

## What Changed at the Cross

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Ever since Jesus died and was resurrected, believers have discussed the question, "What was nailed to the cross?" The simplicity of this question belies the enormity of this subject.

This question profoundly concerns Christians because the way they answer it influences their Christian walk. Therefore, this subject deserves prayerful study and investigation. While the question of what was nailed to the cross has a simple answer, the process of arriving at this right answer is complicated.

Even the disciples themselves struggled with this question, its answer and the consequences resulting from the answer. (See Acts 15, Galatians 2 and 2 Corinthians 11.) I am convinced that God did not reveal an answer to this question until later, when He gave a number of revelations to the apostle Paul. (2 Corinthians 12)

If the truth concerning this topic had been revealed sooner, I believe the disciples would not have been able to bear it. (John 16:12) No matter how you answer the question, it continues to produce a host of other questions. Here are a few: Did God change or lessen the requirements for salvation after the cross?

Is it easier to be saved *now* than it was *before* the cross? Did God abandon the nation of Israel after the cross or are they still God's chosen people? Are Jews still obligated to observe the "old covenant" today? If the Jews are God's chosen people, should Christians become Jews? What does God require of Christians? Does God require the same things of all people after the cross?

Sooner or later, every Bible student has to address the question, "What was nailed to the cross?" because God's character and integrity is closely united by covenant law to the ancient nation of Israel. Most Christians agree that the cross marks the spot where God's commitment to humankind was confirmed. However, the question of what was nailed to the cross remains one of those fundamental questions that all Christians *will answer*.

Notice, I said, "will answer." I assert this statement because all religious belief systems require a defining set of rules established by divine authority. (This is true for Christians, Hindus, Jews, Moslems, etc.) Today, for this reason, all Christian churches have an official position on this question.

Most Christians regard the Old Testament as one authority and the New Testament as another. Within this context, they generally maintain that the Old Testament was made void at the cross (with the exception the covenant God gave to Noah that He would not destroy the Earth with a flood again), and because of this, they maintain that we are now under the authority of the New Testament.

Consequently, they claim that Christians are limited to the laws found only in the New Testament.

A minority of Christians disagree with the Old versus New Testament approach. They believe that some laws in the Old Testament were "fulfilled" at the cross and the rest of the laws God gave during Old Testament times are still binding upon humankind. Understand that considerable diversity exists among these Christians.

On the conservative end of the spectrum, some people insist that just about everything in the Old Testament is still binding upon man except for animal sacrifices. Other people pick and choose, claiming that all the ceremonial and civil laws given to ancient Israel were nailed to the cross.

However, they believe the laws regarding clean and unclean foods, tithing, the observance of feast days and the Ten Commandments are still binding upon man. Usually, the people who insist that the Ten Commandments are binding after the cross also advocate the observance of the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as God's holy day.

## **A Question with Serious Ramifications**

To appreciate the seriousness of the question of what was nailed to the cross, consider this scenario as it unfolds in Christ's day. Let us suppose that you are a devout, sincere, middle-aged Jewish man (like Nicodemus) who has listened closely to Jesus' teachings. Let us suppose that you are somewhat convinced that He could be the Messiah.

Let us suppose that you watched as Jesus was hung on the cross and were present when He ascended to Heaven. Finally, let us suppose that you attended the required feast of Pentecost and witnessed the manifestations of the Holy Spirit! With these suppositions in place, and as a potential believer in Jesus Christ, let us now consider the ramifications of the question within the context of your life in Jerusalem.

How hard would it be for you to accept the fact that animal sacrifices at the temple are no longer necessary – especially since you had personally offered many sacrificial lambs on behalf of your family and this practice had been followed ever since Adam and Eve had sinned?

How hard would it be for you to accept the fact that circumcision was no longer necessary – especially since you have believed all your life that this was *the* sign of an everlasting covenant God made with Abraham proving that your nation was God's chosen people? (Genesis 17:13)

How hard would it be for you to accept the fact that your religion was now obsolete and the temple services meaningless, even the exalted office of priest and high priest no longer warranted? (Hebrews 7) How hard would it be for you to face the livid hostility of your family and friends when you announce that you are no longer observing the Jewish customs because you are convinced that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, the Messiah?

Consequently, how hard would it be for you to have your business boycotted and burned because you were regarded a traitor? Finally, how hard would it be for you to attend a Christian worship service, sitting beside Gentile believers, now considered as equals in the Lord? (Acts 10:28)

From the onset of this study, understand that the correct answer (and there is *one*) to this profound question often produces unpleasant consequences. This is why discussion over this question sometimes becomes tense.

The truth is, many Christians today, like the early believers in Acts 15, have a religious tradition and vested interest that often prevent them from seeking and seeing the truth on this topic. Yes, the honest in heart will be guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth (John 16:13), but the process of getting there is usually painful.

Unfortunately, too many Christians quit before reaching the worthy goal of gaining the truth. As I said earlier, the answer to this question is simple, but the process of getting to the right answer is complicated. This dilemma does not stop there. Consider how distressing a transition "from error" to "truth" can be!

In December 1994, the Worldwide Church of God (founded by Herbert Armstrong) changed the official church position on the question of what was nailed to the cross and it destroyed the church. Then, the church leaders made a startling declaration to the members that the Old Testament laws were nailed to the cross.

