

Covenant

1 The meaning of Covenant

The Christian Bible is divided into an Old and New Testaments. The word “testament” derives from the Latin translation of “covenant”. To prevent confusion of these terms this article will use the abbreviations “OT” and “NT” to designate the collection of books known as the Old Testament and New Testament respectively.

1.1 Biblical words used to express the concept of covenant

1.1.1 Hebrew. The word *Berît* occurs 286 times in the Masoretic text. Despite extensive research on its etymology its verbal root remains unidentified and its meaning must be determined from its usage alone. Depending on the context it can be translated as “treaty,” “pact,” “agreement,” “solemn promise,” “obligation” or more familiarly as “covenant”. As this latter term is used in English to express the idea of a solemn binding agreement it matches the semantic range of *berît* very well (Nicholson, 1986: 105-106).

1.1.2 Greek. *diatheke* is used 270 times in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *berît*. In the NT it occurs 33 times (7 citing the OT). It has a similar semantic range to *berît*, but includes one additional meaning for which it was commonly used in Greek jurisprudence, that of a “testament” or “will”. This meaning is added to the concept of covenant by the New Testament writers from their use of the Septuagint and forms a distinct development in the concept of covenant in the theology of Paul and the writer to the Hebrews particularly.

2 Covenants in the Ancient Near East

2.1 The History of Covenant Making. Archaeology has provided us with examples of covenants from all over the Ancient Near East, dating from around 750 BC as far back as the third millennium. Two main types of covenant are evident. The first is an agreement between equals called a *parity* agreement. (The best OT example is 4.2.8 below, but note also 4.2.11.) The second, between a Lord and his vassal, is known as a *suzerainty* or *vassal* treaty. (The best OT example is 4.2.5.) Typically the parties of the former type of covenant refer to each other as “brothers”, while parties to the second call themselves “Lord” and “Son”. As early as 1931 V. Korosec identified the six basic elements in the structure of Late Bronze Age Hittite treaties, but it should be noted that not every treaty contained all of these elements (Mendenhall, 1992: 1180). **a) Title / Preamble.** This identified the giver of the treaty, his titles and the nature of the relationship between that parties (whether parity or suzerainty). In the case of suzerainty treaties the vassal was bound by an exclusive relationship with the suzerain. **b) Historical Prologue.** The history of the relationship between the two powers was recalled in order to make the vassal feel obligated to the suzerain because of the benefits he had received in the past. Out of gratitude the vassal would then seek to fulfil the suzerain’s wishes which followed. It is important to note that in order to instil this sense of obligation the history of relationship recounted had to be factual (Hillers, 1969:31). **c) Stipulations.** Typically these were casuistic in form, i.e. “If you do such and such a thing, then you act in

disregard to your oath.” They commonly included the following requirements: no alliances were allowed with other nations; no enmity was permitted with other vassal states; the vassal must mobilise its armies when called upon by the suzerain; the vassal must be loyal to the suzerain; no asylum must be given to refugees (cf. 1 Kings 11:40); vassals must appear before the suzerain annually (usually with tribute) (cf. Exod. 23:17); and disputes between vassals were to only be settled by the suzerain. **d) Provision for deposit in the temple and periodic public reading.** The treaty had to be made known to the people of the vassal state and become a part of their thinking. Deposit in the temple placed it at the heart of their society and emphasised that there was no higher appeal that could be made against its commands and served to remind the gods of their obligations. **e) The list of witnesses.** The deities of both the suzerain and vassal are called upon to witness and enforce the treaty. Often the gods of mutual enemies were included in order to ensure that there could be no force to the vassal could legitimately appeal. In addition to the gods the “(deified) mountains, rivers, springs, sea, heaven and earth, the winds and the clouds” were also listed (Mendenhall, 1955:34). Enforcement of a covenant by the gods themselves was intended to make it self-policing and to reduce the need for military force. Clearly it was inappropriate for other deities to be included in the biblical covenants (cf. Deut. 4:35), but not for certain elements of the world to be referred to as witnesses to divine statements (Deut. 32:1; Isa. 1:2; Mic. 6:1-2). The idea of witnesses to covenants is apparent in the setting up of piles of stones and pillars (Gen. 31:44-52; Josh. 22:25-26), while at other times the Israelites themselves served as witnesses (24:22-23). **f) Blessings and Curses.** Obedience to the terms of the covenant brought corresponding blessings and disobedience cursings similar to those described in Deuteronomy 28. Later Iron age covenants significantly contained only curses. **g) Oath & Solemn Ceremony.** The most common method ratifying a treaty involved the cutting up of an animal. The unspoken implication was that if the covenant was broken, then the offender would become like the animal. It is thought that from this ceremony is derived the common Hebrew idiom *karat berît* - “to cut a covenant” (Gen. 15:18; Jer. 34:18) (Hillers, 1969:41). Whatever the original derivation of the term it seems to have meant simply “to make a covenant” (Nicholson, 1986: 102). **h) Note of Sanctions.** If the treaty were to be broken the suzerain could declare that act as the agent of the deities and attack the vassal kingdom.

