

Fallen Into the Hands of a Loving Father

Chapter One:

Throwing Your God a Goddie Biscuit?

I have warned my children, like every loving father would, not to go near the busy highway that passed the entrance of my drive. The warning is to protect them from danger and is an attempt to save their lives. With every command there will be one child who determines that he knows best and will test the father's wisdom. My test came in the form of a three year old blonde haired boy who informed me one day, "Daddy, I went across the road and I didn't get killed." This was no comfort to me to hear such a challenge to my instruction. I had to figure out additional ways to reinforce my directions. If he is not scared of the road, he must develop a proper fear of his father. So I continued over the next 14 years balancing between the need to show love and kindness, but giving additional impetus to follow my commands. Yes, over those years he met punishment, but also learned to play a very good game of rummy and gained abilities in various skills from archery to block laying.

No-one could imagine a father who when finding out that his child had crossed the road and had done so unharmed would then bring him into the yard and run over him with a car to punish him, hoping he lived long enough to repent. Truly this is preposterous and such a father would be jailed for murder if he tried such a technique. Why is it that we portray our Heavenly Father with such images? Jonathan Edwards once wrote an essay, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Is this the portrait of God that we desire to paint? To misrepresent the nature of God would profane His name. Considering such I would like to reform our false historical representation of God and show how our misunderstanding of the Old Testament law has given us a skewed image of the true nature of God.

The first misunderstanding of God's nature comes to us in the form of sacrifice. The polytheists portrayed their gods as angry ogres who sit up in heaven waiting for man to mess up. Once men traverse the uncrossable line their gods are justified in inflicting numerous punishments, withholding any pleasure and making life immensely difficult for the sinner. In order to reinstate one's status with an angry god the follower is required to perform some sort of sacrifice to pay for his transgression. So the follower would throw the offended god a bloody beast as a kind of goddie biscuit and supposedly this god would be appeased by such an action. When a volcano would erupt, the cause was determined to be that the volcano god was angry. He needed to consume a virgin and then would be satisfied. What kind of gods are these. They are all full of the same vengeful, vindictive, and violent natures as seen in fallen man. Are these not gods made in man's image.

At this point it should be pointed out that gods such as these are subservient to man. If they can be bribed by such trivial amenities as a sacrifice, then there is little difference between them and

a genie who is in the bottle to do the bidding of man. While no pagan god is openly portrayed like the infamous genie, the sentiment is the same. The pagan gods are ascribed to be terrible angry ogres awaiting appeasement. Unfortunately we have understood God's sacrifices in the same manner. If God can be appeased with a small gift, can He not be bribed with a greater gift? This makes God sound more as if He were created to serve us rather than we created for His special purposes. Are we not profaning God's name by giving Him human characteristics in the likeness of fallen man?

The pagan gods had many of the characteristics of sinful man. They were very angry, wanted revenge, and were always seeking a way to get ahead of their competing gods. They were spiteful, erotic, adulterous, unpredictable, vengeful, punitive, and could be bought off with the slightest payment. A peasant in pre-Christian Roman times not only had to please the god of the earth in order to be able to grow his food, he also needed to please the god of rain, the sun god and who knows how many others just to get his crops to grow. Hence the appeasement of angry gods was of primary importance to sustain his existence. This gives good reason for us not to be followers of such gods, and a multiplicity of reasons not to follow many gods.

Unfortunately I fear, Christianity has portrayed the One True God in the same manner as the pagan deities. While we speak of a God of love, we explain that a sacrifice was a "payment" for sin. Did we need to buy off God, give Him a bribe so He would not wipe us off the face of the earth? Was it necessary to appease our angry God?

To understand the sacrifices, not at all a part of our life today, we must consider the Hebrew language, and associations made within that language, and study how God worked within that language to paint a picture of the work He was doing on earth. First we need to study the Hebrew word *brit*, meaning covenant.

Some etymologist connect the word **בְּרִית** *brit* to the Hebrew word **בָּרָא** *bara*, meaning create. Create is a good translation of this word into English, yet this single English word does not contain the entire essence of the Hebrew word. In addition to create we find the concept of, "to cut down (like trees)," therefore meaning cut. Also there is a sense of "selection" so select or choose is a possible meaning. Considering these additional concepts it is no wonder that *bara* can be translated as, choose, create, creator, cut down, dispatch, do, make (fat). The particular word that I want to associate with the word *brit* (covenant) is the English word cut. We have all heard that God cut a covenant with Abraham. Covenants seemed to be innately associated with cutting. An animal had to be cut in order to establish a covenant. It was first bled, next bisected, then the parties of the covenant would walk between the pieces to signify their complete agreement to the terms.