Consequently, church leaders claimed, tithing, observing the seventh day, and other doctrines were no longer "required." Subsequently, the church disintegrated. (Ironically, I find the new position taken by the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God to be no better than their original position. It appears to me that the pendulum of religious doctrine simply swung from legalism to lawlessness.)

## **This was Nailed to the Cross**

I believe there is one correct answer to the question, "What was nailed to the cross?" The Bible teaches that the special covenant between God and the biological descendants of Abraham was nailed to the cross (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 24:1-8; Ephesians 2; Colossians 2:13-17). In other words, the death of Jesus brought an end to an *exclusive* covenant that existed between Himself and the ancient nation of Israel.

This covenant was based on the shedding of blood and it was temporary from the beginning. This is why it is called a "blood covenant" (Zechariah 9:11), "the old covenant" (2 Corinthians 3:14), "the first covenant" (Hebrews 9:1), or "the law of Moses" (Luke 2:22).

This covenant includes everything conveyed *through* Moses to the grandchildren of Abraham (and subsequent generations). The Mosaic covenant includes laws regarding food (clean and unclean, the use of yeast, etc.), tithing, animal sacrifices, purification ceremonies, the

observance of annual feast days, new moon celebrations, the observance of sabbatical years, circumcision, the priesthood of Aaron, and many civil laws.

## Unilateral Covenants

I realize that some readers will stumble over my conclusion. So, at this point I will attempt to demonstrate that God established a number of *unilateral* covenants in the Old Testament long before the Mosaic covenant existed and that these covenants were not done away with at the cross.

Many readers may not be familiar with the terms unilateral and bilateral covenants, so let me give a brief definition. A unilateral covenant is a *one-sided* covenant that God imposes on man. A unilateral covenant is nonnegotiable – it is *not* a mutual agreement between two parties.

Although a unilateral covenant implies the presence of an ongoing relationship, this one-sided perpetual covenant remains intact for as long as God deems necessary.

A bilateral covenant is quite different. A bilateral covenant is a *mutually agreed* upon covenant between two or more parties. This type of covenant has a set of rules or laws that are binding upon its participants because a relationship exists.

A bilateral covenant ends when,

- (a) either party is unfaithful to the agreement, or
- (b) when the object of the covenant is fulfilled.

For example, marriage is a bilateral covenant – two people *agree* to vows of moral fidelity and faithfulness "until death do us part." The exchange of vows shows mutual agreement and the marriage is ratified (publicly agreed upon) at the wedding service before witnesses.

Similarly, if a builder and a customer enter into an agreement to build a new house, the bilateral covenant between them ends when the house is built – because the covenant is fulfilled. Bilateral covenants require the presence of witnesses.

In ancient times, if third-party witnesses were not available when the covenant was made, stones were stacked into a large pile as a witness to the agreement. (See Genesis 31:44-48.)

Both types of covenants, unilateral and bilateral, have laws or rules within them. Both instruments are identified as covenants because both are based on a relationship. In unilateral covenants, obedience is a matter of choice. A person is not forced to obey God. However a person will face the consequences of rebellion.

In bilateral covenants, obedience is required or the covenant can be declared void by the other party. With these definitions in mind, let us consider the covenants that were put in place *before*

Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Mosaic Covenant:

1. God told Adam not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil for if he did, he would be put to death. (Genesis 2:17) According to divine wisdom and sovereign authority, this unilateral (one-sided) covenant was imposed upon Adam and Eve *before* sin began and it was nonnegotiable.

Adam's offspring would have been subject to this covenant if he had never sinned and had remained in the garden. When Adam and Eve chose to violate this covenant, they came under its condemnation. This condemnation remains to this day! (Romans 3:23; 5:18; 6:23)

A person needs to understand that the purpose of this covenant was not about the fruit of a particular tree, rather it was about faith and obedience. The fruit of the tree was the vehicle for testing Adam and Eve's faith and obedience.

2. When Adam and Eve sinned, God announced the second unilateral (one-sided) covenant given to man. God declared that, (a) He would put enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman, and (b) "He," who is Messiah, would someday crush the head of the serpent. (Genesis 3:14,15)

Although Genesis does not say so in the clearest of terms, I believe God offered a bilateral covenant (a mutual agreement) to fallen man. This covenant can be summed up with the following words: "If you will be *My* people and show faith in *Me* by obeying *Me*, I will be your Salvation." I believe God Himself conducted the first animal sacrifice to show Adam and Eve the price of sin.

With the flawless coat of that Edenic lamb, God mercifully clothed the shame of the guilty pair. In this setting we have a most beautiful illustration of God Himself providing the righteousness that is necessary for our salvation!

This *original* bilateral covenant was based on blood. This covenant routinely required the sacrifice of animals in a proscribed manner. The presence of this covenant is confirmed by Abel's appropriate offering and his subsequent death. (Hebrews 11:4; 12:24; 1 John 3:12) In other words, the offspring of Adam who desired God's salvation had to show faith in God by doing what was *required* by the original blood covenant, namely offering the fat portions of animal sacrifices. (Genesis 4:4)

Of course, you know that Cain rebelled against God's requirements and God refused to honor Cain's offering of fruit. This made Cain angry and he killed Abel who had demonstrated his faith in God. Evidently, all of the patriarchs, from Abel to Noah, presented blood offerings (animal sacrifices) according to the requirements of this bilateral covenant. (Genesis 8:20,21)

The Bible does not say much about the requirements of the original bilateral covenant that God offered man, but we know from the unilateral covenant that when Messiah would die, shed blood would no longer be a requirement. (Romans 5:17-19; Hebrews 11:4, 12:24)

In fact, concluding that God sent the flood in Noah's day would be accurate because the original bilateral covenant between Himself and man was violated beyond recovery. The flood was not only necessary to cauterize the growth of sin; it was legally justifiable before the intelligent beings of the universe on based on a violated covenant! (Genesis 6:5,6)

I should mention here that after the flood, the original bilateral covenant (a blood covenant) given to Adam and Eve continued until God dedicated His plans to the offspring of Abraham at Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 5:3) Review the centerfold chart on pages 12 and 13 and notice how God's unilateral covenants (one-sided) and His bilateral covenants (mutually agreed upon covenants) operate in harmony with each other.

