

Pt 4-Covenant: Solemn and Binding

PREVIOUS
STUDY

NEXT STUDY

THE SERIOUSNESS OF COVENANT

H Clay Trumbull has discovered elements of covenant throughout history in all cultures. He comments that...

There are historic traces of it, from time immemorial, in every quarter of the globe.... This close and sacred covenant relation, this rite of blood-friendship, this inter-oneness of life by an inter-oneness of blood, shows itself in the primitive East and in the wild and prehistoric West, in the frozen North as in the torrid South. Its traces are everywhere. It is of old, and it is of today; as universal and as full of meaning as life itself. (See top of page 5 [The Blood Covenant A Primitive Rite And Its Bearings On Scripture - 1893](#) - This book is recommended as fascinating reading if you would like more insight into the profound concept of covenant - Click here for Table of Contents to Online Version)

The question we will seek to answer in this discussion is this...

IS COVENANT SERIOUS BUSINESS?

DEFINITION AND SYMBOLISM

We will do a review of the basic principles of covenant and then examine whether the Biblical evidence supports or refutes the premise that "covenant is serious business". We will look at several specific covenants - the covenant between Jonathan and David, the Abrahamic Covenant (and it's relation to Moses), the covenant Joshua cut with the Gibeonites, the Old Covenant (and how it related to Judah just prior to their defeat by Babylon), and finally the New Covenant (and it's relation to the celebration of the Lord's Supper).

Covenant is the most solemn, binding, intimate contract known in the Bible. The Hebrew phrase for **"make a covenant"** is the idiom **"[Karath beriyth](#)"** which more literally is translated **"cut a covenant"**. The noun **Berit/berith/beriyth (word study)** is a contract or agreement, one made by passing between pieces of cut flesh. The verb **[Karath](#)** means to divide or cut in two or to make a covenant.

Covenant was considered a binding agreement among the ancients, and so was **not entered into lightly**. After pieces of the sacrificial animal were laid opposite one another, the individuals who were cutting covenant would walk between the flesh. This walk represented the so-called **"walk into death"** indicating their commitment to die to independent living and to ever after live for their covenant partner and to fulfill the stipulations of their covenant. Furthermore, this **"walk into death"** was a testimony by each covenant partner that if either broke the covenant God would take their life, even as had been done to the sacrificial animal. In short, we see the gravity of entering into and then breaking covenant.

Covenant is a pledge unto death. Covenant represents a pledge cut in **blood**. In covenant the shedding of **blood** demonstrates as nothing else could the intensity and solemn nature of the commitment (cp Lev 17:11). By cutting covenant the two parties were bound for life. Thus the shedding of **blood** in the cutting of covenant symbolized the solemn, binding nature of this transaction. And discussed in more detail later, both the Old and the New Covenants were inaugurated with **blood**. As Trumbull notes in the opening quote above, the practice of cutting covenant is found throughout history with traces or remnants of covenant truth in every quarter of the globe, and in those remnants we can see that even the pagan world understood the gravity and binding nature of entering into covenant with another party.

What truth about covenant did Jonathan (heir to the throne) demonstrate when he cut covenant with David and gave him his royal robe(1Sa18:1, 2, 3, 4, 5)?

"Putting on" the covenant partner's robe symbolizes putting on the partner's identity. In so doing the **two parties become as one**. When one is seen, then the other is in a sense seen, because the two have become intimately, integrally identified with each other in covenant. In addition, each partner is saying to the other in essence that "I am dying to independent living and to my rights". There is

a yielding or surrendering of one's rights. Each partner would swear an oath saying in essence "God, do so to me as to the slain animal we have walked between if I break our covenant!" (see Jonathan's declaration 1Sa 20:13) **Can you see the profound, practical implications for a man and woman entering into the immutable covenant of marriage?** (See Covenant As It Relates to Marriage) For more in depth discussion see Covenant - The Exchange of Robes.

When do the New Testament saints put on Christ's robe?

When we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we **clothed** ourselves with Christ (Gal 3:26, 27, 28, 29). Prior to entering the New Covenant, "all our righteous deeds (were)...like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), but when we entered the New Covenant cut by Christ on Calvary, God replaced our filthy rags with Christ's "**garments of salvation**", His "**robe of righteousness**" (Isaiah 61:10). At that moment we received Christ by grace through faith (Ep 2:8, 9), we were made eternally, **positionally righteous** before God (2Cor 5:21, Is 45:24, 53:11, Ro 1:17, Ro 5:19). In other words, from the moment we were saved and throughout eternity when the Father looks at us, He sees us as perfectly righteous, because He sees us in Christ, in union with the Son of His love (1Co 1:30, Php 3:9). Absolutely nothing can ever reverse or alter or cancel that supernatural spiritual transaction because of the solemn, binding, indissoluble nature of covenant, especially the covenant cut by the ever faithful (Ps 100:5), unchangeable (Mal 3:6), non-lying God (Nu 23:19). Those who have entered the New Covenant now have a responsibility to live in a manner that reflects their new position in Christ. In other words, now when the lost world sees us, it should see His robe of righteous attitudes and actions (synonymous with growth in Christlikeness, **practical righteousness**, progressive sanctification, growth in holiness), not possible naturally but only supernaturally, by His ever sufficient grace and His indwelling Spirit (Ro 8:9, Ro 8:13, Ep 5:18, Gal 5:16). Supernaturally enabled, our **responsibility** now is to daily (even moment by moment) put off the old attitudes and actions associated with darkness and put on the deeds associated with a walk in the light. **Who did people see this past week when they met you? How would your spouse describe your attitudes, your words and your actions this past week...like Christ ("clothes by Christ") or like the "old man" in Adam ("clothes by Adam")?**

What did the exchange of armor symbolize (1Sa18:4)?

The **exchange of armor** symbolized that one covenant partner would be the defender of the other partner. The covenant partner was responsible to defend the partner and take on the partner's enemies. In covenant the enemies of your partner become your enemies. In David's case, his enemy was Jonathan's father King Saul. The fact that Jonathan came to the defense of his covenant partner demonstrates the solemn, binding, indissoluble power of covenant in ancient times -- in this instance it was more important than even paternal ties (see 1Sa 19:1, 2, 3, 4, 20:1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 13, 32, 33, 34, 42). Cutting covenant produced a binding relationship that took precedence over one's own blood relatives! Earlier we saw that the **exchange of robes** demonstrated that Jonathan's covenant with David superseded even his own personal ambitions (Jonathan was first in line to be the next king, but he yielded his rights when he cut covenant with David - as an aside the Scripture does not state when Jonathan knew about Samuel's prior anointing of David as the next king - 1Sa 16:12, 13, 14).

Who is our Covenant Defender from Acts 9:1-7?

The Lord Jesus Christ is now obligated to be our Defender and Protector.

What is the liberating truth of understanding God is now your Covenant Defender?

Persecution, affliction and suffering will come upon believers (cf 2Th 1:3-10) when the lost world sees us clothed in Jesus' robe ("putting of and putting on"), but because we have a Covenant Defender we do not need to seek revenge. God is committed to be our Avenger and He will repay. We are called to love our enemies, pray for them, bless those who persecute us, curse not and to overcome evil with good (cf Ro 12:14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21-notes Ro 12:14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21, Mt 5:44 - note).

Paul teaches that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be **persecuted**." (see 2Ti 3:12-note) and that to them "it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake" (see Php 1:29- note)

What does Jesus say will be true of those in covenant with Him (Jn 15:18, 19, 20)?

God's enemies are our enemies. God's Enemy is this present evil **World System**. The world hates Jesus (Notice how you can casually use the name "God" in conversations, but when you mention "Jesus" you can "hear the proverbial pin drop"!). The world hates believers (Corollary question - what does it say about the authenticity of our faith if the world does not hate us?). The world will persecute us (cp 2Ti 3:12-note). The world hates us because we are in covenant with Christ, because He is now our life and as we learn to yield and surrender to His Spirit with us, His life in us is lived out in "real life" before the lost world, shining forth even as lights in the darkness (Jn 1:4, 1:5ESV, Mt 5:14,15,16-note, Php 2:14,15-note, 1Pe 2:9-note, Ep 5:12-note, Ep 5:13-note). But the world hates this "divine light" (2Pe 1:4-note) because it exposes the darkness of their evil deeds, and thus it should not shock us (it always seems to catch me "off guard") that the world hates us **most** when we are **most** like the Light of the World, Christ Jesus! (Jn 8:12, Jn 3:19, 20, 21).

"World" is not the people per se (God so loved that world - Jn 3:16, Ro 5:8-note) and not the physical earth or universe but the spiritual reality of the man-centered, Satan-directed kingdom of darkness of this present evil age (1Jn 5:19), which is alienated from and hostile toward God and God's people, is opposed to the kingdom of light ruled by Christ and manifests itself in self-centered, godless values and mores. The goal of the world system is self-glory, self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, self-satisfaction, and every other form of self-serving.

In addition to the **world (kosmos)**, God's enemies (and thus our enemies) include the **flesh** and the **devil**.

The "**flesh**" (in this context not a reference to the physical body) describes what remains of the **Old Man (Old self)** after a person is saved or redeemed. The "flesh" will remain with the believer until we receive our glorified body. The flesh is that part of a believer that functions apart from and is continually opposed to the Spirit (Gal 5:17-note). Paul teaches us that the "old self" was crucified with Christ (sustaroo) and as a result is no longer has absolute authority over us (Ro 6:6-note). Yes, it is still present in our mortal, physical bodies, but it is present even as a defeated enemy is in under a new, victorious regime. And as such the flesh ever seeks to regain control. Paul explains that the way we can now live "victoriously" over the defeated enemy, the flesh, is to "Walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16-note). What is the "promise"? We will not fulfill the desires of the flesh! Note two truths in this statement --(1) The flesh will still have strong, evil desires, ever seeking to seduce us to gratify ourselves in a way that may be "pleasurable" but which is sinful and which is an evanescent pleasure, in contrast to the fulness of joy and pleasures forever in the presence of the Lord (Ps 16:11) and (2) The way to "suppress" or "defeat" the flesh is not by trying in your power to "not" fulfill the desires of the flesh.

Beloved, now that you are in covenant with Christ, you must know and continually be mindful that you now have three mortal enemies for the remainder of your days on earth. And make no mistake --- **they all want to kill you and cut you off from communion with your Creator and Covenant Partner...something they can do temporarily when they entice us to commit sins...but they can never cut us off eternally from our Savior - We cannot lose our salvation!** But we do not have to fear nor cave in to the attacks of our mortal foes, for when Christ the Covenant Messenger, cut covenant on Calvary, at that very moment in time and eternity, He defeated forever all three of our adversaries. Hallelujah! Now we must stand in that truth. We must learn the secret of living in that truth. We must continually practice that truth. And we do so only by His provision of all sufficient grace and His indwelling Spirit. May our Teacher the Spirit frequently bring to each of our minds the truth about our enemies...**all three were defeated at the Cross** when Christ consummated the cutting of the New Covenant in His blood...

(1) **The World**- But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the **World** has been crucified to me, and I to the **World**. (Galatians 6:14-note)

(2) **The Flesh** - (Continually know) that our **Old self** was crucified with Him (sustaroo), that our body of sin might be done away with (katargeo), that we should no longer be slaves (douleuo) to sin...Even so **consider** (present imperative = **continually reckon this to be true**) yourselves to be dead to (separated from) (the power, the tyranny, the rule, the enslavement of) **Sin (repeatedly personified in Romans 6 as an evil king, a harsh slavemaster)**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Ro 6:6-note, Ro 6:11-note)

(3) **The Devil** - Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same (Php 2:6, 7-note, Php 2:8-note), that through death (when He cut the New Covenant in His blood on the Cross) He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb 2:14-note)

How do believers "defend or protect" God Who is their Covenant Partner?

