

Do you know JAC about Covenant?

## Do you know JAC about Covenant?

The Journal of Aggressive Christianity addresses many important issues for Salvationists in today's world. JAC, drawing upon the rich tradition of our primitive Salvation Army, examines eternal truths within the context of the contemporary Salvation Army world. Contained in the following pages are a few of the insights on covenant that have been included in its pages as well as a couple of introductory articles from The Officer Magazine.

I would hope that the information included here will be of use to anyone considering entering into a covenant relationship be it as a Salvation Army soldier, officer, as a spouse, or any other contractual relationship.

Sincerely,



Captain Michael Ramsay  
The Salvation Army

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The three-legged race is always fun to watch. Some people seem to run it with ease while others fall down and trip all over each other. I've seen dads tied to their kids who've simply picked them up and run with them without breaking the tie that binds. It is a lot of fun. The secret is that the winning couple is the pair who moves in sync with each other so that with every stride each matches their partner. Two independently minded people determined to do their own thing have no chance!

It is like that with covenants. The origins of the most commonly translated word for covenant (*Berit[h]*, used 286 times in the Hebrew Bible) refers to being bound, tied or even shackled together, not unlike the three-legged race.

We in the Salvation Army are a covenanted people. Our covenants are very important to us. They can certainly be one of our organisational strengths. General Clifton wrote in his third pastoral letter that our covenants are one of the main ways in which the Lord chooses to provide opportunities for us to join him in his work for the salvation of the world. A covenant is more than a promise; it is more than a legal contract. It is a sacred covenant through which the Lord binds himself to us. Covenants are important.

Salvation Army soldiers pledge to uphold our movement's doctrine and, among other things, to abstain from all that can enslave the mind and body. We officers covenant to make soul-winning a primary focus of our lives. The Lord binds himself to us in these covenants. As Christians we are all yoked together with Christ.

Commissioner William Francis wrote in the Canadian *Salvationist* in June 2008: 'The key to upholding our sacred covenant is staying close to God, keeping faith with him.' This is significant and this relates very closely to the three-legged race.

Any of us who have ever been in such a race with our children – or years ago with our brothers and sisters or parents – will remember the challenges it represents. When one partner tries to move at a different pace than the other, neither goes anywhere very quickly. I am sure I am not the only person who has fallen on the ground laughing as my partner has started heading in the wrong direction. It's difficult to move, let alone win the race, when the one you're yoked to is going in the opposite direction to you.

It's the same with our covenants. If we tie ourselves to God in a sacred vow and do not follow him closely, it's impossible to even finish, let alone win, the race and experience victory with Christ. Once we've committed to the race, we need to press on towards the goal and not give up. If we try to go our own way, our covenant is of little or no use to us or to our Heavenly Father.

If we move in step with each other, bound together, with our arm around our partner, relying on his strength, the race is easy and the child can often move even faster than if she were running on her own. If we remain faithful to our covenant and allow our Heavenly Father to put his arm around us we will find it easier to walk in step with our Lord. At times, often when things are most challenging, we will find he is actually carrying us towards the finish line where we will celebrate victory in Jesus.

*THE OFFICER MAGAZINE, March – April 2009, p. 30.*

## **Covenant: The Example of Samson**

COVENANTS are very important to the Lord. In his Officer article 'Till I Die' (November / December 2008), Captain Stephen Court made a very important point about our soldier's covenant when he pointed out that it does not come with an expiry date. This is significant. We can't simply declare that we no longer feel called to be a soldier or that we no longer agree with every aspect of the covenant, then pick and choose which parts we adhere to and which we disregard.

I'm reminded of Samson. Samson was bound by a covenant without an expiry date (Judges 13:7), a covenant that he didn't even willingly enter into (Judges 13, cf. 1 Samuel 1, Luke 1, Leviticus 27:28, 29), a covenant that he either didn't like to obey or at the very least struggled to keep.

Samson, like a Salvation Army soldier, was not to drink nor was he to defile himself. He was a liar at times (Judges 16:7ff). He was a killer (see Judges 14:19), he visited prostitutes (Judges 16: 1), he put himself and others ahead of God at times (Judges 14: 17), he disobeyed his vows. Samson transgressed his covenant with God. But the Lord did not forsake him (see Judges 16:22, Romans 3:3, 4). At some times in his life Samson, like many of us, was better at following the Lord's direction than at others. At times he was greatly used by God. At times he experienced the great blessings that accompanied his covenant. At times Samson drew on the strength of the Lord and was used greatly by God to accomplish his purposes. At other times Samson sinned.

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Every time in his life that Samson turned to and drew on the strength of the Lord, the Lord delivered him. No matter what Samson did, the Lord did not leave him. He still reaped the benefits of his covenant with the Lord until one very significant day.

I'm sure it was a surprise to Samson, who had lied, visited prostitutes, sinned and transgressed his covenant in his life, that one day after the covenant made on his behalf by someone else had been violated (by someone else, see Judge 16: 18), the Lord's strength of his covenant was not available to him (Judges 16:20).

Samson disobeyed his covenant and finally - after being given many chances - the Lord allowed him to experience the natural and logical consequences of disobeying his covenant. Samson was blinded, bound and imprisoned (Judge 16:21).

But the story does not end there. This is significant. Samson did not fulfil his vow. Samson sinned. Samson disregarded his covenant. Because he did this, he suffered natural and logical consequences, but the Lord did not release him from his covenant (see Judges 16:22).

God is faithful even when we are faithless. God did not forsake Samson. When Samson repented, turned to the Lord and drew on the strength of the Lord that was provided through his covenant, the Lord used Samson to save his people and Samson is now forever remembered as a hero of the faith (Hebrews 11).

This is important for Salvation Army soldiers and officers. We, like Samson, are bound to God through a covenant that does not have an expiry date before we die (Romans 7:2, 3). As such, if we do not live up to our covenant, like Samson, we will find that we are not as effective as we could be and we will find that we will suffer the natural and logical consequences of disrespecting our covenants.

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However, no matter what we have done, no matter how far we have strayed, no matter how many times we have fallen short of our covenantal promises, while we are still alive there is still the opportunity to turn to the Lord (repent) and draw on our covenant and his strength.

This is one of the many benefits of covenant. We are bound to God until we die. As this is the case, rather than suffering the natural consequences of struggling against our vows, let us defend them with zeal and continue to draw on the strength of the Lord. Then, like Samson, we will surely see many people saved.

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## **Rights and Responsibilities of Covenant - a look at Judges 2**

Judges 2:1,2: The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.’ Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?”

This is a disappointing but very important passage from which to launch the stories of the Judges.<sup>1</sup> Reading a few verses further (Joshua 2:1-5) we learn why the Israelites and their allies suffer hundreds of years of oppression:<sup>2</sup> the cycle of sin, enslavement, repentance, deliverance, and sin again - which repeats until Israel finally descends into civil war and anarchy - this whole downward spiral<sup>3</sup> stems from one disobeyed promise; a disregarded covenant.

How we live in our covenant relationships has significant implications; our promises, our covenants are very important to God. The Lord promised His people that He would never break His covenant with them (Judges 2:1; cf. Lev 26:42-44, Deut 7:9). As such, instead of being released from our covenants before the Lord simply for disobeying

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘Judges’, with the notable exception of Deborah, were actually more like military rulers and ‘strong men’ than judges as we would think of them today.

<sup>2</sup> Exactly how many hundreds of years has been debated. If one adds up the total time of enslavement as if they were served consecutively, one would arrive at a total of 480 years. There is a distinct possibility that some of these times of enslavement could be served concurrently. It is also likely that no one tribe suffered the entire length of subjugation. Cf. Denis T. Olsen, NIB II: Judges, (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1998) 724. Cf. also Robert G. Boiling, Judges, AB 6A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975) 9-29.

<sup>3</sup> The extent of the periods of peace generally decline as the story progresses.



them (cf. Romans 7:2), there are often serious consequences that result from taking our covenants lightly (cf. Num 33:55; Josh 23:13).

This is important for us as Salvationists to remember because we do have the opportunity to enter into rich and strong covenant relationships with the Lord in the form of our Officers' and Soldiers' covenants. It is important too for all of us living in the new covenant era of the post-resurrection world and especially for those of us living in the so-called 'First World' where litigation, broken contracts, and divorces<sup>4</sup> occur on a daily basis both inside and outside the churches. As Christians we should all be aware of exactly what we are getting into when we enter into a covenant. When we enter a covenant with the LORD as either a partner or a witness, we should realise to what we are agreeing.

