

stone for the Church, which is a living temple of the Spirit (Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:4).

COS A small island in the Aegean Sea, first settled by the Mycenaean in the mid-fifteenth century B.C. The island figured in the events of the Maccabean War (1 Macc 15:23) and was mentioned once in the New Testament at Acts 21:1: following Paul's third missionary journey, the apostle journeyed from Miletus to Cos; there he spent the night before setting sail for Rhodes.

COUNCIL See *Sanhedrin*; see also *Jerusalem, Council of*.

COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM See *Jerusalem, Council of*.

COVENANT A kinship bond between two parties, with conditions or obligations, established by an oath or its equivalent. Covenants were ubiquitous in the ancient Near East as well as Greco-Roman culture as a means to forge and maintain relationships between individuals, families, tribes, and even nations. Covenant is also the master-theme of the Bible, which records the various ways throughout history that God has drawn humanity into a familial relationship with himself through divine oaths.

The imperfect rendering of the word "covenant" (Hebrew *bērit*; Greek *diathēkē*) as "Testament" in the Latin tradition has obscured the fact that the Bible is divided into the Scriptures based on two covenants, the Old and the New. Nonetheless, this division of the canon on the basis of covenant distinctions points

to the undeniable centrality of the concept of covenant to biblical thought and Christian theology. Moreover, for Catholics, the fact that the source and summit of the Christian life, the **Eucharist**, is identified by Christ as "the New Covenant" (Luke 22:20) should suffice to demonstrate the importance of covenant to the plan of salvation.

I. THE ESSENCE AND DEFINITION OF COVENANT

The definition of "covenant" has been widely debated by biblical scholars. Especially in German scholarship there has been a tendency to reduce the notion of "covenant" to a synonym for "law" or "obligation." Covenants do frequently contain laws or obligations. However, research on ancient Near Eastern covenants in the second half of the twentieth century has established a virtual consensus among Protestant (Frank Moore Cross, Gordon Hugenberger), Catholic (D. J. McCarthy, Paul Kalluveetil), and Jewish (Moshe Weinfeld, David Noel Freedman) scholars that a "covenant" is, in its essence, a legal means to establish kinship between two previously unrelated parties. Harvard scholar Frank Moore Cross explains that a covenant "is . . . a widespread legal means by which the duties and privileges of kinship may be extended to another individual or group, including aliens." This kinship, or familial, relationship was regulated by conditions and obligations specified during the covenant-making ceremony, usually consisting of a liturgical rite culminating in a verbal or ritual oath performed by one or both of the parties to the covenant.

It is incorrect to view a covenant simply

as a contract. Generally, a contract involves the exchange of goods, whereas a covenant involves the exchange of persons. Unlike most contracts, covenants are not merely civil but sacred bonds, in which an oath is employed to call on God (or the gods, in polytheistic societies) to enforce the covenant obligations.

II. THE MEANS OF ESTABLISHING A COVENANT

The Bible and various ancient Near Eastern texts describe a variety of ways that were used to establish or solemnize a covenant between two parties.

In almost every case the central act of covenant-making was the swearing of an oath by one or both of the parties to the covenant (Gen 21:31–32, 22:16, 26:28; Josh 9:15; Ezek 16:59, 17:13–19). The oath generally took the form of a self-curse. The covenant-maker called on God or the gods to inflict death or some other grave penalty upon himself should he fail to keep the obligations of the covenant he was entering. This oath could be verbally pronounced, or it could be expressed by a ritual. Secular covenant texts from the ancient Near East record a wide variety of ritual self-curses, such as this one described in an Assyrian text from 754 B.C.:

This head is not the head of a lamb, it is the head of Mati'ilu (the covenant-maker). If Mati'ilu sins against this covenant, so may, just as the head of this spring lamb is torn off . . . the head of Mati'ilu be torn off.
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A similar ritual self-curse was performed by cutting animals in two and passing between

the carcasses (Gen 15; Jer 34). This ritually represented the intention, "May I be slain like these animals if I do not maintain this covenant" (see Jer 34:18). The Bible records other ritual self-curses as well: the sacrifice of animals and the sprinkling of blood (Exod 24:8; Ps 50:5), expressing, "May my blood be shed like the blood of these animals"; and circumcision (Gen 17:10), expressing, "May I myself be cut off if I do not keep the covenant."