Do not love the world. Do not love things of the world. Refuse to be friends with the world. Separate ourselves from the world (see 1Jn 2:15, 15, 16, 17-note, Jas 4:4-note, 2Cor 6:14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 2Co 7:1-note) Remember that if we are in covenant with Jesus Christ, we are in covenant with God and He must have preeminence in every area of our life.

What did the exchange of belt symbolize (1Sa18:1, 2, 3, 4, 5)?

The belt probably symbolized an exchange of strength. How does (or should) the exchange of strength impact believers? We exchange our weakness for His strength - as we wait on the Lord (Isaiah 40:31). Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness, so that we can even "boast" about our weaknesses (2Cor 12:9-note, 2Cor 12:10-note). We learn the secret (not something mystical but this implies it is a process of daily walking with Christ, learning to rely on His Spirit in the "highs" and "lows" and everything in between) that we can do all things in Christ Who continually strengthens us within (Phil 4:13-note; be sure to study the context [Php 4:11-note, Phil 4:12-note] to help understand how Paul came to the point that he could testify to Php 4:13). For more in depth discussion see Covenant - The Exchange of Armor and Belts.

How can believers "in some sense" give God our strength?

Jesus taught we can love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and **strength** (Mark 12:30)

[My Hope Is Built](#)

His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood
When all around my soul gives way
He then is all my hope and stay.

HOW SERIOUS WAS THE COVENANT BETWEEN JONATHAN AND DAVID?

Do we see evidence of Jonathan taking a "walk into death" (1Sa 20:13)?

Here is the **NLT** version...

But if he (King Saul) is angry and wants you killed, **may the LORD kill me if I don't warn you** so you can escape and live. May the LORD be with you as he used to be with my father. (1Sa 20:13NLT)

In covenant, David's enemies became Jonathan's enemies and he was obligated to protect David from his father King Saul. Jonathan's declaration of loyalty demonstrates how serious he took his cutting of covenant. Jonathan in essence calls down a "curse" upon himself if he were to fail to fulfill his covenant commitment, which supports the premise that the "**walk into death**" (passing between the halves of dead flesh) symbolized that if either covenant partner broke the covenant, God was to take their life, even as had been done to the sacrificial animal.

In 1Samuel 20:16 (discussed in part in following entry) notice the second half of the passage...

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, **'May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies.'**

Comment: Now compare the following popular translations - 1Sa 20:16GW, 1Sa 20:16ASV 1Sa 20:16NIV 1Sa 20:16NKJV 1Sa 20:16HCSB 1Sa 20:16NCV - Note that in these versions the sense of the last half of the passage allows for the interpretation that if David does not keep his part of the covenant bond, his enemies are held accountable to punish David for breaking covenant. This is in keeping with the idea that when two parties cut covenant they are bound on fear of death to defend and protect their covenant partner. And if they do not keep their oath, they are subject to just retribution (in this case meted out by David's enemies). Now read 1Sa 20:16ESV noting that the ESV is one of the more popular new versions and is highly acclaimed by Bible scholars and expositors. How would you interpret the passage from the ESV? It gives the text a completely different meaning, one that I think the context does not as readily support. Note also that there is no Hebrew word for "*vengeance*" in the original text so that the ESV translators have chosen to add this word which leads to a different interpretation (**Note:** This is another reason you should seek to become conversant with the original languages of Scripture - Hebrew and Greek. **Remember that every translation (even my favorite the NAS) is in some sense a "commentary"**(The "Acts 17:11 Berean student" does well to know how "literal" or how close their favorite translation is to the original Greek or Hebrew text - for help see the simple chart-**Bible Versions compared**). All that to say (in my humble opinion) this passage appears to support the fact that both parties, Jonathan and David are bound to this covenant and that the penalty for breaking it is punishment including death (which is consistent with the idea of the "walk of death" when two cut a blood covenant recalling that the "life...is in the blood" Lev 17:11).

The **UBS Handbook on First Book of Samuel** adds that the...

Revised English Bible follows the Septuagint in reading "him" instead of "the enemies of David," that is, **may the Lord take vengeance on David himself**. The Revised English Bible basically follows the Greek in the following translation of this verse: "*may the Lord call him [David] to account if he and his house are no longer my friends.*"

In summary, even this **man to man covenant** shows us the gravity and binding nature of entering into and then breaking covenant.

What additional truths do we learn from the covenant Jonathan and David cut (1Sa 20:16, 42)?

Note that in this passage, Jonathan cuts another covenant but in contrast to the first covenant which was specifically with David, this "addendum" covenant was between their houses (families) and their descendants. It was forever (1Sa 20:23) which underscores that covenant is binding and that covenant partners are obligated to one another unto death do them part. **Does this sound like your marriage vows beloved? I wonder what would happen to the divorce rate among born again believers, if they truly**

comprehended the **Biblical significance of covenant?** (See short study on Covenant As It Relates to Marriage).

**COVENANT IS
SERIOUS BUSINESS!**

HOW SERIOUS WAS THE COVENANT BETWEEN JOSHUA AND THE GIBEONITES?

Whereas Jonathan cut a solemn and binding covenant with David because he loved him as himself (1Sa 18:3), Joshua was tricked by the inhabitants of Gibeon to cut covenant with them. One might think that a covenant cut with such a deceitful party might be annulled, but subsequent events proved otherwise.

In Joshua 9 we see the principle of covenant and how covenant binds one to take on the other covenant partner's enemies. Joshua had entered Canaan which by virtue of God's promise in the Abrahamic Covenant was to be Israel's permanent possession. Joshua strategizes to defeat the enemies occupying the land with a three-pronged attack. The people in Canaan are trembling because they have heard about the defeat of Jericho by Joshua's army (Joshua's God). The iniquity of the Amorites is full and the children of Israel are going in to take the land. It is right that they do so because God is judging the land of Canaan for their sins (Genesis 15:16). After Israel invades the promised land under the leadership of Joshua, they encounter the Gibeonites, who are very much afraid. Joshua 9:3-27 records this fascinating but sad interlude in Israel's history...

When the inhabitants of Gibeon (located in the heart of Canaan about 6 miles north of Jerusalem) heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, (4) **they also acted craftily** and set out as envoys, and took worn-out sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, (5) and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and had become crumbled. (6) And they went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, **make a covenant.**" (7) And the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we **make a covenant** with you?" (8) But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" (9) And they said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country (**Note: they are lying**) because of the fame of the LORD your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, (10) and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroth. (11) So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; now then, **make a covenant** with us. (12) "This our bread was warm when we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. (**Note: they are deceptive**) (13) And these wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey." (14) So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and **did not ask for the counsel of the LORD.** (**Note: The leaders acted independent of God which is the very essence of all sin. How many times would this verse be appended to our words and actions?! Not only that, but God had clearly commanded Israel not to make a covenant with any of the inhabitants of Canaan** (cf [Deut 7:2](#) "and when the LORD your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall **make no covenant** with them and show no favor to them.'). **Instead, they were to drive them out lest their corrupting influences cause them to stumble and worship their idolatrous gods.**) (15) And Joshua made **peace** with them and **make a covenant** with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation **swore an oath** to them (**Note: the common elements of covenant - peace, swearing of an oath**). (16) And it came about at the end of three days after they had **make a covenant** with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land.

(17) Then the sons of Israel set out and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim. (18) And the sons of Israel **did not strike** them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD the God of Israel (**Note: the solemn, binding nature of covenant, even cut under such questionable circumstances.**) (18) And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders. (19) But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, "**We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them.** (Note: in fact Israel was now the "covenant defender" of the Gibeonites!) (20) "This we will do to them, even let them live, lest wrath be upon us

for the oath which we swore to them." (**Note: The leaders understood the binding nature of their covenant and knew that they dare not break it lest God bring retribution against them.**)

(21) And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole congregation, just as the leaders had spoken to them. (22) Then Joshua called for them and spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you are living within our land? (23) "Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." (24) So they answered Joshua and said, "Because it was certainly told your servants that the LORD your God had commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land (**Note: this is "remnant" of covenant, for the unconditional promise of the land of Canaan was given initially to Abraham not Moses**), and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; therefore we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. (25) "And now behold, we are in your hands; do as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us." (26) Thus he did to them, and delivered them from the hands of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them. (**Note: because of the covenant**) (27) But Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place which He would choose.

As we have noted, remnants of truth about covenant were known throughout the peoples of the earth. The Gibeonites clearly knew about **covenant** though they did not know the Covenant Keeping God. And yet even though they were pagans, they knew enough about the cutting of covenant to understand that it a serious, **solemn, binding agreement**. They knew that if they duped the leaders of Israel into cutting a covenant that Israel would be bound to protect them as their covenant partner and would not be able to destroy them as God had decreed.

Did Joshua fulfill his promise to be the covenant defender of Gibeon?

When the Gibeonites were attacked by Adoni-zedek the Amorite king of Jerusalem along with 9 other kings, the men of Gibeon appealed to the solemn covenant with Israel, Joshua 10 recording that...

"the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they with all their armies, and camped by Gibeon and fought against it. Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, "Do not abandon your servants (**Note: here they appeal to the binding covenant with Israel that she would be their covenant defender - their enemy would be Israel's enemy**); come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us."

So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you." So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. And **the LORD confounded them before Israel** (Remember that Israel is in covenant with God, and thus He is their "Defender" a truth David recognized in his battle with Goliath - 1Sa 17:45, 46, 47 or as the prophet told King Jehoshaphat when faced with sure defeat - "the battle is not yours but God's" 2Chr 20:15-25), and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. And it came about as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that **the LORD threw large stones from heaven** on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword. Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for **the LORD fought for Israel (Why? Because He was her "Covenant Defender")."**

Joshua remained true to his covenant vow and experienced a supernatural victory (brought about by Jehovah Israel's Covenant Defender!), relieving the besieged city, pursuing the attackers down the ascent of Beth-horon and winning decisively.

How serious and long-lasting was Israel's covenant with Gibeon?

God is serious about keeping covenant. Note that the following vignette occurs **400-500 years** after Joshua had cut covenant with

the Gibeonites. In 2 Samuel 21:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 where we read as follows...

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the LORD. And the LORD said, "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." (**Note: God used the famine to bring Saul's disobedience the attention of David. Note carefully that Saul's sin was "personal" but it was not "private" in the sense that the consequences had broad ranging effects. The same principle applies to our personal sins. Saul must have known that Joshua had promised the Gibeonites immunity from the extermination decreed for the other inhabitants of Canaan but in his unbiblical "zeal" he broke the covenant**) So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them (now the Gibeonites were not of the sons of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites, and the sons of Israel **make a covenant** with them, but **Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal** for the sons of Israel and Judah). Thus David said to the Gibeonites, "What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?" (**David asked the Gibeonites what they would accept as settlement for Saul's breaking of the covenant peace agreement. He was hoping to pay them off in money**) Then the Gibeonites said to him, "We have no concern of silver or gold with Saul or his house, nor is it for us to put any man to death in Israel." And he said, "I will do for you whatever you say." So they said to the king, "The man who consumed us, and who planned to exterminate us from remaining within any border of Israel, let seven men from his sons be given to us, and we will hang them before the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give them."

When David tried to arrange matters with them they stood upon their ancient **covenant** rights, claiming life for life, which is in keeping with the solemn nature of covenant when it is broken by one of the parties. The Gibeonites would accept no "blood money" but instead demanded blood from the family of the slayer of their people. And so seven men of Saul's descendants were given over to the Gibeonites, who hung them "before Jehovah"—as a kind of sacrifice—in Gibeah, Saul's own town! God is serious about keeping covenant!

