

Digging Deeper

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Robert Rohlin's Lesson Notes - 3/31/02

The Initiation of the Covenant in Genesis 15

Key firsts in the Genesis 15 occurrence of "I am" statements.

- Jesus said John 8:56-58 -- *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw [it], and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*
- The significance of this is that Jesus is claiming to be the one who said "I am" to Abraham. The Jews recognized this claim and so tried to stone Jesus in the next verse.
 - Several phrases or words make their **first appearance** in Genesis 15:
 - The **"word of the Lord"** came to someone.
 - **"vision"** -- Abraham awake during vision -- not a dream.
 - **"shield"** -- There is a difference between God providing protection for someone and God BEING protection for someone.
 - God can protect a lost person from a calamity.
 - But God IS my protection both now and eternally. He is my shield.
 - **"reward"** -- Any difference between God & the good things He gives? Oh yes!!
 - Young man in love--may have letter, picture, lock of her hair, etc. All are precious to him--Are they any substitute for the girl he loves?
 - No!--God is not saying to Abraham, I will provide you with a reward--**I Myself will be your shield--your reward**--In other words, "I give Myself to you!"
 - **"Fear not"** -- This is an interesting contrast between Adam and Abraham
 - Reaction to God -- Adam feared when he heard the "voice of the Lord God" (Genesis 3:10). Abraham receives assurance and comfort from this "word of the Lord."
 - Fatherhood -- Adam is the father of all men. Abraham is the father of them that believe (Romans 4:11).
 - Protection -- Adam had a fig leaf; Abraham had a shield.
 - What they Received -- Adam received a curse; Abraham a reward
 - **"Believe", "imputed", and "righteousness"** are all used for the first time in Genesis 15:6 (except for the fact that righteousness is built into the name of already mentioned Melchizedek whose name means "King of Righteousness").
 - Why so many firsts? Because the vocabulary changes with the institution of a New Covenant.
 - God Imputes Righteousness to Abram because of his faith.
 - Adam's sin was imputed to all mankind. (Romans 3:23; 5:12).
 - Our sin was imputed upon Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Isaiah 53:5-6; Hebrews 2:9).
 - Christ's righteousness imputed upon the believing sinner (Philippians 3:9; James 2:21-23; Romans 4:16-25).
 - Righteousness means "right clothing". By contrast, all sinners are "naked" before God.
 - Genesis 3:10 -- The first thing Adam and Eve noticed was their nakedness. It had not been there before. They had a clothing of glory which they lost in sin.
 - See also Hebrews 4:13, Revelation 3:17.

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The Covenant of Blood

- Five (number of grace) clean sacrificial animals -- cattle, sheep, goat, pigeon, dove were each killed. One bird in each row with a half-portion of the other animals in each row.
- Abram had to drive off the birds of prey during this time.
 - Satan attempts to thwart the plans of God.
 - The believer must maintain alertness in order that the enemy does not succeed.
- Abram fell asleep -- but not a normal sleep. The horror of darkness came upon him. This is **a picture of death.**
- The covenant ("cutting") follows seven precise steps:
 - Kill sacrificial animals and divide in half (except for birds). Jesus is our sacrifice.
 - Exchange clothing--"I give you myself" to confirm transaction.
 - Exchange coats -- We are clothed in his righteousness. Jesus clothed himself with our humanity.
 - Exchange shoes -- We have our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.
 - Exchange belt w/ weapon. The circle has already been established as the symbol of God's covenant (the rainbow is a circle if viewed from above--like from an airplane).
 - God says "I give you myself" to Abram when He says "I AM your shield; I AM your reward."
 - Exchange vows -- Parties take solemn vow on holy ground, "May the Lord do so to me and more also. . ." (Ruth 1 is example.)
 - Exchange property -- Make resources available to one another.
 - Exchange names. (Will happen in Genesis 17 when the covenant ceremony is completed.)
 - God becomes known as the God of Abraham.
 - Abram (exalted father) become Abraham (father of a multitude). (Takes the "ah" from Yahweh.)
 - God strikes a great blow for women when he also changes Sarai's (contentious) name to Sarah (princess of the Lord).
 - Agree on a memorial. Our memorial is at Calvary.
 - Observe meal together
- But God provides a substitute for Abram during the making of the covenant. God the Father makes the covenant with God the Son -- that way we know neither party to the covenant can fail (like a marriage by proxy). Remember Abram is asleep and therefore would not be actually making the covenant; he just becomes its beneficiary. But the covenant made here is eternal in nature.
 - Smoking furnace (God the Father) -- Exodus 19:18
 - Burning Lamp (God the Son)-- The Light of the World (John 1:7-9; 8:12)
- God Prophesies the Following (all of which comes to pass):
 - Abraham's descendants would be strangers in a foreign land -- Genesis 46:2-4.
 - His descendants would be servants in that land Exodus 1:7-14.
 - Their servitude would last approximately 400 years -- Exodus 12:40.
 - God would later judge the nation that enslaved Israel -- Exodus chapters 7-12.
 - Abram would be spared all of this -- Genesis 25:7,8.
 - After four long generations, Israel would return to the land of Canaan. The four generations were: Levi (Exodus 6:16-20), Kohath (6:18-29), Amram (6:20) and Moses.
- Abraham Receives the Promise He never Sees Fulfilled -- Hebrews 11:39--"All these. . . did not receive the promise." The promise was the Messiah Himself!