Other rituals associated with covenant solemnization in Scripture do not express a self-curse but exemplify other aspects of the covenant relationship. Often the covenant-making parties shared a common meal to confirm their new familial relationship (Gen 26:30, 31:54; Exod 24:11; Josh 9:14–15; Luke 22:14–23). The use of family terms ("brother," 1 Kgs 20:32–34; "father" and "son," Ps 89:26–28; 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) and the exchange of clothing (1 Sam 18:3) or other gifts (Gen 21:27) could also express familial intimacy.

The New Covenant is established at the **Last Supper**, a communal meal between the covenant-making parties analogous to Moses and the elders sharing a meal with God on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 24:11). On the other hand, Jesus's very words, "This is my blood of the covenant" (Matt 26:28), recall Moses's words when sprinkling the shed blood of the sacrificial animals during the ratification of the covenant on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:8). The Eucharist thus is both the family meal and the solemn sacrifice of the New Covenant.

Most of the rituals used in covenant making or covenant renewal were essentially liturgical in nature. They were performed according to sacred customs, in the presence of

God (or the gods), who was called on to witness to and enforce the covenant obligations. Since the divine presence was important to the liturgical rites of covenant making, sacred locations such as temples or holy mountains were preferred places for covenant rituals.

Examining covenant-making ceremonies helps us to see that a covenant had *familial*, *legal*, and *liturgical* dimensions. In brief, a covenant was a *familial bond* established by a *legally binding* oath sworn during a *liturgical* ritual. All these aspects are visible during the covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:3–11). The *familial bond* is illustrated by the shared meal between God and the elders of Israel on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:9–11). The *legally binding oath* is expressed by the solemn words of the people followed by the sprinkling of blood, a ritual self-curse (Exod 24:7–8) that binds them to obey all the legal obligations enunciated in Exod 20–23. A *liturgical ritual* serves as the context for swearing the oath: sacrifices offered at an altar in a sacred place (Exod 24:4–5) while invoking the name of the Lord (Exod 24:7–8).

III. CATEGORIES OF COVENANT

Covenants may be placed into two categories according to the status of the covenant-making parties: “human” covenants are between two human parties, whereas “divine” covenants include God as one partner.

Covenants may also be categorized according to which party actually swears the oath that establishes the covenant.

When both parties swear the covenant oath, a “kinship” (or “parity”) covenant is formed. This covenant type is labeled “kin-

ship” because the familial nature of the covenant-bond is at the forefront of the relationship, rather than the subordination of one of the parties to the other. The mutual swearing of the oath indicates that both parties accept responsibility for keeping the covenant obligations, resulting in an equal, or at least reciprocal, relationship between the two. Several kinship-type covenants in Scripture included a family meal in the covenant-making ritual (Gen 26:30, 31:54; Exod 24:11).

When the inferior party alone swears the oath, a “vassal-type” covenant results. In this situation, the superior party imposes a covenant relationship on the inferior, who is often a rebellious servant. Ancient Near Eastern examples of vassal covenants include the well-known Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (king of Assyria, r. 681–669 B.C.), which Esarhaddon imposed on untrustworthy vassal kings to ensure their obedience to his heir, Ashurbanipal. Biblical examples include the covenant of circumcision in Gen 17, where only **Abraham** performs the covenant-oath ritual (i.e., circumcision); and the covenant of Deuteronomy, in which only the people of Israel invoke the self-curse (i.e., the oath) to fulfill the terms of the covenant (Deut 27:11–26; Josh 8:30–35).

When the superior party alone swears the oath, he establishes a “grant-type” covenant with the inferior party. These “grant” covenants were frequently employed by ancient Near Eastern kings to reward faithful servants, often by granting them a piece of royal land (hence the term “grant”) in perpetuity. In this covenant form, the superior party assumes all responsibility for the maintenance of the covenant, in view of some prior meritorious ac-

tion by the inferior. Biblical examples include the final form of the Abrahamic covenant (see Gen 22:15–18), and the Davidic covenant, especially as described in Ps 89:3–37.

IV. HUMAN COVENANTS IN ANTIQUITY AND THE BIBLE

Ancient Near Eastern archaeology has brought to light a number of non-Israelite covenant texts. Two of the larger collections of these texts are the Hittite Treaties and the previously mentioned Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon. The Hittite Treaties date from the second millennium B.C. and consist of covenants established between the king of Hatti-land (modern Turkey) and the kings of the surrounding nations, functioning as the ancient equivalent of an international treaty. The actual texts of these covenants followed a regular structure, which is also evident in the book of Deuteronomy:

1. Preamble (1:1–5)
2. Historical Prologue (1:6–4:49)
3. Stipulations (5:1–26:19)
4. Blessings and Curses (27:1–30:20)
5. Storage and Reading Arrangements (31:1–34:12)

Some scholars have pointed to the similarity of structure between Deuteronomy and the Hittite treaties as an argument for dating Deuteronomy to the second millennium B.C. (consistent with Mosaic authorship), since ancient Near Eastern covenants from the first millennium B.C. did not follow the same structure. The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (eighth century B.C.), for example, omit the historical prologue and the blessings. These harsh treaties, imposed by Esarhaddon on his vassals, are no-

table for their extremely lengthy and colorful lists of covenant curses, some of which sound similar to those of Deut 28:15–68.

