

April 2021 Restoration Women's Council – Class #1



Living in Covenant - What did it Mean to the Hebrews?

A Covenant is an agreement between two parties that is more binding than a contract because it cannot be broken except through death.

The ancient Hebrews practiced covenants as part of their culture. They knew that covenant meant sacrifice and surety. **Sacrifice** because they knew that covenants came with conditions and often were difficult to fulfill. **Surety** because they knew the other party would fulfill their pledge no matter what. And they would do the same. **They had great assurance in their life when covenant was involved.**

Let's explore how a covenant was created by the ancient Hebrews and then **see how that is relevant to us today**. There are several types of covenants: marriage covenants, covenants between nations or individuals, blood covenants, baptismal covenants, the everlasting covenant, etc. The most common example of the ancient Hebrew covenant is that of a blood covenant. According to author Marvin Wilson, a converted Jew, as well as Rivkah ministries and many other Old Testament scholars, there are six Steps performed when creating a Blood Covenant. (Some references say seven, but we'll stay with six for our discussion.) The two parties involved would:

1. **Discuss Terms:** The two people or tribes would sit down and discuss the terms of the proposed covenant.
2. **Choose Representatives:** In the case of covenants among tribes or groups, each tribe would select a representative for its specific tribe. These individuals would become responsible for their respective tribes during the creation of the covenant.
3. **Exchange Weapons and Garments:** Each representative would then pledge his life, loyalty, and honor to the other as they went through a ceremony in which they would exchange weapons and garments representative of offering their authority and power for the benefit of the other.
4. **Cut the Covenant:** The representatives from each tribe would next perform a blood sacrifice of a pure animal. Each representative would make the ceremonial, "walk of blood" as they would walk to and fro between the pieces of a sacrificed animal. Part of Abraham's cutting of the covenant included circumcision for his household.
5. **Share Meal:** After the "walk of blood," the entire family or tribe would participate in the covenant meal which usually included bread and wine.
6. **Exchange Names:** The names of the representatives and those represented would finally be changed or merged to reflect the newly formed covenant relationship.

Probably most of you are familiar with the specific ways that Christ fulfilled the ancient blood covenant. He is the reason we will be blessed when keeping our covenant with God. He has been called the mediator of the New Covenant, thus our representative. This subject alone could be a month's worth of devotions but we'll look just briefly at how beautifully Christ meets the terms of the final blood covenant with his life and death.

1. The [Covenant terms were discussed](#) and decided on when Christ and God discussed how mankind could be saved and Christ offered to go to earth taking upon Him sin and overcoming sin in exchange for life eternal.

[Genesis 3:3](#) But behold my beloved Son which was my beloved and chosen from the beginning, said unto me; Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

Christ reaffirms the terms in His prayer to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane.

2. [Christ became the representative](#) for all mankind because of his willingness to do the Father's will.

This is referenced in Genesis above, as well as in the Garden of Gethsemane, **[Matthew 26:36](#) Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.** and, **[2 Corinthians 5:21](#), For he (the Father) hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**

3. His [weapon and garment, representative of His righteousness](#), power, and authority are offered to us through him taking our garment of sin and giving us His white garment of righteousness. We have little to offer in exchange except our faith.

[Genesis 15:12](#) And it came to pass that Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest, and he believed in the Lord; and the Lord counted it unto him for righteousness.

[2 Nephi 3:117](#) And behold they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God, their garments are made white in his blood.

Also see **[Alma 3:39](#) and [5:42](#)** which show the importance of us taking on Christ's white garment in order to be part of His Kingdom. When His righteous garment covers us, it becomes a strength.

[Isaiah 41:10](#) I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

The weapon Christ gives is His sword of the spirit, in other words, His Word and His Holy Spirit, which only happens once we have entered into covenant. The Holy Spirit brings peace and discernment as our weapons to combat trials big and small!

[John 14:26-27](#) But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

4. **He is the sacrificed lamb**. This part of Jesus fulfilling the blood covenant is well documented and well-known. Just last month Elder Steve Mapes reminded us on Easter Sunday that traditionally the sacrificial lamb was slain at 3:00 in the afternoon. At that exact time, Christ committed His Spirit to the Father and died. Traditionally the lambs could not have spot or blemish, nor broken bones. Likewise Christ had no sin and did not have his legs broken as often was done in crucifixions.

Hebrews 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

As far as circumcision as part of cutting the covenant, the Apostle Paul testifies that Christ will circumcise our hearts. The book of **Deuteronomy 30:6** also affirms this, **And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.**

See the promise in the introduction again which is made to the children of covenant.

5. The **Covenant meal** was commemorated during the Last Supper and is today remembered through the Lord's Supper each month.

Matthew 26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and brake it, and blessed it, and gave to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is in remembrance of my body which I give a ransom for you. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is in remembrance of my blood of the new testament (covenant), which is shed for as many as shall believe on my name, for the remission of their sins. And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall observe to do the things which ye have seen me do, and bear record of me even unto the end.