Unfortunately, a great misunderstanding regarding these covenants has produced dispensationalism. (Dispensationalism is a doctrine that teaches salvation is offered to man in different ways at different times throughout history.) However, the truth is, man has *always* been saved by grace through faith, and until the Second Coming of Jesus, salvation remains possible only through the simultaneous operation of both unilateral and bilateral covenants. (Revelation 14:6; Hebrews 4:6; 11:1-40; Matthew 24:14)

Before we leave the time-period of Adam and Eve's fall, consider the possibility that God also gave man two additional unilateral covenants – one regarding marriage and the other regarding sexual behavior. The Bible is not clear how these covenants were delivered to the people.

Perhaps it was through Enoch, since we know he was a prophet. (Jude 1:14) I am sure others spoke for God as well. Although these two covenants are not specifically written in the Bible, the evidence of their existence before the Mosaic covenant can be validated, because of the written record of wickedness and rebellion (broken covenants).

God's view of immoral sexual behavior is clearly revealed in Genesis 19. He destroyed the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire for their sexual immorality (Jude 1:7). Did He do this without legal basis? No, God is always fair. In Genesis 20:3, God threatened to take King Abimelech's life for taking Sarah as his wife because she was already married to Abraham.

Remember, Abraham lied to the king saying that Sarah was his sister. Did God threaten Abimelech without legal basis? No, God is always fair. In other words, though the Bible does not explicitly express these covenants in words, we do have God's actions proving what is right and what is wrong.

The evidence of right and wrong presumes the presence of covenant law or no such thing as right or wrong can exist. (Romans 4:15)

**3.** Right after the flood, God announced His third unilateral covenant to Noah. This covenant concerns murder and man's accountability to God for each other. Notice that the covenant of capital punishment is a unilateral declaration imposed by God on man. (Genesis 9:5,6; expanded in Numbers 35:33). There is no wiggle room regarding this matter; God demands accountability for life and requires that murderers be put to death.

4. The fourth unilateral covenant explicitly mentioned in Genesis was also declared to Noah following the flood. God unilaterally promised that He would never destroy the world with another flood. (Genesis 9:9-17) Again, the "No Flood" covenant is imposed by divine authority. The interesting point about this timeless covenant is that it is binding on God, not man! God has faithfully honored this covenant for more than 4,000 years.

So far, we have examined four published covenants in Genesis that *predate* the Mosaic covenant by several hundred years. Further, the perpetual, unchanging nature of these covenants is also reaffirmed in the New Testament. Jesus referred to some of them, as did the apostles, because they were recognized as timeless covenants based on God's sovereign authority. (See Romans 2, Colossians 3:5,6 and Revelation 21:8 on sexual immorality; see Matthew 5:32 and Hebrews 13:4 on marriage, and Romans 13:1-10 on respect for civil authorities.)

## The Covenant Given to Abraham

Now we come to the fifth unilateral covenant recorded in Genesis that predates the Mosaic covenant. The New Testament is unmistakably clear that this covenant endures beyond the time of the cross. This covenant is the unilateral covenant that God gave to Abraham.

In Genesis 12 and 13, we find a compelling story of faith. God selected a man of faith named Abram and He told him to leave his home and family inheritance and go to the land (inheritance) that He would give him. Think about Abram's love for God. God asked him to give up his natural inheritance for something he could not see! Abraham left home, not even knowing where he was going! Every time I review the life of Abraham, I am impressed with his faith in God.

It does not surprise me that God declared a unilateral covenant to Abraham. Nor am I surprised that Abraham's humanness got the best of him at times. Incredibly, Abraham died without ever seeing what God promised him. Yet you can be sure of this, Abraham will live again and someday he will see everything that still awaits fulfillment!

The unilateral covenant God gave to Abraham declares that God will give Abraham all of the land he could see and that his descendants would be a numberless multitude. (Genesis 13:14-17)

The unilateral covenant God gave to Abraham is similar to the unilateral covenant He gave to Adam and Eve after they sinned. The covenant found in Genesis 3:14,15 was directed toward Adam and Eve and their offspring, and the same is true with the covenant given to Abraham. Adam was to be the "great-grand-father" of sinless beings, but he forfeited that honor because of sin.