Although much of the early evidence is fragmentary, Kenneth Kitchen has successfully traced the development of the structure of the covenants. Those which bear the closest relationship with the Sinai Covenant date from the mid second millennium BC. He concludes that there is no warrant for dating this covenant later than around 1200 BC (Kitchen, 1977: 79-85). In later Iron age treaties military force and coercion replaced the moral concepts of obligation, loyalty and fear of supernatural agents. What was implicit in the earlier treaties was now made explicit (Mendenhall, 1992:1182-1183).

2.2 The relation of Ancient Near Eastern Covenants to Scripture. It is generally recognised that the concept of covenant represents a supreme example of God’s accommodation in His revelation to mankind. In expressing Himself through the covenant God has taken something that is already understood as the starting point of a relationship. This concept is then developed and changed as revelation continued. It is therefore wrong, as some scholars have attempted to do (e.g. Mendenhall, 1992) to attempt to locate Hittite covenant concepts in the New Testament when both the secular and biblical meanings of the term had changed.

2.3.1 The Book of Deuteronomy as a Covenant Document. (See DEUTERONOMY).

3 Divine - Human Covenants in the Old Testament

3.1 Covenant with Noah (or Covenant with Creation). The first reference to covenant in Scripture is found in Gen. 6:18. However, the way in which it is used here when God speaks of “establishing his covenant” with Noah indicates that this was merely the continuation of a relationship that was already in existence (cf. Gen. 17:7, 19, 21; Exod. 6:4; Lev. 26:9; Deut. 8:18; 2 Kings 23:3; Jer. 34:18). The terms of this pre-existing relationship are not stated explicitly, but W. J. Dumbrell (1984) has argued that it is possible to deduce them from the earlier chapters of Genesis and the contents of the description of its renewal in Genesis 9. **a) Divine image and kingship.** Man was created in the image of God and established as ruler (under God) of all of creation (Gen. 1:26-28; cf. 9:1, 7). **b) Rest.** The setting aside of the seventh day (2:2-3) is an important theme in Scripture (Deut. 3:20; Josh. 11:23; 14:15; Heb. 4:11). **c) Covenant Demand.** The divine command given in Gen. 2:15-18 was intended to prevent man from moving beyond his assigned sphere of control and intruding on an area rightly reserved for Deity alone. Adam’s failure to do so and its consequences are described in chapter 3.

Following the FLOOD the covenant is re-established with Noah as the representative of both mankind and the creation. The role of man and creation are described which take into account both the divine purposes described in Genesis 1-2 while taking into account the consequences of the Fall (9:1-6; cf. 1:26-30). The Lord promises that the FLOOD would not be repeated and confirms this with the sign of the rainbow, which serves to remind Him of His eternal promise (9:11-17). (Dumbrell, 1984:33-39). The element of command is evident in the prohibitions against murder and the consumption of blood (9:4-6).

3.2.1 Covenant with Abraham. The Lord made covenants with Abraham twice (Gen. 15 & 17), but both are developments of the initial promises made in Genesis 12:2-7. The promises form three distinct strands: **a) Descendants** (12:2; 15:5; 17:4-5; 22:17); **b) Land** (12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:18) **c) Blessing to the nations** (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Elements a) and b) can be seen expressed in the Mosaic covenant (Deut. 1:8, 11; 4:37-38; Josh. 1:2-6; Psalm 105:8-11; Jer. 3:18). The third element rarely occurs under the Mosaic covenant (Psalm 72:17; Isa. 2:2-4; 49:1-6; Jer. 1:5; 4:1-2; Jonah 1-3), but is developed by Paul as an important element in the New Covenant. (See 3.6.4)

Genesis 15 describes the covenant ceremony by which the Lord confirms his promise that he will possess the land. The details of the ceremony (15:9-21) are usually linked with a similar passage in Jeremiah 34 (vv.18-22) and seen in terms on an enacted curse: the party who violated the covenant was bound to become like the slain animals. Instead of walking between the separated bodies Abram was sent into a deep sleep (v.12) and so the Lord passed through alone (v.17) and this is generally seen as indicating that he was solely obligated to fulfil the covenant promises. However, other passages in Genesis make it clear that Abraham still had a part to play in the covenant relationship (Gen. 17:1-4; 18:19; 22:2, 16-18; 26:4-5) (Youngblood, 1983: 36-41).