If you read the passage entirely, you will notice that those participating in the Last Supper were those who were his followers. They were baptized and had entered covenant with him.

6. The **exchange of names** occurs by both parties. Christ, the mediator, took on the name the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. We take on the name of Christ when we enter covenant by becoming the Children of God, or Christians.

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

In scripture, the first clear example we see of a blood covenant is that of Abraham and God entering covenant, found in **Genesis 15-17**.

Genesis 17:8-12 But as for thee, behold, I will make my covenant with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. And this covenant I make, that thy children may be known among all nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be called Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come of thee, and of thy seed. And I will establish a covenant of circumcision with thee, and it shall be my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations...And thou shalt observe to keep all my covenants wherein I covenanted with thy fathers; and thou shalt keep the commandments which I have given thee with mine own mouth, and I will be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee.

Some may also argue that Adam entered covenant when he was baptized in **Genesis 6**. Though I believe this to be true, not all steps of a covenant are mentioned, so I'll leave that to another discussion.

See also **Genesis 17:12**, the story of God covenanting with Abraham through Isaac, which is a perfect foreshadowing of God as He provides covenant to us through Jesus. This story alone could be an entire month's worth of devotions, but I'll leave you with a few scriptures to ponder in your own study of it.

Another example of a blood covenant is David and Jonathan's covenant found in **1 Samuel 18**. This story references each of the steps in making a covenant as mentioned above and I won't go through each but it is worth your time to re-read.

I feel and have felt several times while writing this that it's extremely important to grasp the foundational idea that the reason their covenant began was not as a desire to get something from each other, nor out of need, but stemmed from mutual love initiated by the party in authority, or with royal blood.

This is clear from **verse 3 in 1 Samuel** which says, **Then Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as his own soul.** "Him" is referencing Jonathan (from the royal household, King Saul's son) as can be seen from **verse 1: The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David because Jonathan loved him as his own soul.**

Similarly does a marriage covenant stem from love and has traditionally been initiated by the male who is in God's eyes the spiritual authority in a household. Likewise, God's desire for covenant with us began by Him loving us from the day He created us. God's love for us and his promises to us, only come through His love for His Only Begotten Son. This is revealed many places in His word, but here are a few reminders to let it sink in.

1 John 4:9-10 **In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

Most commonly quoted is:

John 3:16 **For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**

Obviously we had nothing to do with initiating love or the covenant.

Our decision to enter into Covenant should not just be out of wanting to keep the ancient law and receive the blessings that are promised, but should flow from a desire in our heart to live with Him because we love him.

The symbolism of the blood covenant is obviously beautiful and gives us confidence that Christ is the only one who has fulfilled every aspect of the detailed plan God laid out. Realizing and appreciating the spirit of the Covenant and sensing God's great love for us is ultimately what should bring us to our knees in humility with a desire to live the covenant life with Him.

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Why Should I Want to Live in Covenant Today?

Whenever someone challenges you with something new, and encourages you to try it, are you skeptical? Do you want to know why you should try it?

Most of us at least desire a reason for trying something new. In like manner, you might ask, "Why should I want to make the sacrifices to live in covenant?"

If you combine a study of God's word with an observance of people's lives—those who have done such as this, you will see two main reasons why living in Covenant has such great benefits: the NOW blessings and the FUTURE blessings!

When we choose to begin living in Covenant with God now, He promises many specific blessings for our life here on Earth—not that life will always be easy—but, that we will be encouraged along the way.

How do I know this to be true? First, take a look at **Mosiah 1:58** which promises, **He [the Lord] doth require that ye should do as He hath commanded you, for which if ye do, He doth immediately bless you....**

When I am struggling to feel the NOW blessings, because I have had disappointments, hurts, things that stir up anger in my heart, and so on, I try to make a list of my past blessings and see what the Scriptures promise for the NOW blessings.

Maybe you have done this and find it helpful, too. As **D&C 1:7** tells us, we can be assured that God will keep His promises. **Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled.**

Let's look at just a few of these **NOW blessings**. Our Loving Maker desires to grant us peace and strength in hard times in our life. As you read and bask in His promises, look for the requirements on your part also.

Alma 17:3 ...whosoever shall put their trust in God, shall be supported in their trials, and in their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.

Phillipians 4:7-9 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.... Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you.

D&C 10 Seek not for riches, but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich; behold he that hath Eternal Life is rich.

D&C 6:4a Verily, verily, I say unto you, even as you desire of Me, so shall it be done unto you; and, if you desire you shall be the means of doing much good in your generation.

Volumes could be written pertaining to the blessings that follow good stewardship.

Perhaps best known, and with good reason, are these Scriptures:

Malachi 3:10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground...And all nations shall call you blessed, for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.”

D&C 129:8b-h reminds us that we should heed the many revelations to pay our tithing and give free-will offerings and consecrations to the Bishop, and, until we do, we as a people cannot receive the blessings that have been looked for in Zion.

