

## Covenant

By Jeff A. Benner

טַרְיָה בְּרִית *b'riyt*

*They said, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you."(Genesis 26:28, ESV)*

The Hebrew word for a covenant is ברית (*b'riyt*, **Strong's #1285**), a noun derived from the verb ברה (*B.R.H*, Strong's #1262), which means "to select the best."

*He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. (1 Samuel 17:8, ESV)*

In this passage the Hebrew verb ברה (*barah*) is used for the choosing of the best man to fight Goliath. This word can also mean to eat, in the sense of selecting, such as we see in the following verse.

*So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. And when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand." (2 Samuel 13:6, ESV)*

The Hebrew language is a root oriented language, meaning that every Hebrew word is derived from a root word and that root word is the foundation to other Hebrew words. Each word derived from one root will be closely related in meaning to all the other words derived from the same root.

In the case of the word ברית (*b'riyt*) we found that it was derived from the root verb ברה (*B.R.H*), but also derived from this verbal root are the nouns ברות (*barut*, Strong's #1267) meaning "choice meat" and בריה (*bir'yah*, Strong's #1274) meaning "fattened." Livestock that will be slaughtered are fed special grains to make them fat and thereby making the meat of the fattened livestock the choicest.

So how is fattened choice meat related to the word for "covenant?" The phrase "make a covenant," such as we saw in the verse that began this study, appears

eighty times in the Hebrew Bible and in every instance it is the Hebrew phrase כרת ברית (*karat b'riyt*), which literally means "cut a covenant."

A covenant was instituted by the two parties of the covenant who would take a fattened animal, the best of the flock or herd, and "cut" it into two pieces. Then the two parties of the covenant would pass through the pieces symbolizing their dedication to the covenant and by this action are saying, "If I do not hold to the agreements of this covenant, you can do to me what we did to this animal." This methodology of "making" a covenant is clearly recorded in Jeremiah 34:18-20.

*And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like[a] the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts— 19 the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. 20 And I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. (ESV)*

## Covenants from a Hebrew Perspective

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With this understanding of a covenant, we can better understand what is going on in Genesis chapter 15.

***9** He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." **10** And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. (Genesis 15:9-10, ESV)*

***17** When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. **18** On that day the LORD made (Hebrew - *karat*) a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates," (Genesis 15:17-18, ESV)*

Yahweh is cutting a covenant with Abram. However, Abram does not pass through the pieces, only the pot and torch, representations of Yahweh himself, pass through

the pieces. Because Abram did not pass through the pieces, the actions of Abram, or his descendants, are not a condition of the covenant. The only person responsible for the fulfilling of this covenant is Yahweh and Yahweh alone.

Besides this covenant, Yahweh has made several other covenants with his people, such as the one he made with Noah and his descendants (Genesis 6:18, Genesis 9:9) and the one he made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

*And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made (Hebrew – karat) with you in accordance with all these words." (Exodus 24:8, ESV)*

Unlike the unconditional covenants that Yahweh made with Noah and Abram, this covenant will be upheld only on the condition that Israel obeys the words of Yahweh.

***14** But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, **15** if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, **16** then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. **17** I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. **18** And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, **19** and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. **20** And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit. (Leviticus 26:14-20, ESV)*

And in Deuteronomy 31 Yahweh foretells of the day when Israel will break this covenant by following after other gods.

*For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten*

*and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant. (Deuteronomy 31:20, ESV)*

It is interesting to note that when Israel does break this covenant, Yahweh "cuts" Israel into "two" nations, Israel and Judah. But Yahweh promises that he will make a new covenant with the children of Israel and he will unite these two nations into one nation again.

*And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. (Ezekiel 37:22, ESV)*

**31** *Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. **33** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33, ESV)*

## The Suzerain/Vassal Covenants

By **Brian Keith Hudson**

Have you ever wondered, "Why is the land of Israel so important?" Or, "Why is ha'satan the ruler over this word"? Well to find out why, we have to look back at the first chapters of B'reshit (Genesis), and learn a bit about archaeological discoveries.