For the background of this Israelite-Gibeonite covenant, read Joshua 9:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Subsequent to cutting covenant with the Gibeonites, Israel discovered they were actually inhabitants of the promised land whom God had said should be destroyed (Joshua 9:16), but because of the covenant they had cut Israel refrained from striking the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:17, 18), declaring...

"We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. This we will do to them, even let them live, lest wrath be upon us for the oath which we swore to them." (Joshua 9:19, 20)

Note how Israel felt absolutely bound because of the cutting of covenant despite the fact that they had been deceived by the Gibeonites! In the ancient world covenant was a solemn, binding agreement, which the parties did not dare to break lest they invoke serious consequences.

Gibeon the so-called "great city" with "mighty" warriors (Joshua 10:2) out of fear tricked Israel (lied saying they were from a far country)

As an aside (an important one!) what where did Israel make a mistake in cutting this covenant?

Joshua 9:14 states that they failed to consult God! [See below](#) for more detailed discussion of this covenant).

How serious was Joshua about keeping this covenant? ([Note](#))

Israel fulfilled their covenant obligation to defend Gibeon when attacked. Why? Because Joshua understood the binding nature of covenant (Note: once the covenant was cut even their lie didn't invalidate)

How faithful was Saul some 400 years later to keep the covenant with Gibeon? (2Sa 21:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) ([See note](#))

Saul failed to keep covenant with Gibeon. And what were the consequences? ([See note](#)) There was a 3 year famine in Israel and 7 of Saul's descendants were killed by Gibeonites in "payment" for Saul not keeping covenant. Here is the point. In the OT, the penalty for breaking covenant was death. Saul must have known that Joshua had promised the Gibeonites immunity from the extermination decreed for the other inhabitants of Canaan but in his unbiblical "zeal" he broke the covenant. God used the famine to bring Saul's disobedience to light. The men of Gibeon refused David's offer of money and instead sought a **blood payment**. Note Saul's sin was "personal" but not "private" for the consequences affected the entire nation. This principle applies to our personal sins!

**COVENANT IS
SERIOUS BUSINESS!**

HOW SERIOUS WAS THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT?

What do we learn about the gravity of entering into covenant from Ge 15:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18?

God instructed Abram to kill the animals, shedding their life blood (Lev 17:11) and cutting them in halves that lay opposite one another, in so doing producing a pathway for the so called walk of death. It is interesting to note that the only instruction God gave Abram was to secure the animals. The text does not state that God either told him to kill the animals nor to place their slain bodies opposite one another. While we must be cautious in interpreting a text that is silent, Abram's actions at least suggest that he fully understood the concept and symbolic ritual associated with the cutting of covenant.

Who walked between the pieces of cut flesh Ge 15:12, 17, 18?

Abram was in a "deep sleep" and clearly did not walk between the lifeless carcasses. It was God Himself, and He alone, who walked through the path of death, as symbolized by the smoking oven and the flaming torch. And so the covenant with Abraham was an unconditional covenant in that it was God alone who would fulfill the stipulations. It was indeed a covenant of grace, for Abram had done nothing to merit God cutting this covenant. It was a solemn event which God obviously took very seriously as indicated by His command in Genesis 17.

What command did God give Abraham that was to be the sign of the covenant He had cut in Genesis 15:18? (Ge 17:10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

Every male older than 8 days was to be circumcised (Ge 17:10 -[see note below on the meaning of circumcision](#)). It is important that one not confuse the "sign of the covenant" with the covenant itself. A sign points to something, but is not the end in itself. In this case, the carrying out of this **sign** is a call for **obedience**, which in turn is a reflection of one's **faith**. In other words, in Genesis 15:6 Abram **believed** God and in Ge 17:23 Abraham **obeyed** God. From Genesis to Revelation, the principle holds true that **faith** that truly **believes** in Christ will show itself to be genuine by **obeying**. And remember, since none of us is capable (yet) of perfect obedience, this principle of faith that obeys speaks of the general **direction** of one's life ("heavenward") and not of **perfection** of one's conduct.

What was the "penalty" for the male who is not circumcised? (Ge 17:14)

In short, "*cut off*" foreskin or be "cut off"!

Any uncircumcised male shall be cut off from his people. There is a clear "wordplay" because "cut off" (**karath = see note on "Cut Off"**) is the same verb used of cutting the animals and in the phrase "cut a covenant" (Ge 15:18). In this context the verb signifies that the guilty party must be "ex-communicated" or killed (See several [Scriptures on circumcision](#)).

What did God seek to do to Moses in Ex 4:24, 25, 26? Why?

God sought to kill his servant (Ex 4:10, 14:31, Nu 12:7, cp "friend" Ex 33:11, Jas 2:23) Moses **Note**: Beloved, if any of us [yours truly included] think we are not expendable in God's divine economy, we need to think again!). Zipporah's circumcision of the child averted Moses' death. This event implies that Moses had disobeyed the command of Genesis 17:14 and had failed to circumcise his son and had "broken covenant" (see Ge 17:14). Remember that we are not talking about the Old Covenant, the Law, a clearly conditional covenant, but the Abrahamic Covenant, an unconditional covenant, a covenant based on God's grace (like the New Covenant).

As an interesting aside, the Greek translation (the Septuagint) of the Hebrew text renders "the LORD" with the Greek phrase the "**angel of the Lord**" (See Angel of the LORD where this phrase is explained as most likely one of many pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus)

In conclusion, we again see the seriousness of failing to keep covenant. God was teaching Moses (on his way to address Pharaoh) that He was serious about covenant.

Expositor's Bible Commentary notes that...

for one small neglect (**Ed comment**: Clearly this was not "small" in God's eyes. It was a clear command with clear consequences stated in Ge 17. I would say it was a "huge neglect" on Moses part!), apparently out of deference to his wife's wishes, or perhaps to keep peace in the home (**Ed**: This could be the reason circumcision was not performed but is speculation), **Moses almost forfeited his opportunity to serve God and wasted eighty years of preparation and training!** (**Ed**: Beloved, can we not apply

this to the ministry with which He has graced each of us? One misstep, one area of neglect representing overt disobedience might be sufficient to disqualify us from His holy work! If this does not put a reverential fear of the Lord in you, then you may already be vulnerable for a fall! May God give us eyes to see these potential pitfalls and the grace to traverse them unscathed in Christ. Amen.)

Regarding the enigmatic phrase "**bridegroom of blood**", the **NET Bible note** has this quote...

U. Cassuto explains that she was saying, "I have delivered you from death, and your return to life makes you my bridegroom a second time, this time my blood bridegroom, a bridegroom acquired through blood" (Exodus, 60–61). ([NET Bible](#))

Barnes explains it similarly...

Literally, "a husband of blood," or "bloods." The meaning is: The marriage bond between us is now sealed by blood. By performing the rite, Zipporah had recovered her husband; his life was purchased for her by the blood of her child.

Warren Wiersbe notes that...

God had to discipline Moses (perhaps by sickness) to remind him of his obligation. How could he lead Israel if he was failing to lead his own household in things spiritual? Moses later sent his family back to Midian (see Ex 18:2). ([Wiersbe, W. W. Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books](#))

Pfeiffer has a practical comment noting that...

This passage, which is dismissed by many modern commentators (**Ed**: Modern and liberal!) as a curious relic of folklore and superstition, is in fact an illustration of a spiritual law that runs throughout Scripture and history:

**He who would proclaim God's will to others,
must himself be obedient to the express will of God.**

The sign of circumcision, decreed by God (Gen 17:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14) had been neglected by Moses until God forcibly reminded him of the obligation by this stroke. ([Pfeiffer, C F: Wycliffe Bible Commentary. 1981. Moody](#) or [Logos](#) or [Wordsearch](#))

**COVENANT IS
SERIOUS BUSINESS!**

HOW SERIOUS WAS GOD'S OLD COVENANT WITH ISRAEL?

Context: The first giving of the Law, the Old Covenant, is recorded in Exodus 24:1-11

- [See the verse by verse commentary on Exodus 24](#)

How did the people respond in Ex 24:3 when Moses recounted all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances?

They agreed they would do all of these words. In other words they were saying they would obey.

What did Moses do next (Ex 24:4, 5)?

He wrote down all the words of Jehovah, built an altar with 12 pillars and had the young men sacrifice animals.

What did Moses do with the blood from these sacrifices? (Ex 24:6)

He put half in basins and half on the altar. The writer of Hebrews says he "sprinkled both the book itself and all the people" (Heb 9:18+).

What does this division of the blood into two parts remind you of?

The dividing of the animals by Abram into halves to make a path for the "walk of death". (Genesis 15:9-18+)

What did Moses repeat in Ex 24:7? How did the people respond?

He took the "book of the covenant" and read it so all Israel could hear. They make in essence an oath that "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" And for how long were they obedient? About

40 days!!! Go to Ex 32:1-6+. And how did God respond to Israel's breaking of the covenant? See Ex 32:9-10+. Yahweh was ready to destroy all of Israel and begin over with Moses! God was deadly serious (pun intended) about His covenant with Israel.

How did Moses respond in Ex 24:8?

He sprinkled the blood on the people and declared "Behold the blood of the **covenant**, which the LORD has **made** (karath - cut) with you in accordance with all these words."

The sprinkled blood bound both parties (God and Israel) to keep the terms of the covenant.

**COVENANT IS
SERIOUS BUSINESS!**

THE OLD COVENANT: BLESSING AND CURSING LIFE AND DEATH

In Deuteronomy 30 what promises did God give to Israel if they obeyed or disobeyed the Old Covenant? Does this help you understand the seriousness of covenant?

Context: Deuteronomy is the "second" giving of the Law or Old Covenant ordinances to the children of Israel camped on the plains of Moab preparing to enter the promised land led by Joshua.

Deut 30:15 "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;

16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.

17 "But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them,

18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it.

19 "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,

20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

God had set before them, life and prosperity, death and adversity, life and death, the blessing and the curse. He clearly stated that obedience would yield life and blessing and disobedience would bring death and adversity.

Who was called as witness to this covenant?

heaven and earth.

Why did God warn them they would die?

Because of their failure to keep covenant.

How could Israel choose life? (Dt 30:20)

By loving the LORD, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him.

**COVENANT IS
SERIOUS BUSINESS!**

ILLUSTRATION OF

THE SERIOUSNESS OF COVENANT

What did Jehovah say would happen to the king's palace in Jerusalem if His people persisted in disobedience? (Je 22:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)

It would be a desolation, like a wilderness.

What would even pagan nations recognize when they saw the desolation?

They would recognize and acknowledge that Israel had forsaken the covenant of the LORD, bowed to other gods and served them ("Spiritual adultery" of James 4:4) Even the pagans understood the binding nature of covenant and also the penalty for breaking covenant.

Who cut covenant and what were the stipulations (Je 34:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22)?

King Zedekiah and Israel agreed to set their Hebrew slaves free. At first they all obeyed but then they reneged and reinstated slavery.

Why did they renege on their covenant promise to free their slaves?

Possibly because the Babylonian army withdrew (see Jer 34:21NLT) as result of the approaching Egyptian army (Jer 37:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). When the pressure was off, they broke covenant by taking back the slaves.

This begs the question, do I just obey when the pressure is on me?

What does the LORD appeal to in (Jer 34:13, 14)?

Release the Hebrew slaves every 7 years.