Genesis 17 is centred on the promise of descendants to a man and woman well past the age of childbearing (17:1, 17). The sign of circumcision, unlike the sign of the rainbow (9:12), was an obligation required of all the descendants of Abraham. Failure to undergo circumcision meant exclusion from the promises and suffering the consequences of the sanctions of the covenant (17:14) - probably divinely imposed in the form of a premature death (cf. Exod. 4:24-26) (Wenham, 1979: 285-286).

3.2.2 Renewal to Isaac. The terms of the covenant are made clear in Genesis 17 that the promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled through the line of Isaac and not Ishmael (17:18-21). Isaac received his own divine visitations (26:2-5; 26:24). On both occasions it is made clear that he is the recipient of the promise because of the faith of his father.

3.2.3 Renewal to Jacob. In a similar way Jacob was assured that even though he received his father's blessing by deceit (27:1-29) he would receive the promises made to Abraham by divine choice (28:13-15; 35:9-12). Following the massacre carried out by his sons at SHECHEM, Jacob carried out what appears to be a rededication of himself and his household to Yahweh. By putting away all the foreign gods (cf. 31:30-35) and their earrings (cf. Exod. 33:6) they put their trust in Yahweh alone. In response to this act of faith they were protected from reprisal from the Canaanites (35:1-5) (see SHECHEM 3.2.2).

3.3 Mosaic Covenant. After four generations of Abraham's descendants had suffered slavery in Egypt it was time for the promise made in Genesis 15:16 to be fulfilled (Exod. 2:24). Revealing Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Yahweh sent Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (3:7-14; 6:2-5). At Sinai the terms of the covenant are revealed in a form that follows very closely the contemporary Hittite suzerainty treaties (See 2 above) as shown in Table 1. Like the Hittite treaties Israel's obligation to Yahweh is derived from His gracious acts on their behalf (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). He delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh has now given this opportunity to serve Him, which they accept (19:3-5; 20:2; cf. Jer. 11:1-8), but it adds no further promise to those given to Abraham (Hillers, 1969:52). After the terms of the covenant had been revealed it was ratified by the people after which they were sprinkled with the blood of bulls - the blood of the covenant (24:3-9). Finally, Moses, Aaron and the Seventy Elders of Israel ate a covenant meal in the presence of the Lord (24:9-11).

Table 1: The Structure of the Suzerainty Covenant (Mid Second Millennium BC) Compared With the Mosaic Covenant

	Exodus	Deuteronomy	Joshua

Title / Preamble	20:1	1:1-5	24:1-2
Historical Prologue	20:2	1:6 - 3:29	24:2-13
Stipulations, basic & detailed	20:3-17, 22-26; 21-23, 25-31; Lev. 1-25	4; 5-11 plus 12-26	24:14-15 (16-25)
Provision for a) deposit in the temple and b) periodic public reading	a) 25:16; cf. 34:1, 28, 29	a) 31:9;24-26 b) 31:10-13	a) 24:26 b) 8:34
The list of witnesses	24:4	31:16-30, 26; 32:1-47	24:22
a) Blessings and b) Cursings	a) Lev.26:3-13 b) 26:14-33	a) 28:1-14 b) 28:15-68	a) implicit in b) 24:19-20 (cf. 8:34)
(Oath & Solemn ceremony)	Exod. 24:1-11	Deut. 27:1-8	8:30-35
(Note of Sanctions)		Deut. 32	

The people soon violated the covenant and made its renewal necessary by setting up and worshipping the golden calf (32:1-24). Moses broke the stone tablets of the covenant and cleansed the camp with the help of the Levites. Punishment for violating the covenant came from the Lord in the form of a plague (32:25-35). The incident brought about a change in the way in which the Lord would be manifested amongst His people. He would fulfil his promise that he made to the Patriarchs (33:1-3), because He is abounding in *hesed* (covenant faithfulness) (34:5-7). However, from that point onwards His presence would be manifested to Moses alone (33:14).

3.3.1 Renewal by Joshua. Once the conquest of the land had begun Joshua fulfilled the commands given by Moses concerning the renewal of the covenant at SHECHEM (Josh. 8:30-35; Deut. 7:1-8). The contents of Joshua 24 provides another close parallel with Hittite treaty form (See **Table 1**). Near the end of his life Joshua is able to review the history of God's gracious dealings from the time of Abraham to the conquest (24:2-13). On this basis he called upon the people to renew the covenant with Yahweh and not violate the covenant by following after other gods (24:14-16). The people agree and a stone is set up to serve as a witness (24:16-27) (see SHECHEM 3.3.2).

3.3.2 Renewal by Samuel. Although the word covenant is not found in 1 Samuel 12 the passage follows the typical pattern for a covenant renewal. The history of Israel is reviewed (12:8-13) and the prophet calls upon the people to obey the Lord (12:14, 20-21), warning of the consequences of disobedience (12:15, 25). In response the people acknowledge their disobedience and are reassured that the Lord will not abandon them (12:22).