So, God started over by honoring Abraham's faith and declared him to be the "great-grand-father" of all who live by faith. The unilateral covenant given to Abraham still awaits fulfillment. Notice this text: **"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed,**

**and heirs according to the promise [that still stands]." (Galatians 3:29**

– The text in brackets is implied.) This verse, written about 30 years after Jesus died on the cross, confirmed three things. First, God reckons all people who put their faith in Christ to be sons of Abraham (heirs). Second, the time and setting of this verse confirm that the covenant given to Abraham is still valid even *after* the cross! Third, this text indicates that you and I can be heirs of the covenant given to Abraham, although we are not biological descendants of Abraham! (Ephesians 2; Romans 2:28,29; 9:6,7)

In other words, the unilateral covenant given to Abraham still stands and the offspring of Abraham are those who live by faith! Actually, faith in God has been the core issue from the very beginning, but the biological nation of Israel stubbornly refused to comprehend this point. (Jeremiah 3:20; Hebrews 4:2)

Even today, many Christians are still confused regarding the significance of the biological offspring of Abraham. They do not seem to understand that the core issue from the beginning of time has been one of faith! (See John 8:39-44.) Will Abraham still receive what God promised him? Of course!

When God creates the new Heaven and Earth, He will fulfill the unilateral covenant. He will give the land to Abraham and his offspring, the redeemed of all ages (children of the promise) who lived by faith just as Abraham did. (Revelation 7:9)

## **The Ten Commandments**

The sixth unilateral covenant stated in the Bible *before* the Mosaic covenant was given is the Ten Commandments. I know my assertion that the Ten Commandments are not part of the Mosaic covenant will distress some readers, however, I ask for your patience as I leave this point "up in the air" with only a couple remarks at this time.

First, we know that God clearly defined in His word that the Ten Commandments are clearly a covenant. (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13) As with other unilateral covenants, God *imposed* the Ten Commandments upon humankind. The Ten Commandments were not an agreement; that is why they are correctly called commandments.

Although He spoke them to Israel, their scope is not limited to Israel, nor are they negotiable. Further, the Ten Commandments indicate that God Himself will enforce the necessary penalties for violation of this covenant at the proper time. (Exodus 20:5,7,20)

We will come back to my assertion that the Ten Commandments are unilateral, timeless and not part of the Mosaic covenant, but for now, I would like to ask you to consider a thought question: When you study the *New Testament*, does it appear that the laws expressed within its books are reiterations of perpetual covenants previously stated by God, or does it appear to you that Jesus and/or the apostles have created a host of new laws because the old laws were abolished?

If you maintain that the latter part of this question is true, then I must ask, "What new laws are declared in the New Testament that are not found in the Old Testament?" While you are reflecting on this thought question, consider the following:

## **Biological Offspring Receives First Chance**

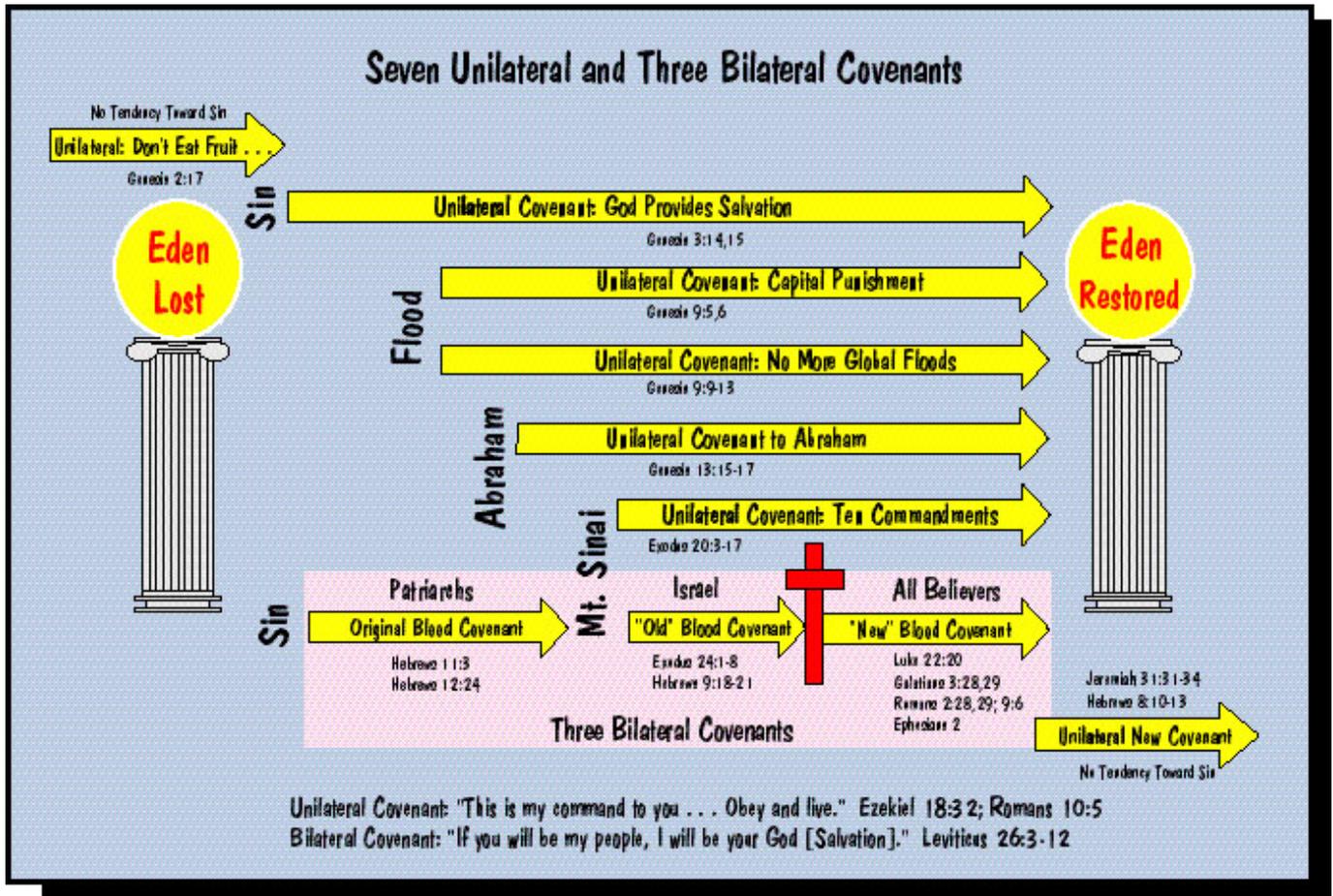
We have examined the unilateral covenant God gave to Abraham and we know that covenant still awaits fulfillment. (Genesis 13:15,16, Galatians 3:29) Most Christians are surprised to learn that the unilateral covenant given to Abraham *is not limited* to his biological offspring, although the New Testament clearly says so. In fact, the offspring of Abraham includes people from all ethnic groups – all people who live by faith.