In more modern times we have heard of the concept of blood brothers. While this came to us from American colonial days, it is distinctly more modern than that of ancient Israel, but of the same nature as forming a covenant. Blood of the parties entering into the agreement had to be shed and mixed in order to become a blood brother. This is quite similar to the biblical understanding even though the blood came from the parties involved rather than the individual's livestock. This practice made a tight compact between the individuals involved which could not be broken. It took

blood to enter into this kind of covenant just as it did in biblical times.

Cutting an animal, sprinkling the blood on the parties and walking between the pieces was the common procedure for making a covenant and can be found within the meaning of the Hebrew word for covenant *brit*. This procedure closely follows the covenant that God made with Abraham. In Genesis 15 God proclaims His covenant with Abraham. In verse 9, God tells Abraham to bring in an offering and denotes what that offering should be. In verse 10 Abraham cuts these animals in two. In verse 17 there is seen something like a burning lamp going between the pieces of flesh. This is God making covenant with Abraham. There is no specific mention of the sprinkling of blood, but after Abraham had killed and bisected the animal he surely would have been sprinkled with blood.

When Moses came down off Mount Sinai to meet with the elders of Israel, he first stated the covenant in their hearing and asked if they were willing to accept these terms.¹ They agreed to keep the covenant and Moses went back up the mountain to report the news to God. On his return from the mountain Moses told the people all the words which God had instructed him and they agreed to the terms of the covenant. A sacrifice had been prepared and Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on all the people.²

Moses had instituted the covenant containing the law of God in the same manner that God had instituted the covenant with Abraham. The covenant with Abraham contained promises that God made to Abraham, and as far as we can ascertain from Scripture, only God walked between the pieces showing that He will keep His part of the deal even if man does not. At that time, there was no stipulation put upon Abraham as something he should do to keep the covenant.³ So God was showing His promise to be faithful to fulfill all He proclaimed to Abraham. When God placed additional requirements⁴ and added many blessings to the covenant which had passed to Abraham's descendants, Moses again offered animals and used the blood as an initiation into the covenant. This

¹ NKJ **Exodus 19:7** So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. ⁸ Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

² NKJ **Exodus 24:6** And Moses took half the blood and put *it* in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." ⁸ And Moses took the blood, sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words."

³ Circumcision was not mentioned until Genesis 17:11. It only became necessary to mark the descendants that would inherit the covenant. Abraham had no descendants when God first made the covenant. Later information given in Genesis 26:5 indicates that Abraham was keeping the law prior to Moses passing it down at Sinai. It does not indicate as to it being a prerequisite to the covenant.

⁴ These additional requirements were not with individual Israelites. Sin on the personal level had already been revealed to the world from creation. The additional requirements dealt with the new national status that was being given to Israel. They had been a family in Egypt, but were developing into a nation. Therefore additional laws were required to explain how they should implement punishment concerning the breaking of God's laws. The additional laws were rules of court, the determination of proper witnesses, how to handle disputes and how to enforce judgments.

is the back drop to the sin offering.

Today when a person makes a contract with another there are stipulations put on both parties. It may be the designated price of work with method and timing of payment on one party and the designated work to be done and a time frame in which it must be completed on the other party. If one of the parties fails to keep any part of the contract, the other parties can ask for judgment, or renegotiate the contract even if it might come out to his favor. The blame falls on the one who broke the contract. If a contract is in default, the contract breaker has no means by which he can re-establish the contract more in his favor since at that time there is a judgment hanging over his head. The party who has kept his part of the contract can ask for damages. A covenant between two parties, with demands on each would act in a similar fashion to the above mentioned contract. Once a party has broken the covenant, he is at the mercy of the other party to get back into the covenant rather than receive the judgment provided by the covenant.

In the Mosaic Covenant, there were qualifications put upon the recipients. With these additional requirements came a way to reinstate a covenant after it had been broken. God showed originally that He intended to keep His part of the covenant with Abraham without regard to the infractions of the parties involved. He walked between the pieces, not Abraham. If an Israelite accidentally broke the covenant, God had provided a way for that Israelite to come back into covenant with Him without a renegotiation period. God would immediately reinstate him into the covenant. The guilty party only needed to make the covenant offering once again. This was done through the sin sacrifice. It was a way to reinstate the covenant. Since the Israelite was the one who broke the covenant, he was the one who would be required to bring the offering to reinstate the covenant. The sin sacrifice was not a payment for the evil deed. God had no need of a bloody animal. He doesn't eat flesh, nor does he like the destruction of life. God was merely making a way to reinstate a covenant that previously had no means to be reinstated. This is further proof that our Heavenly Father intended to keep the covenant with Abraham which included his seed even if that seed was not true to the conditions later put upon them.

