

The Blood Of An Eternal Covenant

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his, sight through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20f). Attention is focused on the phrase "with the blood of an eternal covenant" a reminder of our Savior's words "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Mt. 26:28). Mention of the "blood of the covenant" is found in Mark, Luke and 1 Corinthians with the latter two expressing it thusly: "the New Covenant in my blood" (Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). W.E. Vines, in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, pp. 250-251, defines "Covenant": "primarily signifies a disposition of property by will or otherwise. In its use in the Sept. it is the rendering of a Hebrew Word meaning a covenant or an agreement (from a verb signifying to cut or divide, in allusion to a sacrificial custom in covenant making, e.g. Gen. 15:10 'divided', Jer. 34:18, 19)". The blood of this eternal covenant is the blood of Christ.

What is this "eternal covenant" mentioned by the Hebrew writer; and this "new Covenant" of which Jesus spoke? Is it an entirely new covenant made by Jesus, or is it the covenant God made with Abraham? Jim Puterbaugh says "when Jesus said in Matthew 26:28 'for this is my blood of the covenant...' He did not mean He was making a new covenant but meant he was providing the death required by the old one. (my emphasis, jm)" (Tape: The Covenant, 2-6-95). According to Puterbaugh, when Abraham was instructed to take three animals and cut them in two through which a flaming tower of fire passed, "God can cut Israel in half if they violate the covenant just as the animals were cut in half when the covenant was made. This means that if a person violated the covenant; his life could be taken. God walked through the animals to take the oath." (IBID.) "Hebrews 9:13-15; Rom. 3:24-f, God did die in order to keep his covenant" (IBID.). Puterbaugh affirms that the blood of Christ was not offered to dedicate a uniquely, new covenant but was "the death required by the old one", the covenant God made with Abraham. (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22). Puterbaugh argues that God's act in passing through these animals (Gen. 15: 7-18) was the oath mentioned of Hebrews 6:13-19 "For when God made promise to Abraham, since he could swear by none greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men swear by the greater: and in

every dispute of theirs the oath is final for confirmation. Wherein God being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath". Puterbaugh argues that the covenant of Genesis 15 was broken and that the death of Jesus was the death that oath required. Puterbaugh argues in this way because he teaches there is just "one Eternal Covenant" God has made with man (as relating to salvation), the covenant He made with Abraham, and while there have been a number of "renewals" of that covenant such as at Sinai and Calvary, these were neither truly new nor different covenants, just "renewals" of His "Covenant" with Abraham.

Is Puterbaugh's theory correct? Or does the "Eternal Covenant" of Hebrew 13:20 have no allusion to Genesis 15 but rather to a new covenant Christ made and dedicated when He died on the cross? Answering these questions will be the design of the following study.

Which "Eternal" Covenant?

There is no denial that God identified a covenant he made with Abraham as an "eternal (everlasting) covenant". He said, "He that is born in thy house, and that is bought with thy money must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:13). Still, the fact the Lord made an everlasting Covenant with Abraham does not necessarily mean that Hebrews 13:20 is a reference to that covenant. God made an "eternal covenant" with Aaron concerning his priesthood as well as with David to set his fleshly heir continually upon his throne but Puterbaugh does not argue that the "eternal covenant" of Hebrews has reference to these (Lev. 24:8; 2 Sam. 23:5; 1 Kings 11:34-36). God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham of circumcision as well as a covenant that he would make of Abraham's seed a great nation and would give to them the land of Canaan (Gen. 17:13; 15:18). Is this the "eternal covenant" of Hebrews 13:20? Genesis 15:1-20 is the reference Puterbaugh gives to prove his assertion!

Examination of Proof Texts

Puterbaugh says Hebrews 6:13-18 speaks of "an oath that is unchangeable" (Covenant: God's Faithfulness and Mercy, Outline). There is great comfort in God's unchangeable oath. However, Puterbaugh's identifying Hebrews 6:13-18 with the events of Genesis 15 is incorrect. The quotation of Hebrew 6:13f is a quotation from Genesis 22:16-18, to which the reader is referred to examine and see for himself. No such language is found in Genesis 15:1-20, although there is mention that

Abraham's seed should be as numerous as the stars.

Significantly, examination of the Genesis 15 text shows no reference made there to the "seed promise". God promised Abraham He would multiply his seed and give them the land of Canaan. In response to this promise, Abraham asked, "O Lord Jehovah, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" and God then commanded Abraham to slay the animals through which a flaming torch passed (Gen. 15:7-10; 17-18). The Lord's "walking through the animals was his answer to Abraham's question, "How shall I know that I shall inherit it (i.e., the land)?" and was His assurance he would give Canaan to Abraham's seed. Yet it is this incident that Puterbaugh identifies as a picture of the death of Christ, that His blood was "providing the death required by the old one" (Tape: The Covenant, 2-6-95).