A few years after declaring His unilateral covenant to Abraham, God presented a bilateral covenant to Abraham on behalf of his forthcoming descendants (Abraham was still childless at the time). (Genesis 15) Notice, there is a sharp distinction between what God *unilaterally* promised Abraham and what God *bilaterally* offered his descendants.

God intended to make Abraham's biological descendants a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. (Exodus 19:6) In other words, because of God's great love for Abraham, God intended to exalt Abraham's offspring as "His finest sons" on Earth. The sons of Abraham would stand between Himself and the nations of Earth as priests.

God intended that they would be men of faith, who would love Him with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves – *just as their father Abraham did!* God wanted Israel to serve as a shining light to all the Gentile nations. He wanted Israel to love the other nations as much as they loved their own nation.

He wanted Israel to evangelize the world with a testimony about God's love and gather in a great harvest of souls for His coming kingdom. (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47)



I am sure Abraham often wondered about his title, "father of many nations," since he was childless. One day, God came to Abraham to reveal more of His plans. God explained how Abraham's offspring would go into captivity for 400 years and then come back to the land that He wanted them to have.

After sharing this with Abraham, God initiated a bilateral covenant with Abraham's descendants (although they were not present) by passing through the animal parts that Abraham had sacrificed. (Genesis 15) Since no offspring was present at the time, God could only declare the covenant to Abraham. To assure Abraham that He would keep this covenant, God made the covenant a "blood covenant."

In other words, an escrow of blood made this covenant binding upon God since the people for whom this covenant would apply were not present. With this done, Abraham was satisfied. By requiring blood at this declaration, God signified that He Himself, the Great I AM, the Eternal God of the Universe, would keep His promise to Abraham until His own spilled blood released Him from this covenant.

This is why this specific covenant is sometimes called "a blood covenant." The blood of the five animals served as a surety or a deposit – the only way out of this covenant was for God to shed His own blood. (Read Genesis 15 and observe how these same five animals were used in the tabernacle services that would be instituted some 400 years later. These five creatures

encompass the future estate of Israel, from the rich to the poor, from the heifer to the dove.)

## Ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant

Although God entered into this bilateral "blood covenant" with Abraham, it was not ratified (publicly agreed upon) for more than 400 years. (Exodus 12:41; Hebrews 9:18-21) In fact, this covenant was not ratified until *after* God gave all of the details to Moses on Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 24:1-8) Remember, a bilateral covenant is two-sided.

Unlike a unilateral covenant, both parties must agree and both parties must be faithful to the terms and conditions set forth in a bilateral covenant. So, when the time came to ratify the bilateral covenant that God had made with Abraham, God directed Moses to come up the mountain and meet with Him.

Moses was required to write down all the terms and conditions of the bilateral covenant – the covenant that would mutually bind God and the seed of Abraham together. When Moses had completed this task, he went down the mountain and read the words of the bilateral covenant to all of the people. Twice the people stated their agreement to abide by the Mosaic covenant.

Notice how the story unfolds in the Bible:

**Exodus 24:1-8 "Then he [God] said to Moses, 'Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.' When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, '*Everything the Lord has said we will do.*' Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, '*We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.*' Moses then *took the blood, sprinkled it on the people* and said, '*This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.*' " (Exodus 24:1-8)**

The covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham was ratified with the sprinkling of blood. After hearing the terms and conditions of the covenant, the people voiced their agreement twice. Because third party witnesses were not present, Moses stacked twelve stones (one for each tribe) as a witness of this event to signify Israel's corporate agreement.

The shedding of blood made this a blood covenant. The significance of the blood is very important. Understand that a blood covenant in ancient times was a life or death issue for both parties. For God, the only way to revoke this covenant was through His own death. For ancient Israel, the only way out was their destruction as a nation. (Deuteronomy 28)

If one party proved to be unfaithful, then the faithful partner had the right to demand the blood (death) of the unfaithful party. Paul confirms that this covenant (sometimes called the old covenant or first covenant) was put into effect with blood. (See Hebrews 9:18-22.)

## A Fulfilled Covenant is a Finished Covenant

Over the centuries, Israel proved to be unfaithful, time and time again. (Jeremiah 11:10; Ezekiel 23) Ultimately, God abandoned Israel as a nation because of their persistent unfaithfulness and Jesus pronounced a final benediction upon Israel, "**Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.**" (Matthew 23:38, KJV)

What did He mean with these words? The Jews regarded the temple as the place where God dwelled. They believed that since God dwelt there, they were, (a) the apple of God's eye, and (b) safe from the threat of any nation. (Jeremiah 7:4) Yes, they had an opportunity to be the apple of God's eye, but unfortunately they rebelled.