3.3.3 Renewal by Elijah. 1 Kings 18 records the encounter of Elijah with the prophets of Ba'al and Asherah in Mount Carmel. The episode has clear allusions to a covenant renewal, while Elijah is portrayed as a type of Moses. The construction of the altar from 12 stones, representing the 12 tribes (18:31) recalling both the events at Sinai (Exod. 24:4) and the command to Joshua at the time of Conquest (Josh. 4:8-9, 20). The people respond to the fire from heaven by affirming that the Lord was God (1 Kings 18:39). In the next chapter the Elijah-Moses parallel becomes clear when Elijah flees to Mt. Horeb (Sinai of the Exodus), a journey of 40 days (Exod. 24:18; 34:28). There Elijah complains of how the Israelites have rejected his Covenant (1 Kings 19:10) and calls for His judgement upon them (cf. Exod. 32:11-13). The Lord's response is not to answer by either wind, earthquake or fire (Exod. 19:16-19), but in a "still small voice". The covenant breakers would be punished according to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant - by the sword (Lev. 26:25) - specifically by the swords of Hazael and Jehu (1 Kings 19:17). The continuance of the Covenant is assured by the presence of a godly remnant in the land (1 Kings 19:18; Rom. 11:2-5).

3.3.4 Renewal by Jehoida & Joash. 2 Kings 11:17-18 describes a twofold covenant renewal. The king and people swore allegiance to Yahweh and the people reaffirmed their commitment to the line of David which had almost been ended by the actions of Athaliah (11:1-3). This was followed by a cleansing of the temple of all the trappings of Ba'al worship and the execution of Mattan, the priest of Ba'al.

3.3.5 Renewal by Hezekiah. The reforms carried out under Hezekiah were the wide-ranging. 1 Chronicles 29-30 records how the king started by repairing the temple and commanded the Priests and Levites to consecrate themselves. He also had the bronze serpent (Num. 21:9) destroyed because it was being worshipped and removed the high places and sacred stones (though presumably only those in the vicinity of Jerusalem) (2 Kings 18:4). When the temple ministry was restored Hezekiah invited the people to celebrate the Passover Meal in Jerusalem (cf. Deut. 16:1-8), an invitation that included all who remained after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (1 Chron. 30:1-12). The people responded by purging their home villages of Asherah poles and by destroying the high places (31:1). Hezekiah's obedience to the commands of Moses was rewarded by victory over his enemies (1 Kings 18:7-8; cf. Deut. 28:7).

3.3.6 Renewal by Josiah. Josiah started to seek the Lord when he became king aged eight years (2 Chron. 34:3). When he was twelve he began to cleanse Jerusalem, Judah, Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon of their altars, idols and images (34:4-7). In his eighteenth year the book of the law was discovered in the temple (2 Kings 22:3-10; 2 Chron. 34:14-18). This discovery spurred the king on to continue his cleansing of the land (2 Kings 23:1-25; cf. 1 Kings 13:1-2) and to celebrate the Passover (2 Chron. 35:1-19). The Chronicler notes that this was the greatest celebration of the Passover since the days of Samuel (2 Chron. 35:18). There are important differences between Josiah's and previous reforms: this reform was more far ranging and was apparently instituted by the king. There is no mention of popular support for these measures and the spiritual state of the populace remained unchanged (2 Kings 23:26-27; cf. Jer. 26:19).

It is often argued that discovery of the Book of the Law preceded the reforms, but this clearly contradicted by the text. The Book of the Law is identified by most scholars as some form of the book of DEUTERONOMY.

3.3.7 Renewal under Ezra & Nehemiah. The long prayer of confession by the Levites (Neh. 9:5-37) recalls God's gracious dealings with the children of Abraham and the peoples continued unfaithfulness. The prayer acknowledges that the desperate situation the people now face is due to their violation of the terms of the covenant. In response the people bind themselves with an oath to observe the commands of Moses (9:38; 10:28-29): specifically not to permit intermarriage (10:30; Exod. 34:16); to observe the Sabbath and sabbatical year (Neh. 10:31; Exod. 23:10-12; Lev. 25:1-7), and to maintain both the temple and the Levites who served there (Neh. 10:32-39).

