

Sermon Summary
2nd in Lent
24th February 2013

- Genesis 15:1-18 contains material which is both familiar and puzzling
- The familiar is the promise to Abram
- The puzzling is the ritual which concludes the section.
- When we think about the ritual our thinking is also confused if we take the commonly held view that “we give something to get something back”.
- This, I think, worsened the conflict at the reformation over the Eucharist, but is more about Greek and pagan sacrifice than what the Hebrews thought.
- Abram does not sacrifice to get something from God. Verse 8 tells us that the ritual confirms, but does not cause, the promises to be enacted.
- Covenants or agreements were confirmed by rituals in which the parties passed between a split sacrificial victim to enact their trust, and what would happen if they broke trust: they would be like the split carcass.
- That is what happens here.
- There is a difference.
- Abram never passes between the animal parts: God never asks him to make a commitment!
- Only a smoking pot and flaming torch (v. 17) pass between the animal halves.
- The torch and pot (fire and smoke) stand for God.
- They represent the Shekinah (presence of God) which the Exodus story describes as the column of fire by night, and smoke by day which accompanied Israel in the wilderness.
- So, God confirms his part of the promise but asks nothing in return.
- The story which unfolds in the OT and NT continues this.
- For, in sending Jesus, God performs the part of the covenant which Abram and his heirs might be expected to do. God does our part of the covenant for us.
- We might liken Jesus' actions to a bank which, after years of defaults, pays off the mortgage for its customer and lets them live on in the house.
- It's far different from the world of repossessions!

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