### ***Covenants are good.***

Covenants with and before God are good things. The Lord uses covenants to give us direct access to strength, security, and blessing. The Lord made a promise to Abraham (Genesis 12) that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him and this promise is ultimately fulfilled through Jesus Christ. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15) that his descendants would at some point in time occupy the land promised to him. The Lord is faithful to His word. He does not break his covenants.<sup>5</sup> He is bound to us through His covenants.

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<sup>4</sup> Divorce Magazine.com has world statistics for divorce: Aus 46%, USA 45.8%, UK 42.6%, Can 37%; more statistics are available on-line at: <http://www.divorcemag.com/statistics/statsWorld.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Ramsay. Covenant: When God is Bound...a look at Genesis 15:7-21. Journal of Aggressive Christianity, Issue 52, December 2007 – January 2008, pp 5-10. Available on-line at [http://www.armyarmy.com/pdf/JAC\\_Issue\\_052.pdf](http://www.armyarmy.com/pdf/JAC_Issue_052.pdf)

This is good news and, as we have discussed in JAC before (Issues 52, 40) the most common word for covenant in the Hebrew Bible is berit[h], (mentioned 286 times).<sup>6</sup> Berit[h] in all probability comes from the Akkadian word for ‘to shackle’<sup>7</sup> so the image of a covenant with (or in the presence of) the LORD then is of one actually being bound, shackled to him with a tie that will not be broken, a chain that cannot be severed.<sup>8</sup>

These covenantal ties are strong and trying to break them – like trying to snap out of iron shackles – will be unsuccessful and will naturally result in unpleasant consequences. Judges 2:3: “...you have disobeyed me.... Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them [the Canaanites] out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.” It is important for us to remember that there are consequences that result from rebelling against our covenants.

The episode around this covenant referred to in Judges 2 is particularly interesting. It relates to the covenant of Genesis 15 and it refers also to the covenant experience of Joshua 9. God commanded Israel not to make a covenant with the Canaanites (Cf. Deut 7:1-6; 20:16-18);<sup>9</sup> God told the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites.<sup>10</sup> (This was after the people of Canaan had graciously been given 400 years and still did not repent of their own sins, cf. Gen 15:16.)

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6 G.E. Mendenhall. "Covenant." In *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by George Arthur Buttrick. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1962), 715.

7 Ibid. Cf. also M. Weinfeld. "berith." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck. (Stuttgart, W.Germany: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 253.

8 Michael Ramsay, "Berit[h]" *Journal of Aggressive Christianity*, Issue 40, December 2005 – January 2006 pp 16-17.

9 Cf. *David H. Madvig. Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Pradis CD-ROM: Joshua/Exposition of Joshua. The ruse discovered (9:16-27), Book Version: 4.0.2.

10 Also referred to as 'Amorites,' Cf. Gen 15:16.

*There are natural results of rebellion against covenants .*

The Israelites did not follow in a proper covenant - Joshua 9:3ff:

“...when the people of Gibeon [who were Canaanites] heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse [they tricked them]: they went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and mouldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, “We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.”

Notice that the Canaanites lied to Joshua and the Israelite leaders; the leaders were tricked when made the treaty with the Canaanites (Joshua 9:15) - without first discussing the matter with God - and in doing this they disobeyed their earlier covenant with the LORD.

Betraying a promise to YHWH is not a trivial matter. In the book of Judges alone (and the breach of this particular covenant will come up again in other books: Joshua 9, 2 Samuel 21) generations of people suffer as a result of their forefathers' broken promise to God. For hundreds of years, their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and even more than that experience the consequences of continuing in rebellion against this covenant and this promise. The natural results of not respecting our covenants with or before God - whether or not we are tricked into them, whether or not we consult God before we call Him as a witness (Joshua 9) - can be devastating. There are consequences for ignoring our covenants and betraying our promises.

### *A contemporary example from the marriage covenant.*

This should be easily understandable for us because this same thing still happens in our world today. Think about the children who are raised in broken homes. Think about the children whose parents rebelled against their marriage covenants with each other and before God<sup>11</sup> (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-14; Luke 16:16-16; Mark 10:1-12; Matthew 5:32, 19:9: You will note in these references that – even if one ‘goes out on a limb’ in order to argue that you no longer need to live with the one you with whom you are covenanted in marriage – there is still no NT provision made for marrying a second or subsequent spouse while the one you covenanted before God with is still alive.) One is not released from one’s covenants simply by disobedience to them. God takes all our covenants seriously. There are consequences for not walking in a proper covenant.

Some of the consequences for rebelling against the marriage covenant through divorce are immediate and some of the immediate consequences are the struggles of how to raise a child in two separate homes with two separate sets of rules. Some of the immediate consequences are the challenges involved in that fact that whatever the problem was that split up the marriage in the first place was obviously never resolved: mom or dad still moved out. Some of the immediate consequences of disregarded marriage covenants are that children from broken homes are more likely to be ‘latch-key kids’ and less likely to have access to all the material and emotional support that their peers do. Some of the

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<sup>11</sup> Child and Family Canada: Divorce, Facts, Figures, and Consequences. Available on-line: [http://www.cfc-efc.ca/docs/vanif/00005\\_en.htm](http://www.cfc-efc.ca/docs/vanif/00005_en.htm): Overall, about one third of all marriages in Canada end in divorce and the rate is somewhat higher for remarriages. Dissolution rates are even higher among cohabiting couples. Currently, there are no solid predictions of either a sharp decline or a sharp rise in divorce rates in the near future.

immediate consequences include the possibility that, at best, one may only ever get a good night kiss from one of their single parents.

But there is more than that in our world today; there are consequences for future generations as well. Many people who get divorced once wind up getting divorced twice or even thrice.<sup>12</sup> Children of divorce are more likely to be divorced themselves<sup>13</sup> and perpetuate the devastating cycle that contributes to generations and generations and generations going without the emotional, spiritual, and other support that only comes from strong marriage covenants.

This is sad because there is a great benefit from continuing in a strong covenant relationship but when we stray from it there are often devastating results. As one continues to read through the book of Judges, it becomes obvious that much misery comes as a direct result of the Israelites' disobedience to their covenant with the Lord. There are consequences for not walking in proper covenants.

***If we rebel against a covenant we are not released from it for bad behaviour.***

Relating to the disobeyed covenant in Judges 2, we learn from in Joshua 9 that the Israelites were tricked into making this covenant agreement with the Gibeonites (who are Canaanites). They didn't realise that in so doing they were defying their previous promise

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12 Statistics Canada: The Daily: Wednesday March 9, 2005: Divorce. Available on-line at: <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050309/d050309b.htm>: In 1973, only 5.4% of divorces involved husbands who had previously been divorced. Some 30 years later, this proportion has tripled to 16.2% of all divorces. Similarly, the proportion of divorces involving wives who had previously been divorced rose from 5.4% to 15.7% during this three-decade period.

13 Divorce and Children: An Interview with Robert Hughes, Jr, PhD. Available on-line at: <http://www.athealth.com/consumer/disorders/childrendivorce.html> Cf. also from the Associated Press: Divorce Gap Narrows over time. Available on-line at: <http://www.divorcereform.org/mel/rchildrenofdivor.html>

to God. They entered into this new agreement under false pretences. The Gibeonites lied to them but that doesn't change the fact that Israel is now bound through the covenant her leaders made with the Gibeonites before God (Joshua 9:18; Judges 2:2). The leaders themselves are well aware that they are bound to keep this covenant (Joshua 9:18); when the Israelites find out that they have been tricked, they don't nullify the agreement: they realise that it is not within their authority (or power) to do so; Israel still does not attack the Gibeonites. They don't attack the Gibeonites because –even though they have been lied to, even though they have been tricked, even though they have been deceived – they are still bound to God and the Gibeonites via this treaty. Simply disobeying a covenant does not render it void (cf. Judges 2:1; Romans 3:3-4, 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-14; Luke 16:16-16; Mark 10:1-12; Matthew 5:32, 19:9).<sup>14</sup> There are consequences for disregarding a promise but because we disobey a promise made before God does not render that covenant void (Romans 3:3,4).<sup>15</sup> God says, through His angel, Judges 2:1: “I will **NEVER** break my covenant with you.” The covenant with or the covenant before God is not nullified; the ties are not severed, just because one disobeys God.

There is another interesting point about the agreement that Israel enters into here (Joshua 9) that sets the stage for the book of Judges. Israel enters into a covenant with God first (cf. Genesis 15:7-21; Exodus 34:12-13; Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13) and this covenant says that He will give them the land and that they will not make a covenant with the Canaanites: they will instead destroy the present inhabitants of the land. Then the

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<sup>14</sup> Notice that in a rare NT command attributed directly to God himself (1 Cor 7:10,12) – rather than human origin - even if a divorce is permitted, remarriage is not. Just because the original covenant is disobeyed does not mean it is rendered broken. It does not mean that one is released from it,

<sup>15</sup> God is faithful even when we are unfaithful (Romans 3:3,4). Cf. Cf. N.T. Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” p. 37. See also N.T. Wright, “The Law in Romans 2.”