3.4 Covenant With Phineas. During their last encampment in the Transjordan the Israelites were seduced by Moabite women at the instigation of Balaam (Num. 25:1-3; cf. Rev. 2:14). Before Moses had time to carry out the Lord's sentence on the leaders of Israel, Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron took a spear and killed an Israelite man and a Moabite woman in the act of ritual prostitution inside the Tent of Meeting itself (Num. 25:6-8). Such was his zeal that the Lord made a covenant of peace with him that he and his descendants would enjoy an everlasting priesthood (Num. 25:10-13). The line of Phineas served as high priest down until the time of Eli and his sons (of the line of Ithamar according to 1 Chron. 24:3) described in 1 Sam. 1-3. When the Tabernacle and priesthood was restored by David it was Zadok, a descendent of Phineas who served as high priest and so on down to the time of Ezra (Ezra 7:1-5). The succession ended in 171 BC when Antiochus IV transferred the priesthood from Jason to Menelaus (2 Macc. 4:23; Bruce, 1969:58).

3.5 Covenant with David. In response to David's expressed desire to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem the Lord spoke through the prophet Nathan. David was not the one to build a temple, rather the Lord would establish a house for David and his kingdom would last forever (2 Sam. 7:12-17). Although this passage does not use the word covenant at all the word is connected with the same incident elsewhere in Scripture (2 Sam. 23:2-7; Psalm 89:3-4, 27-28). The promise was seen as the renewal of the promises made to Abraham to a specific family, as the wording of Psalm 72:17 makes clear (cf. Gen. 12:3). These promises led to several developments in Hebrew theology. **a) The City of God.** David's city, located on Mount Zion became the focus of soteriological and eschatological interest, rather than the whole of the Promised Land (Psalm 48:2; 133:3; Isa. 2:2-4; 51:3; Micah 4:1-4; cf. Heb. 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 21). It also led to the belief that Jerusalem would never fall (Isa. 33:20-22; Jer. 26:1-19), a belief shattered by the conquest by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Psalm 137:1-3; Micah 3:9-12). **b) The Messiah.** The idea of an ideal Davidite is developed in the Psalms and the prophetic writings. This "anointed one" or "Messiah" would rule the nations from Zion and serve as a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 2; 110). Like his forefather he would be born in Bethlehem in Judah (Micah 5:2; cf. Matt. 2:1-6). When he sinned the Lord would chastise him, and there remained the possibility that part of the Davidic line would be excluded because of sin, as happened in the case of Jehoikim (cf. Jer. 22:18-30). Nevertheless, the promise would be fulfilled (Jer. 23:5-6). The writers of the Gospels demonstrated clearly that these prophecies were fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 22:21-46; Luke 1:32, 68-69; 20:41-44; Acts 2:25-31).

3.6 The New Covenant.

3.6.1 New Covenant in the Prophets. In the final days of Judah's independence the prophets foresaw a new covenant that included all the elements of those that preceded it, Noahic,

Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic (Jer. 31:1-34; 33:14-26). These insights are found primarily in Jeremiah, where the only reference is found to a “New Covenant” (31:31), “new” in the sense that it fulfilled and achieved the purposes of those that preceded it (cf. Ezek. 16:60-63). The New Covenant is made with the reconstituted people of Israel and Judah (31:31; 33:14). They will be ruled by a descendent of David (33:15-19) and ministered to by the Levites (33:18-22), promises as sure and binding and the covenant with creation (31:35-37; 33:19-26; cf. Gen. 8:22). However, unlike the covenant made at Sinai which the people broke, this covenant would be inwardly (31:33-34; Ezek. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26-27) rather than outwardly imposed as it was for the most part under the Mosaic Covenant (but note Deut. 6:6; 11:18; 30:14).

3.6.2 New Covenant in the Gospels. Covenant is mentioned in all the Synoptic Gospels in connection with Jesus' words at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). Jesus appears to be recalling the imagery used by Moses in Exodus 24:7, as well as pointing to his own sacrificial death.

3.6.3 New Covenant in Acts. The word (*diatheke*) is found only twice in Acts (3:25; 7:8), but the concept of covenant promise forms an important element in many of the speeches, particularly that of Paul in Acts 13:10-41. Acts also records the acceptance of the Gentiles as part of the covenant people following the conversion of Cornelius and his household (10:1-11:18; 15:12-21).

3.6.4 New Covenant in the Writings of Paul. In Romans Paul maintains that the covenant promises made to Israel have not been forgotten. Rather, they have received experienced a hardening for the benefit of the Gentiles (Rom. 9:1-5; 11:25-27) who had now been allowed access to benefits of the promises (Eph. 2:11-13). The New and the Mosaic (old) covenant are contrasted in much the same way by Paul as they were by Jeremiah; the old of the letter and brought condemnation while the New is of the Spirit and brings righteousness (2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 4:21-31). Paul's use of the secular meaning of covenant in Galatians 3 has caused some difficulty. The problem arises from the fact that in the Graeco-Roman world it was always possible for a testator to change his will. There were two types of will that were irrevocable unless specific conditions were made to do so, but the text does not refer to these. Paul's point is nevertheless clear: God's promises stand. (Longenecker, 1990: 128-130). Paul recognised the salvation of the Gentiles as the fulfilment of the third element of the promises made to Abraham (**3.2.1**) (Rom. 15:8-12; Gal. 3:6-14).