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What Does All of This Have to Do with the Wedding Ceremony?

Genesis 15 Gives a Beautiful Picture of the Marriage Covenant.

- Marriage is a covenant. [Malachi 2:14 -- "*She is thy companion and the wife of thy covenant.*"]
 - A covenant is based on trust between parties. A contract is based on distrust.
 - A covenant is based on unlimited responsibility. A contract is based on limited liability.
 - A covenant cannot be broken if new circumstances occur. A contract can be voided by mutual consent.

Significance of Wedding Ceremony Customs

Note: Much of the following material is borrowed heavily from "The Wedding Covenant" -- a publication of the [Institute in Basic Life Principles](#).

- **Why do ushers seat the family and friends of the bride and groom on opposite sides of the auditorium? (Genesis 15:10, 17-18).**
 - In the Old Testament, a blood covenant (which David and Jonathan, Abram and God, and typical marriages entered into) began with the sacrificing of animals.
 - These animals were split exactly in half and placed on the ground with a pathway between the halves.
 - Then the two parties of the covenant came from the two ends of the pathway meeting in the middle. This ground was then considered holy ground.
 - There the participants cut the palms of their right hands and clasped their hands together. They then exchanged a vow pledging all of their possessions and privileges to the other.
 - After this, the outer coat and belt were exchanged. Also each participant took some part of the name of the other for their own. If Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones entered into a covenant, Mr. Smith came to be known as Mr. Jones-Smith. Mr. Jones became Mr. Smith-Jones. (This is the reason for many of the hyphenated names in the Bible. They were people that had entered into a blood covenant.)
 - The people are separated at a wedding to demonstrate the sacrifices that many of them have made for the couple in order to bring that couple to the maturity necessary for marriage.
 - Also, our wedding ceremony is based upon the blood covenant ceremony. That is why people sit on a certain side of the auditorium.
- **What is the significance of a white runner in the aisle?**
 - A symbol of walking on holy ground. The ground upon which a covenant is established is holy ground.
 - Marriage is not just a promise to one another but a solemn vow, oath, and covenant with Almighty God. He requires that we reverence Him in what we do.
 - (This is why all music at a wedding should be distinctly Christian music -- because it is holy ground.)
 - God joins the couple together (Matthew 19:6). See also Exodus 3:5.
- **Why are the parents given special seating?** (Proverbs 23:22) The final responsibility of parents is to determine with the children God's will concerning the one whom they are to marry.
- **Why does the groom enter the auditorium first?** [Note that in I Thessalonians 4:14-17 that Christ comes for his bride and calls her up to Himself.] Christ came to establish the covenant. God starts the covenant.

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- **Why does the father walk down the aisle with the bride?**
 - Endorsement of her choice. He is saying to the bride by that action, "I am endorsing this young man as God's very best choice of a husband for you, and I am now bringing you to him."
 - Presenting a pure bride. He is saying to the young man, "I am presenting to you a daughter whom I have earnestly endeavored to train up as a pure bride." In Scripture the father is responsible for this role. (See II Corinthians 11:2.)
- **What is the real significance of the white wedding dress?**
 - It is representative of the wife's purity of heart and life for which the husband is responsible (Ephesians 5:25-28).
 - Also, Christ's righteousness is given to us (notice the clothing worn by Christ's bride in Revelation 19:8 -- he bought the wedding garment for her).
- **Why does the preacher ask, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"** The answer to this question ("Her mother and I") indicates the blessing of the parents upon the marriage and the transfer of parental responsibility to the husband for the care of the bride.
- **Why does the couple hold right hands?**
 - It is in the nature of the covenant. In the blood covenant, the participants grasped each other's bleeding right hands, mingling their blood and exchanged an oath committing all their strength and resources to the other person.
 - Thus, it symbolizes the giving of one's strength, resources, and purpose to another. It is also representative of the "cleaving" relationship which takes place.
- **Why does the groom say his vows first?** He is to be the leader and initiator of the covenant. (This is because marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church and Christ initiated His grace toward us by coming to the cross. We didn't think of that, He did.) The groom must be committed to God's purpose for biblical marriage.
- **What does the wedding ring really mean?** It does not symbolize "eternal love" as some claim. Instead it represents:
 - Authority -- A ring was used to seal official documents by pressing the ring in wax. Thus to wear a ring means that one is under the authority of God in his/her marriage. A woman is to be under the authority of their husband but a man is to be under the authority of God leading his family to a greater knowledge of the Lord.
 - Resources -- All material wealth, intellectual knowledge, talents and abilities, physical and emotional resources are given to the other in marriage. This is symbolized by the exchange of rings.
 - Covenant
 - The most important thing about the ring is that it is a symbol of a covenant relationship. In a blood covenant, belts (which are circular when worn) were exchanged to symbolize the giving of one's assets to another.
 - A rainbow (symbol of God's covenant to man -- Genesis 9:13) viewed from sky is a circle. In other words, God saw the symbol of His covenant as a circle even though we see only a half-circle when we view a rainbow.
 - The wedding ring reminds us then that God is super-intending and supervising the execution of our covenant. He is vitally interested in our marriages because when we got married we entered into a covenant not only with our spouse but with God.