How was covenant ritual described? (Jer 34:18, 19)

They cut a calf in half, passed between its parts thus taking the "Walk of death". They were saying in essence "May my life (represented by the blood) be poured out if I fail to honor my part."

What did the Lord say Israel had they done to His Name by failing to keep their covenant agreement? (Jer 34:13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22)

They profaned God's Name.

What was Jehovah's sentence for breaking this covenant? (Jer 34:17, 18)

Release from His protection to pestilence, famine and terror. He gave them into hands of enemies, the resulting penalty for breaking covenant being death. Is there any doubt that God takes covenant quite seriously!

**COVENANT IS
SERIOUS BUSINESS!**

HOW SERIOUS IS THE NEW COVENANT?

The question we will answer is how does the OT truth about covenant parallel the truth about the New Covenant?

How did Isaiah describe Messiah in [Isaiah 42:6](#)?

Messiah is the Covenant.

What role did Malachi ascribe to Messiah in regard to the covenant ([Malachi 3:1](#))?

Messiah is the Messenger of the Covenant. The Hebrew word for "messenger" is [mal'ak](#) which describes one who carries a message, who performs a specific commission or who officially represents the sender. Messiah functioned in all of these capacities.

How did Jesus, Himself the Covenant and the Messenger of the Covenant, convey the message of the New Covenant? ([Mt 26:26, 27, 28](#))

At the Passover Meal He took common elements, the Bread symbolizing His body and the Wine His blood, and explained it as "the blood of the covenant". In essence these elements depicted Christ's sacrificial offering of Himself.

John MacArthur writes that

The bread that had represented the Exodus (in the Passover supper) now came to represent the body of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. To the Jewish mind the body represented the whole person, not just his physical body. Jesus' body represents the great mystery of His whole incarnate life, His whole teaching, ministry, and work—all He was and all He did...The cup (3rd of 4 cups of wine that made up the Passover celebration) that had represented the lamb's blood smeared on the doorposts and lintels now came to represent the blood of the Lamb of God, shed for the salvation of the world. The Old Covenant was ratified repeatedly by the blood of animals offered by men; but **the New Covenant has been ratified once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ** (Heb. 9:28), which God Himself has offered. The old deliverance was merely from Egypt to Canaan. So Jesus took the cup and said it is the "new covenant in My blood". It is important to realize that this was not new in the sense that it was a covenant of grace replacing one of works. It is new in that it is the saving covenant to which all the Old Testament shadows pointed. The new deliverance is from sin to salvation, from death to life, from Satan's realm to God's heaven. Passover was transformed into the Lord's Supper. We now eat the bread and drink the cup not to remember the Red Sea and the Exodus but to remember the cross and the Savior. ([MacArthur, J: 1Corinthians. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

What does Paul record that Jesus commanded concerning the New Covenant? (1Cor 11:24)

And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; **do** this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; **do** this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." (1Co 11:24, 25)

Do this in remembrance of Me. Note that the verb "**do**" is in the **present imperative** which is a command to do this continually. Sharing in the Lord's Supper is not optional. As an aside, what might be a possible effect of celebrating the Lord's Supper more frequently than we do in many modern churches? One effect is that it might become "ritualistic". We do it every week and it soon become a "ho-hum" activity with little substance. But if we did it with the full realization of the potential divine disciplinary consequences (weak...sick...sleep - 1Cor 11:30, 32), perhaps there might be some weeks when we opt to sit out for fear of God's hand of discipline. Of course, we would never have to sit out the Lord's Supper if we were willing to confess our sins (1Jn 1:9). I know that personally when I know that there will be communion on a given Sunday, I am strongly motivated during that week to resist the devil and temptations from the world and the flesh, because I know that I will be participating in a holy activity that carries serious consequences if I partake in an unworthy manner.

What are we to remember?

Considering the fact that the meal symbolizes covenant, some of the things we are to remember include the fact that covenant is serious, that cutting covenant is costly (Cross), that His death was for our sin, that Jesus in fact took the "walk of death" so to speak, that believers in the New Covenant are to "wear His garment", to defend His name and to not love the world.

What do we proclaim when we take the Lord's supper, the New Covenant meal?

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1Cor 11:26)

The Lord's death until He comes -- looking back to His death and looking forward to His return and then living in light of that blessed hope. Beloved, what you are looking for will determine what you are living for.

What is Paul's warning about not taking covenant seriously in (1Cor 11:27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34)?

In 1Cor 11:27 he warns that whoever eats or drinks unworthy manner (like a common meal, division, faction, ritualistically, indifferently, with an unrepentant heart, a spirit of bitterness, or any other ungodly attitude as Corinthians were manifesting) is guilty of body and blood of the Lord and therefore one should examine self (1Cor 11:28), else they would received judgment if they fail to judge the body rightly (1Cor 11:29), that this Judgment was already manifest by the fact that many were weak and sick and a number slept (had died). Paul encouraged them that if we judged self rightly, we should not be judged. (1Cor 11:31). In (1Cor 11:32) he equated judged with being disciplined (child training) by the Lord that we not be condemned.

The New Covenant meal in Christ's blood is a reflection of the solemn nature of covenant and can serve as a time of purification for the church or of discipline even unto death for those who refuse to prepare their hearts for communion. The Lord chastens to drive His people back to righteous behavior and even sends death to some in the church to remove them before they could be condemned

God's discipline for improper partaking of the New Covenant is pre-figured by the an event in 2Chr 30:18, 19, 20 in the context of the

OT parallel feast, the **Passover**. In the background of reforms by Hezekiah's which resulted in a revival and re-institution of the Passover feast (which apparently had not been properly and regularly observed in some time, perhaps since the division of the kingdom 215 years earlier), Scripture records that ...

a multitude of the people, even many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they **ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed**. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God (just as in the new covenant meal, the internal attitude of the heart was to prevail over one's external activity), the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification rules of the sanctuary." So the LORD heard Hezekiah and **healed** the people.

So just as when one who approaches the New Covenant meal in an unworthy manner may suffer sickness and even death, so too in this OT passage we learn that sickness resulted in those who failed to eat the Passover in the prescribed manner.

THE NEW COVENANT IS SERIOUS BUSINESS

THE RELATIONSHIP OF SAVING FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

What is the definition of Biblical faith?

Related resources:

- Faith = pistis (Cognates = pistos, pisteuo, apisteo, apistia see also peitho)
- Another Discussion of Relationship of Faith and Obedience

James alludes to a quality of one's **faith** that is not **saving faith** when he writes...

You **believe** that God is one. You do well; the demons also **believe**, and shudder. (James 2:19-note)

In light of this James' declaration, it is clear that not all faith results in salvation for the demons are certainly not saved and yet they have some type of belief. It follows that it is of utmost importance that we all understand the nature of true saving faith because of the solemn implications.

W E Vine in his respected classic work [Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words](#) offers the following definition of **faith** characterized by three main elements ()...

(1) Firm conviction producing a full acknowledgement of God's revelation or truth (e.g. 2Th 2:11,12).

(2) Personal surrender to Him (Jn 1:12).

(3) Conduct inspired by such surrender (2Co 5:7).

Vine comments: Prominence is given to one or other of these elements according to the context. All this stands in contrast to belief in its purely natural exercise, which consists of an opinion held in good "faith" without necessary reference to its proof. The object of Abraham's "faith" was not God's promise (that was the occasion of its exercise); his "faith" rested on God Himself, Ro 4:17-note, Ro 4:20,21-note.

A A Hodge adds that "Faith must have adequate evidence, else it is mere superstition."

John MacArthur on faith...

Faith, like grace, is not static. Saving faith is more than just understanding the facts and mentally acquiescing. It is inseparable from repentance, surrender, and a supernatural longing to obey (**Ed:** cp the truth in Php 2:13-note = "will" = desire to obey! And not only the desire but the power!). None of those responses can be classified exclusively as a human work, any more than believing itself is solely a human effort.

A W Tozer a "modern prophet" of sorts well stated that...

The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from

faith. The two are opposite sides of the same coin.

James discusses relationship of faith and works, a vital truth that parallels the truth of faith and obedience, one's obedience signifying that they have a "working faith" or a saving faith. As someone has well said "Faith and works are like the light and heat of a candle; they cannot be separated." Faith is never the basis or the reason for justification, but only the channel through which God works His redeeming grace. Faith is simply a convicted heart reaching out to receive God's free and unmerited gift of salvation. Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone. See study on **faith** and **works** beginning with **commentary notes** on James 2:14-26. I love how the hymnist Augustus Toplady put it...

If God gives you St Paul's faith, you will soon have St James's works!

No more, my God, I boast no more
Of all the duties I have done:
I quit the hopes I held before,
To trust the merits of thy Son.

Isaac Watts

The martyr **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** had an interesting saying

Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes.

Spurgeon wrote that

Faith is the foot of the soul by which it can march along the road of the commandments.

William Barclay defines **faith** as that which

begins with **receptivity**. It begins when a man is at least willing to listen to the message of the truth. It goes on to **mental assent**. A man first hears and then agrees that this is true. But mental assent need not issue in **action**. Many a man knows very well that something is true, but does not change his actions to meet that knowledge. The final stage is when this mental assent becomes total **surrender**. In full-fledged faith, a man hears the Christian message, agrees that it is true, and then casts himself upon it in a life of total yieldedness. ([Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series](#)) (Bolding added)

Nothing before, nothing behind,
The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void, and find
The rock beneath.

Whittier

How does [Hebrews 3:18, 19](#) help us understand the meaning of faith and its relationship to obedience?

And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. (He 3:18, 19-note)

Those who were disobedient (**apeitheo [word study]** = "refused to believe, did not allow themselves to be persuaded") could not enter God's rest. **Why not?** Because they had manifested unbelief (**apistia**) or lack of faith, distrust or refusal to trust. The root was unbelief and the fruit was disobedience. Biblically defined **belief** affects **behavior** which is a reflection of obedience.

As **Spurgeon** said

Obedience is the hallmark of faith. Believing and obeying always run side by side. Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God; and he that trusts God, obeys God.

What do we learn about the association between faith and obedience from the following verses?

Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the ("obedience of faith") **obedience that comes from faith**" (NIV). (Ro 1:5-note)

The gospel "is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to **obedience of faith** (NIV "so that all nations might believe and obey him")" (Ro 16:26-note)

Regarding the phrase "**Obedience of faith**" **John MacArthur** comments that

It is not that faith plus obedience equals salvation but that obedient faith equals salvation. True faith is verified in obedience.

Obedient faith proves itself true, whereas disobedient faith proves itself false. It is for having true faith, that is, obedient faith, that Paul goes on to commend the Roman believers... Together, faith and obedience manifest the inseparable two sides of the coin of salvation. ([Click](#) for more detailed discussion)

What do we learn about faith and obedience in 2Thessalonians 1:8?

Here is the context of this verse...

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed. (2Th 1:6-10)

Some commentaries see two groups in verse 8 (those who do not know God and "those who do not obey the gospel") stating that those who do not know God are Gentiles (1Th 4:5-note, Jer 10:25) and the second group is Jews who are familiar with the OT Scriptures. However in John 8:54, 55 Jesus describes Jews who do not know God, so the distinction does not seem to be clear-cut. Irregardless all those not knowing God and not obeying the Gospel are destined for eternal separation from God. Paul is not saying that obedience to the Gospel is what saves a person. Faith alone saves a person as is clear from Paul's other writings (Ep 2:8, 9-note). What he is saying is that obedience (e.g., godly behavior) is the fruit of the root of genuine belief. They demonstrate that their belief is is not genuine, saving belief because there is no supernatural power to obey. There is no change in their life (cp 2Cor 5:17-note). They may have even made a profession of belief in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, but their is absolutely no evidence in their lifestyle that they have been born again and have either the desire or the power to obey righteousness (cp Php 2:13-note). Writing to the Corinthians Paul exhorts them to...