3.6.5 New Covenant in Hebrews. The writer to the Hebrews contains the fullest exposition of the New Covenant. In Chapters 8 - 10 he develops his argument that the New Covenant is better than the Old (See Table 2 below). This is not to be understood as an anti-Jewish polemic, but rather as an argument from the lesser to the greater - if the old was good then how much more the new. In this he follows closely Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 3 (Newman, 1997: 248-249).

Table 2: The Contrast Between Old & New Covenants According to the Writer to the Hebrews*

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Earthly (9:1)	Heavenly (8:1-2)
Copy and a shadow (8:5; 9:23; 10:1)	Real and true (8:2; 9:24 10:1)
Mortal human priests (7:23)	Immortal High Priest (7:24)
Regulated by the Law (8:4)	Divine administered (8:1-2)
Administered by sinful priests (9:7)	Administered by a sinless High Priest (4:15)
Sacrifices constantly repeated (9:6-7, 25; 10:11)	One sacrifice carried out once for all time (9:12, 26; 10:10, 12)
Offered the blood of animals (9:18-22)	Jesus offered his own blood (9:12, 26)
Limited efficacy (10:1-4)	Eternal efficacy (10:12)
No inner cleansing achieved (9:9)	Leads to sanctification and a cleansed conscience (9:14; 10:14)

* Table based on the text of Newman, 1997: 248.

4 Human Covenants in the Old Testament

4.1 Mutual Personal Commitment

4.1.1 The Marriage Covenant. This is the first and most common of all human covenants (Gen. 2:22-24). The closeness of this relationship is often used to describe Yahweh's relationship with the Israelites (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14, 20; 31:32; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:16). In the prophecy of Hosea the prophets relationship with unfaithful Gomer became an enacted parable of the Lord's relationship with Israel. In the writings of Paul we find the same imagery applied to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33). If the breaking of a marriage vow was condemned (Mal. 2:14-16), how much more the breaking of the covenant (2:10-12; Jer. 3:1-10).

4.1.2 Abraham & Ephron the Hittite. See Abraham 3.1.4

4.1.3 Rahab & the Spies. In exchange for her help and protection the two spies promised Rahab and her family protection in the coming assault on Jericho (Josh. 2:8-14; 6:22-23). The promise was conditional on Rahab identifying the house with a scarlet cord and ensuring that all her family remained within there (2:17-21).

4.1.4 David & Jonathan. Following David's defeat of Goliath he and Solomon, son of Saul formed a deep friendship which they sealed with a covenant (1 Sam. 18:1-4; 2 Sam. 1:26). David reminded Jonathan of his covenant when Saul was seeking his life (1 Sam. 20:8) and it is clear that for some time Saul was ignorant of the arrangement (22:8). Later when David was fleeing for his life, he and Jonathan made a second covenant, presumably to the effect that he would be king and Jonathan his second in command (23:15-18). Following the death of Jonathan David sought to show kindness to his son Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:1-13) and protected him from the revenge of Gibeonites (21:1-9).

4.1.5 David & Abner. In order to bring to an end the civil war between the houses of David and Saul David and Abner made an agreement (2 Sam. 3:12-13).

4.1.6 Solomon & Shimei. Shimei the son of Gera of the family of Saul had called down curses upon David as he fled from Absalom (2 Sam. 16:5-13). Upon David's return Shimei had begged forgiveness and David made an oath that he would not be put to death (19:16-23). David asked his son Solomon to avenge the insult that he had received (1 Kings 2:8-9) and Solomon achieved this by binding Shimei with a vow which he broke and was executed as a result (2:42-46).

4.2 Tribal and National Alliances.

4.2.1 Abraham the Amorites. In Gen. 14:13 Abraham is noted to have had an alliance with Mamre, Eshtaol and Aner the Amorites chieftains among whom he was encamped. These allies assisted Abraham in the rescue of Lot (14:14-17, 24).

4.2.2 Abraham's Covenants with Abimelech. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, approached Abraham as asked him to make a treaty to ensure peace and good will between their two peoples. A second vow was made concerning water rights and this was witnessed by the exchange of seven lambs (Gen. 21:22-32).

4.2.3 Isaac's Covenant with Abimelech. Abimelech renewed his covenant of peace with Isaac (Gen. 26:26-31).

4.2.4 Jacob's Covenant with Laban. Jacob and Laban set up a pillar and pile of stones as a witness to their covenant. They both bound themselves to non-aggression, while Jacob swore not to take any other wives. Of note is the calling on God as a witness to the treaty (see 2.1 e). (Gen. 31:43-54).

