

In Part 1 of this study, we discovered the Hebrew background of the word “covenant”. We found that in its Hebrew context, to make a covenant is to say that if I don’t keep my word, I would expect to happen to me as what happened to the covenant victim. This is based on the fact that the word implies the “cutting” of an animal in two pieces.

We also found that many of the ancient Biblical covenants were based on a very common middle-eastern model of suzerain – vassal treaties whereby a strong nation would provide protection and status to a smaller weaker nation as long as that nation agreed to abide by terms established by the stronger “suzerain” nation.

Another form of covenant we discussed was called a “parity” covenant. It closely resembles what we know today as a Hebrew marriage covenant whereby two parties come together on equal standing – a man and a woman – without duress or fear of reprisal in the event one or the other decides not to join in to the covenant. Yet, in the event they both join in, there are stipulations and consequences for failure to keep the covenant.

And finally, we saw that the book of Deuteronomy is laid out according to the ancient Hittite suzerain treaty model.

Let’s now explore some of the covenants between God and man. We’ll determine the parties involved, the purpose of the covenant, the duration and requirements of each party, sign of the covenant, if either side violated the covenant, and if the covenant is still in existence. As we look at each of them from the perspective of what we’ve seen so far (the protection, status, love, etc. offered by the suzerain to the vassal), we’ll try to determine if we today are still party to the covenant.

One more thing before we start . . . this study is intended to show what a person would understand about the major covenants between God and man if the reader were to start without preconceived ideas based on the New Testament. In regards to statements made in the New Testament that appear to alter the status of various covenants, they will be addressed in a later study.

Covenant with Noah and all Mankind –

This is the first recorded covenant between God and a man. In it, God promises to never again destroy mankind (Gen. 9:11-17). The covenant includes a promise that the seasons would forever remain intact, thus providing man with the ability to sow and reap. Mankind is given more food options, but is prohibited from eating blood and from murder (Gen. 9:3-6). As a covenant token, God puts a rainbow in the sky as a testimony that he is fulfilling the terms of the covenant. It is, in effect, a sign between God and man that He is indeed in charge.

Covenant Summary -

- Parties Involved – God, Noah, Noah’s descendants (all mankind), the animals
- Purpose – assure all involved that the earth will not be destroyed again by a flood
- Covenant Sign - Rainbow
- Duration - forever
- Requirements -
 - God – to look at the rainbow any time He’s inclined to destroy the earth
 - Mankind and animals - none
- Violations – None
- Still Valid Covenant – Yes



Covenant with Abraham –

One of the most important covenants of the Bible is the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant is developed over a period of years, but is considered one covenant. This covenant is the basis for both Christian and Jewish faith.

The form of the covenant follows the “parity” covenant model in that God appears to notice Abraham and “takes a liking to him”. Abraham’s continued obedience moves God to offer him more and more. The initial covenant (Gen. 12:1-3 though not necessarily called a covenant) promised Abram (as his name was then) that his descendants would be a great nation, that his name would be great and honored, that nations would be blessed because of his descendants, and that God would curse those who curse Abram. In return, Abram was expected to leave Babylon and settle in a new land that YHVH was going to show him. So, at the beginning, the covenant was Bi-lateral. God would respond to Abram’s actions.

Following this, God added to the covenant. Genesis 15 shows that Abram assumed God would fulfill the covenant promise (so far no land was involved) through his servant Eliazer. God’s response was that Abram himself would sire a child through which the covenant promise would be fulfilled. He also showed Abram the vastness of the promise in that Abram’s descendants would be as the stars in the sky in number, but for a short period would be slaves to another nation, but they would receive their freedom with great treasures. It was at that time that he also added the promise of the land that would be given to him, and that he would die in peace at a good old age.

At that point, we saw the actual covenant process taking place, a divided animal and God walking between the parts. Notice, God walked between the pieces, not Abraham. Abraham was asleep at the time. Because only God walked through the parts, it’s apparent the covenant was now unilateral; God alone was responsible for bringing the terms about.