Israelites –without consulting God- enter into the second covenant with the Gibeonites (who are Canaanites) promising that they will not destroy them and in the process Joshua and the Israelites disobey the first covenant agreement with God.

### *The Both / And of Covenant.*

Israel is understandably held to its original agreement with YHWH. It is understandable that Israel suffers the consequences (Judge 2:2-3; Exodus 34:12-13; Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13) for disobeying God by making this competing covenant. What is interesting, however, is that the Israelites are also held accountable to this new covenant with the Gibeonites, which they made before God even though they made it contrary to the expressed command of God (2 Samuel 21; Joshua 9, Exodus 34:12-13; Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13). The Israelites disobeyed God in making this second covenant but they are still held accountable to it. God holds them accountable to both covenants: the one that He initiated and the one that He forbade.<sup>16</sup>

In Judges 2, we read of the consequences for breaking the first covenant with God and in 2 Samuel 21 we see the consequences the Israelites suffer for breaking the second, competing covenant with the Gibeonites. God holds us to our promises. Whether we are lied to, tricked, or even enter into a covenant that is against the Lord's commands, God holds us to our covenants that are made with Him either as a witness or as one of the parties Himself.

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<sup>16</sup>There were natural and logical consequences for the Gibeonites after their deception as well. They were saved but, as per the earlier instructions of Moses (Deut 20:10-15; cf. Josh 16:10; 17:13; Judg 1:28, 30, 33, 35), they became forced labour for Israel (Joshua 9:21).

2 Samuel 21: 1 ff:

During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years [people die]; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, “It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.” The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.) David asked the Gibeonites,

“What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the LORD's inheritance?”

The Gibeonites answered him, “We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” David asked.

They answered the king, “As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the Lord's chosen one.”

So the king said, “I will give them to you.”

Verses 13-15: David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up. They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.

Even though the Israelites disobeyed God by entering into this covenant with the Gibeonites - and suffered their due consequences for disobeying the terms of the covenant with God- when they transgressed this new covenant that they made with the Gibeonites - even though it was against the expressed will of God - God did not even answer their prayers until they made it right.



### *Conclusion.*

I would like to re-emphasise a couple of things: One, God does not sever the covenantal ties that bind us to (or before) Him. He is faithful to His promises, even if we are faithless (Romans 3:3,4). This is important for us to remember. We should not enter into our covenants lightly. I don't believe that God says we can simply declare (through the courts or otherwise) that our partner did not live up to the marriage covenant and so we are no longer married (cf. Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-14; Luke 16:16-16; Mark 10:1-12; Matthew 5:32, 19:9). I don't think that God says that simply because we had a drink we can throw out our Soldiership agreement. I don't think the shackle is cut. I don't think that God says that just because we decide not to be Officers anymore that we are released from our vow to 'make soul-saving a primary purpose of our lives.' I think that this covenant referred to in Genesis 15, Joshua 9, Judges 2, and 1 Samuel 21 points to the fact that God doesn't break His covenants with us and as a natural result, there are consequences for us if we try to break that chain that binds.<sup>17</sup>

This brings me to my second point of emphasis: covenants are not punishments; the consequences for rebelling against covenants are not punishments; the consequences of rebellion are the natural and logical results of our own actions. As I have already pointed out, the origin of the Hebrew word for 'covenant' comes from a root word meaning, 'to be shackled together.' The image of a covenant then is one of being shackled to God through a promise. One can compare a covenant with God (be it through marriage, Soldiership, Officership ...) to being shackled to a locomotive, with God being the locomotive. When

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion on this as it relates to Genesis 15 and Abraham's covenant with God, see Michael Ramsay. Covenant: When God is Bound...a look at Genesis 15:7-21. Journal of Aggressive Christianity, Issue 52, December 2007 – January 2008, p 5. On-line at [http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC\\_Issue\\_052.pdf](http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC_Issue_052.pdf)

we are chained to the train and ride comfortably on it – following the Lord’s leading - we wind up where He is going a lot faster and a lot easier than if we travel the tracks on our own strength (under our own steam). This is the benefit of a strong covenant with the Lord.

If, however, once we are bound to the Locomotive of the Lord by a covenant, if we try to go our own way or try to shackle ourselves to something going in a different direction, it is not going to be a pleasant experience. The tie doesn’t break. Disobedience to our covenants is like jumping off the train and trying to run in the opposite direction while we are still chained to it. It is going to hurt but this is not God’s fault. He doesn’t throw us from the train and because God is faithful (cf. Rom 3:3,4) this covenantal chain is so strong that it won’t break - therefore what we suffer are the natural results of our own actions. This is what happened in the stories of the Judges (cf. Judges 2). God, wanting the Israelites to experience the full rest of the promise land entered into a covenant with Abraham and then with Israel. They willingly shackled themselves to His train but later, however, the Israelites also shackled themselves to the Gibeonite train that was going in a different direction and suffered the natural and logical consequences of their actions. This is exactly what happens to us when we don’t respect our covenants.

There is good news in all this though and this good news is a great strength for covenanted people: no matter how many times we are faithless and jump off that train; no matter how many times we try to break the covenant; no matter how many times we throw ourselves on the tracks, under the wheels of the ‘God Train’, the Lord is faithful. While we are still alive (cf. Romans 7:1,2), there is opportunity to return to the Lord; the covenantal chain will not be broken.

## **Do you know JAC about Covenant?**

God is faithful and Jesus himself is standing here as the new chain that binds all of us in our relationship to God. Jesus is the new covenant through whom whosoever may will indeed be pulled back up onto the train as we turn to and rely on the Lord; so then instead of rebelling against God, instead of pulling against the tie that binds, let us all give our lives over fully to the Lord, buckle up, lean back and enjoy the fully sanctified ride on His train because His train is bound for glory.

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### **When God is Bound: a look at Genesis 15: 7 – 21.**

In our world today, people seem to be entering into covenants less and less and the ones that we are engaging in then are being taken less and less seriously. Of the ‘till death do we part’ vows that couples take before God, half are broken. Covenants are not being taken any more seriously by those in the church than they are by those in secular society. This is distressing. For the Salvationist this should be even more alarming. I have heard testimony of some soldiers drinking, smoking, gambling, and seen many who are obviously flirting with that ‘which can enslave the mind and body.’ I think we try to walk away from our vows too easily; I am not convinced that God actually lets the ties of covenant fall as easily as some might like. I am not convinced that simply declaring oneself ‘un-wed’ in the courts or renouncing our Soldiership vows necessarily releases us from these covenants with God. There are no consequences for taking vows but there are consequences for breaking vows.

In NE Saskatchewan, we have been looking at this very foundational topic of covenant.<sup>18</sup> If you open your Bible and look at Genesis 15:7 – 21, you’ll see a covenant possibly even more extreme than our Soldiership agreement. This agreement is a very significant one for us all in that it relates back to the good news of Chapter 12, where God has already promised Abraham that all nations of the earth will be blessed through him and, as well, it looks forward to Chapter 17 where the symbol of circumcision is introduced

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Ramsay’s sermons on these topics are available on-line at [www.sheepspeak.com](http://www.sheepspeak.com)

(17:11). This sign of the covenant may be less noticeable than wearing a uniform; however, it is no less extreme!

One thing that is interesting of this ceremony and of the earlier promise God made to Abram that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him is that the promise includes us here and now even though neither we nor our nation existed at the time of this agreement (cf. John 8, Mark 3, Luke 3, Romans 2). Genesis 12:3 is the first time that the Gospel, the ‘good news’ (that all the nations of the world will be blessed through Abraham) is presented in scripture and it is here in Chapter 15 that God ratifies the promises about inheriting the promised land with a contract (v.18) and a strange and significant, symbolic covenantal act.

Now before I go any further, I should probably take some time to explain exactly what a covenant is and was. The Hebrew word for covenant here, *berit[h]*, is the most common term translated 'covenant' in the Hebrew Bible: it appears 286 times, making it quite an important word.<sup>19</sup> This word in all likelihood is also associated with the older Akkadian word ‘*biritu*’, which means literally “to fetter”, “to shackle” or to “bind” and when it is used in the sense it is here, it designates the beginning or the end of a contract.<sup>20</sup> The image then is of two people being fettered or bound together by this covenant.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> G.E. Mendenhall. “Covenant.” In The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1962), 715.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 715.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Ramsay, “Berit[h].” In the Journal of Aggressive Christianity

This particular contract, in the text before us today, is only one of three in the entire Hebrew Bible where God himself is bound<sup>22</sup> - the others are with Noah, (Gen. 17, Num. 25:12) and the David (II Sam. 23:5, Pss. 89:3, 28-29; 110:4).