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test? (2Cor 13:5-note)

Pfeiffer writes that 2Th 1:8

is a blanket reference to all who refuse to act on what they **know** about God and who, more specifically, reject his revelation in Christ.

William MacDonald adds that this verse speaks about

those who have heard the gospel and have rejected it. The gospel is not simply a statement of facts to be believed, but a Person to be obeyed. Belief in the NT sense involves obedience. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

What association do you see between faith and works in [Ep 2:8, 9-note](#), [Ep 2:10-note](#)?

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship ("masterpiece" = **poiema** [word study] gives us English "poem"), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Clearly this verse teaches that faith alone saves but the faith that saves is not alone!

What is our responsibility as those who have entered into the New Covenant by grace through faith?

To walk in obedience and to warn others of the serious and binding nature of covenant. The question we all need to ask ourselves is does our covenant relationship with Christ supersede every other relationship?

MEANING OF CIRCUMCISION AND BE CUT OFF:

CIRCUMCISION: Moses tells us that circumcision was a sign. To carry it out was to obey God's instruction.

Mills has a lucid well reasoned comment writing that...

The rite of circumcision was the one demand God made on Abraham and his descendants. There is no magical power in this rite; it is simply a **demonstration of faith** by the covenant people, depicting that the father who does the circumcising believes in the effectiveness of the covenant which God gave Abraham: it is the father's profession of confidence in God's ability to do what He has promised (Ro 4:11, 12-note, Ro

4:13-note). Ishmael, for instance, was circumcised as a demonstration of Abraham's faith in the covenant, but this did not automatically place Ishmael under Israel's covenantal blessings. (Mills, M. Genesis : A Study Guide to the Book of Genesis. Dallas: 3E Ministries) (Bolding added)

Willmington alliteratively summarizes circumcision as...

the **sign** and **seal**, but not the **source**, of God's promise: Faith in God's word is the **source** (Genesis 15:6; Ro 4:1–12). (Willmington, H. L. Willmington's Bible handbook. Page 17. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers)

Warren Wiersbe writes that...

It is important to note that circumcision was not a "sacrament." The performing of it did not convey spiritual blessing to the recipient. An eight-day-old baby boy (Lev 12:3) would not even understand what was going on; and when he got older, the ritual would have to be explained to him. It was the **obedience** of the parents that was important; for if they did not obey God in this matter, their son would be cut off from his people (Ge 17:14 - **Ed Note:** But see who is "cut off" in Ex 4:24,25,26 = it was Moses who was going to be cut off not his son.). The covenant people must bear the mark of the covenant. ([Wiersbe, W. W. Be obedient. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books](#))

In another writing **Wiersbe** adds that...

This is the first mention of **circumcision** in the Bible. Nowhere does the OT teach that circumcision saves a man. It is but the outward symbol of the covenant between God and men. It was to remind them of the inward circumcision of the heart that accompanies true salvation (Deut 10:16, Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4; Ro 4:11-note, Gal 5:6). ([Wiersbe, W. W. Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books](#))

The **Believer's Study Bible** comments that...

the Abrahamic covenant, although conveying unconditional promises to Abraham, also included obligations by which individual descendants would express their **faith** and enjoy the blessings. **Circumcision was an act of obedience and faith.**" ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#)) (**Comment:** Don't miss the association of **faith** with **obedience**, for this truth permeates holy writ from Genesis to Revelation. A **faith** that [habitually] fails to **obey**, gives little to no evidence that it is a **genuine saving faith!**)

The **Nelson Study Bible** comments that...

There is something of a pun in the expression, **cut off**. Any man who did not accept circumcision would be **cut off**...Circumcision—an outward sign—stood for a **thorough commitment** to God—an inward reality. ([Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. The Nelson study Bible : New King James Version. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers](#))

The **Preacher's Commentary** writes that...

The covenant was clearly one of grace appropriated by **faith**, but at the same time the faith had to be manifested in **obedience** and circumcision was ample evidence of that **obedience**. (Briscoe, D. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. Vol. 1: The Preacher's Commentary Series. Page 150. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.)

In his book "**The Genesis Record**" **Henry Morris** writes that...

All this was done on the same day God had spoken to him. This required a particular **act of faith** on Abraham's part, since it no doubt incapacitated all the males in his community for several days, thus leaving his home and possessions with no protection at all (save God!). One can imagine there may have been a great many questions from his household that day and quite possibly some resistance. Nevertheless, finally all submitted and this in itself must have been a testimony to the effectiveness of Abraham's influence and esteem in his own household. By this time at least, everyone knew that God was with Abraham; and if this was what God asked of them, they, along with Abraham, would **obey**.

**KARATH: "CUT OFF" in Ge 17:14
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

In regard to the uncircumcised male being "cut off from his people", there are two considerations (1) **'ex-communication'** from the tribe or (2) **loss of one's life**.

Although it is difficult to be dogmatic the following passages tend to support **'cut off'** as a reference to physical death:

(1) In Exodus 31:14,15+ we see the verb **Karath** is used of physical death and not just excommunication.

'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath (the **sign** of the covenant between God and Israel Ex 31:13+, Ezek 20:12, 20),, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it **shall surely be put to death**; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be **cut off (Karath; Lxx = exolothreuo)** from among his people. 15 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day **shall surely be put to death**. (Exodus 31:14,15+)

In this context **cut off from** one's people is clearly parallel to putting that person to death. God was serious about this covenant (Ex 31:16+ - where observation of the Sabbath was stipulated as a **perpetual covenant**, see first giving of this ordinance but without the penalty - Ex 20:8, 9, 10, 11+; Ex 23:12+), as indicated by the penalty of death for profaning the Sabbath.

(2) The first use of **'cut off'** in Scripture in Genesis 9:11 refers to physical death, Moses recording

(God speaking) I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be **cut off (karath)** by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.

In context cut off by the flood is a reference to the death that resulted from the global flood. This use again demonstrates that Scripture did use the verb **karath** to refer to physical death.

(3) The supreme example of **karath** referring to death is found in Daniel's great prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, wherein we read that...

after the sixty-two weeks the **Messiah** will be cut off (**karath**) and have nothing (Da 9:26-note)

Cut off is the Hebrew verb **karath** and in this context clearly refers to the crucifixion of Christ, when Isaiah 53:8+ says He was "cut off (not karath but gazar) out of the land of the living".

(4) Genesis 17:14 translates karath with the strong verb exolothreuo

NASB = Genesis 17:14 "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person **shall be cut off** (Heb = karath; Lxx = exolothreuo) from his people; he has broken My covenant."

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE Septuagint (LXX) = And the uncircumcised male, who shall not be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin on the eighth day, that soul **shall be utterly destroyed** from its family, for he has broken My covenant.

The Greek verb **exolothreuo** (1842) (from **ek** = intensifies meaning + **olothreuo** = to destroy, used in Heb 11:28+, Ex 12:23+; Jos 3:10) means to utterly destroy, root out, completely cut off, to eliminate by destruction, all indicative of a serious action. The word never means cessation of existence or extinction but a change in state which involves judgment! How "utter" is this destruction? Let's look at the derivation to get a sense of the meaning. **Exolothreuo** is derived from the root noun **olethros** (from verb = **ollumi** = to destroy) which describes a state of utter and hopeless ruin and the end of all that gives worth to human existence! Do not confuse this with a state of annihilation (or non-existence such that there is no longer an actual personal perception) for **olethros** signifies an unavoidable, very real experience of distress and torment! The destruction Paul warns about is a time of unavoidable distress, disaster and ruin. This **destruction** will not be a loss of *being* but rather a loss of *well-being*. **The idea of olethros is to suffer the loss of all that gives worth to existence**. Let us read that last line again and may it cause us to weep for all God's Chosen People and for all of our friends and relatives who make the fatal choice to reject the Prophet Jesus!

Exolothreuo is used to translate **karath** and is used once in the New Testament by Peter warning that

it shall be that every soul that does not heed (HEAR WITH ATTENTION AND OBEDIENCE) that Prophet (THE PROPHET JESUS - Acts 3:22 QUOTING Dt 18:18) **shall be utterly destroyed (exolothreuo)** from among the people. (Acts 3:23+)

Comment: So here in Acts 3+ Peter was boldly proclaiming the Gospel of God and warning the Jews that if they failed to enter the New Covenant by grace through faith, the only alternative was to experience eternal separation from those who did enter the New Covenant ("from among the people").

Greek lexicons state that **exolothreuo** means to utterly destroy, to completely cut off, to eliminate by destruction, all indicative of a serious action.

And so while **exolothreuo** is used only once in the NT (Acts 3:23+) it is used frequently in the [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) - about 204 times in 191 verses (eg Dt 7:23, 24, 31:3, 4, Josh 2:10, Jdg 1:17, 4:24, 1Sa 15:18 - referring to the fate decreed for the Canaanites [which include the Amalekites], but also used in warnings to Israel - Dt 28:20, Dt 28:61, 63, 28:45 = Why they would be destroyed? Which covenant had they failed to keep? Is God serious about covenant? Clearly Israel had not obeyed the Old Covenant they had sworn they would obey - Ex 24:3, 7+)

In summary, there is no question that **karath** was used to describe death but whether that is the intended meaning in Genesis 17:14 is not agreed on by all commentators. A "Berean mindset" is encouraged (Acts 17:11-note).

