In modern times, when someone takes an oath—whether in court or in a ceremony—they often place a hand on a religious book like the Bible or over their heart. This gesture symbolizes sincerity and a deep commitment to telling the truth or fulfilling a promise.

However, in the ancient Hebrew culture, things were done quite differently. One unique and deeply symbolic practice involved placing a hand under another person’s thigh when making a solemn oath. Though it may seem strange today, this act had profound theological and cultural meaning.

Why the Thigh?

In biblical language, the “thigh” symbolized strength, life, and generational continuity. It was close to the loins, associated with the procreative organs, and thus represented a person’s future lineage and covenant responsibilities. To place a hand under someone’s thigh was to acknowledge the seriousness of the commitment being made, under the witness of God and the weight of generational promises.

Theologians interpret this act as an acknowledgment of God’s covenant—especially the covenant of circumcision, which was given to Abraham as a sign of his descendants’ faithfulness

(Genesis 17:10-11). Since the sign of the covenant was marked on the male reproductive organ, the area near the thigh symbolically pointed to God’s promise and human responsibility to uphold it.

Example 1: Abraham and His Servant (Genesis 24:2–9, NIV)

When Abraham wanted to ensure that his son Isaac would marry a woman from his own people rather than from the surrounding pagan nations, he entrusted this sacred task to his most senior servant. To confirm the seriousness of this mission, he instructed the servant to place his hand under Abraham’s thigh and swear by the Lord.

> *“He said to the senior servant in his household… ‘Put your hand under my thigh. I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites… but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.’”*
> (Genesis 24:2–4, NIV)

This was not just a cultural gesture—it was a sacred oath before God. The servant agreed and placed his hand under Abraham's thigh, signifying obedience to both Abraham and to the Lord.

Example 2: Jacob and Joseph (Genesis 47:29–31, NIV)

A similar scene occurs later in Genesis, when Jacob (also known as Israel) is nearing death. He calls his son Joseph and asks him not to bury him in Egypt but in the burial place of his ancestors in Canaan. Again, Jacob requests that Joseph place his hand under his thigh while making the vow.

> *"When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, 'If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt... Bury me with my fathers.'"*
> (Genesis 47:29–30, NIV)

Joseph swore to honor his father's request, understanding the cultural and spiritual weight of such a promise.

The New Testament Teaching on Oaths

Under the New Covenant, Jesus redefines the way we approach truthfulness and oaths. Instead of swearing by objects or body parts, He calls His followers to live with such integrity that oaths become unnecessary.

> *“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all… All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*
> (Matthew 5:33–37, NIV)

Jesus emphasizes that true disciples should be trustworthy without needing dramatic gestures or vows. Our character should speak for itself, because we are no longer bound to external rituals to prove our honesty.

Conclusion

The act of placing a hand under the thigh in biblical times was a serious and sacred gesture, rooted in covenant theology and deep respect for divine promises. While we no longer practice this today, the principle remains: when we make a commitment—especially before God—we should treat it with the utmost seriousness.

As followers of Christ, we are called to speak with honesty, keep our word, and live with integrity—because our lives now reflect the One who is Truth Himself.

May the Lord bless you.

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