

The Salt Covenant

Eating salt together in the East is a pledge of friendship. “A covenant of salt” stands for incorruption and permanence. Salt was used in the sacrifices and offerings of the Israelites probably with the idea of honor and fidelity. It was the one symbol that was never absent from the altar of burnt offering, showing the everlasting love of Jehovah for His people.

—Explorer Bibles Study

The salt of the sacrifice is called the salt of the covenant, because in common life salt was the symbol of covenant; treaties being concluded and rendered firm and inviolable, according to a well-known custom of the ancient Greeks (see *Eustathius ad Iliad*. i. 449) which is still retained among the Arabs, by the parties to an alliance eating bread and salt together, as a sign of the treaty which they had made. As a covenant of this kind was called a “covenant of salt,” equivalent to an indissoluble covenant (Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5), so here the salt added to the sacrifice is designated as salt of the covenant of God, because of its imparting strength and purity to the sacrifice, by which Israel was strengthened and fortified in covenant fellowship with Jehovah.

—Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament

sôlt (מֶלַח בְּרִית, *b^erith melah*; ἅλας, *hálás*, classical Greek ἅλις, *hális*): As salt was regarded as a necessary ingredient of the daily food, and so of all sacrifices offered to Yahweh (Lev 2:13), it became an easy step to the very close connection between salt and covenant-making. When men ate together they became friends. Compare the Arabic expression, “There is salt between us”; “He has eaten of my salt,” which means partaking of hospitality which cemented friendship; compare “eat the salt of the palace” (Ezr 4:14). Covenants were generally confirmed by sacrificial meals and salt was always present. Since, too, salt is a preservative, it would easily become symbolic of an enduring covenant. So offerings to Yahweh were to be by a statute forever, “a covenant of salt for ever before Yahweh” (Nu 18:19). David received his kingdom forever from Yahweh by a “covenant of salt” (2 Ch 13:5). In the light of these conceptions the remark of our Lord becomes the more significant: “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another” (Mk 9:50).

—International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

It is a covenant of salt—That is, an incorruptible, everlasting covenant. As salt was added to different kinds of viands, not only to give them a relish, but to preserve them from putrefaction and decay, it became the emblem of incorruptibility and permanence. Hence, a covenant of salt signified an everlasting covenant. We have already seen that, among the Asiatics, eating together was deemed a bond of perpetual friendship; and as salt was a common article in all their repasts, it may be in reference to this circumstance that a perpetual covenant is termed a covenant of salt; because the parties ate together of the sacrifice offered on the occasion, and the whole transaction was considered as a league of endless friendship.

—Adam Clark’s Commentary

Covenant

A contract or agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word berith is always thus translated. Berith is derived from a root which means “to cut,” and hence a covenant is a “cutting,” with reference to the cutting or dividing of animals into two parts, and the contracting parties passing between them, in making a covenant (Gen. 15; Jer. 34:18, 19). The corresponding word in the New Testament Greek is *diatheke*, which is, however, rendered “testament” generally in the Authorized Version. It ought to be rendered, just as the word berith of the Old Testament, “covenant.”

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This word is used

- (1.) of a covenant or compact between man and man (Gen. 21:32), or between tribes or nations (1 Sam. 11:1; Josh. 9:6, 15). In entering into a covenant, Jehovah was solemnly called on to witness the transaction (Gen. 31:50), and hence it was called a “covenant of the Lord” (1 Sam. 20:8). The marriage compact is called “the covenant of God” (Prov. 2:17), because the marriage was made in God’s name. Wicked men are spoken of as acting as if they had made a “covenant with death” not to destroy them, or with hell not to devour them (Isa. 28:15, 18).

- (2.) The word is used with reference to God’s revelation of himself in the way of promise or of favour to men. Thus God’s promise to Noah after the Flood is called a covenant (Gen. 9; Jer. 33:20, “my covenant”). We have an account of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17, compare Lev. 26:42), of the covenant of the priesthood (Num. 25:12, 13; Deut. 33:9; Neh. 13:29), and of the covenant of Sinai (Ex. 34:27, 28; Lev. 26:15), which was afterwards renewed at different times in the history of Israel (Deut. 29; Josh. 24; 2 Chr. 15; 23; 29; 34; Ezra 10; Neh. 9). In conformity with human custom, God’s covenant is said to be confirmed with an oath (Deut. 4:31; Ps. 89:3), and to be accompanied by a sign (Gen. 9; 17). Hence the covenant is called God’s “counsel,” “oath,” “promise” (Ps. 89:3, 4; 105:8-11; Heb. 6:13-20; Luke 1:68-75). God’s covenant consists wholly in the bestowal of blessing (Isa. 59:21; Jer. 31:33, 34).

The term covenant is also used to designate the regular succession of day and night (Jer. 33:20), the Sabbath (Ex. 31:16), circumcision (Gen. 17:9, 10), and in general any ordinance of God (Jer. 34:13, 14).

A “covenant of salt” signifies an everlasting covenant, in the sealing or ratifying of which salt, as an emblem of perpetuity, is used (Num. 18:19; Lev. 2:13; 2 Chr. 13:5).

—Easton’s Bible Dictionary