The word image for us here is clear. It is that of God, in this contract, actually shackling himself to a promise to Abram and in so doing, of course, not only is God bound to the promise but He is bound to the consequence of a broken covenant – which in this case, if we are correct in our understanding, is more extreme than either our wedding vows or our Soldiership pledge – the consequence of breaching this covenant is possibly even death (cf. Jer. 34:18-20).<sup>23</sup>

Now let's take a look at this whole contractual ceremony here because it is peculiar in Scripture. In verse 9, it is recorded that God asks Abram to bring him a number of different dead animals of varying (and mostly forgotten)<sup>24</sup> significance and has him cut many of them in half and Abram does.<sup>25</sup> And Abram stays by these bodies guarding them from other animals that want to eat them (v.11) and then he falls asleep into a 'deep and terrifying darkness (v.12).'

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<sup>22</sup> G.E. Mendenhall, P. 718.

<sup>23</sup> Death is the penalty meted out to those who violate this ceremony the only other time it is recorded as being enacted in the scriptures: Jeremiah 34:18-29. See Sarna, Genesis, PP. 114-115, Terence E. Fretheim, The Book of Genesis, 446. cf also, Anet, p.532 and John H. Sailhamer *Abraham and the covenant* (15:1-21). Cf. also Ronald F. Youngblood, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Pradis CD-ROM: Second Samuel/Exposition of Second Samuel/II. Epilogue (21:1-24:25)/A. The Lord's Wrath Against Israel (21:1-14) and Polzin, "HWQY' and Covenantal Institutions in Early Israel," pp. 229, 234; and Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, p. 266.

<sup>24</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, NIB, P. 446.

<sup>25</sup> John H. Sailhamer *Abraham and the covenant* (15:1-21)

Abram is terrified as the Lord approaches him and says, verse 13, “know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. Wow, this is ‘good news’! (sarcasm) – Abram is terrified (v. 12) and the Lord meets him with the comforting words of, ‘your descendants will be slaves for 400 years.’

This is great (sarcasm) and there is even more: look at the contractual ceremony here. After God tells Abram that his family will be slaves - and then those who enslave them will be punished – and at the same time that all this is happening, another people will be allowed to run wild in the promised land until their sin reaches its absolute full measure (v. 16), there will be 400 years of sin and 400 years of slavery and now, verse 17, “when the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and walked between the pieces [of the dead animals]. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram... (vss. 17,18)”<sup>26</sup>

And this is interesting: the 400 years of sin and slavery are signs of the covenant or contract. They are not the contract itself. This section highlights a portion of the covenant and that portion states that Abram’s descendants will eventually possess this land that he is on.<sup>27</sup> And what is the sign that they will possess this land? The sign is that they will be in slavery for 400 years and none of this sign will Abraham see ever actually see.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The fire and the smoke are interesting symbols here. They cast the reader’s mind ahead to the fire and smoke with which God leads the Israelites out of Egypt and to this same promised land. Those who have been studying Acts along with us in NE Saskatchewan or online ([www.sheepspeak.com](http://www.sheepspeak.com)) will also note the pillars of fire that settled above the people’s heads in Acts II, which may or may not be making reference to the Exodus and by extension this earlier passage as well.

<sup>27</sup> The Holiness Code in Leviticus (esp. Lev 25), as well as the prophecy of Amos (esp. 3-4) and numerous other portions of scripture testify that yes indeed the Lord was faithful in fulfilling this agreement but as the

Further, remember how we said that this is one of the few times in Scripture where you will find that it is actually God who is bound by the covenant. Here it is ONLY God who is bound by the covenant. It is God (represented by a smoking firepot with a blazing torch<sup>29</sup>) who walks between the halves of the dead animals here – not Abram. This is interesting because in so doing, God says that He will pay the consequence for the broken covenant. He says that He is bound and that He will pay for it and - if our interpretation of the ceremony is correct – He will pay for it with His own life. This is quite the serious ceremony and this ceremony has parallels in ancient customs and literature but only in Jeremiah (34:18-20) in the Scriptures is this type of a ceremony mentioned and there it says:

"...all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth."

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covenantal talks are re-opened with future generations who are looking for a permanent territorial blessing for their offspring, it is granted to them albeit with conditions (pertaining to caring for the poor and the land) which they did not fulfill (cf. Gen 18:19; 26:5; Amos 3:1-2; Lev 25:2; 26:34-35; cf. also N.T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," *Pauline Theology*, Volume III, ed. David M. Hay & E. Elizabeth Johnson, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995): 37.) The blessing to the nations (12:3) that was offered through Abraham stands fulfilled to this day. Remember also that the messianic prophecies to David are not tied to the physical land (2 Samuel 7) in that, of course, they are ultimately also fulfilled in Christ. Also pertaining to the descendants of Abraham, we should neither forget that God can raise up decedents of Abraham from stones if need be (cf. John 8:31-41; Hebrews 11:8-12) and indeed he does graft all the nations into the promises of Abraham (cf. Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8, John 8, Romans 11). There is also a certain irony in this covenant in that ultimately, of course, the promise that all nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (12:3) is ultimately fulfilled when God (Jesus) dies.

<sup>28</sup> Compare this to Moses' sign that the LORD is speaking to him (Exod 3:11-12) and the sign of the Lord's faithfulness re: the provision of his people around the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:19-20).

<sup>29</sup> This does cast our minds tangentially ahead to the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire with which God will later lead the Israelites around the desert.



If the covenant fails after this ceremony, the one bound by it here, dies.<sup>30</sup> This is serious and this is like the ceremony that God is voluntarily taking upon Himself. And it says that Abram does believe Him (and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness, v.6) **EVEN BEFORE** the Lord goes to these great lengths to bind himself to His promise.

So then Abram believes God, even before God covenants up to even His own life. Abram believes God that he and Sarai will have children and that they will inherit the promised land, **and then** God makes this deal that may **EVEN** risk His own life, **and then** Abram, at his wife's insistence... has sexual relations with his wife's slave (16:3). And she becomes pregnant.

This is reminiscent of earlier in Genesis, isn't it?<sup>31</sup> Back in Eden itself Adam takes matters into his own hands at his wife's prompting and she blames the serpent (Gen 3) and sin and death enter the world and here Abraham takes matters into his own hands and Sarah blames God (16:3) after God has just entered into this most serious covenant.

God has put a lot on the line. In the contract he may be bound, to die, if it is not kept...and instead of relying on God, Abram, a hero of Hebrews 11's walk of fame, takes matters into his own hands...just like Adam, just like the People of Babel a couple of Chapters previous (Gen 11:1ff), and just like too many of us, I fear.

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<sup>30</sup> Jeremiah 34:18-20

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Chapter 11. This is the chapter where Abram is introduced. He is introduced - ironically enough - after the people from the city of Babel are dispersed for (pridefully) taking matters into their own hands.

Well, what about us? Are we any more faithful<sup>32</sup> to our covenants than Abram with God's life on the line? Do we really avoid all that may enslave the mind, body, and spirit, or do we rationalize that our indulgences are fine whereas other people's indulgences may or may not be? Do we keep our vows before God about forsaking all others UNTIL DEATH DO WE PART or do we pretend that God releases us from those vows as soon as we no longer wish to be bound?

Years ago, I met a lady and I felt the Lord prompting me to give her \$500; she, I was led to believe, needed it to go up north and gain the custody of her infant son. I gave her the money – and that was a lot of money for me in those days –but I give this stranger the money at what I feel at the time is the Lord's prompting and she tells me she will meet me there again on a certain date with the money and – well – the time comes and goes and I continue to go to that place a few times over the next months still with faith but I confess each time this faith is intermingling with more doubts until it gets to the point that I am thinking of calling friends of mine and tracking her down on my own, in my own strength, and retrieving the money. My thoughts drift from faith to frustration...

I also think of a friend of ours –he is a godly man and the Lord taught me a lot through him. Before I ever met him, he felt the Lord telling him to witness to one of his employees, to tell him the good news of Jesus Christ. He believes the Lord but he does not tell his employee and the next day, he hears that his employee is dead.

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<sup>32</sup> I am using the term 'faith' in the rest of this document in a manner that is consistent with the so called 'New Perspective on Paul'

An example from the Bible again: remember the Israelites with Moses on the edge of this land promised to them by God. Ten of 12 spies come back saying that they are afraid; they don't have faith and they won't receive the land (Deut 1; Num 14). The Lord is angry and tells them that because they did not act in faith their generation will not inhabit the land; so the people get up early the next morning and say, "We know we have sinned, we'll go do it now"...but it is too late...God is not with them...and they are defeated by their enemies. There are consequences.