It is true, they could have been safe from the threat of other nations, but again they rebelled. How sad, but true, that God Himself came and yet lived in their midst and they rejected Him. So, back to the initial question, what did Jesus mean when He said, "Your house is left unto you desolate?"

He meant that "never again" would His presence enter their Jewish temple. Their house of worship became insignificant . . . an empty shell of a structure. John says, "**He came unto His own and His own received Him not.**" (John 1:11, KJV) In A.D. 70, Jesus Himself sent the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and with this destruction, fulfilled the terms and conditions set forth in the blood covenant. He not only shed His blood on the cross to fulfill the covenant, He also demanded theirs for unfaithfulness. (See Deuteronomy 28:44,45 and Daniel 9:26,27)

When the Romans burned Jerusalem, historians confirm the accuracy of Jesus' prophetic words recorded in Matthew – no two stones of the temple were left standing together. (Matthew 24:2) God decreed that an end was to come to the temple that bore His Name and it would not be built again.

The blood of Jesus shed on Calvary *fulfilled* the blood covenant between God and the nation of Israel. A fulfilled covenant is a *finished* covenant. The animal offerings required under the blood covenant pointed forward to Jesus' death and when He died, shedding His blood, the covenant ended – the shadow was replaced with reality! (Colossians 2:17)

The blood covenant (the Mosaic covenant) was designed from the beginning to be a "schoolmaster" that explained the wonderful dimensions of the plan of salvation. With this knowledge and working illustration, Israel could share the good news of salvation with the whole world. (Galatians 3:24-26, KJV)

Incidentally, the blood covenant was not designed as something that belonged exclusively to Israel. Yes, they were the trustees of the covenant and the first in line to benefit from it.

However, God promised to bless *all nations* by allowing them to partake in the provisions of this covenant. (See Isaiah 2 and 56.)

This is why Abraham was called the father of *many nations!* (Genesis 17:4) The blood covenant with Israel was temporary from its inception and it had a "sunset" or fulfillment date from its first day! (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 4:4)

## Plan "A"

Many Christians fail to understand the following point. It was God's initial design that Israel, as a nation of priests, would reach full spiritual maturity "as the light of the nations" by the time Jesus was to die on the cross. (Isaiah 60) During the time span of the 70 weeks (completed in A.D. 33), God intended for the whole world to hear the gospel invitation. (Daniel 9:24)

Jesus was to begin reigning in Jerusalem as King of kings – ushering in the reign of Everlasting Righteousness. For lack of a better phrase, I call this "Plan A." If Israel had been faith "full," events would have proceeded as originally planned. God would have implemented the "new unilateral covenant," the covenant prophesied in Ezekiel 36:26,27 and Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Remember, both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand in A.D. 27. Even Daniel predicted that at the end of the 70 weeks, the Jews would bring in "**everlasting righteousness and seal up vision.**" (Daniel 9:24)

This was God's original plan. (Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:1,2) History would have been much different if Israel had cooperated with God. Consider how different history would have been if the generation that had left Egypt did not fail at Kadesh Barnea and had gone forward by faith!

## The Blood Covenant in the New Testament

The properties of a blood covenant shed light on many New Testament Bible texts. For example, Luke says, "**In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'**" (Luke 22:20) The spilled blood that Jesus shed on the cross brought an end to every element found in the Mosaic blood covenant.

When Jesus said to His disciples, "**This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you,**" He initiated a much better blood covenant than what had been offered to ancient Israel. (2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 7:22; 9:15)

A second blood covenant became necessary because the Kingdom of God could not be established – Israel had failed God for the last time as His trustees of salvation. Consequently, God opened the doors of opportunity to the Gentiles. As the Bible says, "**Whoever will,**" can choose to be his people.

Therefore, Jesus offered a second blood covenant to everyone who would believe in Him as the

Messiah. *The essential difference between the new blood covenant and the old is not the imposition of laws, but rather, the condition of the heart.* What I mean is that God entered into the first blood covenant with a nation of people who were carnal and rebellious.

Yes, the children of Israel were awed into submission at the display of His glory and power at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19; Galatians 4:24,25), but Bible history records how their hearts remained unconverted. This is precisely why God let them wander 40 years in the desert. (Hebrews 3:16)

However, the next blood covenant (or new covenant as it is sometimes called) is between God and those people who receive Jesus as their Savior. Both the old and new covenants are similar in one way; both are based on faith – faith meaning a complete surrender to the will of God. However, the second covenant is based on the shed blood of Jesus (a far superior blood than that of animals – Hebrews 8:6) and it is offered to everyone, including Jews, on the basis of spiritual rebirth and regeneration. (John 3:3; Romans 8:3,4; 11:19-23)

In other words, instead of entering into a blood covenant with a nation of people who really did not want to understand God or live according to His ways, God offered a new blood covenant to a self-selecting group of people who will choose to live by faith. So, anyone who wants salvation on God's terms, can have it!

## **Three Blood Covenants**

God has entered into three blood covenants with the human race. The original blood covenant began at Adam's fall and continued until the time of Mt. Sinai. The Mosaic covenant lasted from Mt. Sinai to the death of Jesus. The present blood covenant began at the cross and will continue until God seals the living. (Revelation 7:1-4).