Counsel in **D&C 130** tells us to exercise the principal of sacrifice and the repression of unnecessary wants in order to get rid of debt. This was said to be applied in our private lives as well as to the Church as a whole.

Do any of us have need to alleviate debt in our lives, or perhaps desire to help others in need, or give to the Lord’s work at large?

Fulfilling this portion of our Covenant lifestyle assuredly will bless us NOW in this world as well as in the Eternal world ahead.

In addition to keeping the financial law and receiving the above blessings, there are the blessings granted due to keeping other stewardship laws.

This includes financial, physical and spiritual stewardship.

One of my favorite promises is to our nation:

II Nephi 1:12-13, 20-21 And if it so be that they shall serve Him according to the commandments which He hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them.... And if it so be that they shall keep His commandments, they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever.

Now let us look forward to the **FUTURE blessings of Eternal Life**—living in the presence of our Savior and His love—and being free from pain; which is, of course, so important in remembering why we’re choosing the often-challenging Covenant-way of life!

Here are a few examples of the FUTURE blessings to keep in mind when struggling with following through with our part of the “deal.”

FUTURE blessings would include, of course, the gift of Eternal Life as stated in numerous places. But what comes along with Eternal Life?

D&C 51:5b And whoso is found a faithful, a just, and a wise steward, shall enter into the joy of his Lord, and shall inherit Eternal Life.

D&C 95:3b ...and I will try you, and prove you herewith; and whoso layeth down his life in My cause, [a life lived in Covenant] for My name’s sake, shall find it again; even Life Eternal.

This Scripture brings a blessing that we all hope for in our lifetime, but if not in our lifetime, then we will look forward to it in the FUTURE:

Isaiah 51:11 Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy and holiness shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

FUTURE blessings continue:

D&C 76 For thus saith the Lord, I the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear Me, and delight to honor those who serve Me in righteousness and in truth unto the end; great shall be their reward, and eternal shall be their glory...

Alma 19:44 And then shall it come to pass that the spirits of those who are righteous, are received into a state of happiness, which called paradise; a state of rest; a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles, and from all care and sorrow.

And here is my personal favorite FUTURE blessing. This is a promise that will come if we are found keeping the commandments—and what a marvelous promise it is!

Mosiah 1:88-91 ...I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end, they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

Notice that each of these blessings do carry conditions. The conditions are where we need to focus our heart and energy; the blessings will flow freely thereafter.

Later, I will share several stories of times I have tested the Lord's promises and He has followed through with the blessings He promised.

Most of the promises found in Scripture are specifically for those who have entered into Covenant with God.

Making Covenant assures us of His blessings!

The following poem was written by my great uncle, Patriarch Bill J. Dollins:

Grant me, O Lord, just this one day,
The strength to live for Thee;
Not for tomorrow's needs I pray,
Nor rest my thoughts on yesterday,
But humbly seek Thy loving way,
And feel Thee close to me.

I can't re-live my yesterday;

For me, tomorrow may not be;

My time of service is today,

So wilt Thou help me, Lord, I pray,

To live my life in such a way,

That I may walk with Thee.

In close communion may I stay,

And with Thee ever be;

When sunlight sends its shining ray

To herald in each bright new day,

Then grant me strength,
O Lord, to say,

Just let me live today for Thee.

Also, on the next page you will find a song titled "I'll Live in Covenant." It may be sung to the tune of "Blessed Assurance."

I'LL LIVE IN COVENANT

I'll live in Cove—nant, Dear Lord with thee;
 My life must sh—ow, my love for Thee.
 My words and deeds now, must clearly show;
 That your great love, Lord, I've come to know.

CHORUS:

To live in Cove—nant, Dear Lord with thee;
 To live in Cove—nant, I've promised Thee.
 Day, by day and eternally,
 I'll live in Cove—nant, Dear Lord, with Thee.

Not my own will, Lord, this I can say,
 Not for one moment to have my way;
 Thy plan is best and this now I know,
 Lead where Thou wilt, Lord, I'll gladly go.

(REPEAT CHORUS)

Thou has a plan, Lord, for me each day,
 Some prayer to offer, some word to say.
 Make Thy will known, now, that I may see,
 Whatever pa—th, Thou hast for me.

(REPEAT CHORUS)

Thou has a place, now, for me to fill,
 Where I can kn—ow, and do thy will;
 Thou hast a work, Lord, for me to do,
 To share that others may know you, too.

(REPEAT CHORUS)

A word to comfort, someone that's dear,
 A song to gladden, a smile to cheer,
 In all these ways, Lord, our lives can show,
 As Cove—nant children, Your love we know.

(REPEAT CHORUS)

Help me to learn, Lord, the Cove—nant way,
 I want my li—fe, to always say;
 That I am living, day by day,
 Always, only, the Cove—nant way.

(REPEAT CHORUS)

(author unknown—sung to the tune of
 “Blessed Assurance”)