

Covenant

Hebrew ברית (b'ryit)
Greek διαθήκη (diatheke)

1

Translations for ברית

- ▶ Translated as:
- ▶ Gen. 14:3 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were **allies** (ברית) of Abram.
- ▶ Joshua 9:6 They went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the Israelites, "We have come from a far country; so now make a **treaty** (ברית) with us."
- ▶ Job 41:4 Will it make an **agreement** (ברית) with you for you to take it as your slave for life? (NIV)
- ▶ Exodus 24:8 Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the **covenant** (ברית) that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

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Translations for διαθήκη

- ▶ Translated as:
- ▶ Acts 3:25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the **covenant** (διαθήκη) God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed."
- ▶ Hebrews 9:16 In the case of a **will** (διαθήκη), it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it,

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Types of covenants (Scott Hahn)

- ▶ Kinship Covenants
 - ▶ "A kinship covenant binds two parties together in a mutual relationship with divine sanction. This type of covenant may be used to reinforce prior familial bonds or to draw hostile parties into a familial relationship. This covenant has the features of an oath, a shared meal, sacrifice, and concepts denoting mutual affiliation."
- ▶ Treaty (Suzerainty) Covenants
 - ▶ "The treaty-type covenant is imposed by a suzerain on a vassal. Often this covenant is marked by the vassal's swearing an oath that consists in the promise of loyalty under threat of divine judgment."
 - ▶ Common in Ancient Near East - many examples in Hittite and Assyrian records
- ▶ Grant Covenants
 - ▶ "With the third covenant, the grant-type, the vassal is rewarded for its loyalty by the suzerain with a grant. A good example is the grant made to Noah. The covenant is the result of Noah's loyalty and is based on God's promise of unconditional blessings."

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Other related types of covenants

- ▶ Parity covenants - like suzerainty treaties, but between equals.
 - ▶ 1 Kings 5:8-12 Hiram sent word to Solomon, "I have heard the message that you have sent to me; I will fulfill all your needs in the matter of cedar and cypress timber. My servants shall bring it down to the sea from the Lebanon; I will make it into rafts to go by sea to the place you indicate. I will have them broken up there for you to take away. And you shall meet my needs by providing food for my household." So Hiram supplied Solomon's every need for timber of cedar and cypress. Solomon in turn gave Hiram twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, and twenty cors of fine oil. Solomon gave this to Hiram year by year. So the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. There was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and the two of them made a **treaty** (ברית).
- ▶ Marriage covenants - an important subtype of the Kinship covenant.
 - ▶ Malachi 2:14 - You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by **covenant** (ברית).

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Preamble - identification of the suzerain including titles, and of the vassal who is party to the covenant
 - ▶ Exodus 20:1-2 Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
- ▶ Historical prologue - talks about the events leading up to the covenant treaty, often featuring the benevolent acts of the suzerain.
 - ▶ Exodus 19:3-6 Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.'"

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Stipulations - the rules set out by the suzerain for the vassal. This includes both general principles, and specific stipulations arising from the general principles
- ▶ Exodus 20:3-17 You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Provision for annual reading/proclamation of the covenant
 - ▶ Leviticus 23:1-2 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals.
- ▶ The divine witnesses and guarantors of the covenant treaty
 - ▶ Heb 6:13 When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you."

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Benedictions (blessings) for keeping the covenant.
 - ▶ Leviticus 26:3-13 - Benedictions
 - ▶ I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit.
 - ▶ I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid.
 - ▶ I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant (ברית) with you.

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Maledictions (curses / penalties) for violating the covenant.
 - ▶ Leviticus 26:14-39 - Maledictions
 - ▶ I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength.
 - ▶ Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of your land yield their fruit.
 - ▶ I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle, and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.
 - ▶ I will bring the sword on you to avenge the breaking of the covenant (ברית).