A number of covenants between two human parties are recorded in the Bible: between Abraham and **Abimelech** (Gen 21:22–33), **Isaac** and Abimelech (Gen 26:26–33), **Jacob** and **Laban** (Gen 31:43–54), the Israelites and Gibeonites (Josh 9:15), **David** and **Jonathan** (1 Sam 18:1–4; 20:8), **Ahab** and **Ben-hadad** (1 Kgs 20:32–34), **Jehoiada** and the palace guards (2 Kgs 11:4), and others. These numerous human covenants recorded in Scripture testify to the widespread use of covenants in ancient society over an extended period of time. These covenants formed sacred bonds that could not be broken without incurring a curse, even if the covenant was established under false pretenses or duress (Josh 9:19; Ezek 17:11–21).

V. DIVINE COVENANTS IN THE BIBLE

The people of Israel were unique among ancient nations in believing that God had entered into covenants with themselves and their ancestors. The Bible is structured according to a sequence of divine covenants established between God and man, through the mediation of different individuals: **Adam**, **Noah**, **Abraham**, **Moses**, **David**, and ultimately **Jesus Christ**.

Although the **Creation** narrative (Gen 1–3) does not use the word “covenant” (Hebrew *bĕrît*), there are various implicit or indirect indicators that a covenant is present between God and creation, mediated by Adam: (1) the creation account culminates on the Sabbath, which is the “sign” of the covenant elsewhere

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in Scripture (Exod 31:12–17); (2) in Gen 6:18, the verb used for the making of the covenant with Noah is not the usual one for covenant initiation (Hebrew *kārat*), but a term indicating the maintenance or renewal of a preexisting covenant (Hebrew *hēqīm*). The similarity in language between Gen 6 and Gen 1 suggests the covenant being “renewed” with Noah is the one present at creation; (3) In Hos 6:7 the prophet compares Israel with Adam in terms of covenant unfaithfulness: “Like Adam they transgressed the covenant.”

The creation or Adamic covenant bound God with Adam, whose status was Son of God (cf. Gen 1:26–27, 5:1) and vice-regent of creation (Gen 1:28). The condition of the covenant was to refrain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16–17); the corresponding curse was death (Gen 2:17).

Adam and Eve’s subsequent breaking of the covenant introduces death into human history (cf. Gen 4:8) and begins a cycle of sin that ultimately necessitates the cleansing of the earth by the Flood. After the Flood, the original creation covenant is renewed with Noah (Gen 9:1–17), although with modifications: the once-peaceful relationship between man and nature has been marred (cf. Gen 1:29–30; 9:2–6).

God begins the process of the redemption of mankind with Abraham, the covenant recipient par excellence of the Old Testament. God makes at least two covenants with Abraham in Gen 15:1–21 and 17:1–27. In addition, in light of the close relationship between “oath” and “covenant” (see Gen 21:31–32; Ezek 17:13–19), it is likely that the divine oath of Gen 22:15–18 also establishes a covenant with Abraham.

These covenants should be viewed as cumulative, each building on the previous one.

Genesis 15 establishes the initial covenant between Abraham and God, solemnizing the earlier promise that Abraham would become a “great nation” (Gen 12:2). The promises of the Gen 15 covenant include numerous descendants for Abraham and a land to call their own, the ingredients necessary for his people to become a great nation.

Genesis 17 augments the earlier Abrahamic covenant by including a promise of kingship for Abraham’s descendants (Gen 17:6), and the expectation that Abraham would become not just one but “many nations” (Gen 17:5–6). Also included for the first time is the covenant obligation of circumcision (Gen 17:9–14).

In Gen 22, after the near sacrifice of Abraham’s “only begotten” (Hebrew *yāhīd*) son, Isaac, which so strongly foreshadows Calvary, God swears a covenant oath to Abraham reiterating earlier covenant promises but also confirming the promise of blessing to all nations through Abraham’s seed (Gen 22:18), a promise given earlier in Gen 12:3 but not included as a provision of the covenant in either Gen 15 or Gen 17. In Gen 22:15–18, the Abrahamic covenant reaches its final form.