4.2.5 The Gibeonite Covenant. The Gibeonites deceived Joshua into making a covenant with them. However, once made it could not be broken (Josh. 9:3-27). In the time of David, the Lord brought a famine on the land as a result of Saul breaking this covenant (2 Sam. 21:1-3).

4.2.6 Between the people of Jabesh Gilead & Nahash the Ammonite. Besieged and without hope of relief the people of Jabesh Gilead requested terms of surrender in the form of a treaty (against the command of Moses - Deut. 23:3-6). The Ammonites demanded that the whole population be blinded in their right eye - disabling them in any future warfare and bringing disgrace on their nation (1 Sam. 11:1-2).

4.2.7 David & his vassal states. The terms of the suzerainty treaties made by David are not

given, but his policy was clearly to disarm the nations he captured, put garrisons at strategic points and demand tribute (2 Sam. 8:1-14).

4.2.8 Solomon & Hiram of Tyre. This probably the best scriptural example of a parity treaty. Hiram King of Tyre established friendly relations with David and his son Solomon (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1-2). In return for timber and gold (9:11, 14) for the temple Solomon provided food for Hiram's household (5:3-11). They cemented their friendship by making a covenant (5:12). Later in 1 Kings we learn that Solomon had become deeply indebted to Hiram and gave him 20 towns on the Phoenician-Galilee border in payment. Hiram seems to have been unimpressed by the deal and addresses Solomon in the typical language of a parity treaty as "my brother" (9:10-14).

4.2.9 Solomon & his vassal states. Solomon continued his father's policy of demanding tribute from his vassals (1 Kings 4:21).

4.2.10 Israel, Judah & Aram. In order to avoid defeat from the Asa bribed the King of Aram to break his covenant with Israel and establish one with Judah (1 Kings 15:18-19). Although the plan was successful Asa's actions brought condemnation from the prophet Hanani because he had relied on a human covenant instead of that with the Lord (2 Chron. 16:7-10).

4.2.11 Ahab & Ben-Hadad. While seeking terms of surrender for their master Ben-Hadad's officials were surprised to hear Ahab speak of their master using the language usually reserved for partners in a parity treaty. Taking up the same theme they ensure Ben-Hadad's safety and a treaty is made between him and Ahab (1 Kings 20:31-34). Ahab spared his life, an action that brought prophetic condemnation (20:35-42) and in the long term was ill-advised. In the short term it had advantages as it led to a military alliance and the return of captured Israelite cities which his father, Tabrimmon, had captured, as well as the establishment of Israelite bazaars and extra-territorial rights in Damascus. The peace thus established lasted for three years. During these years the states of Israel, Aram, Hamath and nine other smaller powers were forced to unite against the growing power of Assyria, which had been rendered impotent for almost two centuries by the attacks of Aramean nomads. From 900 BC onwards the power of Assyria swept westwards and in 853 Shalmaneser III faced the coalition of Syrian and Cilician states at Qarqar on the Orontes river. According to Shalmaneser's own records Ben-Hadad fielded 20 000 soldiers, and Ahab 10 000 soldiers and 2 000 chariots. "Shalmaneser claims a sweeping victory; the corpses of his foes, he says, covered the plain of the Orontes and dammed the stream itself. But the fact that he did not pursue his alleged advantage and returned home and did not return for 12 years suggests that the confederates gave a good account of themselves." (Bruce, 1987: 47). After the Assyrian threat had been vanquished, for a time at least, the alliance soon broke up and war resumed between Israel and Aram (22:1-4).

4.2.12 Nebuchadnezzar & Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 597 BC he made Mattaniah, Jehoichin's uncle his vassal king and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17). Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar nine years later and appealed to Egypt for help (24:20b - 25:1; cf. Jer. 37:5-10). This not only brought a swift response from the King of Babylon, but also brought condemnation from the prophet Ezekiel because Zedekiah had broken the covenant he had sworn in the name of the Lord (Ezek. 17:11-21).

4.2.13 Israel & Assyria. Hosea condemns the swearing of covenants with other nations, such as those referred to above (see 4.2.10-12) (Hosea 12:1). The practice of smearing oil was probably part of the ceremony of swearing a covenant, accompanied by drinking water (Jer. 2:18) (Hillers, 1969:40). In doing so he was merely one voice in a prophetic chorus against such activity (cf. Isa. 30:1-5; 31:1-3; Jer. 2:16-19; 37:7-10; Ezek. 17:5).

4.3 Agreements between a King and his people

4.3.1 David & Israel. The Northern tribes came to David at Hebron and acknowledged that he was their rightful king. This agreement was ratified by a covenant between them to carry out their mutual responsibilities (2 Sam. 5:1-3; 1 Chron. 11:3; cf. Deut. 17:14-20).