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Sacrifice as a symbolic element of the covenant
 - ▶ Exodus 24:4-8 And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant (ברית), and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See the blood of the covenant (ברית) that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Sacrifice as a symbolic element of the covenant (continued)
 - ▶ Genesis 15:8-10 But he said, "O LORD GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 17-18 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant (ברית) with Abram ...
 - ▶ Jeremiah 34:18-20 And those who transgressed my covenant (ברית) and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make like the calf when they cut it in two and passed between its parts: the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf shall be handed over to their enemies and to those who seek their lives.

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Sacrifice as a festive element of the covenant
 - ▶ Genesis 26:28-31 he said, "We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant (ברית) with you so that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD." So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Formal oath
 - ▶ Joshua 9:15 And Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them.
 - ▶ 2 Chronicles 15:12-15 They entered into a covenant (ברית) to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their soul. Whoever would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. They took an oath to the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with horns. All Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around.

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Elements of a suzerainty covenant

- ▶ Sign / seal
 - ▶ Genesis 9:12-17 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

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Results of a covenant

- ▶ It creates kinship between the parties.
- ▶ It initiates a partnership of working together towards (a) mutual goal(s)

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The narrative arc of the Bible in Six Covenants

- ▶ The Adamic covenant - Genesis 1-3
- ▶ Adam's vassalage - as steward of creation; as husband to Eve.
- ▶ Stipulations - Be fruitful and multiply; have dominion. Name the living creatures. Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.
- ▶ Benedictions - I will make him a helper as his partner.
- ▶ Maledictions - In the day that you eat of it you shall die.
- ▶ Kinship relationship - marriage
- ▶ Sign of the covenant - the Sabbath.

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The narrative arc of the Bible in Six Covenants

- ▶ The covenant with Noah - Genesis 9
- ▶ Noah's vassalage - as father of his family, as representative of all living things.
- ▶ Stipulations - Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth. Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.
- ▶ Benedictions - As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease
- ▶ Kinship relationship - household
- ▶ Sign of the covenant - the rainbow.

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The narrative arc of the Bible in Six Covenants

- ▶ The covenant with Abraham - Genesis 12; Genesis 15; Genesis 17
- ▶ Abraham's vassalage - as father of a great nation, as the ancestor of a multitude of nations
- ▶ Stipulations - Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.
- ▶ Benedictions - will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.
- ▶ Kinship relationship - clan
- ▶ Sign of the covenant - circumcision

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The narrative arc of the Bible in Six Covenants

- ▶ The covenant with Moses - Exodus 19-31
- ▶ Moses' vassalage - as prophet and judge of Israel
- ▶ Stipulations - 10 commandments and Mosaic law
- ▶ Benedictions - You shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.
- ▶ Kinship relationship - tribes
- ▶ Signs of the covenant - Passover; Stone tablets, Ark of the Covenant

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The narrative arc of the Bible in Six Covenants

- ▶ The covenant with David - Exodus 19-31
- ▶ David's vassalage - as king of Israel
- ▶ Benedictions - I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.
- ▶ Kinship relationship - nation
- ▶ Signs of the covenant - Throne

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The narrative arc of the Bible in Six Covenants

- ▶ The covenant with Jesus - Jeremiah 31;
- ▶ Jesus' suzerainty - King as David's descendant;
- ▶ Stipulations - I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
- ▶ Benedictions - I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. But he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.
- ▶ Kinship relationship - church
- ▶ Signs of the covenant - Communion

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Further Study

- ▶ <https://bibleproject.com/guides/covenants/>
- ▶ <https://bibleproject.com/articles/covenants-the-backbone-bible/>
- ▶ <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/language-faith-part-3-covenant/>
- ▶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelos/review/kinship-by-covenant-a-canonical-approach-to-the-fulfillment-of-gods-saving-promises/>
- ▶ <https://russmeek.com/2020/10/the-suzerain-vassal-treaty-covenant-in-the-old-testament/>
- ▶ https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/to/treaties_thomson.pdf
- ▶ <https://www.chafer.edu/CTS-Journal/Israelite-Covenants-in-the-light-of-Ancient-Near-Eastern-Covenants-by-Rene-Lopez>
- ▶ <https://www.tyndalebulletin.org/article/32389-the-significance-of-the-ancient-near-eastern-treaty-pattern.pdf>

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