Exolothreuo Uses in [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) - 204x in 191v - Gen. 17:14; Exod. 8:24; Exod. 12:15; Exod. 12:19; Exod. 30:33; Exod. 31:14; Lev. 17:4; Lev. 17:9; Lev. 17:14; Lev. 18:29; Lev. 19:8; Lev. 20:17; Lev. 20:18; Lev. 22:3; Lev. 23:29; Lev. 26:30; Num. 9:13; Num. 15:30; Num. 19:20; Deut. 1:27; Deut. 2:34; Deut. 3:6; Deut. 4:38; Deut. 6:15; Deut. 7:4; Deut. 7:10; Deut. 7:17; Deut. 7:23; Deut. 7:24; Deut. 9:3; Deut. 9:4; Deut. 9:5; Deut. 9:8; Deut. 9:14; Deut. 9:19; Deut. 9:20; Deut. 9:25; Deut. 9:26; Deut. 10:10; Deut. 12:29; Deut. 12:30; Deut. 18:12; Deut. 20:19; Deut. 20:20; Deut. 28:20; Deut. 28:45; Deut. 28:48; Deut. 28:61; Deut. 28:63; Deut. 31:3; Deut. 31:4; Deut. 33:19; Jos. 2:10; Jos. 7:25; Jos. 9:24; Jos. 10:1; Jos. 10:28; Jos. 10:32; Jos. 10:37; Jos. 10:39; Jos. 10:40; Jos. 11:11; Jos. 11:12; Jos. 11:14; Jos. 11:20; Jos. 11:21; Jos. 13:6; Jos. 13:12; Jos. 13:13; Jos. 14:12; Jos. 15:14; Jos. 17:12; Jos. 17:13; Jos. 17:18; Jos. 22:33; Jos. 23:4; Jos. 23:5; Jos. 23:9; Jos. 23:13; Jos. 23:15; Jos. 24:8; Jdg. 1:17; Jdg. 1:19; Jdg. 2:3; Jdg. 4:24; Jdg. 6:26; Ruth 4:10; 1 Sam. 2:31; 1 Sam. 2:33; 1 Sam. 15:3; 1 Sam. 15:9; 1 Sam. 15:15; 1 Sam. 15:18; 1 Sam. 15:20; 1 Sam. 24:21; 1 Sam. 28:9; 2 Sam. 4:11; 2 Sam. 7:9; 2 Sam. 21:5; 1 Ki. 2:4; 1 Ki. 9:15; 1 Ki. 11:15; 1 Ki. 11:16; 1 Ki. 12:24; 1 Ki. 15:29; 1 Ki. 16:33; 1 Ki. 18:5; 1 Ki. 21:21; 1 Ki. 21:26; 2 Ki. 9:7; 2 Ki. 9:8; 2 Ki. 18:4; 2 Ki. 23:14; 1 Chr. 17:8; 1 Chr. 21:12; 1 Chr. 21:15; 2 Chr. 8:8; 2 Chr. 20:7; 2 Chr. 20:10; 2 Chr. 20:23; 2 Chr. 21:7; 2 Chr. 22:4; 2 Chr. 28:3; 2 Chr. 32:14; 2 Chr. 33:2; 2 Chr. 34:11; 2 Chr. 36:5; Ps. 12:3; Ps. 18:40; Ps. 34:16; Ps. 37:9; Ps. 37:22; Ps. 37:28; Ps. 37:34; Ps. 37:38; Ps. 44:2; Ps. 54:5; Ps. 73:27; Ps. 83:4; Ps. 83:10; Ps. 92:7; Ps. 101:8; Ps. 106:23; Ps. 106:34; Ps. 109:15; Ps. 143:12; Ps. 145:20; Isa. 10:7; Isa. 29:20; Isa. 48:9; Isa. 48:19; Jer. 4:7; Jer. 36:29; Jer. 47:4; Jer. 48:8; Jer. 50:16; Jer. 50:26; Jer. 51:11; Jer. 51:53; Jer. 51:55; Jer. 51:62; Ezek. 6:3; Ezek. 6:6; Ezek. 14:19; Ezek. 14:21; Ezek. 21:3; Ezek. 21:4; Ezek. 25:7; Ezek. 25:13; Ezek. 25:16; Ezek. 31:12; Dan. 9:26; Hos. 8:4; Joel 1:16; Amos 1:5; Amos 1:8; Amos 2:3; Obad. 1:14; Mic. 5:9; Mic. 5:10; Mic. 5:11; Mic. 5:13; Nah. 1:14; Nah. 2:13; Nah. 3:15; Zeph. 1:11; Zeph. 2:11; Zeph. 3:7; Zech. 9:10; Zech. 13:2; Zech. 13:8; Zech. 14:2; Mal. 2:12;

The respected expositor **John MacArthur** for example does not favor "**cut off**" as referring to death (but notice his last phrase in the quote below - placed in italics) writing that "Being **cut off** from the covenant community meant loss of temporal benefits stemming from being part of the special, chosen, and theocratic nation, *even to the point of death by divine judgment*" ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word Pub](#))

MacDonald agrees that "Every male in Abraham's house was circumcised, and thereafter every male baby was to be circumcised when he was eight days old or else be **cut off** from his people—that is, put away from the congregation of Israel (Ge 17:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). The expression "cut off" **sometimes means to put to death**, as in Exodus 31:14,15+. In other places, as here, it seems to mean to ban or ostracize. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

The **KJV Study Bible** writes that "A Hebrew who failed to observe this rite would be cut off from the covenant community. Circumcision was to serve as an outward sign of inward dedication to God. In itself, it was neither efficacious, nor unique to Israel. ([King James Version study Bible. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

Matthew Henry comments that...The religious observance of this institution was required under **avery severe penalty**, v. 14. The contempt of circumcision was a contempt of the covenant (Ed note: to refuse circumcision was tantamount to rejecting the covenant); if the parents did not circumcise their children, **it was at their peril, as in the case of Moses**, Ex 4:24, 25. With respect to those that were not circumcised in their infancy, if, when they grew up, they did not themselves come under this ordinance, God would surely reckon with them. If they cut not off the flesh of their foreskin, God would cut them off from their people. It is a dangerous thing to make light of divine institutions, and to live in the neglect of them. (Henry, M. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible)

Wenham feels that to "be cut off" "has been supposed to involve excommunication from the community, to be "cut off" **seems more likely to be divine punishment resulting in the offender's untimely death.** "The threat of being 'cut off' by the hand of God, in His own time, hovers over the offender constantly and inescapably; he is not unlike the patient who is told by his doctors that his disease is incurable and that he might die any day" (H. H. Cohn, ILR 5 [1970] 72; cf. W. Horbury, VT 35 [1985] 31–33)." (Wenham, G. J. Vol. 2: Word Biblical Commentary : Genesis 16-50. Word Biblical Commentary Page 25. Dallas: Word, Incorporated)

EXCURSUS ON CIRCUMCISION

Genesis 17:9 God said further to Abraham,

Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be **circumcised**. 11 "And you shall be **circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin**; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be **circumcised** throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. 13 "A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be **circumcised**; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 But an **uncircumcised male** who is not **circumcised** in the flesh of his foreskin, that person **shall be cut off** from his people; he has **broken My covenant**."

Comment: Do not to mistake the rite of circumcision as the covenant proper. Moses is careful to specify that the physical act "**shall be the sign of the covenant**." Circumcision is not the actual covenant.

MacArthur comments: Circumcision (cutting away the male foreskin) was not entirely new in this period of history, but the special religious and theocratic significance then applied to it was entirely new, thus identifying the circumcised as belonging to the physical and ethnical lineage of Abraham (cf. Acts 7:8; Ro 4:11). Without divine revelation, the rite would not have had this distinctive significance, thus it remained a theocratic distinctive of Israel (cf. v. 13). There was a **health benefit**, since disease could be kept in the folds of the foreskin, so that removing it prevented that. Historically, Jewish women have had the lowest rate of cervical cancer. But the symbolism had to do with the need to cut away sin and be cleansed. It was the male organ which most clearly demonstrated the depth of depravity because it carried the seed that produced depraved sinners....This cleansing of the physical organ so as not to pass on disease... was a picture of the deep need for cleansing from depravity, which is most clearly revealed by procreation, as men produce sinners and only sinners. **Circumcision** points to the fact that cleansing is needed at the very core of a human being, a cleansing God offers to the faithful and penitent through the sacrifice of Christ to come. ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word Pub](#)) (Bolding added)

NIV Study Bible: Circumcision was God's appointed "**sign of the covenant**" (Ge 17:11), which signified Abraham's covenanted commitment to the Lord—that the Lord alone would be his God, whom he would trust and serve. It symbolized a self-maledictory oath (analogous to the oath to which God had submitted Himself: "If I am not loyal in faith and obedience to the Lord, may the sword of the Lord cut off me and my offspring (see Ge 17:14) as I have cut off my foreskin." Thus Abraham was to place himself under the rule of the Lord as his King, consecrating himself, his offspring and all he possessed to the service of the Lord. ([NIV Study Bible](#))

EXTERNAL CIRCUMCISION AND INTERNAL CIRCUMCISION

While God had indeed commanded **external circumcision** of the foreskin as a sign of entrance into the Abrahamic covenant, the deeper significance was that this physical act was intended to be an manifestation of the **obedience** that flowed from one's **faith** (see discussion of the relationship to faith and obedience [here](#) and [here](#)). In other words, the physical act of circumcision was to reflect one's belief in the **Abrahamic Covenant** and the "**Gospel**" that had been preached to Abraham in that covenant (specifically that God would bring forth a Seed, the Messiah, Gal 3:8, Gal 3:16, see the prediction of that "Seed" in the Genesis cross references below). The reader should be aware of the fact that in the original Hebrew the word **descendants** is more literally the word "**seed**" and each use in the following passages is in the **masculine singular** which would be compatible with Paul's explanation in

Galatians 3:16 that the reference was not to **seeds** plural but to **Seed** singular (masculine), specifically a reference to the **Messiah** (Study the following passages that speak of the "descendants" [the seed - **every** occurrence of descendants or seed is in the masculine singular] = Ge 12:7 13:15,16 15:5 17:7,8 21:12 22:17,18 26:3,4 28:13, 14 until the "Seed" culminates in Ge 49:10- see comment below on this last verse). Thus **belief** in the the promise which Jehovah gave to Abraham was tantamount to **belief** in the promised Seed, the coming **Messiah**. That belief resulted in an **internal circumcision of the believer's heart** which was manifest by their obedience to willingly perform the **external sign of circumcision**. Unfortunately, fallen men (all mankind Ro 5:12-note) seeks to come to God via their own way, via their works of presumed righteousness (which are really "filthy rags" Isa 64:6). The result was that many in the Jewish nation perverted the **sign of circumcision** (Ge 17:11) as a "work" which they taught merited salvation. In short, the sign in essence became the covenant instead of that which pointed to the covenant (see how one might misinterpret Ge 17:13 for example but to do so is to take it out of the **context** of the "whole counsel" of God's Word and a text out of context is a pretext [pretense]!).

ABRAHAMIC COVENANT A COVENANT OF GRACE

The Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional covenant (God would perform the promises independent of whether a man entered into or refused to enter into the covenant), clearly a covenant which Abraham did nothing to merit, and thus clearly a covenant of grace ("unmerited favor"), just as is it's New Testament "extension", the New Covenant in Christ's blood, also a covenant of grace (cp Ep 2:8, 9-note) not merit. (See discussion of Ro 4:11-note)

In some of Jacob's (Israel) last words, he made the following statement that relates to the fulfillment of the "Seed" that had been promised to Abraham some four hundred years earlier...

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until **Shiloh** comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Septuagint or LXX of the last half of the verse = "*He is the expectation of nations.*"). (Genesis 49:10 - See the [NETBible notes at bottom of page for summary of the 4 interpretations of this verse](#))

Genesis 49:10 while not specifically using the Hebrew word "**seed**", does specify the tribe of Judah from which the "**Seed**" would come refers to the coming **Messiah** ("Until **Shiloh** comes"). As a proper name **Shiloh** could be translated "rest giver." As Jacob looked to the future, he might well have wondered from which of his sons the Messiah would come. The three eldest sons, Reuben (the firstborn) along with Simeon, and Levi (Ge 34:25), forfeited their rights because of their sins (Reuben = Ge 35:22), so as Jacob prophesied on his deathbed the honor fell on **Judah**. The right to rule would not depart from Judah until Shiloh (the Rest Giver) would come, the "**Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David** (Rev 5:5-note [includes nice schematic of Messiah's lineage from Abraham], cp Mt 1:1, 2,3, He 7:14-note), and the people would obey Him because He would reign as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16-note). Hallelujah! Amen!

W A Criswell commenting on Ge 49:10 writes...The coming of "**Shiloh**" is not to terminate the reign of Judah, but it is the coming of "**Shiloh**" which would bring about Judah's rule over the nations. "Shiloh," therefore, is a reference to the Messiah, and the patriarch is here proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. Some commentators translate "Shiloh" as "to whom it belongs," indicating that the scepter will remain in Judah until the Person comes to whom rulership belongs.

Henry Morris adds that...This important prophecy has been strikingly fulfilled. Although Judah was neither Jacob's firstborn son nor the son who would produce the priestly tribe, he was the son through whom God would fulfill His promises to Israel and to the world. The leadership, according to Jacob, was to go to Judah, but this did not happen for over 600 years. Moses came from Levi, Joshua from Ephraim, Gideon from Manasseh, Samson from Dan, Samuel from Ephraim and Saul from Benjamin. But when David finally became king, Judah held the scepter and did not relinquish it until after Shiloh came. "**Shiloh**" is a name for the Messiah, probably related to the Hebrew word for "peace" (shalom) and meaning in effect, "the one who brings peace."