And Abram, righteous Abram, now has chosen to act on his own instead of trusting God. God pledged his life so that we may have faith and faithfulness (Romans 1-3) but we are faithless many times over and what is the consequence of our faithlessness? God dies. God dies.

God is fettered and bound in this covenant with Abram. As a consequence of Israel's sin in the dessert a whole generation dies outside of the promise and as a consequence of our sin today, God dies: Jesus dies on the cross.

We didn't need to make our covenants before and with God and God didn't need to make His promises to us. He didn't need to make this promise to Abram. Abram believed Him before He put his life on the line. But God did make this promise and the thing about God is that, even if we are unfaithful to our promises, He remains faithful (Romans 3:3,4).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. N.T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," p. 37. See also NT Wright, "The Law in Romans 2."

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And look ahead in our text from Genesis with me, God is not unfaithful, and in Chapter 21, verse 2, it says, “Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.” So now here it is- even though Abram may not have acted in a manner consistent with faith, ONLY God was bound here and as the covenant is fulfilled, God lives!

God promised children to Abraham and God provided children to Abraham. God promised that his decedents would inhabit Canaan after 400 years of slavery, and God provided that they inhabited the land after 400 years of slavery. Like the Apostle Paul says emphatically, centuries later, in his letter to the Romans, “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! (Romans 3:3,4).” No way. No! No! No! God is faithful even and especially when we are not!

God promised Israel that they would inhabit the land and, even though they were faithless at the border, God still fulfilled his promise a generation later. My friend who did not pray with his employee the night before he died, went on to be a pastor and never forgot the lessons the Lord taught him that night in the whole time I knew him anyway. And my other friend, the lady I met, just when I had almost given up hope that she would ever find me and return the \$500, she did and that's not the end of the story. Years later I almost came to tears. I came out of my house and there she was with her son. He was now 5 or 6. She knew our tenants and was visiting them. The Lord let me meet her son – the Lord let me see how He used His \$500 to help a child be raised by his mother. She, in her excitement at seeing me, grabbed her now school-aged son and said, “This is the man from the story I told you...” THIS child KNOWS the stories of the MIRACLES of GOD. Even

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though, after I believed I had my doubts, The Lord used even me to do His will. And He rewarded me in such a way that day that I will never forget it.

And isn't that the same for all of us? Jesus died on the cross because of our sin. Jesus died because of our faithlessness but God is faithful to His promises and Jesus is alive. Jesus rose from the dead! Jesus defeated death. He died for us and he rose again. Nothing we do can change that! Now all we need to do is not reject him; we can do that by remaining faithful and holy and by upholding our covenants.

So then let's not be like that generation of Israelites who rejected His invitation to the promised land and died in outside of the promise. Let's not be like those who confess 'Lord, Lord' with their mouths but do not live up to their obligations. Covenants are important and God will hold us to our vows so instead of being faithless, let us be thankful for to God for his sacrifice, respect our covenants, and inherit the promise of eternal life.

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[http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC\\_Issue\\_059.pdf](http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC_Issue_059.pdf)

## **Jephthah's Parachute: a look at Judges 11:29-40...**

When I was in my first year of studies at university, a friend of mine and I decided that we were going to have the time of our lives that summer or die trying. That is the year we took up SCUBA diving. I went white-water rafting for the first time, did a lot of ocean kayaking and we went parachuting...

As neither of us had ever been parachuting before we needed to be trained. We spent the day at the airport studying wind trajectories, physics, the speed of acceleration of a free falling object, as well as what to do if your parachute fails to open. I did not understand it at all and even when we practiced with a mock parachute, I didn't get it.

We went to the plane. Flipping a coin to see who would go first, I lost and was supposed to jump first. Discovering, however, at about 850 ft in the air that I was afraid of heights, I convinced my companion to jump first.

We were jumping from 3000 ft. As this was our first jump, cords were tied to our parachutes so that they would open automatically upon exiting the plane. My friend climbed out on the wing (as he was supposed to) jumped, counted to five (as we practiced), looked up saw that the parachute had opened beautifully and enjoyed one of the most peaceful experiences of his life noticing the miracles of God's creation while drifting to the ground on this perfectly windless day.

Emboldened, I do the same: climb onto the wing, jump, count, and look to see my parachute; I reach to grab the steering toggles on my parachute...they aren't there. My parachute isn't there (most of it anyway). It isn't working. I have to take it off my back and pull the emergency chute all the while falling faster and faster towards the ground. As I pull the cord, I pray: "Lord, please save me." I pull the cord, look, and the emergency chute didn't open properly either. It isn't catching any wind. It isn't slowing me down. I fall beneath the trees towards the power lines and highway below.

It is at this time that the Lord's hand reaches out and actually lifts me up in the air, opens my parachute and gently sets me on the ground without a scratch. This is a true story. It was indeed a miracle and an answer to sincere prayer.

When I was without a parachute and about to pull the emergency cord, I prayed. Now, I was a smoker back then and when I pulled my emergency cord, I remember praying, "Dear God, if you save me I'll quit smm... - never mind just please save me!" And He did. And I knew that as He did the first thing that I would want after I landed would be a cigarette. And it was, so it was a good thing that I didn't make the vow. (I did eventually quit smoking; but that's an unrelated story.) I know that God takes covenants, oaths, and vows very seriously and I didn't make one then that I wouldn't keep.

Jephthah, who we read about in the book of Judges, might have been better never to make his vow.<sup>34</sup> Jephthah, as recorded in Judges 11, made a vow that he may wish that he could take back but like we know through examining Judges 2, Joshua 9, and 2 Samuel 21 (Cf. JAC Iss.56; [www.sheepspeak.com](http://www.sheepspeak.com)), the Lord holds us accountable to our vows, our covenants, our promises, and in the case of the earlier Israelite-Gibeonite vow (Josh 9), even when we are lied to, even when we are tricked, even when we make a vow that is against the expressed command of YHWH, when we make a vow to God, He holds us to it. Through Joshua 9 and 2 Samuel 21 we see that Israel is responsible to fulfill both competing vows it made. One, a covenant that God commanded and another, that He forbade. Jephthah knows this, as he is well aware of the scriptures (cf. Chapter 11:1ff); Jephthah knows this and he immediately regrets his vow to the LORD (11:35).

His vow to the LORD:

“If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.” Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands (11:30ff).

“When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, “Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break” (11:34ff).

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<sup>34</sup> That this vow was reckless and that he would have been better not to make this vow are common ideas these days. This may not be the case however. As the meaning of the vow may be that he either dedicates what meets him OR sacrifices it (11:31) then this could be an inspired act for sure (cf. 11:29) and is certainly one of obedience on par with Hannah's (1 Samuel 1) or Abraham's (Gen 22)



Jephthah made this vow and it may or may not have been illicit or illegal even.<sup>35</sup>

Human sacrifice after all is forbidden by the Law (cf. Lev. 18:21, 20:1-5; Deut 12:31; Jer. 7:31-32, 19:5-6; Ezek. 16:20-21, 20:31) so some people – atheist, agnostic and even some Christian writers – have argued that Jephthah would not need to fulfill this vow.

We, of course, know that he did need to fulfill this vow for a couple of reasons.

One, even though God explicitly generally forbids human sacrifice (Lev. 18:21, 20:1-5; Deut 12:31; 2 Ki 23:10; Jer. 7:31-32, 19:5-6; Ezek. 16:20-21, 20:31), there are exceptional circumstances when He has asked for it. Abraham was commanded to offer up his son as a sacrifice (Gen 22:2) and indeed our Heavenly Father offered up His only begotten son. And we remember from the Exodus that God has a claim on every firstborn child in Israel – be it a person or animal – (Exodus 13:2, 22:29) after the Angel of Death collected that same sacrifice from the Egyptians (Exodus 4:22-23, 12:12).<sup>36</sup> In the New Testament, we are also told that if we lose our life for the Lord we will gain it (Matt 10:39, Lk 17:33). Jephthah made this promise to God and even if this vow was taken against the expressed wishes of God (which it may or may not have been, cf. 11:29-30) he is still obligated to fulfill it and he did.

