

The Covenants of YHWH

by John Steed

At the heart of our relationship as humans with our Creator YHWH lies the ancient institution of the covenant (*berit*). Essentially an agreement between two parties, a covenant was an institution of primitive common law - it had legal force and it generally exhibited certain characteristics -

- set terms to be upheld each party,
- a sign or symbol, it was made by the shedding of blood,
- if done properly, this included the passing between the two halves of the slain and dissected animal by the parties of the covenant.

The word *berit* carries the sense of cutting.

Covenants were made by people of all ranks in society - whenever they wished to make a firm agreement and make it binding. We read of a number of such human/human covenants in Scripture (1Mosh/Gen. 21:27; 1Shem/Sam. 18:3 for example), also we read of occasions when people made covenants with YHWH (2Sov/Kings 23:3; 2Ann/Chron. 34:31; Ezra 10:3). But the covenants that I wish to discuss here, and which are of the greatest interest to us, are those covenants made with us humans by our Creator, YHWH. Using the criteria that the word *berit* must be used at some point in Scripture in reference to the agreement, I count the covenants of YHWH with humanity as being 9 in number. The first of these applies to all humanity, the following 8 are made with Abraham and his children. It is around these covenants that the story of the Scriptures centres, and within these 9 covenants we find the essentials of our belief. They are in fact what we could call our “Articles of Faith” - for if I was to say, “I believe in YHWH and His covenants” I would be expressing belief in all the essential truth of the Scriptures.

But we do not hear a lot spoken about the covenants - with the exception of the covenant made at Sinai, and the “new” covenant, the favourite of Christianity, though they rarely do they speak of its substance. Probably it is because 8 of the 9 are “to Yisra’el,” as Sha’ul says in Romans 9:4, the Gentile world doesn’t want to know about them. But the truth is that in them lies our salvation, for YHWH, who does not lie (4Mosh/Num. 23:19) and does not change (Mal. 3:6), has bound Himself to perform the promises of these covenants - which include the eternal inheritance of the Land by Yisra’el and the blessing of the Gentiles. So what are these covenants?

(1) The Noachic Covenant YHWH told Noah before the flood that He would make a covenant with him - “But I will establish my covenant with you;”

(1Mosh/Gen. 6:18). It is worth noting here that while *berit* carries the sense of cutting it comes from a root, *barah*, which means to select. So YHWH's covenant with Noach is built on just that, a selection of Noach and his family because of Noach's righteousness (1Mosh/Gen. 6:9; 7:1). The actual covenant was made after the flood when Noach and his family left the ark - read 1Mosh/Gen. 8:15-9:17. The covenant was made after Noach made burnt offerings.

- It is made with: Noach and all his descendants and every living creature - all flesh (Yes, even the birds!).
- Yahueh's promise: "the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh" - "neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." (Note that in Yere/Jer. 33:20&25 this covenant is referred to as Yahueh's covenant with the day and night.)
- Instructions (our side of the agreement): "Bear fruit and increase and fill the earth." All creatures to fear humanity. Every living creature to be food - as the plants - but no blood to be eaten. Murderers to be executed.
- Sign of the covenant: the rainbow.
- Duration: to *'olam* - forever, everlasting.

(2) The Abrahamic Covenant This covenant also involves selection - the selection of particular family to be the special representatives of YHWH. We read of this covenant in 1Mosh/Gen. 15 and 17. In 15:8-17 we read how Abram (soon to be Abraham) performed the proper ritual forming a covenant - cutting the animals in halves - which YHWH as a "smoking oven and a burning torch," passed between. This covenant is made with: Abram and his descendants.

The promises:

- The land of Kena'an to be the possession of Abram's seed. Abram to be the father of many nations. and of sovereigns.
- Covenant to be made with Yitzchak, Yishma'el to be blessed.
- Instruction: "walk before Me and be perfect."
- The sign: circumcision of all males the eighth day, also Abram and Sarai's names changed.
- Duration: too *'olam* - forever, everlasting.

(3) The Covenant with Yitzchak As part of the covenant made with Abraham, YHWH had promised to make a covenant with Yitzchak. We read of this covenant in 1Mosh/Gen. 26:2-5. Scripture does not record the any formal

proceedings in the regard to the making of this covenant, nor with the following covenant with Ya'akov, probably because they are restatements of the covenant made with their father Abraham.