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- **Why does the bride wear a veil?**
 - It shows her modesty (as should her wedding dress), respect for the man and for God, and her respect for the sacredness and sanctity of the covenant.
 - Also, you will remember that the veil in the temple was rent (torn) when Christ died. This was to show us that Christians have free access to God. Since marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the believer, the removing of the veil after being pronounced husband and wife represents the fact that a sinner who comes to Christ no longer is separated from God.
 - (It also indicates the husband and wife now have full access to one another which they should not have had prior to marriage.)
- **Why does the pastor pronounce the couple "husband and wife?"**
 - The establishes the exact beginning of the covenant. It is at that moment that the two people are married in the eyes of God. From that point onward the covenant is to be honored and cannot be broken in the eyes of God.
- **Why is the couple introduced to the congregation?**
 - It is to indicate the name change of the covenant. In the blood covenant, names were exchanged.
 - Judy Thornton became Judy Rohlin.
 - I became known as Judy's husband.
 - In Genesis 16 (after the establishing of the covenant in Genesis 15), Abram becomes **Abraham**, the "father of multitudes." The two additional letters in his name come from God's name -- Yahweh. {Note: Hebrew has no vowels -- only consonants. But these letters best reflect the sound that Jews put with YHWH.}
 - God is often referred to as "The God of Abraham," after this time (also, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and later "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" -- because the covenant extended to them.
- **Why does the couple sign the wedding papers?** Some weddings will end with the couple signing the wedding papers in view of the congregation. This establishes a public record of the covenant. In Genesis 31:43-55, Jacob and Laban left a pile of stones as a record of their covenant.
- **Why do the guests sign a guest book?** They are attesting to the fact that they have witnessed the covenant and pledge their support to helping the couple continue in that covenant.
- **Why is there a receiving line after the wedding?**
 - In Ruth 4:11-15, there is mention of a receiving line after the wedding of Ruth and Boaz. People imparted blessings, encouragement, and Scripture to the newly married couple.
 - A good idea would be for people to give notes of encouragement to the couple when going through the line.
- **Why do we issue a separate invitation for the reception?**
 - The preacher invites everyone to come to the reception and/or the wedding invitation will include an invitation to the reception in it. This is to invite people to partake of the blessings of the covenant relationship.
 - It represents the duty of Christians to invite others to salvation.
- **Why do we serve food at the wedding reception?**
 - One Hebrew word for covenant means "to feed." Also, the best method of fellowship is a meal.
 - Another reason is that Revelation 19:6-10 speaks of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb which believers will attend in heaven.
- **Why do the groom and bride feed each other cake?** This says, "I give you all I am. I am now becoming a part of you and you are becoming a part of me." It shows the truth of being one flesh.
- **Why do we throw rice as the couple is leaving?** Originally, seed was used instead of rice. This was to remind the couple that they were leaving to begin a life as a family and would raise a Godly seed to the Lord. We must never forget that procreation (or reproduction) is one of the basic commands of God for marriage.



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Marriage Still Takes Three

*I once thought marriage took
Just two to make a go
But now I am convinced
It takes the Lord also.*

*And not one marriage fails
Where Christ is asked to enter
As lovers come together
With Jesus at the center.*

*But marriage seldom thrives
And homes are incomplete
Till he is welcomed there
To help avert defeat.*

*In homes where God is first
It is obvious to see
Those unions really work
For marriage still takes three.*

(Perry Tanksley)