Cutting an animal, sprinkling the blood on the parties and walking between the pieces were not the only practices associated with covenant. The eating of the covenant victim was a way to show that you were the party to their covenant. This practice is referenced in Exodus when God is forbidding idolatry. He cautions about making covenant with pagans for fear that the Israelite might eat with the pagan who has sacrificed unto his god.⁵ This would make him a party to the worship of the pagan god. So not only did the covenanters sacrifice an animal, spill its blood on the ground, sprinkle some of the blood on the parties involved as well as the document on which the agreement was written and walk between the two pieces, they may have prepared the animal and shared a covenant meal. An example eluding to this is seen when Abraham's servant goes back to Abraham's family to obtain a wife for Isaac, the servant first had to state the purpose of his mission prior to eating a meal with the parents. He wanted to proclaim the covenant before eating the covenant meal.

⁵ KJV **Exodus 34:15** Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and *one* call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice;

A New Testament passage that may also elude to the eating of a covenant meal comes to us in 1st Corinthians 5:11. In this passage it speaks of a brother (one who is in covenant with God) who breaks this covenant by sexual immorality, idolatry and other such reviled behavior. We are told we should not even eat with such a person.⁶ Contrast this passage with Galatians 2:12 where it seems to indicate that eating with idolaters is okay.⁷ The New Testament clearly states that we are not to knowingly eat food offered to idols,⁸ but this first passage is discussing an idolater who is a covenant brother who is breaking his covenant relationship with God, while the Galatians passage discusses a group of covenant brothers who are seeking those of the heathen who might come and join them in the correct practice of worshiping the one true God. There is still no indication that Paul is condoning the eating of meat sacrificed to pagan gods, but merely the taking care of one's necessities while dwelling with those in the nations.

Now to add this additional piece of information to the topic at hand let us once again review the components of a contract and a covenant and see how the eating of a covenant meal is portrayed in the sacrificial system. Once a contract is broken, there is no way for the party who broke it to merely put it back into effect. The other party who did not breach the contract could now renegotiate the entire contract. However God was intending to be true to His part of the covenant without regard to the bad actions of the people to whom the covenant had passed. All that was required was a renewal of the original covenant by offering a sin sacrifice. This sacrifice was given to the priest after the sinner had killed it. The priest carried out the rest of the procedure on behalf of the sinner. He burnt the holy portions then ate the meat of the sacrifice.⁹ The priest acting on behalf of the sinner had atoned for,¹⁰ or brought back into unity the parties of the covenant. The priest had reinstated the covenant, therefore he was entitled to the covenant meal.

⁶ NKJ **1 Corinthians 5:11** But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-- not even to eat with such a person.

⁷ NKJ **Galatians 2:12** for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

⁸ NKJ **Acts 15:29** that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

⁹ NKJ **Leviticus 6:24** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁵ "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'This is the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed, the sin offering shall be killed before the LORD. It is most holy. ²⁶ 'The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of meeting. ²⁷ 'Everyone who touches its flesh must be holy. And when its blood is sprinkled on any garment, you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled, in a holy place.

¹⁰ Atonement is an English word made up specifically for this process. It is the combination of the word "at" and "one." It means that the two parties had been separated since the sinner had broken the covenant, but the priest was joining them back together as one in the covenant. Hence, atonement is truly at-one-ment. This is the reinstating of the covenant.

This sacrifice was not an appeasement of an angry god. Instead it was a procedure made by a merciful God to enable the covenant breaker to re-establish his covenant relationship with a gracious and loving Heavenly Father. God was not looking for a way to send His children to hell, He was seeking a way to re-establish relationship even after His people had varied from the path. When one sees the sin sacrifice in this manner the message of the Apostolic Writings clearly aligns better with the Hebraic Scriptures. Since the Hebraic Scriptures are the basis to the Apostolic Writings, it is very important for them to establish one and the same message. When the sacrifices are portrayed as appeasing and angry god, it is reasonable to question whether the God of the New Testament is the same God as the Old Testament. Yet when the sin sacrifice is properly portrayed as the way made by a merciful God for a sinner to re-establish covenant, then the grace of the Old Testament is clear and the God of the Old and New Testaments is visibly one and the same God. He is not at all like the pagan gods who required payment in order to relieve their human like emotions and characteristics.

To understand the practices that put a *brit* (covenant) into effect enables one to recognize the intent behind the provision of a sin sacrifice. Once understanding that this sacrifice is a renewal of the covenant, it is clear that we have fallen into the hands of a merciful, loving Father. Furthermore we discover there are no goodie biscuits that we can throw God to draw Him closer to us. The best news is there isn't even a need to do so. This revelation may help us understand other acts of mercy that have been misunderstood in the past. In our next chapter we will discover how we have been set up to misunderstand the intent of God in other instances. As we continue through the pages of this book, the hands of our loving Father will become more and more inviting.

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