God again added to the covenant after Abram tried to bring about fulfillment of the promised child through Sarah’s handmaid (Gen. 17:1 – 21). This time, God promised Abram that his descendants would become many nations, therefore He changed Abram’s name from “exalted father” to Abraham, “father of multitudes”. In addition, the child of promise was to come through his wife Sarah (whose name was also changed), and at the birth of the child, the covenant would become eternal¹, never to be broken.

At that time, God added a stipulation for those who wanted to join into the covenant God, circumcision, the sign of the covenant, a sign that Abraham was quick to apply. Notice what God said about the man who would not wear the sign of the covenant –

^{ESV} **Genesis 17:14** Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; **he has broken my covenant.**"

Finally, after Abraham expressed his faith in YHVH by his willingness to sacrifice the son of promise, God added to the covenant that Abraham’s descendants would exceed the stars and be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. In addition, they would possess the gates of their enemies, thus giving them world domination. God also stated that He was satisfied with Abraham’s heart and faith and that God himself would see to it that the covenant would be fulfilled.

The covenant with Abraham was built over a period of time. As Abraham performed what God had asked, God confirmed that the covenant up to that point would be fulfilled. As Abraham continued to obey God, the covenant with him became unilateral.

By definition, this covenant is nested within the prior covenant with Noah. Without the assurance that mankind, including Abraham’s descendants, would not be threatened by a cataclysmic flood, worldwide

¹ See Gen. 17:7



human destruction, Abram had little hope concerning the perpetual aspect of the covenant. All Abram had to do to believe God was to look at the rainbow.

So to summarize this covenant -

- Parties Involved – God, Abraham
- Purpose – establish a people for God, included land, national identity, blessings
- Covenant Sign - Circumcision
- Duration - forever
- Requirements –
 - God – perform what He said He would do
 - Abraham – leave Ur of the Chaldees, go to the land, conceive a child through Sarah, circumcision, obedience to God’s Torah²
- Violations – None
- Still Valid? – Yes

After Abraham’s death, God confirmed the covenant with Abraham’s son Isaac. Apparently, Isaac’s firstborn son, Esau, found little value in the covenant and thus sold his firstborn rights to his brother, Jacob. Jacob valued the covenant and God confirmed it with him. As time went on, Jacob conferred varying aspects of the covenant on two of his twelve sons, Judah and Joseph, though ultimate fulfillment was through all twelve. As far as we can tell, all the descendants of Abraham (through Jacob) seem to have wanted to be part of the covenant people since they wore the sign of it³. Note that God did not make a new covenant with all the descendants, only those who wanted to be a part of it.

The next covenant we see is between YHVH and the children of Israel. This was a NEW COVENANT, it was not a continuation of the covenant with Abraham. As we will see, it was built upon and within the covenant with Abraham. This covenant follows both the “parity” and the “suzerain” model. Though God was clearly the greater power (the suzerain) in this case, He still appears to “court” Israel before proposing to her.

Because God remembered the covenant He had made with Abraham⁴ and confirmed with Isaac and Jacob⁵, he arranged a swap – firstborn for firstborn⁶. It is there that YHVH stated clearly that He intended to take Israel as His wife and that He would be their (only) god.

We all know the Exodus story, but did you know that the events of the 50 or so days between the Passover and the giving of the Ten Commandments was all part of the covenant process? Let’s look back at the Hittite suzerain covenant model:

- Preamble (Deut. 1:1-5)
- Historical prologue (Deut. 1:6 - 4:49)
- Stipulations (Deut. 5:1 – 26:19)
- Provisions for treaty deposit & public reading (Deut. 31:9-13)
- List of witnesses to the treaty (Deut. 30:19)
- Blessings & curses for fidelity or infidelity to the treaty (Deut. 27 – 30)
- Accommodations for renewal of the covenant with a change of leadership in the vassal nation (Deut. 29:1-29; Deut. 31:1-8)

² **Genesis 26:5** ⁵ Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge (“mishmereth” – safeguarded), my commandments (mitzvah – code of law), my statutes (“chuqqah” – ordinances based on law, judgements), and my laws (torah – instructions).