The remaining divine covenants recorded in Scripture are grounded in the Abrahamic covenant. The book of Exodus records the flight of Abraham’s descendants from Egypt and their assembly at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive a covenant from God through Moses. This covenant had within it the potential to fulfill the promises given to Abraham

of great nationhood, kingship, and universal blessing. The descendants of Abraham had multiplied remarkably, the land of Canaan lay before them, and they were about to receive a law forming, as it were, their constitution as a political entity, a "great nation." In addition, the promise prior to the giving of this Sinaitic (or Mosaic) covenant stated that obedience to the covenant would result in Israel's attaining the status of a "royal priesthood" (Hebrew *mamleket kōhānīm*; Exod 19:6), that is, a nation of king-priests, fulfilling the promise of Gen 17 ("kings will come from you") and of Gen 22:18 concerning blessing to all the nations, since a major function of a priest is to bring blessings (cf. Num 6:22-27).

This promise of Abrahamic covenant fulfillment was not attained under the Mosaic covenant, however, because of the immediate violation of the covenant with the fashioning of the golden calf (Exod 32). The golden calf incident necessitated a remaking of the Mosaic covenant (Exod 34:1-35) in which the general priesthood of the firstborn of Israel transferred to the Levites (Exod 32:27-29; Num 3:5-51) and a great deal of additional law was added (Exod 35-Lev 27). Additional rebellions in the desert (Num 11; 12; 14; 16; 17), especially the idolatry and promiscuity at Beth-peor (Num 25), set the stage for yet another renewal of the Mosaic covenant described by the book of Deuteronomy. Promulgated at Beth-peor in the Plains of Moab (Deut 1:5; 3:29; 4:44-46) almost forty years after the Sinai event, the Deuteronomy covenant is clearly a distinct covenant augmenting the one made and renewed at Sinai (also called

"Horeb"; see Deut 29:1). For the first time laws are given to Israel permitting a human king (Deut 17:14-20), total warfare (Deut 20:16-18), and divorce (Deut 24:1-4). Jesus will later indicate that at least some of these covenant provisions were not the divine ideal but were concessions to the hard-heartedness of Israel (Matt 19:8-9).

Israel's subsequent track record under the Mosaic covenant was checkered at best, but Yahweh's plan for his people reached a high point under David and the early reign of Solomon (2 Sam 5-1; 1 Kgs 10). David united the nation under a strong central government at his capital in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5) and made proper worship of the Lord a national priority (2 Sam 6-7). God granted to David a covenant as recorded in 2 Sam 7:5-16, although the word "covenant" only appears in later references to this event (2 Sam 23:5; Ps 89:19-37, 132:1-18; Isa 55:3; 2 Chr 13:5, 21:7; Jer 33:20-22). The terms of this covenant made David and his heirs sons of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26-27) and high kings over the earth (Ps 89:27; 2:6-9) who would enjoy an everlasting reign (2 Sam 7:13, 16) and would build the House of God—that is, the **Temple** (2 Sam 7:13).

After a brief period of glory under Solomon, during which these covenant promises appeared to be visibly fulfilled (1 Kgs 4-10), the Davidic monarchy entered a long period of decline, beginning with the division of Israel into the ten tribes in the north and southern Judah (2 Kgs 12). During the decay of the divided people of God, the prophets spoke of a new covenant to come (Jer 31:31; cf. Isa 55:1-3, 59:20-21, 61:8-9; Ezek 34:25, 37:26) that

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would be unlike the unsuccessful Mosaic covenant (Jer 31:32; cf. Ezek 20:23–28; Isa 61:3–4). Simultaneously, the Davidic covenant would be restored (Jer 33:14–26; Isa 9, 11, 55:3; Ezek 37:15–28).

The Gospels, particularly Matthew and Luke, clearly depict Jesus as the Son (heir) of David and thus the one to restore the Davidic covenant (Matt 1:1–25; Luke 1:31–33, 69; 2:4). At the Last Supper, Jesus explicitly identifies his body and blood as the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) promised by the prophets (Jer 31:31), thus strikingly fulfilling the promise of Isaiah that the servant of the Lord would not simply *make* a covenant but would *become* a covenant (Isa 42:6; 49:8). According to Hebrews, the New Covenant is superior to the old (that is, the Mosaic covenant) because it is established by a better mediator (Christ versus the high priest; Heb 8:6, 9:25), based on better sacrifices (the blood of Christ versus the blood of animals; Heb 9:12, 23), in a better sanctuary (heaven itself versus the earthly tabernacle; Heb 9:11, 24).