Puterbaugh cites eight passages which reflect "God's constant knowledge of His covenant with mankind" which "produces appropriate or important activity on the part of God for the benefit and blessing of His people". (Covenant: God's Faithfulness and Mercy, p. 2, outline) thus to be identified as the Abrahamic, "everlasting covenant", the eternal covenant for which Jesus' blood was shed, the "blood of an eternal covenant" (Mt. 26:28; Hb. 13:20). The reader is referred to Exodus 6:2-8; 32:13; Leviticus 26:42-45; Psalms 51:1 (with Deut. 7:9); Psalms 105:6-11; 106:44-46; Jeremiah 14:21; Ezekiel 16:59-63. The reader will observe that in all but one of these passages the "everlasting covenant" is God's promise to make Israel into a mighty nation and give them the land of Canaan, as can be discerned from the context of each (Ex. 6:4; 32:13; Lev. 26:42; Psa. 51:1 with Dt. 7:9; 22; Psalms 105: 11; Jer. 14:2; and Ezekiel 16:55) The single exception in which "land" is not specifically mentioned is Psalms 106:44-46, but that it has reference to physical Israel and her land promises is evident for the captors of Israel are said to have "pitied" Israel. Is the promise to make Israel into a mighty nation and give her the land of Canaan the covenant God made with "mankind"? Unless the reader is prepared to accept that God yet intends to multiply the seed of Abraham as the stars of heaven and to give them literal Canaan, he sees that the promise to multiply physical Israel and give them the land of Canaan and God's promise to bless all nations through the Seed of Abraham are not the same. Does brother Puterbaugh actually believe Christ shed his blood to guarantee those promises to physical Israel? Does he actually believe Israel is to be given Canaan again? Remember, Genesis 15:1-20 does not mention God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's seed. The promises of Genesis 15 are to physical Israel, to give them Canaan. The oath of Hebrews six has no

reference to the events of Genesis 15:1-20.

Old Testament References To a New, Future "Eternal Covenant"

The Old Testament does refer to the "eternal covenant" of Hebrews 13:20 and the "covenant" of Matthew 26:28. However, such references are to a covenant that was to be made, not to a covenant that had already been made.

Isaiah 55:1-4 speaks of a covenant that would be made and to which such persons would be given the "sure mercies of David". God said "And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Is. 55:4). Paul quotes this passage in Acts 13:32-34 and said that what God had promised had been performed. Notice that in Isaiah 55:4 Jehovah said "I will make an everlasting covenant," not "I have made an everlasting covenant".

Isaiah 61:1f is another reference to the "eternal covenant" of Hebrews 13:20. Jesus applies this passage to himself (Lk. 4:18-19). Notice that the prophet quotes God as saying "I will give them their recompense in truth and I will make an everlasting covenant with them". Again, the "everlasting covenant" is future, "I will make...". It was not a covenant that had already been made.

Ezekiel 37:24-27 is yet another passage which speaks of the "eternal covenant" of Hebrews 13:20. The passage tells of the joining together of two separate nations under one shepherd, one king, even David. And the prophet continues: "Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them" (Ezk. 37:26). With these two nations made into one, God said "I will make a covenant of peace with them...". Future action!

Jeremiah 31:31ff is yet another reference to the "eternal covenant" of Hebrews 13:20. It is quoted by the Hebrew writer in reference to the special work of Christ (Heb. 8:7-13). The prophet said. "Behold the days are coming, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah". Once more the language is future. The days come, that "I will make a new covenant".

Thus we see that while the Old Testament does mention an "eternal covenant" which is to be identified with the "Eternal Covenant" of Hebrews 13:20, those references pointed to something God would do or make, not something God had done or made.

Blood of An Eternal Covenant: A Specific, Exclusive reference to The New Covenant Given by Jesus Christ

Unhesitatingly, we affirm that "the blood of an eternal covenant" of Hebrews thirteen has not only specific but exclusive reference to the New Covenant Christ gave. Consider the following verses: "For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old." "And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you" "In like manner the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood" "Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus" (Heb. 8:8, 13; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Hb. 13:20).