Such as in Judges 2:1-5, Joshua 9, and 2 Samuel 21, where it is recorded that the Israelites were lied to and they broke their promise to God by making a competing one with

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<sup>35</sup> Some contemporary comment seems to lean in this direction but not the bulk of comment throughout history by any means (Olsen, p. 834.) and some have argued that he may not have even needed to fulfil this vow (cf. Wolf, Expositors, CD Rom Book version 4.0.2.) I think the root of that isogetical claim clearly sprouts from the non-theistic viewpoint that life is not eternal and therefore one's life is what is most important. Scripture, of course claims otherwise. One who loses one's life for the Lord will gain it. There will be a resurrection of the dead: those who die for God will enjoy it; those who live for themselves will not.

<sup>36</sup> Denis T. Olsen, 'Judges' in NIB II: Deuteronomy-2Samuel. P.834.

the Canaanites.<sup>37</sup> They were tricked by the Gibeonites and then they broke their promise to YHWH by making a treaty with the Canaanites. They broke the agreement by making a competing treaty with the Gibeonites who lied to Joshua and the leaders of Israel. Israel was tricked into making the second treaty and Israel, when they were making the second covenant, did not realize that they were breaking their first promise to God and yet they were still responsible to both covenants that they made in the presence of God and now Jephthah, in Judges 11, has made a promise to God and now he is responsible to keep it.<sup>38</sup>

Covenants are good and covenants are important and because of this the Lord warns us (Mt 5:34) while discussing the prohibition against divorce: “But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” We should not take our oaths, our promises, our covenants, lightly at all. We are obligated to them (cf. Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2-3, and Deuteronomy 5:11; 6:3; 23:21-23).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Captain Michael Ramsay. Judges 2:1-5: Covenant and the Gibeonite Dilemma (a look at Judges 2:1-5 through the lenses of Joshua 9 and 2 Samuel 21) Presented to Nipawin and Tisdale Corps on May 18, 2008. Available on-line: <http://sheepspeaks.blogspot.com/2008/05/judges-21-5-covenant-and-gibeonite.html>

<sup>38</sup> Herbert Wolf. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* Pradis CD-ROM: Judges/Exposition of Judges/II. The Rule of the Judges (2:6-16:31)/ Jephthah's vow and victory over Ammon (11:29-33), Book Version: 4.0.2 :Jephthah's desire to defeat the Ammonites was so intense that he made a special "vow to the Lord" (v.30). ... Scholars continue to debate whether or not Jephthah had a human sacrifice in mind. The masculine gender could be translated "whatever comes out" (v.31) or "whoever comes out" and "I will sacrifice it," but it is hard to see how a common animal sacrifice would express unusual devotion. .... Although Jephthah did not originally plan to sacrifice his daughter, he would gladly have offered up anyone else if it helped bring victory.

<sup>39</sup> DA Carson. *Expositor's Bible Commentary, The*, Pradis CD-ROM:Matthew/Exposition of Matthew/II. The Gospel of the Kingdom (3:1-7:29)/B. First Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)/3. The kingdom of heaven: its demands in relation to the OT (5:17-48)/b. Application: the antitheses (5:21-48)/(4) Oaths and truthfulness (5:33-37), Book Version: 4.0.2 :The Mosaic law forbade irreverent oaths, light use of the Lord's name, broken vows. Once Yahweh's name was invoked, the vow to which it was attached became a debt that had to be paid to the Lord.

In the Old Testament it records that, “If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth” (Numbers 30:2; see also: Deut. 23:21-23). Jephthah knows this.

Do we know this? How well do we do at keeping our vows? In a May sermon on Judges 2,<sup>40</sup> we explored the number of divorces in Canada and the drastic results that disregarding these covenantal vows have on future generations as well.

What about our other promises? Have you ever made a rash vow? I remember once in grade five promising that if so and so won this or that I would fight someone else and I assure that my friends held me to that vow. I know that as an adult a friend of mine promised the Lord that he would quit smoking: this was 10 years or so ago and around the same time another friend promised that she would clean her room – we’re still waiting for them to fulfill their vows but I have faith that their delay is just like the delay of Jephthah’s daughter as she goes to cry with her friends in the mountains (Judges 11:37-40). I have faith that these people of faith (my dear friends) will fulfill their vows and experience the full covenantal blessing as indeed Jephthah did.

How do we know that Jephthah fulfilled his vow? There are many ways and I assure you that scholars have spared no ink in exploring this topic but one of the most convincing

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<sup>40</sup> Captain Michael Ramsay. Judges 2:1-5: Covenant and the Gibeonite Dilemma (a look at Judges 2:1-5 through the lenses of Joshua 9 and 2 Samuel 21) Presented to Nipawin and Tisdale Corps on May 18, 2008. Available on-line: <http://sheepspeaks.blogspot.com/2008/05/judges-21-5-covenant-and-gibeonite.html>

arguments is that Jephthah is mentioned in the Hebrews 11's Walk of Fame. He is one of only four in the book of Judges mentioned as a Hero of the Faith. He is mentioned alongside King David and the prophet Samuel (Hebrews 11:32) and for what is he remembered? He is remembered for his faith (or faithfulness). Jephthah, like Abraham, like Hannah, and like God did not even withhold his one and only child.

Do you remember the story of Hannah (1 Samuel 1)? This actually has some bearing on our text here today (Judges 11) and Jephthah's vow. 1 Samuel 1: Hannah didn't have any children. She didn't have any children at all. Her husband wound up taking another wife at the same time and had children with his other wife but Hannah did not have any children and she was suffering much because of it so she called upon the Lord, "And she made a vow, saying, 'O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life... (2 Samuel 1:11).'"

1 Samuel 1:20-28:

So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always." [This is reminiscent of Jephthah's daughter's time with her friends]

"Do what seems best to you," Elkanah her husband told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, "As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there."

Hanna 'gave Samuel over to the Lord' (cf. Lev 27.28-29).<sup>41</sup> Related to this, the language in the Hebrew text of the Jephthah's vow is certainly ambiguous.<sup>42</sup> While Luther argued that Jephthah was committed to executing his daughter. Wesley and others have argued the opposite.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, there are some words and phrases in Jephthah's oath that do permit these different renderings of the text. It has been noted, that the phrase in Judges 11 which is usually translated as, "Whatever comes out of the doors of my house ... shall be the Lord's, **AND** I will offer it up as a burnt offering" in Judges 11:31 can also be read as: "Whatever comes out of the doors of my house ... shall be the Lord's, **OR** I will offer it up as a burnt offering."<sup>44</sup> So, if this second reading is correct, which it might be – and there are other things that lend itself to this idea as well such as the fact that Jephthah's daughter and her friends did not mourn her loss of life but rather her loss of opportunity to be a mother – if this reading is correct then Jephthah could keep his vow and not execute his

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<sup>41</sup> JP Holding: "such vows did NOT allow the person to be redeemed with money." On-line: <http://www.tektonics.org/gk/jephthah.html>

<sup>42</sup> Denis T. Olsen, P.834, argues that this ambiguity is intentional.

<sup>43</sup> John Wesley: "It is really astonishing that the general stream of commentators should take it for granted that Jephthah murdered his daughter! If a dog had met Jephthah, would he have offered up that for a burnt offering? No, because God had expressly forbidden this. And had He also not expressly forbidden murder?" and referring to the authority and responsibility for Jephthah to execute his daughter: "For this is expressly limited to all that a man hath, or which is his, that is, which he hath a power over. But the Jews had no power over the lives of their children or servants, but were directly forbidden to take them away, by that great command, thou shalt do no murder." (Notes on the Old Testament).

<sup>44</sup> (Clarke's Commentary, vol. 2, p. 151) cited from Al Maxey, available on-line at: <http://www.zianet.com/maxey/reflx224.htm>

daughter. He would give her up to live a (possibly celibate) life devoted to God: to a life like that of a pre-Roman Catholic nun as it were.

The text is not clear though. Scholars are not in agreement and either way this vow is a serious thing. Even if Jephthah did not execute his daughter, the fact that she was his only child, means that the leadership of his clan which he gained from winning the battle, would not be passed down to his descendants and even more important than that his family's inheritance in the promised land would actually pass to another. Jephthah sacrificed his descendants' claim to the promise, to the land, to the promised land. This was very important to ancient Israel. It would represent the ultimate sacrifice (for Jephthah and for his daughter who willingly submitted to this commitment that was made on her behalf.)

<sup>45</sup> Whether she was committed to celibacy or to death: either way – whether it was a reckless vow or a pious and an inspired one – Jephthah's family sacrificed their whole world for God and God accepted that sacrifice and Jephthah is remembered as one of the 'Heroes of the Faith.'

So we should not take our covenants, our vows, our promises, lightly when they are made to (or before) the LORD because we will be held accountable to them. God is faithful to his promises (Romans 3:3,4). So when we rely on His covenant promises we will be safe but when we ignore them we will be lost.