To start, we must take a look at covenants. I remember growing up in the Church of God, and many times I heard covenants described as "Everything that is mine, is yours, and everything that is yours is mine", which is OK in describing a parity covenant like Jonathan and David had, but there are other types. Covenant is the very back bone of Scripture. What I want to detail and focus on are the;

1. Suzerain/Vassal covenant
2. Royal land grant covenant, along with the Royal messenger.

These, once you understand them, are everywhere in Scripture.

Let's start with Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

*Gen 1:26 And Elohim said, **Let us make man in our image**, after our likeness: and **let them have dominion over** the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over **all the earth**, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.*

*Gen 1:27 So Elohim created man in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female created he them.*

*Gen 1:28 And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said unto them, **Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over** the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.*

There are some things here that, without the Hebrew and historical information, cannot be seen easily. First is a look at verse 26's statement of "Let us". The word "elohim" is a plural word used to refer to a plural 'strong authority', or a reference

to the one True God. This a bit a side note, and one that Jeff and I have different takes on, but I believe this refers to YHWH and the divine council discussed in Job 1& 2, along with various mentions in Psalms, like PSA 82. Not that this idea is mandatory, yet I feel it is. The 'likeness' that Adam was created in was as a Strong Authority on earth, and was commanded to use this authority to subdue the earth.

These verses in chapter one are a 1st example of a Suzerain/Vassal covenant seen in Scripture. In the Ancient Near East, treaties between kings were a common occurrence. *These were treaties drawn up among equals, and between stronger and weaker kingdoms, and mostly outlined agreements to honor each other's boundaries, to maintain trade relations, return run-away slaves, etc. These treaties are preserved in the Mari Tablets and in the Amarna texts (Dr. Kline's Lecture notes: "Suzerain Treaties & The Covenant Documents the Bible") and you will find this treaty referred to often as Hittite in origin since the tablets found were of Hittite in origin.*

When there was a covenant between a stronger and lesser kingdom, it id referred to as Suzerain(superior king)/Vassal(Lesser King) covenant. In these agreements, autonomy within their own borders is retained, and there was an alliance in wars and protection. If the vassal had issue with another vassal, they would bring it before the suzerain. This is the case in Gen 1:26-28, the Father created Adam to be the vassal king of the garden in Eden, and to colonize this world. Like in the Lord's Prayer; " thy kingdom come, thy will be done, On earth AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

Dr. Kline, in his lecture notes on the *"Suzerain Treaties & The Covenant Documents the Bible"*, mentions that *"[t]hese Suzerain/Vassal covenants open with these two sections:*

- 1. The identification of the Suzerain by his name and titles;*
- 2. The historical survey of the Suzerain's dealings with the vassal, with the purpose of illustrating to the vassal how much the Suzerain has done to protect and establish the vassal who therefore owes submission and allegiance to the Suzerain.*

Dr. Kline also states that *"[T]hese two sections are referred to as the preamble and the next section of these treaties list the 'stipulations.' What the vassal is required to do is spelled out in principal and detail. This section is often concluded with the requirement that the vassal deposit his copy of the treaty in his temple, where he is*

*to occasionally read and study it to refresh his memory concerning his duties.*

*The last section of the S/V covenant contains the blessings and curses of the Suzerain. If the stipulations are met by the vassal, he will receive the Suzerain's blessings, which are listed. If the vassal fails to meet the stipulations, he will receive the Suzerain's curses, which are also listed.*

This can be easily seen here:

*Deu 30:19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that **I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live:*

The Suzerain would keep one copy of the covenant and the vassal would keep one copy of the covenant. This can be seen with the giving of the Torah, and the reason there were 2 tablets. Typically the most widely used rite was that of cutting the bodies of animals in halves and placing them in two rows with enough space between for the two parties of the treaty to walk side by side, as with the Avrahamic covenant, but this isn't seen until after the fall of Adam and death (separation) was brought into the world. As they walked between the pieces, they were vowing to each other, "May what has happened to these animals, happen to me if I break this covenant with you." This is why that Avraham was put to a deep sleep. It was a one sided covenant, to which, if Avraham or his descendant break, per-incarnate Yeshua would have this done to Him.

