

“CUTTING” A COVENANT

“In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram” (Gen. 15:18)

The Hebrew word for “covenant” is “beriyth”. It is used in Gen. 6:18 to describe a “covenant” God made with Noah. The same word is used 7 times in Gen. 9 to describe the covenant God made to never destroy the earth again with a flood (Gen. 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17).

In Gen. 15:18, however, the word covenant is preceded by the Hebrew word “karath” which means “to cut”. This is the word translated as “made” in the KJV. When God “made” this covenant with Abram it was accompanied by “cutting”. This is the first of 77 times the Scriptures refer to “cutting a covenant” (two additional references are implied by the context). On this occasion Abram was commanded to take a 3 year old heifer, a 3 year old she goat, a 3 year old ram, a turtle dove and a young pigeon. All of these creatures except the birds were to be cut in half. Normally those making the covenant were to pass between the halves to ratify the covenant. The implication is that if either party defaulted they would be cut in pieces as were the animals. Jeremiah makes reference to this: **“The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between the pieces” (Jer. 35:18 NIV).**

When this covenant was “cut” with Abram, however, he was asleep. When the sun went down a deep sleep fell upon Abram and a horror of great darkness (Gen. 15:12). Then, when it was dark, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between those pieces (Gen. 15:17). Note! Abram did not pass through the pieces, the smoking furnace and burning lamp did. In other words, this covenant was made by God with no obligation for Abram to do anything.

This covenant in Gen. 15 was different from the covenant made at Sinai when **“all the people answered together, and said, all that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8)**. While people may forget their covenant, God won’t! Isaiah made reference to this: **“Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee” (Is. 49:15).**

With this background let us take a closer look at the covenant God cut with Abram:

- Abram’s seed would be a stranger in a land not theirs and would be afflicted there for 400 years (Gen. 15:13). At this time, as you know, Abram had no children.
- God promised to judge the nation that oppressed them and bring Abram’s seed out with great substance (Gen. 15:14).
- Abram would go to his death in peace and be buried in a good old age (Gen. 15:15).
- In the fourth generation his seed would return to the Promised Land for the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full (Gen. 15:16).

As always, the promises of God are so profound that they are beyond the ability of the finite mind to completely comprehend. Paul put it like this; **“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgment, and his ways past finding out” (Rom. 11:33)**. These words of Paul were written immediately after reminding his readers of the promises God made to Israel. In some mysterious way Israel has been afflicted with blindness until the fulness of the Gentiles comes in. While the scholars debate the meaning of this promise, the Scriptures teach emphatically that **“all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:26)**.

Cutting our own personal covenant is not totally detached from the covenant that God cut with Abram. The promise to Abram involved the “Seed” which was Jesus (Gal. 3:16). Even the Law which came 430 years later could not disannul this promise. Neither can we! When you truly believe, you can become the children of God, Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise!