

Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Covenants (Part 2 of 2)

René A. López

René A. López earned a B.A. from Trinity International University, where he also taught Old and New Testament Bible courses for three years. He received a Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary, where he is currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree. His email address is rema0612@verizon.net.

Introduction

In the first part of this article, the following conclusions were reached regarding the concept of the covenant: (1) Foundationally, *berit* (“covenant”) signifies a binding agreement between two parties. (2) The basic form of ancient Near Eastern covenants consists of six elements, which will be developed in this article in more detail. (3) The function of *berit* is basically that of an oath, commitment, or bond between two parties. (4) There existed two types of covenants in Israel, as well as in the ancient Near East. The promissory covenants bound the suzerain (master) to the vassal (servant) unconditionally. The obligatory covenants, also known as the suzerainty treaties, bound the vassal (servant) to be faithfully obedient to the suzerain (master). The historical implications of the similarities and differences between Israelite covenants and ancient Near Eastern covenants will be developed below.

Historical Implications of Old Testament Covenant Settings

Discoveries of the Mesopotamian and Hittite cultures, along with the Babylonian *kudurrû* and Syro-Palestinian and Neo-Assyrian documents, have shown that there are similarities between the structure of the ancient Near Eastern covenants and Israelite covenants.¹ Scholars have come to a consensus that the six elements mentioned in the previous article² form the basic treaty pattern used in the ancient Near East.³

The Hittite texts “exhibit a much more highly developed [treaty] form” than the rest.⁴ Furthermore, the Israelite covenants of Exodus,

CTSJ 10:1 (Spring 2004) p. 73

Deuteronomy, and Joshua 24 are patterned after the Hittite treaty form.⁵ Although some scholars have challenged this position,⁶ there remains a near consensus “about the [six] essential elements of standard Hittite treaty texts” analogous to Israelite treaty forms. [You must have a subscription and be logged in to read the entire article.](#)

[Click here to subscribe](#) visitor : : uid: ()