

Student Notes: The New Covenant

Part 1: What is a covenant?

Yeshua offered up the cup of wine and declared that it was the New Covenant in His blood.

Matthew 26:26-28 NKJV 26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

What is a covenant?

Covenant: "ber-eeth'," number 1285 meaning a compact made by passing between two pieces of flesh.
root word is "bar-ah," number 1262 meaning to select in the sense of cutting.

Covenants are cut: "kaw-rath'," number 3772 meaning to cut.

Hebrews 9:16-20 YLT 16 for where a covenant is, the death of the covenant-victim to come in is necessary, 17 for a covenant over dead victims is steadfast, since it is no force at all when the covenant-victim liveth, 18 whence not even the first apart from blood hath been initiated, 19 for every command having been spoken, according to law, by Moses, to all the people, having taken the blood of the calves and goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, he both the book itself and all the people did sprinkle, 20 saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God enjoined unto you,'

In Genesis, Moses describes a covenant ceremony that God cut with Abram.

Genesis 15:9-10 NKJV 9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

While Abram dozed, God confirmed the covenant by passing between the parts.

Genesis 15:17-18 NKJV 17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates-

Jeremiah describes a covenant the children of Israel made with God and, then, promptly broke.

Jeremiah 34:18-20 NKJV 18 'And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it- 19 'the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf- 20 'I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth.

The cultures of the ancient Near East gives us more understanding about the practice and the sanctity of the covenant ritual and the ramifications of the covenant agreement.

- Blood covenant
- Threshold covenant
- Salt covenant

H. Clay Trumbull, nineteenth century theologian and historian researched both ancient and modern observances of covenant rituals in the Near East and discussed their relevance to understanding biblical covenants.

Trumbull relates an accounting of one such ritual.

It was two young men, who were to enter into this covenant. They had known each other, and had been intimate, for years; but now they were to become brother-friends, in the covenant of blood. Their relatives and neighbors were called together, in the open place before the village fountain, to witness the sealing compact. The young men publicly announced their purpose, and their reasons for it. Their declarations were written down, in duplicate,—one paper for each friend,—and signed by themselves and by several witnesses. One of the friends took a sharp lancet, and opened a vein in the other's arm. Into the opening thus made, he inserted a quill, through which he sucked the living blood. The lancet-blade was carefully wiped on one of the duplicate covenant-papers, and then it was taken by the other friend, who made a like incision in its first user's arm, and drank his blood through the quill, wiping the blade on the duplicate covenant-record. The two friends declared together: "We are brothers in a covenant made before God: who deceiveth the other, him will God deceive." Each blood-marked covenant-record, was then folded carefully, to be sewed up in a small leathern case, or amulet, about an inch square; to be worn thenceforward by one of the covenant-brothers, suspended about the neck, or bound upon the arm, in token of the indissoluble relation.ⁱ

Discussion Question: Read 2 Chr. 20:7. What does that tell us about God's covenant relationship with Abraham?

Discussion question: How are the phylacteries a sign of the covenant God made with the children of Israel?

Other forms of the blood covenant involved comingling blood with wine.

As far back, even, as the fifth century before Christ, we find an explicit description of this Oriental rite of blood-covenanting, in the writings of "the Father of History." "Now the Scythians," says Herodotus, "make covenants in the following manner, with whomsoever they make them. Having poured out wine into a great earthen drinking-bowl, they mingle with it the blood of those cutting covenant, striking the body [of each person having a part in it] with a small knife, or cutting it slightly with a sword. Thereafter, they dip into the bowl, sword, arrows, axe, and javelin. But while they are doing this, they utter many invoking [of curse upon a breach of this covenant]; and, afterwards, not only those who make the covenant, but those of their followers who are of the highest rank, drink off [the wine mingled with blood]."ⁱⁱ

Still other forms involve a substitutionary sharing of blood.

The covenant ceremony is usually followed by a celebratory meal. In many instances, some memorial is erected as a reminder of the covenant agreement.

In various parts of the East, a *tree* is given prominence in the rite of blood-covenanting. In Burmah, as above shown, one mode of covenanting is by the mutual planting of a tree. In Timor, a newly planted fig-tree is made to bear a portion of the blood of the covenant, and to remain as a witness to the sacred rite itself.^[711] In one portion of Central Africa, a forked palm branch is held by the two parties, at their entering into blood-friendship; and, in another region, the ashes of a burned tree and the blood of the covenanting brothers are brought into combination, in the use of a knotted palm branch which the brothers together hold. And, again, in Canaan, in the days of Abraham, the planting of a tree was an element in covenant making; as shown in the narrative of the covenant which Abraham cut with Abimelech, at Beer-sheba.ⁱⁱⁱ

Discussion question: What elements of the blood covenant are included in the covenant ceremony of Genesis 15?

From these descriptions, we can see many places in the Bible where a blood covenant ceremony took place.

Discussion Question: What are some of the covenant ceremonies, either implied or directly stated, that occur in the Bible? What are the elements of these covenants?

ⁱ The project Gutenberg EBook of the Blood Covenant. H. Clay Trumbull. ©1885. P. 6.

ⁱⁱ The project Gutenberg EBook of the Blood Covenant. H. Clay Trumbull. ©1885. P. 62

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