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

A number of passages in both the **Law** and the **Prophets** speak of **circumcision** in terms that clearly do not describe physical circumcision and can by default must refer to spiritual circumcision.

LEVITICUS 26:41-42

Leviticus 26:41+ I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies-- or

if their **uncircumcised heart** becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land (Clearly referring to the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant of grace).

Comment: Leviticus 26 deals with obedience (Lev 26:1-13) and disobedience (Lev 26:14-46, cp similar sections outlining first the blessings for obedience and then the cursings for disobedience = Dt 7:12-26, 28:1-68, 30:1-20) to the Old Covenant of the Law into which Israel had entered at Mt Sinai (Ex 24:3, 6,7, 8). In the last half of Leviticus 26 (Lev 26:14-46) God is reviewing their disobedience and explains that the root of their disobedience is their "hard" uncircumcised heart condition. In other words they were disobedient because they were not genuinely saved (like Abraham Ge 15:6). As an aside, while most of Israel in the OT was not genuinely saved, God always preserved a remnant of genuine believers in every age (see study on the doctrine of the **remnant**).

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a Jewish believer, alludes to the concept of remnant commenting that God chose Israel to be an elect nation, not true of any other nation in this world. However, national election **does not guarantee the salvation of every individual member of that nation** Individual salvation is based on individual election on God's part and **faith** on man's part. In Dt 10:16 (see below), individual members of the elect nation are encouraged to '**circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart.**' Whereas **circumcision of the flesh** is a sign of one's membership in the elect nation (**Ed:** Fruchtenbaum is not completely correct - This is unfortunately what physical circumcision came to mean, but originally that was not the meaning. It was originally intended to signify that an individual had entered the Abrahamic Covenant by grace through faith and was a mark that they were genuinely saved. The analogy is modern Baptism - water baptism does not save anyone, but does serve as a public testimony that one has been saved), **circumcision of the heart** is a sign of individual election. (Bolding added)

DEUTERONOMY 10:16-17

Deuteronomy 10:16, 17 (Context is Dt 10:15 - Refers to the Abrahamic Covenant) "**Circumcise then your heart**, and stiffen your neck no more. 17 For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords (Rev 19:16-[note](#)), the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe.

Comment: Physical circumcision was originally intended by God to be a sign that one had entered into the Abrahamic covenant (Ge 17:9, 10). In other words, physical circumcision was an outward act which testified that the individual had experienced an inner "circumcision" of their heart. While God is calling on Israel to "circumcise" their hearts, clearly no human being can carry out such an act without supernatural intervention. As the new **ESV Study Bible** says that "Circumcision of the heart comes from renewal through the Spirit of Christ." God's charge is not just for Israel to "get a grip" and change their rebellious attitude toward Him! Our hearts are intractably deceitful and sick (Jer 17:9) and we are all by nature, hard hearted, stiff necked rebels toward God and His Word, **unless and until** He graciously brings about an individual's "heart circumcision" in response to that individual's **faith** - in other words, "spiritual circumcision" is by grace through faith, which sounds like salvation in the NT, because it is!

Dave Guzik comments: God command them to do something that only He could do in them to show them the need to have the inner transformation, and to compel them to seek Him for this inner work.

Warren Wiersbe comments on Israel's misinterpretation of the rite of circumcision Unfortunately, this same spiritual blindness is with us today, for many people believe that baptism, confirmation, church membership, or participation in the Lord's Supper automatically guarantees their salvation. As meaningful as those things are, the Christian's assurance and seal of salvation isn't a physical ceremony but a spiritual work of the Holy Spirit in the heart (Php 3:1-10; Col. 2:9, 10, 11, 12). Jewish circumcision removed but a small part of the flesh, but the Holy Spirit has put off the whole "body of the sins of the flesh" and made us new creatures in Christ (Col 2:11). (Be Equipped: Chariot Victor Pub)

Bible Knowledge Commentary: The proper response to their election by the sovereign Lord was to **circumcise their hearts** (cf. Dt 30:6). An **uncircumcised heart** means a will that is hardened against God's commands. It is another way of saying the person is stiff-necked or stubborn (cf. Dt 9:6, 13; 31:27). Thus the command to **circumcise their hearts** assumes that human hearts are naturally rebellious and need correction. Though human hearts are slow to change, Moses warned the nation that no bribe or anything less than an **inward transformation** could satisfy the Lord, Who is the great God. God's treatment of the helpless (the fatherless . . . the widow, and the alien) further illustrates His absolutely just

character (showing no partiality) and highlights His requirement for Israel to be just. ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#)). (Bolding added)

DEUTERONOMY 30:1-6

Deuteronomy 30:1+ "So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you (**Ed**: The prophecy described in the following passages will ultimately be fulfilled at the end of the "time of Jacob's distress" [Jer 30:7], the 3.5 year period which Jesus referred to as the **Great Tribulation**), the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, 2 and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart (**Ed**: Not legalistic obedience, but supernatural obedience motivated by love and desire to be pleasing to the Lord) and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, 3 then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. 4 "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. 5 "And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 6 Moreover the LORD your God will **circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

Comment: Deut 30:1-5 prophesies of the gathering of Jews out of all the countries of the world at the time of Israel's end time redemption (see Ro 11:25, 26, 27-note). Restoration to **the Land** will be in fulfillment of the promise of the covenant given to Abraham (see Ge 12:7; 13:15; 15:18, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21; 17:8) and to Isaac and to Jacob. The Church does not replace Israel and this promise has never been fulfilled in its entirety to the nation of Israel. ([What is replacement theology?](#)) ([What is replacement theology - supersessionism?](#)) **Circumcision** of the heart is an internal, spiritual work of God which results in true salvation and a "new heart" that provides a supernaturally enabled desire to obey God (see Ezekiel 36:26-27-see commentary)

Bible Knowledge Commentary: The promise that the Lord your God will **circumcise your hearts** (cf. Dt 10:16) means that God will graciously grant the nation a new will to obey Him in place of their former spiritual insensitivity and stubbornness. After returning to the Promised Land with a new heart they will remain committed to the Lord and therefore will experience abundant blessing (live). Loving Him wholeheartedly (cf. Deut 30:16, 20), they would not fall back into apostasy as they had done before. ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#))

JEREMIAH 4:4

Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.

Comment: Here the meaning of **circumcision** is the idea of purifying, separating from the sinful tendency of the flesh, that propensity inherited from Adam in which the unregenerate seeks only to please self, never God. In other words, God desires that the **inward condition** match one's **outward profession**, which of course is not just an OT idea related to circumcision. God's intent has always been that the outward symbols (e.g., circumcision, baptism) should be signs of an inward reality of a heart willing to and enabled to obey Him. Mere outward conformity to the standards of the covenant does not please God

John MacArthur writes: This surgery (Ge 17:10, 11, 12, 13, 14) was to cut away flesh that could hold disease in its folds and could pass the disease on to wives. It was important for the preservation of God's people physically. But it was also a symbol of the need for the heart to be cleansed from sin's deadly disease. The really essential surgery needed to happen on the inside, where God calls for taking away fleshly things that keep the heart from being spiritually devoted to Him and from true faith in Him and His will. Jeremiah later expanded on this theme (Jer 31:31, 32, 33, 34; cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Ro 2:29). God selected the reproductive organ as the location of the symbol for man's need of cleansing for sin, because it is the instrument most indicative of his depravity, since by it he reproduces generations of sinners. ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word Pub](#))

JEREMIAH 9:25-26

Jeremiah 9:25 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "that I will punish all who are **circumcised** (physically, externally) and yet **uncircumcised** (spiritually, internally) 26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the

sons of Ammon, and Moab, and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations are **uncircumcised**, and all the house of Israel are **uncircumcised of heart**."

Comment: Conformity to the external standard of circumcision must be accompanied by "circumcision" of the heart to please God. To see how one can "circumcise the heart" in the teaching by Paul in Romans 2 and Colossians 2 (below).

Ezekiel 44:6 "And you shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, 7 when you brought in foreigners, **uncircumcised in heart** (spiritual circumcision) and **uncircumcised in flesh**, (physical circumcision) to be in My sanctuary to profane it, even My house (the Temple in Jerusalem), when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void-- this in addition to all your abominations. 8 And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set foreigners to keep charge of My sanctuary. 9 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "No foreigner, **uncircumcised in heart** and **uncircumcised in flesh**, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary."

ROMANS 2:28-29

Romans 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is **circumcision** that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one **inwardly**; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart by the Spirit**, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (See notes)

Comment: Due to the passing down of (defective, non-Biblically centered) teaching from one rabbi to another over the centuries ("*traditions of men*") the true meaning and requirement of **circumcision** had been lost. And so by the first century we find rabbinical "*traditions*" teaching such fallacies as: "*No circumcised Jewish man will see hell*" "*Circumcision saves us from hell*."

The Midrash says "*God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised would be sent to hell. Abraham sits before the gate of hell and never allows any circumcised Israelite to enter.*"

And so in Romans 2:28, 29 Paul seeks to correct this "eternally fatal" flaw in the rabbi's misinterpretation - physical circumcision never saved anyone! Paul also helps us understand the somewhat enigmatic OT passages alluding to "**circumcision of the heart**". Based on Paul's teaching, we can see that the OT was clearly calling for a **spiritual circumcision** performed by the Holy Spirit at the time one received the Messiah as their Savior. In the Old Testament, this spiritual transaction transpired when one entered the Abrahamic Covenant by grace through faith. Similarly, in the New Testament the spiritual circumcision transpired when one entered the New Covenant by grace through faith. In other words, in the Old Testament, salvation (*circumcision of one's heart*) was achieved by placing one's faith in the prophesied Messiah, even as their "eyes of faith" looked forward toward the Cross of Messiah (at which time He "cut" the New Covenant). How much of the work of Christ on the Cross the Old Testament believers understood is uncertain. One thing is certain - they knew enough to be genuinely saved! And we in the NT (the "church age") with eyes of faith (Heb 11:1-note, 2Co 5:7) look back toward Messiah's finished work of redemption at Calvary (Jn 19:30-note).

COLOSSIANS 2:9-12

Colossians 2:9 For (explains warning of Col 2:8-note) in Him (Christ) all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete (We have all of Christ we will ever receive - we are complete), and He is the head over all rule and authority (probably refers to the hierarchy of angelic beings) 11 and in Him (Note the allusion to covenant - when you entered covenant, you entered into union with Christ the Covenant - Isa 42:6) you were also **circumcised with a circumcision** made without hands (Thus clearly not a reference to physical circumcision), in the removal of the **body of the flesh** (the "old self" who was crucified in Ro 6:6-note) by the **circumcision** (crucifixion - Da 9:26-note says He was "cut off" the Hebrew verb used of cutting covenant) **of Christ**; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism (Ro 6:3,4-note), in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, Who raised Him from the dead.