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<sup>45</sup> Herbert Wolf, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Pradis CD-ROM:Judges/Exposition of Judges/II. The Rule of the Judges (2:6-16:31)/I Jephthah's vow fulfilled (11:34-40), Book Version: 4.0.2: "Jephthah's daughter sensed the implications of her father's vow but made no attempt to get him to break it. Her willingness to yield herself resembled that of another only child, Isaac, who faced almost certain death when he allowed his father to tie him to an altar (Gen 22). Even if victory over Ammon meant her life, it was worth it; and she gently encouraged her father to perform his vow (v.36)."

## Do you know JAC about Covenant?

Our covenants, our oaths, our promises then are like a parachute. When we try to jump out of life's plane without them or when they aren't properly applied, the consequences can be frightening and even fatal but when we prayerfully pull on the cord of our covenants, when we pull that cord, when we put our faith in the faithfulness of the Lord and His covenant promises, we will not be disappointed. When we fully rely on the Lord. When we put our faith in Him and His covenant promises, as God is faithful to his covenants, we will look up and see the full parachute canopy of our salvation guiding us gently to where we are supposed to be and then we – like Jephthah – through faith and faithfulness, may also find that we are remembered as a 'Hero of the Faith.'

Let it be.

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[http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC\\_Issue\\_060.pdf](http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC_Issue_060.pdf)

## **Numbers 6:1-21: Covenant and Old Testament Salvationists?**

**By Captain Michael Ramsay**

In the Salvation Army we have an opportunity to be separated for God in a very important covenant. Salvation Army soldiers voluntarily take a significant oath. We enter into the Soldiership Covenant before God and this vow is not dissimilar from one recorded in Numbers 6 that the Lord used to greatly bless some of the ancient Israelites: the Nazirite vow. This was a special vow of separation unto the LORD and the LORD himself told Moses that if a man or woman wants to take this special vow of separation to the LORD then there are some things she must do (Numbers 6:1,2).

Most of us, if we think about it, can probably name two or three famous people from the Bible who were bound to the LORD through this Nazirite vow: Samson. Samuel, John the Baptist. It is good to keep these three in mind as we think about the Nazirite vow but we should recognize that there are some key differences between the vows of these three and the other people who have been bound to God through a Nazirite vow.

- 1) None of these three people - Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist - entered into the Nazirite vow of their own accord;
- 2) And their vows, which were made on their behalf were for their entire life (which is the default position for vows, covenants, and oaths unless otherwise specified)

This is different than most times when a Nazirite vow would be taken; in general, the Nazirite vow was **voluntarily** entered into by both men and women and it was for a



**specified** period of time (Numbers 6:4): unlike Samson’s vow, The Salvation Army Soldier’s covenant, and the Christian marriage, the Nazirite vow usually comes with an expiry date.

## Grapes

The vow itself, as outlined in Numbers 6, is very interesting in that it does have some important similarities to our Soldiership vows that we take before the Lord in The Salvation Army. Similar to the Soldier, the Nazirite, “must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins” (Numbers 6:3,4).

This is interesting. As many of us may know The Salvation Army soldier does not drink.<sup>46</sup> He swears that, he “will abstain from alcoholic drink...and all else that could enslave the body or spirit.” Abstaining from alcoholic drink is common to both the Nazirite and the Soldier. You can see how this would be beneficial for setting one apart for the Lord. In The Salvation Army, when God raised us up in London’s East End over a century ago, alcohol was one of the primary things that the Enemy was using to enslave people. They would even serve drinks to young children. We were separated from that societal evil of alcoholism for God.

Today, we can see how much good God can do in delivering people from alcohol still. I know that I have heard more than one exciting testimony from people who have

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<sup>46</sup> There are some exceptions to this rule, i.e.: France.

actually found God through the Alcoholics Anonymous programme. Their first seven steps that they take in enjoying sobriety are as follows:

1. We admitted **we were powerless** over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a **Power greater than ourselves** could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to **turn our will and our lives over to the care of God** as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. **Admitted to God**, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready **to have God remove all these defects** of character.
7. Humbly asked **Him to remove our shortcomings**.

In order to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understand Him, we need to seek Him and when one truly seeks out God, He promises that we will find Him (Matthew 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10; cf. Matthew 6:33). One friend of mine recounts frequently at AA meetings how when he told a priest that he didn't believe in God; the priest asked him, "well what if God didn't believe in you?" This gave my friend some food for thought and he – like so many others through AA – came into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as he began his life of separation from alcohol.

There is more than abstaining from alcohol to this part of the commandment though. This separation from alcohol for the Lord is part of it but there is more. You see the Nazirite is not permitted any grapes – not just fermented grapes- so *Welch's* grape juice is

out of the picture<sup>47</sup> as well as those little packages of *Sun-Maid* raisins that so many kids have in their lunches. Many people, like we said, could readily find reasons why one might want to abstain from alcohol for a time (at least) but why would one want to abstain from raisins, grapes, grape juice, etc.?

Grapes were generally seen as frivolous for the Israelites. They were seen as extra. They were dessert while they were in the desert (as they were in the book of Numbers). No one needs to drink grape juice; we can just drink water. This is reminiscent of the primitive Salvation Army as well. In the old days we were not allowed to wear earrings (Cf. 1 Tim. 2:9) or even engagement rings. I have been told that Soldiers weren't even allowed to have a feather in their hat. These we seen as frivolous; they weren't necessary so why would we want to spend the money that God has given us stewardship over on something as frivolous as a feather or an engagement ring? In the Army today, we have moved away from that and both my wife and I wear rings – and before my daughter accidently pulled it out, when she was two, I had an earring as well (cf. Exod. 32:2-3, 35:22; Num. 31:50; Judges 8:24). I know many good Salvationists who even have tattoos (cf. Lev. 19:28)!

That being said, we do come back to our roots of self-denial at this time of year. During the Lenten season, The Salvation Army concentrates on missions and we used to even call this season 'Self-Denial'. It is when we put aside money that we would normally spend on dessert, going out for dinner, or renting a movie, for example. We are – for this season at least – to deny ourselves, take up our cross in this way for Jesus and His mission

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<sup>47</sup>...and non-alcoholic communion wine, if it existed then; they, due to this art of the oath, were separated from rituals as well.

through us (Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34, cf. Luke 14:27).<sup>48</sup> This self-denial is similar to the first part of the Nazarite vow.

### **Uniform, Long Hair**

The next part of the Nazirite vow refers to the hair. Nazirites were not supposed to cut their hair for the whole time that they were separated from society for God. We, of course, are all familiar with the story of Samson (Judges 13-16). The cutting of his hair was the straw that broke the camel's back as it were. He strained against his covenant more than once in his life but it was when he provided for his hair to be cut that the strength of his covenant was no longer available to him – for a time.

This part of the vow is certainly noticeable, as the bulk of the Israelite population at this time - Israelite men, anyway - would have had short hair. People separated for the Lord would let their hair grow long (Num 6:5; cf. Lev 21:12, 2 Sam 14:25-26). It was a distinctive feature of their vow.<sup>49</sup> The Nazirite would intentionally stand out, drawing attention to the fact that he is separated; he is holy unto the LORD.

This is akin to The Salvation Army uniform. We are noticeable when we are in uniform and if people know anything about the Soldiers' covenant then they know that we are separated from a number of societal behaviours – all that can 'enslave the body or spirit' – specifically for God. They know we are separated for God. When in uniform, we are immediately recognisable to someone who finds himself in need of help from a servant separated for God. This has been exciting part of ministry for me. I have literally had

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<sup>48</sup>Cf. Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers: Journey to God's Rest*. Moody Press, Chicago, 1964., P.37.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers: Journey to God's Rest*. Moody Press, Chicago, 1964., P.37.

people running up the street behind me yelling ‘Captain, Captain!’ and even ‘Priest! Priest!’

The uniform also came in very helpful when offering emotional and spiritual care after Hurricane Ike struck Galveston Island in the fall and immediately following the explosion that hit Nipawin a year ago. After that tragedy, a number of evangelical pastors in this town lamented that they did not have some sort of uniform (like ours) to show themselves as distinct, separated for God. The uniform, like the Nazirite’s long hair, is a way that people can know that indeed we have been set apart; we have been made holy for God.

This is of course what holiness is: it is a setting apart, a separateness for God. Therefore, when we don our uniforms, as every soldier in The Salvation Army is eligible to do, we are easily recognisable to people, as an instrument of hope in the Lord. Therefore, when we are in uniform - as well as at all other times - let us strive to be holy as the Lord our God is holy (Lev 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7-8; 26).

