

“There is Salt Between Us” The Covenant of Salt in the Bible and in our Relationship with God©

Salt Between Us

Throughout the Middle East there are ancient and traditional expressions which carry *profound* weight and meaning. For example, in Arabic it is said:

“*baynatna khubz wa milah*” () or which translates to
“**there is bread and salt between us**” or “**salt between us**”

These are terms to express enduring friendship and eternal loyalty. It can also be an oath of permanent alliance. In any context, it is a serious and significant expression, it is not spoken or used lightly, but reserved for deep and treasured relationships.

I thought: what a beautiful way to describe a valued and deep friendship. It reminded me of the relationships we have formed among the ladies in our Bible Study classes. I think we can honestly say that there is indeed “salt between us.”

But I was curious as to the origin of this expression. Salt is so critical to and plays an important role in all cultures, not just to sustain life and provide nourishment but also as a potent symbol. Still, I wondered, why is there *salt* between us and not some other common foodstuff like olive oil, or some rare item like saffron, or some precious commodity like gold? Why is salt an expression of an enduring, loving, meaningful, treasured relationship?

Biblical Origin of the Salt Covenant: Importance of Salt

Not surprisingly, the solemn significance of salt can be traced back to the Bible and Jewish tradition. Salt plays an important symbolic role in the Bible, it is mentioned over 40 times. The Hebrew word for salt is “*melach*” (pronounced “meh’-lakh”).

And Jesus said point blank: “***You are the salt of the earth.***” (Matthew 5:13). Salt stands for permanence, eternity, incorruption, something that cannot be dissolved or broken.

Salt so important that there is a Hebrew word for the *absence* of salt which means: barrenness. In context this can mean tasteless food without salt; physically barren as in unable to conceive; and most significantly, spiritually barren.

But also important in everyday Jewish traditions. For example, newborns were traditionally “salted”: that is, washed and scrubbed with salt immediately after birth. As a practical matter

the salt helped to kill bacteria on the infant, but it is also spiritually significant as a demonstration of the “salt covenant.” It is likely that Jesus Himself was “salted” after his birth. So salt – just in and of itself - has profound meaning theologically throughout the Bible. But more than that, alludes to the **covenant of salt** that:

God made a covenant of salt with David
God makes a covenant of salt with each of us

Before we get to specific references to the covenant of salt in the Bible, let’s also:

- 1) understand the meaning of covenant, which is quite different than a contract.

That is the case in the Bible, in ancient times, and according to our modern legal definitions.

A *contract* is a two-way exchange (I sell you my car, you give me money, we each have an obligation).

A *covenant* is a solemn promise to engage in or refrain from a specific action; it is one-way and unconditional (God’s covenant with David, is an example of this, did not require David to do anything to realize the fruits of this covenant).

And

- 2) take a quick look at God’s covenant with David: The Davidic covenant is in **2 Samuel 7:8-16**
 - Many things: make David’s name great
 - Provide a physical place for David and his offspring
 - Among other things David’s house, kingdom, and throne would be established forever (note not un-interrupted, plenty of those) but the right to rule would always remain with David’s house

Specific References to the Covenant of Salt

The first reference is in Leviticus 2:13:

Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.

- Ritual of sacrifice to God in OT, reminder to include salt and it’s part of covenant between God and His people to add salt to all the offerings

The second reference is in Numbers 18: 19, where the Lord provides for the Levites (His priests):

Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the Lord I give to you and your sons and daughters as your perpetual share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord for both you and your offspring.

- This is God speaking to the 12 tribes and how He will provide for them
- Each tribe is allotted land to provide for them,
- Except the Levites (Lord's priests) who receive no land but instead God reassures the Levites that they are entitled to keep a portion of all the offerings from the other tribes
- And God seals with what He calls the everlasting covenant of salt

Now, let's turn to the most detailed invocation of the covenant of salt.

2 Chron 13:5

"Don't you know that the Lord, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?"