4.3.2 Jehoida (Joash) & the King's Guards. Jehoida the high priest bound the commanders of the guard to protect the young king Joash from the murderous plans of Athaliah (2 Kings 11:4-8).

4.3.3 Joash & Judah. The covenant between king and people mentioned in 2 Kings 11:17 was probably very similar to that described in (see 4.3.1).

4.3.4 Zedekiah & Judah. Jeremiah 34:8-11 describes how in the final days of before the fall of Jerusalem (588 BC) King Zedekiah made a covenant with the people of Jerusalem requiring them to free their Hebrew slaves in accordance with the commandments of Moses (Exod. 21:2-6; Deut. 15:12-18). The people obeyed, but later reneged on their agreement. Their actions brought upon them the curse of God for breaking not only their covenant with the King, but more importantly, the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant (34:12-22, esp. v. 18-19).

4.4 Solemn Agreements by the people to obey the law of Moses. (See 3.3.6, 3.3.7 & 4.3.4)

4.5 Metaphorical Covenants with Things.

4.5.1 Covenant with stones of the field. Stones were a fact of life in a primitive farming community. Too many would make farming impractical - a fact that was often used as a punishment by conquering armies (2 Kings 3:19, 25). Eliphaz speaks of the man who fears God being at peace with the forces of nature, signified by a covenant with the stones (Job 5:23).

4.5.2 Covenant with my eyes. Job declares himself innocent of lust (Job 31:1). The eyes were seen as the gateway to the heart (Gen. 3:6; 2 Sam. 11:2; Matt. 5:28; 1 John 2:16).

4.5.3 Covenant with Leviathan. If Job were as superior as he thought himself then even the monstrous Leviathan would seek to become his vassal and swear to serve him (Job 41:4).

4.5.4 Covenant with animals and birds. Hosea 2:18 is an eschatological prediction that the threat posed by wild animals will be removed in the age to come. Both destruction from war and attacks from wild animals formed a prominent part of covenant curses. Israel is promised that in the coming age these threats will be removed (Stuart, 1987:58-59). A similar phrase occurs in Ezekiel 34:25 where it has the same meaning.

4.5.5 Covenant with death. Isaiah 28:15-19 possibly refers to some form of magical rite in

by which the people of Israel seek to make an agreement with death not to touch them or it could be prophetic sarcasm. This will not save them from the Lord's punishment and their security will soon be swept away.

4.5.6 Covenant with the day and the night. (Jer. 33:19-26; cf. Gen. 8:22) **See discussion under 3.6.1 above.**

4.5.7 Covenant with the Nations. This covenant refers to the divine obligation placed upon the nations of the earth not to destroy Israel (Zech. 11:10-11) (Keil & Delitzsch, 1988:366). The verse is extremely obscure and the covenant it refers to is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture.

4.6 Other Covenants

4.6.1 A Covenant of Salt. Salt was an essential part of the diet and required as with the grain offerings (Lev. 2:13). Its use in the covenant ritual and covenant meal was usual. The preservative nature of salt is thought to have symbolised the enduring nature of an agreement. The only biblical references are to the regular share of the sacrificial offerings for the priests and Levites (Num. 18:19) and to the eternal nature of David's Kingdom (2 Chron. 13:5). **(See 3.5 above)**

4.6.2 Covenant with Adam. A number of possible interpretations of Hosea 6:7 have been suggested. One particularly popular in reformed theology is that the verse refers to a covenant made with Adam, the first man, known as the "Covenant of works". By this it is meant that if Adam had obeyed God's command in Eden then after a period of probation he would have become immortal. The major weakness of this argument is that it is built on inference and reading back later passages into Genesis 1-3 (Dumbrell, 1984, 44-46).

A second explanation relies on a conjectural emendation of the text to have it refer to an otherwise unknown covenant broken by the people of the town of Adam on the banks of the Jordan (Josh. 3:16). (Nicholson, 1988, 116). There is no textual support for this emendation and it remains an unlikely solution. More promising is Douglas Stuart's suggestion that "Adam" should be translated "dirt" so as to render the verse "But look - they walked they have walked on my covenant as if it were dirt, see, they have betrayed me!" By obeying only the ritual aspect of the law while committing treason both politically (5:13) and ethically (6:8-9) they were guilty of breaking the terms of the Mosaic covenant (Stuart, 1987:111, 113).

4.6.3 Ba'al of the Covenant. The references in Judges to "Ba'al of the Covenant" (8:33; 9:46) is clearly portrayed as a false god set up in opposition to Yahweh. Some commentators refer to it as an example of syncretism in the light of SHECHEM's association with covenant renewal (Josh. 8:30-35; 24:25-27).

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