God gave the blood covenant to ancient Israel because of His love for Abraham. (Deuteronomy 7:7,8) This gave them the potential to secure an advantageous position among the nations of the world, but they failed because of their lack of faith. (Romans 9:4,5; 11:21; Matthew 23:37-39)

So, God turned to the Gentiles as the new trustees of His salvation message. He threw open the doors and "whosoever will" becomes the new Israel. Spiritual Israel is composed of believers in Christ from every tribe, language and nation who live by faith in Christ, just as Abraham did. (Romans 2:28,29; 9:8; James 1:1; 2:1; Galatians 3:28; Revelation 7:9)

Jesus' death terminated the first blood covenant with ancient Israel and initiated the second blood covenant with all who would believe He is the Messiah. His death finished the first and started the second. In fact, this is why Jesus said He would not drink of the vine until He drinks it again in His Kingdom! (Mark 14:25)

In other words, we are still under a blood covenant that points back to Calvary and forward to its termination when Jesus will "toast" the redeemed with the new wine of Heaven!

Please note that all three blood covenants are temporary. At this time, we are under the temporary provisions of the third blood covenant. However, a time is coming when God is going to elevate the current blood covenant from a temporary arrangement to a permanent conclusion. He is going to seal the living for eternity by *imparting* His righteousness to them during the Great Tribulation. (Hebrews 8:10-13; Revelation 7:1-4; 10:7; 1 John 3:2)

In short, God will take away the sinful nature of all righteous people by sealing them during the Great Tribulation.

When He completes the sealing, the third blood covenant will be fulfilled and Hebrews 8:10-13 accomplished. **"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.** (See the centerfold on pages 12-13 for placement of the covenants discussed in this article.)

## Back to the Ten Commandments

Now that we have examined the three blood covenants in some depth, I will attempt to explain why I find the Ten Commandments to be unilateral, distinct and separate from the Mosaic covenant. First, God unilaterally *declared* the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai and they are appropriately called "the Testimony" or "the Covenant" of God. (See Exodus 32:15 and Deuteronomy 4:13.)

God Himself magnificently declared the Ten Commandments to Israel with accompanying demonstrations of powerful thunder, lightening and earthquakes – the very mountain itself trembled in the presence of the Almighty. I believe God used these physical manifestations so Israel would recognize the unique importance of this unilateral covenant and have a sense of its value.

God did not limit His presentation of the Ten Commandments to that tiny nation standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai on that day, nor did He give this unilateral covenant only for Israel's sake. No, God gave this unilateral covenant (the Ten Commandments) for the benefit of all humankind. The Ten Commandments reveal the wisdom of God.

He will bless the nation that exalts the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments do not offer salvation, nor does keeping them produce salvation. They were not agreed upon nor ratified with blood -- they were imposed upon man for the benefit of man. God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments on stone with His finger and gave them to Moses *before* giving him the Mosaic covenant.

We have already seen that the Mosaic covenant was temporary, based on blood. We know that

Israel agreed to participate in that covenant when it was presented by Moses and it was ratified with the blood of animals. (Exodus 24:1-8; Hebrews 9:18) The physical properties of these two covenants demonstrate certain differences between them.

God wrote the unilateral covenant (Ten Commandments) and the other bilateral covenant (the Mosaic blood covenant) was written by a man. One was spoken by the eternal God, the other by a mortal man. One was written in stone, the other on parchment.

One was kept in a special chest expressly designed for it (the *Ark of the Covenant*) and the other was kept in a side pocket on the outside of the Ark. (Exodus 31:18; 40:20,21; Deuteronomy 31:26)

One was unilaterally imposed, the other agreed upon. The Ten Commandments did not need to be ratified – they were declared or imposed by God. The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, was agreed on and certified with the shedding of blood.

Because these two covenants are so different, I have wondered at the logic used by so many Christians. Consider the logic: If the Mosaic covenant includes the Ten Commandments (as most Christians believe), and it was nailed to the cross, then the Ten Commandments were also abolished at Christ's death.

However, it seems, that 90 percent of the Ten Commandments were reinstated on the following day, Resurrection Sunday. As you may know, most Christians affirm the validity of nine commandments, but deny that the fourth commandment is still binding. Such logic remains a mystery to me, because Jesus Himself said nothing before or after His death or resurrection about reinstating nine of the Ten Commandments.

In fact, the disciples did not either! Yes, they referred to various commandments, but their books were always written from the perspective that the Ten Commandments were permanent and unchanged. Nowhere in scripture does it say that "such and such a commandment," which was formerly nailed to the cross, has been reinstated.

## Obligations Under the "Old" Covenant

I am often asked whether Christians are under any obligation stemming from the Mosaic covenant – including tithing, abstaining from unclean foods, the observance of feast days, etc. My answer is this: We are no longer *obligated* to keep the requirements of the first covenant unless, of course, the Holy Spirit convicts you to do so.

Paul makes it very clear in Hebrews 7 that with a change of the priesthood, there is also a change of law (the blood covenant). He says that since the descendants of Aaron cannot be high priests any longer, the Levitical laws are no longer valid.

To underscore the transition from the Mosaic covenant to the "believers covenant," Paul used the illustration of tithing (verses 5-10). He wrote, "**For when there is a change of the**

**priesthood, *there must also be a change of the law.* He [Jesus] of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests."** (Hebrews 7:12-14, emphasis mine)

The significance of Paul's statement is profound. How can tithe be demanded by the Levites when the law that gave them authority to do so has been abolished? How can the old blood covenant be intact if Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, is our High Priest?