- Covenant made with: Yitzchak.
- The promises: YHWH to bless, to give the land to Yitzchak and his seed, to establish the oath He swore to Abraham, to increase Yitzchak's seed as the stars of the heavens, and all nations to be blessed in his seed.
- Instructions: Yitzchak to stay in the Land, not to go down to Mitzrayim (Egypt).
- Sign: none mentioned.
- Duration: none mentioned

Note that this covenant is made because Abraham obeyed the terms of the covenant made with him - "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." This means that even if one, two, or more generations fail to keep the covenant, YHWH is still duty bound to perform the promises he made to Abraham.

(4) The Covenant with Ya'akov In 3Mosh/Lev. 26:42 YHWH says that He made a covenant with Ya'akov - but on which occasion? We have a couple of possible times to choose from! YHWH appeared to Ya'akov at Beyth El both when he was leaving the Land and on his return, both times YHWH restated the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Read 1Mosh/Gen. 28:12-22 and 1Mosh/Gen. 35:1-15. In summary -

- Covenant made with: Ya'akov (to be renamed Yisra'el).
- Promises: The Land given to him and his seed. His seed to be as the dust of the earth - to break forth in all directions. All clans of the earth to be blessed in him and his seed. YHWH to guard him when went out of the Land and to return him to it. vereigns to come from his body.
- Instructions: "Bear fruit and increase" - none other's especially given, but note how Ya'akov destroyed the idols from among his family before the second occasion (35:2-4).
- Sign: None given by YHWH - but on both occasions Ya'akov set up a stone and anointed it, also he promises to make it "Elohim's house" and to give a tenth to Elohim.
- Duration: none mentioned.

(5) The Siniatic Covenant When YHWH made a covenant with Abraham He warned him that his children would be slaves for 400 years in another land - but He promised that he would judge that nation and bring them out "with great possessions," returning them to the land in the "fourth eneration." So we read in 2Mosh/Ex. 2:24 that "Elohim heard their groaning and Elohim

remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov." Yes, the miracle of the exodus occurred because YHWH had covenanted to do it. This should give us great confidence that He will fulfil all His covenant obligations. YHWH brought the nation of the Beni Ysra'el - Sons of Yisra'el to Mt Sinai and there made a covenant with them. Actually one could say that two covenants were made at Sinai - though Scripture always speaks of it in hindsight as a single event - because the covenant made on the first occasion was rapidly broken by the people. They could hardly wait to make the golden calf and enter into idolatry! But the covenant was then "remade" by the making of a second set of the tablets of Witness. The first event is recorded in 2Mosh/Ex. 19-31, the second in 2Mosh/Ex. 33-34. The text of the covenant made at Sinai is quite large, but here are the essentials -

- Covenant made with: the people of Yisra'el.
- The promises: Yisra'el to be YHWH's treasured possession - a reign of priests and a set-apart nation.
- Instructions: numerous! Essentially an explanation of what was meant by the instruction to Abraham - "walk before Me and be perfect."
- The sign: Shabbat (Sabbath) (2Mosh/Ex. 31:12-17).
- Duration: to *'olam* - forever, everlasting.

(6) The Levitical Covenant This is probably the least known covenant of all. We read of it in 4Mosh/Num. 18 (note verse 19 - "it is a covenant of salt for ever before YHWH unto thee and to thy seed with thee.") and 4Mosh/Num. 25:10-13 - "Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his Elohim, and made an atonement for the children of Yisra'el." (not all quoted). See also Malaki 2:4-6.

- Covenant made with: Aaron, Phinehas, and their descendants.
- Promises: the tithes and gifts of the Tent of Meeting - to be an everlasting priesthood.
- Instructions: "to bear the crookedness against the set-apart place" and to do the service of the Tent of Meeting.
- Sign: none mentioned.
- Duration: to *'olam* - forever, everlasting.

(7) The Covenant of Moab The text of this covenant is essentially the whole of the fifth book of Mosheh (Deut.). It is a restatement of the covenant of Sinai, but the actual event of the covenant being made is recorded in 5Mosh/Deut. 29-31. It is a most unusual covenant - it actually assumes it will be broken by the people, but it still continues!

- Covenant made with: the Sons of Yisra'el - both those present and not present (29:14-15).
- Promises: the principle promises of this covenant are those of the curses and blessings of chapter 29. This is interesting, because while it promises exile and death to the covenant breaker, it also promises blessing and return to the Land to an Yisra'ite who is repentant! The blessings in this covenant are conditional on obedience. This is the covenant of the return of Yisra'el.
- Instructions: Everything contained in the book of Teaching (Torah) - but repentance is a requirement for it's re-institution (30:1-2&10).
- Sign: no special sign given. (Song of Mosheh to be witness (heaven and earth also) against Yisra'el.
- Duration: none given.