If the New Covenant surpasses the Mosaic covenant, it restores and transforms the Davidic covenant. Jesus Christ is the Son of David who rules eternally from the heavenly Zion (Heb 12:22–24) and manifests his rule over Israel and all the nations (Matt 28:18–20) through his royal steward Peter (cf. Matt 16:18–19; Isa 22:15–22, esp. 22) and his other officers, the apostles (Luke 22:32; Matt 19:28; cf. 1 Kgs 4:7). Thus James sees the growth of the Church among Jews and Gentiles as a fulfillment of Amos's promise that God would restore the fallen "tent" (i.e., the kingdom) of David (Acts 15:13–18; cf. Amos 9:11–12).

The New Covenant involves the fulfillment of the other covenants of salvation history, as well. Thus, Jesus is a new Adam (Rom 5:12–19) who makes us into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). He fulfills all the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (Luke 1:68–75, esp. 72–73), including great nationhood (the Church; 1 Pet 2:9), kingship (Rev 19:16), the fatherhood of many nations (Rom 4:16–18), and the "blessing to all nations" experienced in the outpouring of the Spirit on all people (Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:6–9, 4–18). Even the Mosaic covenant, which to a certain extent is abrogated (Gal 3:19–25), is fulfilled in its essence by the New Covenant, which grants believers the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the very heart of the Mosaic Law, the commands of love for God and neighbor (Rom 8:3–4, 13:8–10; Matt 5:17, 22:37–40).

VI. ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE TERMS FOR COVENANT

The word employed for "covenant" in the OT is the Hebrew *bērīt*. The ancient Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint, consistently rendered this term with the Greek word *diathēkē*. There can be little doubt that the New Testament authors followed the practice of the Septuagint and employed the term *diathēkē* to mean *bērīt*, "covenant." But, because classical Greek authors used *diathēkē* to refer to a "testament" (i.e., a will), some older English translations, such as the King James Version, rendered *diathēkē* as "testament" in certain passages. More recent translations correct this error, except in a few instances. For example, Heb 9:15–17 reads as follows in the RSV:

Therefore he [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant [diathēkē], so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant [diathēkē]. For where a will [diathēkē] is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will [diathēkē] takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

The word *diathēkē* is translated as “covenant” in verse 15 but as “will” in verses 16–17. Many think the author switches to the classical meaning of *diathēkē* in these latter verses, where the discussion seems to revolve around executing a will at a person’s death. However, it may well be that the author of Hebrews means “covenant” in verses 16–17 as well. The covenant under discussion is the broken covenant at Sinai, which required the death of the Israelites according to the ritual self-curse of Exod 24:8 (see Exod 32:9–10). The Greek of these verses may be translated as follows: “For where a [broken] covenant is involved, it is necessary for the death of the covenant-maker to be borne. For a [broken] covenant is enforced upon dead bodies, since it certainly is not in force while the covenant-maker still lives.”

The author of Hebrews is emphasizing that the (broken) Sinai covenant required the death of the Israelites (Exod 32:9–10), because they invoked a curse of death upon themselves during the covenant-making ceremony (Exod 24:8). That curse of death was not paid when the people turned from the Lord and worshipped the golden calf (Exod 32:14) but is

ultimately paid by Christ himself on behalf of Israel (Heb 9:15).

A similar issue appears in Gal 3:15: “To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man’s will [*diathēkē*], or adds to it, once it has been ratified.”

Here there is even less reason to translate *diathēkē* as “will.” In the context (Gal 3:15–18), Paul is discussing the inviolability of covenants. Since even a human covenant cannot be changed after the fact (Gal 3:15; cf. Josh 9:18–20), a divine one certainly cannot be (Gal 3:17). God cannot change his covenant with Abraham (Gen 22:15–18) to bless all nations through his seed (Gen 22:18; cf. Gal 3:14) by adding the Mosaic Law as a condition four hundred years later (Gal 3:17–18). Changing covenants after the fact is not allowed by human justice, much less divine.

To summarize, all the occurrences of *diathēkē* in the NT may and should be translated “covenant,” following the example of the Septuagint.

CREATION The formation of the universe out of nothing by the action of God.

The creation account in Genesis may use figurative language (see “Truth of the Creation Account” below), but it is very different from the creation myths of Israel’s pagan neighbors. In those myths, creation was the result of the triumph of some deity or hero over the pantheon or some god or primordial being, such as Marduk’s defeat of Tiamat or Baal’s triumph over Yaam. In all these myths, the universe arose out of preexistent matter, the result of an undesired or unforeseen accident.

The Genesis account, on the other hand,