, what does it say about God keeping His side of the covenant?
8. Now with this initial knowledge why is it so important that God deals with humans through covenant? Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

Bibliography

1. http://www.riversedgechurch.org/uploads/Blood_Covenant-A_Lost_Understanding.pdf
2. Booker, Richard (2008-04-28). The Miracle of the Scarlet Thread: Revealing the Power of the Blood of Jesus from Genesis to Revelation (pp. 34-58). Destiny Image, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

Material for additional study:

The Blood Covenant by H. Clay Trumbull