(8) The Davidic Covenant Remember how YHWH promised Abraham and Ya'akov that sovereigns were to come from them? Well this is the covenant that establishes this promise. We could call it the "Messianic Covenant" for it establishes the Son of David as YHWH's Anointed (Messiah/M hiach), leading to the fulfilment of the ancient Messianic prophesies in the person of Yahushua HaNatzrati - Sovereign of Yisra'el for all eternity. This covenant brings to completion the founding of Yisra'el, being the seventh covenant from Abraham.

This covenant is made in 2Shem/Sam. 7 - though the word "berit" is not mentioned here, David refers to it as a covenant in 2Shem/Sam. 23:5, and YHWH calls it such in Ps. 89:3 Yere/Jer. 33:21 and 2Ann/Chron. 7:18. This covenant is also referred to in Ps 2.

- Covenant made with: David
- Promises: David's seed to be established as sovereign forever. YHWH to be his Father - and he to be YHWH's son. YHWH to reprove him, but His kindness not to depart.
- Instructions: David's seed to build the House of YHWH.
- Sign: none mentioned.
- Duration: to *'olam* - forever, everlasting.

(9) The Renewed Covenant This is the ultimate covenant! It creates a new beginning for Yisra'el and opens the way to eternal life for the whole earth. It is built on the foundation of all previous covenants. This covenant, which was made by the blood of the Messiah himself is indeed the hope of Yisra'el. The texts that refer to this covenant are numerous - Read Yere/Jer. 31:31-40; 32:37-41; 50:5. Yesha/Isa. 42:1-7; 49:5-13; 59:20&21; 61:1-9. Yech/Eze. 16:59-63; 37:21-28. Dan. 9:27. Hos. 2:18. Zech. 9:9-12. Mal. 3:1-4. Matt. 6:27-29. Mark 14:23-25. Luke 22:20. Heb. 8-10.

- Covenant made with: House of Yisra'el and House of Yahudah (10 tribes + 2 tribes).
- Promises: YHWH to be their Elohim, YHWH to write His Torah (Teaching/law) on their heart and give His Spirit. YHWH to forgive their sins and remember them no more. No man to teach his neighbour - all to know YHWH.
- Instructions: repent and accept the blood of the covenant - that of Yahushua HaMashiach (Yoch/John 6:53-56).
- Sign: the juice of the grape at Pesach (Passover), also immersion as sign of repentance.
- Duration: to *'olam* - forever, everlasting.

Summary : These covenants lay out YHWH's plan for the salvation of mankind - and indeed all His creation. They are a beautiful testimony to YHWH's thought and planning. One covenant does not cancel another, rather they are complementary, building one on the oth till a perfect structure is attained. We have :

- 1 Universal Covenant - maintaining life on earth despite sin.
- 3 Foundation Covenants - selecting a family to witness of YHWH and to enable ultimate salvation.
- 3 National Covenants - (a) establishing the nation and giving the Torah (Teaching); (b) creating repentance and avenue of the restoration of the nation despite the people's failure; (c) bring the nation to final and eternal fulfilment.
- 2 Special Covenants - (a) forming a priesthood (within Yisra'el) to minister to the Nation; (b) founding an eternal Sovereignty - a ruler and leader, saviour for all peoples.

To which covenant or covenants are you or I subject? This depends on who we are - but all do affect us as far as salvation is concerned. All creation is subject to the Noachic covenant. Those born into Yisra'el or those who join themselves to Yisra'el re subject to the foundation and national covenants. The Levites are subject to their special covenant (generally persons bearing the surnames Cohen or Levi, or their variants). Yahushua is the only person living who is really subject to the Davidic covenant.

In order of time, the first 8 covenants are in full force, the ninth however is really still in the process of being made. Yes, Yahushua's blood was shed 2000 years ago, but it is not yet in full force as a simple reading of it testifies. It is not till the Moabic covenant has achieved it's goal, the return of Yisra'el, that the Renewed covenant comes into action. We are currently in a similar position to when Yisra'el was in the wilderness - the covenant had been made at Sinai, but most of it could t be implemented until they reached the Land. So

the door is open for those who wish to become party to the Renewed covenant to do so, but it's promises will not be realised until Yisra'el is fully restored and the Reign of YHWH established.