

In the Bible Study # 42 we learned about the image of blood in the Ancient Middle East. This study will expand on that information and relate it to Covenants, and Atonements, as they relate to the Blood of Jesus in his crucifixion and atonement for the sins of mankind.

A covenant was a way to form a new peaceful relationship between two parties. This was not just a Biblical way of making relationships but was relative standard among most ancient Middle Eastern peoples. The blood of the covenant signified that their very lives were devoted to it. In Genesis 15, when God makes a covenant with Abraham to give him the land, he tells him to sacrifice five animals and make a blood path.

*<sup>9</sup> So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." <sup>10</sup> Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.*

Later, God asks Abraham to take on the covenant of circumcision, where his own blood is shed, as is that of all his male descendants (Genesis 17:9-13).

*<sup>9</sup> Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.... My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.*

Later still, when God makes the covenant with Moses and the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, they are sprinkled with blood to seal the covenant (Ex. 24:8). In other ancient cultures, two men making a covenant would cut their arms and mingle the blood, saying by that act that they were now bound to each other by the covenant, as their lives were intertwined by their blood.

Blood used for Atonement purposes incorporates the idea that the sins of one person can be forgiven because of another person's (or animal's) sacrifice. It usually meant that the atoning person or animal would give up its life's blood for the other person.

In the Levitical laws, God explains that he will allow His people to atone for their sins through the blood of animals. It is a substitution of the

animal's blood for that of the guilty person, the animal's life for the person's life.

It would be like someone sentenced to death being freed by an innocent person taking his place and being killed instead of the guilty person.

Leviticus 17 explains that because the blood represents the life of the person or animal, that the sacrificial blood makes atonement for the life of the person: *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making atonement for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects atonement.* (Lev. 17:11)

Once again God is using a cultural language that they would understand and by allowing them to use animal blood for atonement, he is beginning to teach them that although sin demands punishment, he will provide a way for them to find forgiveness for their sins by means of a substitution. The blood of animals only temporally atoned for their sins, because it was pointing ahead to the ultimate substitutionary death of Messiah to cleanse them from sins.

Now we can see some of the logic behind Jesus' words at the Last Supper, when he brings new significance to the third cup of the Passover meal, the Cup of Redemption: *Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* (Matt. 26:27-28)

Here we see Jesus using the image of blood in two ways: he is explaining that the shedding of His blood on the cross is the substitution of His life for ours, granting us eternal redemption from our sins. He is also saying that His blood ratifies a new covenant (relationship) between God and mankind, whereby we can have a new relationship with God if we personally partake of Messiah's atonement.

The blood of Jesus is both the atonement for sin and the seal of a new covenant. Every time we take communion, we remind ourselves that we are forgiven, and of our new relationship with the loving God, only because of the covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus.

May we come to a full understanding of how Jesus has saved our life's blood (our very life) by substituting His in place of ours; and through His covenant with us provided an eternal relationship with God.