Now, before you conclude that God wants us to keep all our money for personal use, you need to consider this next point. Although the first covenant and its commands have been made null and void, the divine wisdom is evident in the covenant that God set before His people at Mt. Sinai.

If Israel had *combined* the Mosaic covenant with faith, they would have received far more blessings than they could count! (Malachi 3:10,11) Remember, it is God's desire that we mature in faith and leading naturally selfish, self-centered people (the human race) to step out in faith is almost impossible!

In this light, the Ten Commandments represent a starting place for spiritual growth! They are simple and direct. The fourth commandment is a test commandment that helps to develop our faith. The devil has done all he can to place a certain contempt on the observance of the seventh day.

Ironically, the fourth commandment is the *only* commandment of the ten that requires us to do nothing! We just have to do it at the right time each week to honor God.

Look at the Mosaic covenant. Which would you rather have if you were in God's place: A hundred laws commanding religious behavior, or a people who follow the inward prompting of the Holy Spirit -- motivating us to demonstrate faith through obedience? Do not forget -- the standard of righteousness is not less today than yesterday.

God has not changed, but His approach is different. God has shown beyond all doubt through with Israel's failure that righteous laws do not make a people righteous. Instead, people become righteous when they follow the Spirit. (John 14:16,17; Hebrews 12:14) Under the current "believers covenant," God has not imposed the rules and obligations of the old covenant, but the imposition of faith and the struggle to do God's calling *remains the same*.

This suggests to me that God expects a high level of development from all who claim to live by faith.

## **Holy Spirit Conviction**

Corporately speaking, love is what God wants from humankind. The Ten Commandments define how the principle of love is to be expressed: The first four commandments reveal our

obligations to God and the last six commandments reveal our obligations to our neighbor. If we love God with all of our heart, mind and soul and our neighbor as ourselves, we fulfill the intent of the law! (Romans 13:10)

God wants all of us to grow up and develop as "sons of Abraham" until we reach the maturity of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13) While we are under the provision of the current "blood covenant," He is trying to teach us how to love Him, love one another and be useful and valuable in our service to others.

This process is called sanctification and it hurts. It hurts because every human being, without exception, is naturally selfish and self-seeking. We like what we have and we usually want more. Although we may be born-again, this natural, selfish rebellion still wars within each of us and presents a struggle every day. (Romans 7:20)

**But** (and this is an emphatic "but!"), understand this point. Unless the Holy Spirit convicts *you* on some matter of obedience, do not proceed to do it – for whatever is *not of faith* is sin anyway. (Romans 14:23)

If the Holy Spirit convicts you to tithe, then you should follow the Spirit's leading. You will be blessed. Not because of the money you gave, but for the faith you exercised. I know this article may cause great spiritual anxiety for some of my readers, but do not miss this profound point: God's eternal wisdom and limitless love is wonderfully contained within the Mosaic covenant that He made with ancient Israel.

God gave them many principles that are so incredibly brilliant that few human beings can really appreciate the wisdom behind them. Surely, by reviewing and studying them, we can learn more about the ways and blessings of God. So, as the Spirit personally leads you to a deeper understanding and application of God's principles in your life, you will be personally blessed.

God's wisdom is always beneficial to His creatures.

One note of caution regarding the freedom that God grants under the current "believers covenant." You need to know that no one has the liberty to impose his convictions upon you or judge you simply because you disagree. (The exception to this is immoral behavior and its destructive effect within the corporate body of Christ.)

In such situations, the body of Christ is required to pass judgment because of the negative impact on the mission and character of Jesus. See 1 Corinthians 5 and 6.) In matters of diet, dress, culture and lifestyle, some people may not be convicted as you are in these areas. (Romans 14:1-10) The Holy Spirit reads the heart and He tests each of us in different ways and at different times.

We all are on different rungs of the spiritual ladder. Some people are babes in the Lord; some may be in their tenth year of spiritual maturity. (Unfortunately, some are still babes, even in their tenth year!) However, remember this: In ancient times the rules of the Mosaic covenant were externally imposed and the results were a dismal failure.

When the apostles finally understood that the rules had been nailed to the cross, their joy knew no bounds. (Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6) At last, Paul concluded, everything is permissible, even if it is not beneficial. (1 Corinthians 6:12) Free of guilt and condemnation! Free to listen to God's Spirit! Free to grow up in Christ rather than being watched and criticized by the Pharisees.

Instead of responding to God out of fear of not being righteous enough, we are free to respond to God out of love and receive the righteousness of Christ.

It is imperative that we submit to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Failure to surrender can lead to the unpardonable sin. (Matthew 12:31)

Paul wrote, "**If we *deliberately keep on sinning* after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.**" (Hebrews 10:26,27, emphasis mine) In fact, failure to surrender will ultimately lead you into total rebellion against God! Do not forget, when the Holy Spirit speaks to you, He speaks with the authority of God. To refuse Him is to refuse God.

I hope this study has given you new insight into the topic of "What changed at the cross?" Ultimately, we may not understand all that this topic entails, but we know we are on the right track if we can honestly say, "**I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.**" (Psalm 40:8)

This is an attitude that pleases God. Why? Because the last unilateral covenant will be this: "**This is the covenant I will make with the [new] house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**" (Hebrews 8:10)