³ See Gen 34:15; Joshua 5:5

⁴ See Exodus 2:24

⁵ See Exodus 6:2-4

⁶ see Exodus 4:22 - 23



The second item (Historical Prologue) is typically a list of all the things that the suzerain king had done, and proposes to do for the vassal nation. In the case of a parity treaty, typically a wedding covenant, this would be considered the “courting” process. YHVH didn’t expect Israel to simply accept Him without proving Himself.

And prove Himself He did! He stood as a light for them at night and shade during the day. He held back the Egyptian army while dividing the sea for them to pass through. At Marah, he turned bitter waters sweet, and then sent quail to satisfy their desire. He sent bread from Heaven, caused water to gush out of a rock, and destroyed the army of Amalek, all in 50 days! No knight in shining armor could have come close!

So when they came to Mt. Sinai, God was not boasting when He said that He had “born them on eagles wings and brought them to Himself”⁷ He had proven His love and desire for them as well as shown them that He was perfectly able to take care of them. All they had to do is agree to the ketuba⁸, the terms that God was going to propose. The people were so awestruck they agreed to the terms even before He revealed them!

Covenant with Israel -

God spelled out the terms of the covenant to Israel beginning in Exodus chapter 20 and continuing through chapter 24. Israel did not enter into this blindly. They knew that, just as obedience was required of Abraham as terms of that covenant, so would it be with them also. They were already in obedience to the sign of the covenant (circumcision) and had already been introduced to the Sabbath, the sign of the new covenant God was going to make with them.⁹

The terms of this new covenant were based on love for God (the suzerain) and for each other. Many of the laws we see in this passage (Exodus 20:1 – 23:33) follow along with the Hittite suzerain treaty model. For instance, they were reminded of the Sabbath (the sign), forbidden to make covenants with other nations or gods, and required to make annual visits to the great king.

The covenant was confirmed when Moses read the Book of the Covenant to the people and they agreed to it.¹⁰ In accordance with the covenant practice, Moses killed oxen that were laid out on an altar, but instead of walking between the parts, he poured half of the oxen’s blood on the altar, symbolizing God’s commitment to the covenant, and sprinkled the other half on the people, thus symbolizing their commitment.

Now notice – after the covenant was established, Moses was given tablets containing the laws, the stipulations of the covenant, those that had already been read to the people. The covenant was established before the tablets were given. The tablets are part of the covenant, but they are not the covenant. The fact that the first set of tablets was broken has no bearing on the continuance of the covenant.

“But wasn’t the covenant broken at the sin of the golden calf”, some might ask. The answer is NO, the covenant was not broken, only one of the stipulations of the covenant. This sin was an act of idolatry, in effect – adultery. The consequences of such an act had previously been spelled out as one of the stipulations of the covenant –

^{KJV} **Exodus 22:20** " He who sacrifices to *any* god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

⁷ See Exodus 19:4

⁸ A list of the bride and groom’s responsibilities to each other within the marriage. At the signing of the ketuba, the couple was considered betrothed, which in that culture, implied legal responsibilities

⁹ See Exodus 31:12-17

¹⁰ See Exodus 24:7



Thus 3000 of the perpetrators of the offense were killed that day in accordance with the covenant, but the covenant continued. In fact God confirm its continuance in Exodus 34:10 where He said in effect “Behold, I cut a covenant with you . . .” In other words, God was saying that He had cut a covenant with them, and the golden calf incident was not going to sway Him. He is true to the covenant and not looking for a way to throw Israel out. Never-the-less, He again warned the people about being disobedient to Him and to the terms they had agreed to. At the conclusion of the discourse, Moses wrote down the words of the covenant (the stipulations recently spelled out) and along with the new tablets, descended Mount Sinai.

To further illustrate that the covenant was still in effect . . . the entire book of Leviticus was given on Mount Sinai and within one year of the establishment of God’s covenant with Israel.¹¹ In chapter 26, God spelled out the blessings of obedience to the covenant and the consequences of disobedience. As part of the consequences, He said that Israel would be driven from the land if they disobeyed the covenant. Since Israel had yet to step foot in the land, it would stand to reason that they were still under the same covenant God had made with them less than a year before.