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 of Hebrews, deals extensively with the word "covenant". A sharp contrast is made between the Mosaic (Sinaitic, Horeb) covenant and the New Covenant of Jesus. In the midst of this discussion the writer says: "For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it. For a testament is of force where there hath been death: for it doth never avail while he that made it liveth" (Hb. 9:16-17). There is some disagreement concerning the fact that the KJV, ASV, NKJV and others translate the word "DIATHEKE" as "testament" in these verses where ordinarily "DIATHEKE" is translated "covenant". Of this passage Puterbaugh says that the context is "not that of a 'testator' dying in order that his will might be executed" (Covenant: God's Faithfulness and Mercy, Outline), Yet, in their learned conclusion, the scholars who translated the scriptures disagree. To them the language of the passage demanded that the word be "testament" rather than "covenant". The fact that the Greek word 'DIATHEKE' is translated by two different English words poses no problem. Need the reader be reminded that a Greek word may carry different meanings, viz. "world", "soul"? Hebrews 9:16-17 says that a testament is of force after men are dead. It doth never avail while he that made it liveth. These verses say there was a New Testament which came into effect after the death of Christ, which Testament was not in force prior to His death.

Equally significant in proving that the blood of an eternal covenant has specific, exclusive reference to a New Covenant Christ made is Hebrew 9:18-28. "Wherefore even that first covenant hath not been dedicated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses

unto the people according to the law, he took the blood of the calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded to you-ward." (Hb. 9:18-20; Ex. 24:8)

"Wherefore", in verse 18, joins the thought of that verse with the statement of the previous verses "where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it". There is a reference to a covenant dedicated by the death (blood) of the one who made it. To establish that point, the writer reminds his readers that even the first covenant had been dedicated by blood. A contrast between a first and second covenant is seen in Hebrew 8:7;13; 9:15; 10:9f. The writer assure us that the second covenant was dedicated by blood, just as the first covenant had been dedicated by blood. And, he cites the words Moses spoke when he dedicated that first covenant, "This is the blood of the covenant," which words are identical to the words Jesus spoke when he prepared to dedicate the New (Mt. 26:28). The "blood of the covenant" in Exodus 24:8 had no reference to an earlier, broken covenant but to a "new" covenant God was then making with Israel. Even so, when Jesus said, "This is the New Covenant in my blood," He had no reference to an earlier, broken covenant (Abrahamic covenant) but to a New Covenant he was making with His people (Lk. 22:20). Moses, with the blood of bulls and goats, cleansed the copies of the heavenly things, but Christ provided his own blood to cleanse the heavenly things themselves (Hb. 9:23). So we see that just as the blood of an animal is different from the blood of Christ; even so the covenant dedicated by that animal blood was different from the covenant dedicated by the blood of Christ.

From Hebrew 9:18-28 to the book's conclusion there are three more references to the "blood of the covenant". Each passage deserves our attention.

Hebrew 10:26-29. The writer speaks of those who set at naught Moses's law (broke the covenant). All such died without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. Now, notice the contrast. "Of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?" What covenant did these disdain, the Mosaic Covenant? The Abrahamic Covenant? The first covenant had been dedicated with blood. The second (New) had been dedicated by blood. Those who despised Moses's law died without mercy; those who trod under foot

God's Son and count the blood of the covenant with which they were sanctified an unholy thing, deserve sorer punishment. Who is he who fails to see the contrast between the first and second covenants in these verses and who cannot see that the covenant some despise is neither the Mosaic Covenant nor again the Abrahamaic Covenant, but it is Jesus's New Testament which he dedicated with His blood? In verses 9, 10 of this chapter the writer shows that through God's will the first (covenant) was taken away that "he" might establish the second (covenant). It is by this will (covenant) that we are sanctified by the offering of the body (blood) of Christ.

Hebrews 12:18, 24. These verses mention a covenant and blood and again there is contrast between the first and second covenant. Hebrews 12:18-21 calls to mind the memorable days of Sinai when Moses received the Law. But the writer says, "Ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched..." Rather, we are come "unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel," (Hb. 12:22, 24). We come to Jesus (not Moses), the mediator of a new covenant then the writer adds: "and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel". There was the sprinkling of the blood Moses offered to dedicate the Covenant he was the mediator of. But we are not come unto Moses! No, we are come unto Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling... What and whose is this blood? Can any doubt that this was the blood of Christ? And if it is the blood of Christ, it is Christ's blood of a new covenant!

Hebrews 13:20 is the conclusion of another contrast. We are to go to Christ without the camp. He refers to animals of the first covenant who provided the blood for those sacrifices and we have Christ, who in order that he might sanctify the people through His blood, also suffered without the gate (Hb. 13:11-12). The contrast continues "We have not here an abiding City (Jerusalem: law, temple, Aaronic priesthood; blood of animals), but we seek after that which is to come" (Hb. 13:14).

Having concluded his contrast and exhortation, a blessing is now uttered: "Now the God of peace who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good thing to do his will...". The blood is the blood of Christ. The "eternal covenant" is the new covenant He gave and dedicated with his blood which was prophesied of by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and of which he spake when he said: "This cup is

the New Covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25).

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