Comment: **Circumcision** is a cutting away of something and therefore signifies a removal of that which has been cut away. In this verse Paul is clearly using the well known procedure of circumcision not to describe the physical act but ["without hands"] to describe spiritual circumcision. Here Paul uses the **circumcision** metaphor to explain the same spiritual transaction he discussed in Romans 6:1-11, which describes in detail the events that occurred when we placed our faith in Christ. At that very moment we were "circumcised with a circumcision made without hands", we were "**baptized into Christ**" (Galatians

3:27 = identified with Christ) and we experienced a death, burial and resurrection by virtue of our very real (albeit still "mystical") spiritual union with Christ. (Colossians 2:11, 12, 13-notes)

Regarding the "**removal of the body of the flesh**" the Greek verb gives us the picture of taking off and putting away clothes. And so by analogy "the body of the flesh" is taken off like an old garment (by the Spirit at the time of salvation when Galatians 3:27 teaches we "clothed ourselves with Christ", we exchanged our Isa 64:6 filthy rags of righteousness for His garment of righteousness). At the moment of salvation, the "**body of the flesh**" was put off in the sense that it was **rendered inoperative** (see Ro 6:6-note) and **Sin** now can no longer reign over believers like a cruel dictator or wicked despot as it did when we were unregenerate. The ruling power of this old sinful nature has been broken (Ro 6:7, 12, 14, 18, 22 - see **notes** Ro 6:7, 12, 14, 18, 22; Ro 6:11-**note** summarizes this truth and is also a command calling for us to continually reckon ourselves dead to the power of - this call to continually reckon suggest that we are continually in need of remembering this truth for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak) . Note however that the evil nature is not eradicated, for we all still commit sins, but the power of **Sin (note)** (our old "dictator") has been broken, and as we yield to and are led by the Spirit of Christ (See Ro 8:14-note) we are enabled to walk in the power of the Spirit (See Ro 8:4; 8:5; 8:6; 8:12-**notes** Ro 8:4; 8:5; 8:6; 12) and "by the Spirit" to put "to death the deeds of the body" (see Ro 8:13-note). "The **fallen flesh**" now can exert no more power over a believer than he or she allows it to have. (See related discussion of Paul's command to "walk by the Spirit" in Gal 5:16-note)

In short the distinguishing features of the **circumcision made without hands** are: (1) not external but internal and not made with hands, (2) It divests not of part of the flesh, but of the whole body of carnal affections (the power of sin has been rendered inoperative so now we truly can say "no" - in other words now when a believer sins, it is because he or she chooses to do so!) and (3) this circumcision is not of Moses nor of Abraham but of Christ.

Ray Stedman comments: "I will never forget an incident that occurred a number of years ago here at the church. A young man came to my office carrying a thick Bible under his arm, which he had been reading. Looking at me very earnestly, he said to me, "Would you circumcise me?" After I had picked myself up from the floor, I explained to him why, one, he did not need physical circumcision, and, two, what circumcision meant. I pointed out that it was an eloquent symbol when it was properly understood." (Click full message [Beware!](#))

MacDonald on "**circumcision made without hands**" writes: This circumcision speaks of death to the fleshly nature. It is true **positionally** of every believer (the moment we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior), but should be followed by a practical mortifying of the sinful deeds of the flesh (Colossians 3:5-note). The apostle speaks of believers as the true circumcision (Phil. 3:3-note), in contrast to a party of Jewish legalists known as "the circumcision" (Gal 2:12). ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#)) (Bolding added)

EXCURSUS ON ROLE OF HOLY SPIRIT IN OT HEART CIRCUMCISION

Below are notes from Deuteronomy 10:16 (see commentary) where Israel was charged to "circumcise your

So circumcise (mul) your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer - While this is not actually a command in the Hebrew, the instruction nevertheless conveys that sense and a parallel passage in Jer 4:4 is definitely a command to the Jews to "**circumcise yourselves.**" Clearly the reference to circumcision of one's **heart** signifies that this is a figure of speech and not literal circumcision as described and prescribed in Genesis 17. In short, this passage calls for "spiritual surgery," and of the type that only Yahweh Himself could accomplish. Keep in mind that God had given the Israelites five commandments in Dt 10:12+. However God never gives commandments without providing the means to obey His commandments. To say it another way God's commandments always include His enablements! In Dt 30:6+ we see it is the LORD Who says He will "circumcise" their heart. While this latter passage is a prophecy that will be filled at the end of this age, one can deduce that the call for Israel to circumcise their hearts in Dt 10:16 is a call for them to trust God to carry out this transaction. How does this take place? Look first at Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:51+ addressed to his non-believing Jewish persecutors...

"You men who are **stiff-necked** and **uncircumcised in heart** and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

Notice how Stephen's words parallel the words of Moses in Dt 10:16. Specifically notice that they both passages allude to the **heart**, either **uncircumcised** and or as a call to **circumcise** your heart. Notice also that both passages speak of stiff-necked ("stiffen your neck no longer"). So what can we conclude from Stephen's words that helps explain the charge in Dt 10:16? Note that Stephen states that his hearers were **always resisting the Holy Spirit** and says this is what their **fathers** had also done. In context the phrase "**as your fathers did**" is a reference to their Jewish "**fathers**" in the Old Testament. Compare the continual resistance of the fathers to the Holy Spirit in Nehemiah 9:30 ("You bore with them for many years, and **admonished them by Your Spirit** through Your prophets, yet **they would not give ear.**") and Isaiah 63:10 ("they **rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit**"). Based on these observations, one can deduce that in the Old Testament it was the Holy Spirit Who was active in performing the radical spiritual surgery necessary to circumcise a heart. Paul supports the premise that was the Holy Spirit Who was the active Agent in spiritual circumcision, writing in Romans 2:29+ (cf Col 2:11+)

"But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

And since we know from Genesis 1:2 (among many other OT passages) that the Holy Spirit was active in the OT, it follows that the charge to circumcise their hearts was a charge that only the Holy Spirit could accomplish. Further, it would seem to fair when comparing spiritual circumcision with other Scriptures, that circumcision of the heart is synonymous with genuine salvation. And so if we look at the "salvation" of Abraham in Genesis 15:6+ we read...

Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Abraham was declared righteous by God by faith. It therefore is Biblically logical to say that Abraham had a "circumcised heart" and that the only way the Israelites could "circumcise their hearts" in Dt 10:16 would be by faith, a faith just like Abraham's faith. How many of the Israelites received circumcised hearts? It is difficult to say with certainty but OT history supports that most of the nation had uncircumcised hearts (were not saved, cf Dt 32:20+). One other point that should be made is that while the Spirit was active in the OT and in bringing about "salvation," the Spirit did not permanently indwell OT believers as He does every NT believer. As an aside we know the Spirit did occasionally indwell men in the OT including Joshua of whom God Himself said he was "**a man in whom is the Spirit.**" (Nu 27:18) Did the Spirit indwell Joshua for all or most of his life? The Bible does not say so we will have to wait until we arrive in Heaven to answer questions like that (cf Dt 29:29).

Related Resource:

- [What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? | GotQuestions.org](#)

SAVING FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Related resources:

- Obedience of faith - Roman 1:5, 16:25 - What does it mean?
- [Click for more notes](#) in preceding discussion on relationship of faith and obedience

Romans 1:5 (note) through Whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake (NASB)

Below is the same verse rendered in some other translations...

"the obedience that comes from faith" (NIV)

"who bring people from every nation to the obedience that is associated with faith" (GWT),

"in order to lead people of all nations to believe and obey" (TEV)

"so that they will believe and obey him" (NLT)

A T Robertson writes that "obedience of faith" in the original Greek text reflects what is referred to as the...

"Subjective genitive as in Romans 16:26 (note), **the obedience which springs from faith** (the act of assent or surrender). ([Word Pictures in the NT](#)) (Bolding added)

Marvin Vincent another respected Greek scholar writing on the RSV translation "unto obedience of faith" says that...

"Unto marks the object of the grace and apostleship: in order to bring about. Obedience of faith is the obedience which characterizes and proceeds from faith. (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament Vol. 3, Page 1-5)

Life Application Bible Commentary writes that "obedience of faith" refers to...

"the obedience that comes from faith. This was the desired response to the gospel message and the goal of Paul's ministry to the Roman Christians—that they would obey God because of their faith in God. The only source for the kind of obedience expected is faith in the one true God and in Jesus Christ, his Son. Faith and obedience are inseparable. Where one is lacking, the other will not be found either. Real faith will always lead to obedience; real obedience comes from faith. (Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., & Wilson, N. S. Romans. Life Application Bible Commentary Page 8. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers)

Expositor's Bible Commentary explaining the "**obedience of faith**" writes that...

The desired response to the gospel message is "obedience that comes from faith"

Kenneth Wuest writes that ...

As to the meaning of the words, "for obedience to the faith," scholars differ. Some say that it means obedience to the Faith, the Christian system of belief, as in Acts 6:7 where a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. Others say that obedience is the obedience which springs from and is produced by faith." (Wuest, K. S. Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)

The **UBS translator's handbook** comments that

Believe and obey translates "obedience of faith." This is not "obedience to the faith" (Moffatt), but obedience that is caused by faith (NEB "to faith and obedience"; Goodspeed "obedience and faith"). Although "obedience" and "faith" are nouns in Greek, they describe events rather than objects, and so are better rendered by verbs. (Newman, B. M., & Nida, E. A.. A handbook on Paul's letter to the Romans. UBS handbook series; Helps for translators Page 12. New York: United Bible Societies)

The Preacher's Commentary notes that...

Wherever he went the objective was the same—to bring people to "obedience to the faith." It is important to note that for Paul "faith" was considerably more than an intellectual assent or even an attitude of trust. Faith, in his preaching, constituted a life-style of obedience, so wherever he went he presented truth to which people should assent, promises they should trust, and commands they should obey. His goal and burning desire was to bring people to the point where they would "trust and obey" Jesus Christ. (Briscoe, D. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. Vol. 29: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Romans. Page 25. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson)

John MacArthur writes that

"The message of the gospel is to call people to the obedience of faith, which is here used as a synonym for salvation...It is not that faith plus obedience equals salvation but that obedient faith equals salvation. True faith is verified in obedience. Obedient faith proves itself true, whereas disobedient faith proves itself false. It is for having true faith, that is, obedient faith, that Paul goes on to commend the Roman believers... Together, faith and obedience manifest the inseparable two sides of the coin of salvation, which Paul here calls the obedience of faith." (MacArthur, J. Romans. Chicago: Moody Press)

J Vernon McGee adds that...

"Obedience to the faith is very important to God. God saves us by faith, not by works; but after He has saved us, He wants to talk to us about our works, about our obedience to Him. I hear many people talk about believing in Jesus, then they live like the Devil and seem to be serving him. My friend, saving faith makes you obedient to Jesus Christ. (McGee, J. V. Thru the Bible commentary. Vol. 4, Page 648 Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

If one says they have believed in the **gospel of God** and yet continually are disobedient to God, then that individual needs to be wary and should prayerfully look at Paul's warning in (2Cor 13:5). On the other hand, Paul is not saying that works gain God's favor, but he is saying that a "working" faith produces a change in one's behavior. For a great "summary" of the relationship of salvation to works study (Eph 2:8, 9, 10) Man is saved by grace alone but the faith that saves is never alone, but brings forth fruit in keeping with repentance.

Note that it is widely taught that "*once saved, always saved*" and I agree with that, with the caveat that the initial salvation is genuine! Some (even in evangelical circles) teach that a man or a woman can simply pray a prayer to accept Jesus into one's heart, and then live the rest of their life just as they did **before** they obtained the "fire insurance" policy. These teachers conclude that such a person is still saved. This website respectfully disagrees with that teaching. And I think Paul would likewise disagree for the faith that genuinely saves, is the faith that results in obedience.

[Albert Barnes](#) explains that "**the obedience of faith**" means

"in order to produce, or promote obedience to the faith; that is, to induce them to render that obedience to God which faith produces. There are two things therefore implied.(1) that the design of the gospel and of the apostleship is to induce men to obey God. (2) that the tendency of faith is to produce obedience. There is no true faith which does not produce that. This is constantly affirmed in the New Testament..." (Barnes Notes on the Bible)

Augustine said

"Let the acts of the offspring indicate similarity to the Father".