### **Habeas Corpus?**

This brings us to the third aspect of the Nazirite vow and this is no less significant than the first two parts but it would be a stretch to say that it has its direct equivalent to our Soldiership vow. It does however have its parallels and it is no less important to the Nazirite of ancient Israel than the other aspects of their vow: this is the prohibition against contact with dead bodies. Numbers 6:7 states specifically that the Nazirite is not to come in contact with a dead body: even if the dead person is your own mother or father. If your mother or father passes away during your Nazirite vow, you may not attend the funeral ceremony. You may not! Ordinarily the Israelites have very special responsibilities pertaining to the passing of one’s parents, even though it would make them ceremonially

unclean (Num 5:2, 19:11; Lev 21:1-3). For the Nazirite, she is not allowed to be unclean – even for her parents (Cf. Lev 21:10-12). One must choose between one’s family responsibilities and one’s responsibilities to God (cf. Lev 21:10-12; Matt 10:35,12:22-48, 19:29; Mark 3:23-35, 10:29-30, 13:1-28; Luke 8:19-21, 14:25-26; John 19:27). This is important. God is more important than anyone else in the holy person’s life. To the covenanted Nazirite and to the covenanted Soldier, to the devoted spouse and to the fully committed Christian, God is first. What good is it to gain the whole world and yet lose your own soul? (Matt 16:26, Mark 8:36).

There is even more to this though: verses 9-12 are very important for the Nazirite and equally significant for Soldiers in The Salvation Army or anyone else taking a covenant before the LORD. If a person dies in the Nazirite’s presence, the Nazirite is STILL guilty of sin. Even though the Nazirite did not mean to break his vow, he still broke it and needs to be restored in his covenant relationship. Numbers 9-12 (NIV):

“If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing—the seventh day. Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head. He must dedicate himself to the LORD for the period of his separation and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation.”

Even though the Nazirite here is guilty of breaking her vow, the covenant remains in tact. It is even renewed: the previous days do not count; she gets a fresh start. This is

## Do you know JAC about Covenant?

important. The covenant remains until it is fulfilled. We are not released from covenants and vows simply for disobeying them. This is VERY important. The covenantal tie is not broken when we disobey God. Even when we are faithless, God is faithful (Romans 3:3,4). There are consequences for transgressing the covenant. There are natural and logical results of not living up to our vows, our promises, our covenants with or before the Lord – but we are not released from them for simple disobedience. This is one of the very important aspects of covenants that we enter into with and before the LORD. When we disobey that covenant there are consequences but He is still there for us. Until the successful completion of our covenant (if it has an expiry date) or until our death (if it does not) our covenant remains in tact, binding us to the Lord (Romans 7:1-3). Our covenants in this way are like seatbelts. When the car crashes, we don't take off our seatbelts and say that we are never going to wear them again. No, this is when we praise the Lord for our seatbelts more than ever.

Covenants are also like car insurance. It is like last spring when my daughters and I were coming home from Tisdale. We were driving that highway like we did a couple of times every week when all of a sudden we hit black ice, we swerved into on-coming traffic and then off our side of the road where the car proceeded to flip: it rolled over a time and a half. We did not see the accident coming and therefore could do nothing to prepare for it anymore than a Nazirite could prepare for someone suddenly dying in his presence. Even though the experts admitted that there was nothing we could do to avoid the accident, I guarantee you that the insurance company declared that it was our fault. This is the same with the Nazirite. YHWH Insurance, so to speak, declares that they are at fault and demands payment. In this case the payment is their hair and as far as their clean driving

record was concerned, they have to start over again – but the insurance isn't cancelled. Similarly when the Soldier runs into troubles her covenant isn't cancelled; it remains in place to protect her.

It is the same with seatbelts. In my accident the seatbelts did not break and this too is like our covenants before the Lord. Even though the car was totalled, the seatbelts held. This is important. Like sometimes an alcoholic makes a mistake and has a drink; like a husband sometimes does not operate perfectly as a loving husband; like at times we might sin before the Lord and like there are times when our lives just come crashing down all around us; when my car rolled over, there was that moment of panic as I looked back to see if my daughters were all right. To my relief they were safe and sound – even though we were all dangling upside down after the accident – they were all right because the LORD protected them through their seatbelts that did not break. We were safe and sound and soon restored to our normal life. Likewise, for all of us when our lives come crashing down around us, we will be safe and sound as long as we rely on the strength of our holy seatbelt -our covenant with the Lord- because the Lord will not let His covenant with us break no matter what happens to the automobile of our life. So then, let us enjoy the security of this holy seatbelt and, like the ancient Nazirite, through our covenant, let us rely fully on His strength rather than our own so that we may indeed be holy as the LORD our God is holy.



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[http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC\\_Issue\\_040.pdf](http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC_Issue_040.pdf)

## Berit[h]

Covenant is obviously an important concept in The Salvation Army with full membership requiring a signing of the Soldier's Covenant. It is also a very important idea in the Old Testament. The word 'testament' itself can be translated as covenant! *Berit[h]* is the most common term translated as 'covenant' in the Hebrew Bible: it appears 286 times thus proving it an extremely important word.<sup>50</sup>

The origin of this word is not entirely conclusive. It is a form of the word *brh*, which refers to the meal that accompanies the covenantal ceremony.<sup>51</sup> *Brh*, however, is not the usual verb to indicate eating so this origin is not the most likely.<sup>52</sup> *Berith* is identical to the Akkadian word *birith* which means "between" or "among" so that is a possible origin.<sup>53</sup> Most probably though, *berith* comes from the Akkadian word *biritu*, which means "to fetter". This term designates the establishment or breach of a contract.<sup>54</sup>

As this root, *biritu*, suggests the original Hebrew meaning of the word would imply more of an "imposition" of terms rather than an "agreement or settlement between two parties".<sup>55</sup> Covenants are commanded (Ps. 111:9; Jgs. 2:20) and can be seen as the same as a law or commandment (cf.; e.g., Dt. 4:13; 33:9; Isa. 24:5; Ps. 50:16; 103:18).<sup>56</sup> The

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<sup>50</sup> G.E. Mendenhall. "Covenant." In *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by George Arthur Buttrick. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1962), 715.

<sup>51</sup> M. Weinfeld. "berith." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck. (Stuttgart, W.Germany: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 253.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> G.E. Mendenhall, 715.

<sup>55</sup> M. Weinfeld, 255.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

"covenant at Sinai in Ex. 24 is in its essence an imposition of laws and obligations upon the people (vv. 3-8)".<sup>57</sup>

There are a number of classifications of the various types of OT covenants that can be made: secular (where God is not one of the parties involved), covenants in which God IS bound, and covenants in which Israel is bound.

Covenants where God is not one of the parties involved can be further classified as suzerainty, where a superior binds an inferior to terms the superior sets (I Sam 11:1; Hos. 12:1; Job 41:4, 5:23.);<sup>58</sup> parity, where each party is bound by oath (Gen 21:25-32, 26:27-31, 31:44-50; Josh. 9:3-27; I Kings 5:12, 20:34);<sup>59</sup> patron, where a superior binds himself for the benefit of an inferior (Isa.: 28:15); promissory, which guarantees future performance of stipulated obligations (II Kings 11:4-12,17; II Kings 23:3; Jeremiah 34:8; Ezra 10:3; Nehemiah 5:11-13, 9:38, 10:28-29).<sup>60</sup>

Covenants where God, himself, is bound include the covenant with Noah (Gen. 17, Num. 25:12), the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15, 17:1-14), and the Davidic covenant (II Sam. 23:5, Pss. 89:3, 28-29; 110:4).<sup>61</sup>

The covenants where Israel is bound include the Mosaic covenant (cf.; e.g., the ten commandments, Deut 27-28), the covenant of Joshua (Jos. 24), the reform of Josiah (II Kings 23), and the covenant of Ezra (Neh. 9-10).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> G.E. Mendenhall, 716.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 717.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 718.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 721.

## Do you know JAC about Covenant?

Covenants then can be made voluntarily or involuntarily, with or without obligation, and between equals, or superiors and inferiors; *berith*'s origin is uncertain but it is probably derived from *biritu*, which means "to fetter".

So, who cares? Well, the Salvationist, I suppose, or more importantly the person contemplating a 'covenant' relationship with God. When you sign your covenant, you are fettered, shackled, and bound. This chain cannot easily be broken. If it is, there are repercussions. So for potential Salvationists, they should ask, "Is this the star to which God has asked me to hitch my wagon?" and for the Salvationist who tends to take the terms of the covenant lightly, remember that it is difficult to move when the one you are yoked together with is going in the other direction...BUT when you are following in a proper covenant, His yoke is easy! And really what can you accomplish on your own that won't be accomplished much more easily and effectively if you are shackled to the LORD!