Did God establish another covenant with the next generation of Israelites in Deuteronomy? No, instead Moses reiterated and confirmed the Sinai covenant and reminded the people to continue in it. He made it clear that He was speaking of the covenant associated with the tablets of stone, and He reminded them of the consequences if they were to break the terms of the covenant, the same consequences found in Leviticus 26.¹²

Some get confused thinking that a new covenant was made with the new generation during their time in the wilderness. This is based on Deuteronomy 5:2-3.

Deuteronomy 5:2-3 The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. ³ The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even us*, who *are* all of us here alive this day.

In this passage, the “fathers” are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What Moses was doing was showing that, although Israel could enjoy the benefits of the covenant with the fathers, the covenant on Mt. Sinai was dependant on Israel’s continual obedience. God’s promise to “the fathers” was established, but ultimate establishment of the covenant with Israel was yet to be determined. And to drive the point home, Moses again rehearsed the stipulations of the covenant to that present generation.

Another passage that raises questions is Deuteronomy 29:1?

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 29:1** These *are* the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.

Was that a new covenant? No, this was a renewal, or reaffirmation of the covenant at Mt. Sinai. To understand what Moses was doing, one must keep in mind that the greater part of those who came out of Egypt had given up on the covenant after their refusal to enter the land. They no longer considered themselves party to the covenant, evidenced by their failure to circumcise their children.¹³ Before entering into the land, they had to become party to the covenant once again as well as receive explicit

¹¹ See Leviticus 27:34; Numbers 10:11

¹² See Deuteronomy 4:13 - 28

¹³ If that generation had believed that their children would in fact inherit the land, they would have circumcised their children at 8 days so the children would not have to do it themselves at age 40 years. Either they had little regard for their children, or they truly believed God had reneged on His promise to Abraham.



instructions about matters that would apply only when they had come into the land, instructions that would have fallen on deaf ears if given to the previous generation.¹⁴

The translation in the King James is somewhat misleading. This is how the Tnakh reads:

^{TNK} **Deuteronomy 28:69 (29:1 in non-Jewish Bibles)** These are the terms of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to conclude with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.

Notice the blessings and curses immediately preceding the chapter 29:1. They are much the same as those found in Leviticus. Common to both passages is the fact that disobedience will result in a scattering, but Leviticus 26:42-45 and in Deuteronomy 30:1-8 promise of return if Israel turns back to the covenant. In fact, God says in the Leviticus passage:

^{TNK} **Leviticus 26:44** Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I the LORD am their God.

History shows that Israel (both Israel and Judah) were indeed scattered and are still scattered today. The prophecies of return are not yet fulfilled, evidenced by the fact that the Jewish people still pray twice daily for the return of the exiles. According to the above mentioned scripture, God is still in covenant (the Sinai covenant) with His people.

Just as the covenant with Abraham was nested within the covenant with Noah, this covenant is dependent on the covenant with Abraham. Indeed, this covenant was inspired by that covenant. Thus an Israelite who submitted to the terms and signs of the Sinai covenant (the Sabbath) would also submit to the terms and signs of the Abrahamic covenant (circumcision). Of course, we all know that God is still maintaining the covenant sign with Noah – the rainbow.

So to summarize the covenant God made with Israel –

- Parties Involved – God, all Israel (those present and future generations)
- Purpose – establish the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- Covenant Sign - Sabbath
- Duration – until both parties end the covenant
- Requirements -
 - God – establish them as the heirs of the covenant with Abraham¹⁵
 - Israel – keep the Torah along with the statutes and judgments¹⁶
- Violations – many on the part of Israel
- Still Valid? – Yes, even scattered among the nations God remains in covenant.

We will continue with the discussion on Covenants in the next session.

Shalom Alecheim

¹⁴ Notice that, except for two instances that immediately follow the death sentence on the generation of the spies, there are no more “when you come into the land” references until that generation is dead. The two references mentioned above (Numbers 15:2 & 18) were probably meant to encourage the younger generation that they would indeed enter the land.

¹⁵ **Deuteronomy 29:9-13** ⁹ Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do. ¹⁰ Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, *with* all the men of Israel, ¹¹ Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that *is* in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: ¹² That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: ¹³ That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and *that* he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

¹⁶ See Deut. 7:9