Understand the Historical Context

- These words spoken about 910 BC, at a time when Israel was a divided kingdom (931 BC)
- Spoken by Abijah is leading Judah (south, where Jerusalem is located) in battle against Israel (north), who is led by Jeroboam
- Abijah is the great grandson of Absalom (which means great-great grandson of David)
 - o committed sins and was not fully devoted to God.
- Jeroboam (lots of sin, built high places everywhere to keep people in Israel; anyone could be a priest)
- Abijah speaks these words on eve of big battle between two armies
 - o Bible tells us Abijah/Judah had 400,000 troops, and Jeroboam/Israel had 800,000 troops
- Abijah is trying to dissuade Israel from following Jeroboam and engaging in battle
 - o Invokes the Davidic covenant which we now learn is a covenant of salt
 - o Says I am the descendant of David, throne is rightfully mine
 - o ***"As for us, the Lord is our God and we have not forsaken him...but you have forsaken him. God is with us, he is our leader... men of Israel do not fight against the Lord, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."*** (2 Chron 13:10-12)
- Abijah
 - o Not a great leader
 - o Hugely outnumbered and don't survive those kinds of odds in ancient battle, unless.....unless
 - o You are the descendant of David
 - o Which means you benefit from the Davidic covenant which promises your house will be on throne
 - o And God had sealed that promise as a covenant of salt

- And indeed, God gives Abijah and Judah a supernatural victory in this battle.

The men of Israel were subdued on that occasion, and the men of Judah were victorious because they relied on the Lord, the God of their fathers. (2 Chron 13:19)

Yes, relied on God, but God cannot and would not break his covenant of salt. He gave Abijah (not a great leader) victory because of that covenant.

What does the Bible say about Abijah:

1 Kings 15:3-4

He [Abijah] committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been. ⁴ Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and by making Jerusalem strong.

(This son of Abijah was Asa, whose heart was fully committed to the Lord. But for this son to come into being, Judah had to be victorious in this battle.)

Back to 2 Chron 13:

Abijah is invoking, and God is honoring, His “covenant of salt” with David to preserve David’s house (see 2 Samuel 7:8-16). And so God awards the underserving Abijah a tremendous victory to preserve the house of David.

Salt represents the permanence and incorruption of the Davidic covenant. And the ultimate fulfillment of that is David’s direct descendant: Jesus Himself (Luke 1:31-33).

God’s Covenant of Salt With You

Jesus is the connection between the COVENANT OF SALT in the OT; and COVENANT OF SALT he established with David; and the COVENANT OF SALT God has established with us as well.

Jesus had intimate and deep knowledge of the Scripture; as one commentator said: “if you cut Jesus, He literally bled scripture” (the Word became flesh, John 1:14). Jesus was also steeped in the Jewish traditions. He was well aware of the significance of salt and His references to it are pointed, precise and purposeful:

Matthew 5:13 - You are the salt of the earth

Mark 9:49-50 – Salt is good, have salt in yourselves

Luke 14:34-35 - Salt is good but if it loses its saltiness how can it be made salty again?

These references allude to the covenant of salt- Jesus knew what he was talking about – the repeated references to salt are intentional.

- 1) Our covenant of salt with God has elements of that eternal, loyal enduring friendship we started with, the “salt between us” that can describe the relationship between good friends.

That phrase is perfectly apt to describe our relationship with God

- Because we are in **relationship** with God;
- That relationship is eternal, enduring, permanent and cannot be broken.

Because of Jesus (that link/connection)

- We can go to directly to God as we would to our dearest friend
Matthew 27:51 says the curtain of the temple was torn in two, so can go directly to Him
- We can speak to God with ease and comfort as we would to our best friend
Hebrews 4:16 says we can approach the throne of grace with confidence
- This is very similar to how we conduct our relationships with our dearest friends as well.
- This is more than just a lofty theological concept. This salt between you and God has elements of the salt between friends. We do not need special occasions, ceremonial rituals or any kind of excuse. Relationship with God can be – and indeed He wants it to be - an everyday experience. He wants to engage in and nurture that relationship every day, all the time.

Jesus says to you: “Daughter, there is salt between us.”

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