Dr. Kline's lecture notes also document the following concerning Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy:

### ***Covenant Documents of the Bible Patterned After Suzerain Treaties:***

#### ***Exodus 20***

- *(1-2)"Yahweh" is the Suzerain who delivered this Preamble to Moses, the vassal-lord who represents the people under the authority of the Suzerain.*
- *names & titles = "I am the Lord, your God."*
- *historical prologue = "Who brought you out of Egypt..."*
- *(3-17) Stipulations with selected blessings and curses.*
- *stipulations = the 10 commandments;*
- *blessings and curses = (5b-6); (7b); (12b).*

## ***Dueteronomy***

- *(This entire book of Moses is saturated with Suzerain Treaty language and structure. It is not properly the treaty document itself, but it is based upon such a treaty, making reference to it often. Below are some examples.)*
- *(4:32-40) Historical Prologue language and structure;*
- *(4:44 - 5:21) Stipulations;*
- *(6:4-25) Blessings and Curses;*
- *(8) Reflects all the sections of a suzerain treaty;*
- *(11) " " "*
- *(17:14-20) Reflects the relationship of a vassal king to the Suzerain;*
- *(20) Reflects the language and structure of war-time arrangements between a Suzerain and his people;*
- *(27-28) Curses and Blessings;*
- *(29) Covenant Renewal;*
- *(30:11-19) Classic presentation of Ancient Near East Treaties!*

One more term I'd like to bring briefly introduce and discuss for clarity is the Royal Messenger. Daniel McGir states in his article about the royal messenger:

*Royal messengers in the ancient Near East had numerous responsibilities and roles granted to them such as being a vassal king, a prophet, a vizier, or one who intercedes on behalf of the people. All of these roles are initiated with the legality of being sent" with all the king's authority.*

The training of the RM was intense and lifelong. The RM was usually the son of the king, and had to learn every mannerism of the king, as well as the very mood and nuance of the message. He came, "Not speaking his own words, but the Father's". Kings never physically met. The RM was the contact, and he carried all the authority of the king, and had to be treated as such. This concept helps to clarify Yeshua in the Tenakh, and answer the verses that state that "No man has ever seen nor heard the Father". The YHWH in the Tenakh is most often the RM coming in the "name of the Father". This was a bit of a side note, but the information is needed in the complete understanding of the covenant function.

Back to the S/V covenant, we can now see that this covenant was being initiated in Gen 1. Adam became king of the earth, and was to have dominion over the earth and fill it. To colonize the earth with the Kingdom of YHWH. The language between

the 2 kings used words like: father to the suzerain, son to the vassal, and love. These are covenant words. No matter how they felt about each other, they treated each other accordingly. Love is actionary, like the Hebrew language concept goes. It isn't about harm feelings, but how you treat each other.

Adam was also granted a land/kingdom by YHWH. Gen 2 introduces us to this covenant, the Royal Land Grant covenant. A RLG gives, by the suzerain, land to another. Royal grant covenants have been found in Hittite, Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian texts and most recently in materials from Ras Shamra. They are particularly known from the Babylonian kudurru or boundary stones, texts which cover a period from B.C. 1450 to B.C. 550, the period of Babylonian history during which Boundary-stones were employed for the protection of private property.

The first characteristic of the Royal grant is seen in the basic posture of the covenant, while in the Suzerain-vassal covenant, the rights of the Great King are guaranteed by the treaty. In the Royal grant the rights of a favored individual are protected, and the curses are directed against any who would infringe upon the rights of the land owner.

Once the land is granted, that land cannot be taken away from the recipient, but if the recipient rebels, he loses access to the land. Once the decedents turn back to the suzerain, they have full access back. The land is never taken away, just his access. This is the reason for all the fight over the land of Israel. It belonged to Adam, and was the garden in Eden. Once His decedents return to him, they will have all the land for the restoration of all things. Let us take a look at Gen 2:

*Gen 2:7 So the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground, breathed life into his lungs, and the man became a living being.*

*Gen 2:8 The **LORD God planted a garden in Eden**, toward the east, where he placed the man whom he had formed.*

*Gen 2:15 The **LORD God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden in order to have him work it and guard it**.*

Here we can see YHWH placed man in the garden with the stipulations: 1) Avad - work, serve 2) shamar – guard, protect. As long as he obeys and does his part, he has a kingdom, but he allowed the "nachash" to shame and defile his household,

which dishonored his reign. Since he ate of the fruit too, rather than restoring his bride, he lost the kingdom

The nachash/serpent is defined as:

**H5175** נָחָשׁ nâchâsh

**BDB Definition:**

1) serpent, snake

**Part of Speech:** noun masculine

**A Related Word by BDB/Strong's Number:** from **H5172** נָחַשׁ nâchash

**BDB Definition:**

1) to practice divination, divine, observe signs, **learn by experience**, diligently observe, practice fortunetelling, take as an omen

I find it important to take note of this "to learn by experience", because this truly defines the role of ha'satan. Many scholars connect the serpent and ha'satan, but for a different reason than I do. Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate, summed up the references in Revelation to serpent and the Genesis as the same entity, but the rule of the dishonored king losing his land is my point of connection, along with:

*2Co 4:4 in whom **the god of this age has blinded** the thoughts of the faithless ones, so that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine on them.*

Here you see that ha'satan is the god of this world, and Adams shaming is the reason. Adam was dethroned, and in addition to the nachash become "god/el of this world, he also gained the authority to join the divine council in Job 1 & 2.

Hopefully I have conveyed the basic understanding around this topic well enough to give a basic understanding of the topic. Adam was coronated king, and given a kingdom, with the basic command to guard and protect. He failed miserably, and lost the strong authority he once had. He would have been at the government meetings of the divine council too, but he subjugated all his authority, and now has to "learn by experience". But praise YHWH, the restoration of all things is coming. When the kingdom is restored back to us, the kingdom of priests that we strive to be. The land will be restored to the sons of Adam, and the 2nd Adam will rule for 1000 years until He hands the keys to the Kingdom over to the Father/

## The Two Covenants: Sarah and Hagar

By Jeff A. Benner

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he explains the two covenants. Below is my commentary on Galatians 4:21-31.

*Tell me you who want to be under the covenant of obedience, are you not aware of what the Torah says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.*

The covenant of law is like the relationship between a master and the servant. God is the master and those in this covenant relationship are servants to him and must obey him. If the servant disobeys, he is punished or executed. The covenant of love is like the relationship between a father and son. God is the father and those in this covenant relationship are his sons. The father protects and provides for his son out of love, unconditionally. As the son grows, he begins to return the love by following in his father's footsteps. The servant's relationship with the master remains static while the relationship between father and son grows.

*His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.*

Because of the heart of stone, which covers our heart of flesh, our natural way of entering into covenant relationship is through blessings and curses. It is only through supernatural ways that the heart of flesh is revealed bringing us into the covenant of love.

*These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves. This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.*

The Greek word translated as "above" is *ano*, meaning above and is the same word used for "born from above" in John 3.3. Those who are born in the super (a Latin word meaning above) natural way are born in the Jerusalem that is above. How

does this supernatural birth occur? Yeshua was born by the "breath" of God and it is by this breath that our hearts of flesh are revealed.

Hagar represents the present-day Jerusalem and the leaders of Israel who keep Israel in the slavery of the covenant of law. Through the breath of God, we are supernaturally born into freedom, which is represented, by Sarah and her son's supernatural birth by the breath of God.

*For it is written: Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband. Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted (Gk: dioko meaning to chase away) the son born by the power of the Spirit.*

Those born in the natural way will chase away those who are born from above desiring the inheritance promised to those in the covenant of love.

*It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."*

This verse quotes Genesis 21:9 and in the verse prior to that (Genesis 21:8) it says that Sarah saw Ishmael (meaning one who hears God) laughing. Sarah said "all who hear what God has done will laugh for me" Sarah saw Ishmael laughing. Evidently Ishmael was pursuing after the inheritance promised to the firstborn.

Similarly, the Israel under the covenant of law has continually pursued after those born from above, for the inheritance naturally belongs to the Israel that is free in the covenant of love.

*Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.*

Who is born from above? Those whose hearts of flesh have been revealed by the breath of God, are the sons of Abraham through the free woman Sarah, whether Jew or Gentile. As Shaul says in Eph 2.12,19;

*You were separate from Messiah excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.....You*

*are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.*

Those born of the free woman receive the promised inheritance - the land of Israel.

*(Psalms 105.8-11) He remembers forever his covenant spoken by command to a thousand generations. Which he cut with Abraham and he swore to Isaac and he made it stand for Jacob, a decree for Israel, a covenant everlasting. To say to you, I give the land of Canaan, bound as your inheritance.*