

# Praise The Lord For Covenants

*Old Testament wisdom for our world today*

By Captain Michael Ramsay



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I would like to especially praise the Lord for all of the assistance He provided to me through Major Stephen Court in this endeavour. – mr

## **What people are saying about 'Praise The Lord For Covenants'**

We make promises every day. So does God. With the rising of the Sun He promises His grace, provision and deepest love for each of us. In "Praise The Lord For Covenants," Captain Michael Ramsay convinces us that the covenants we consider are a holy obligation and fully strengthened by God's resolve to love us. The undeniable bond of our covenants with Him are relational. Read to be affirmed and aligned in your covenanted commitment in God.

**- Commissioner James Knaggs**

COVENANTS offers a properly high view of God and of a Salvationist's relationship with Him through the Soldier's Covenant. Readers may be provoked by some of the author's applications of Old Testament teaching to contemporary Christian living; if so, all to the

good! The book is rigorous and accessible and will be valuable for group and personal Bible study.

**- Commissioner Doug Davis**

Michael Ramsay has provided us with an easy-to-read explanation of the meaning of 'Covenant' in the Old Testament, and linked it strongly with the saving life and work of Jesus while applying biblical covenantal principles to the life and experience of Christian today. Salvationists everywhere will benefit from his years of study and the insights he has drawn from scripture and personal experience.

**– Lt. Col. Ian Barr**

It is simply impossible to fully grasp what it is to be a Salvationist without a solid understanding of what a covenant is and what the expectations and obligations are of those whose lives are bound by one. The terms, conditions, and behaviours a Salvationist willingly binds himself to as they sign any of the Army's covenants form the

night-and-day difference between the person who is a mere “member” of a congregation and a “blood and fire” Salvation Soldier. In ‘Praise The Lord For Covenants’, Michael Ramsay offers solid, basic instruction, along with helpful, relevant insights on the subject that should be read and embraced by all Salvationists.

– **Major Willis Howell**

Michael Ramsay gives some practical reflections on Covenant, which nails down things that otherwise tend to slip out of line. It’s helpful that there is so much discussion going on about things pertaining to our Wesleyan (and Biblical) roots.

– **Major Harold Hill** (author of ‘LEADERSHIP IN THE SALVATION ARMY: A case study in clericalisation.’)

I was grateful to have been provided with a draft of a Salvation Army approved book on “COVENANTS” written by Captain Michael Ramsay, with a request that I write a short endorsement of the book

before its publication, to help increase the profile of the release. My gratitude was related to learning that Captain Ramsay had spent several years in research and prayer and re-writing on the important topic of “covenants”, and my wanting to be aware of the foundation of knowledge he had established on the subject, which I hoped would lead to my own greater understanding of its biblical and historical background.

I trust that some of the thoughts that I gained in reading the draft will be helpful encouragements for others to study the book as well for their own further development in their understanding of the Old Testament covenants to which Captain Ramsay refers, and the specific covenants that he focuses on, having to do with marriage and Salvation Army soldiership and Salvation Army officership. Here are just a few quotations from the book that were especially helpful for my own thoughts about covenants and their importance to me as a Salvationist follower of the Lord: God is faithful to His covenants even when we are faithless; If we remain faithful to our covenant and

allow our Heavenly Father to put his arm around us we will find it easier to walk in step with our Lord; If we tie ourselves to God in a sacred vow and do not follow him closely, it's impossible to even finish, let alone win, the race and experience victory with Christ; God is more important than anyone else in the holy person's life. And then, linked with that last thought, but a thought that sums up everything else Captain Ramsay says in his book, is this – God comes first!

– **Colonel Earl Robinson**



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# FOREWORD

## **General Eva Burrows (Rtd)**

The only Salvationist book on *Covenant* I have read previously is the inspiring volume by the late esteemed Commissioner Ed Read entitled *Keepers of the Covenant* . This was published in 1995, so it is time for a further look at the subject so important to Salvationists who, above all else, are people of Covenant.

The writer of this slimmer volume, Captain Michael Ramsay, has been a passionate student both of Biblical covenants and Salvationist covenants, and we should be grateful to him for bringing us a 21<sup>st</sup> century view with thought-provoking insights.

He does a wide-ranging study of significant covenants in Scripture, not only the well-known covenants with Abraham, Moses,

Samson and others, but also lesser known examples such as the Nazirite vows, and the various covenants in the book of Judges. He draws out the significant elements or attributes that identify all covenants God makes with his servants, not only in the Old Testament but also with us today. Such elements as:

- A covenant has no expiry date;
- To keep covenant on our side is costly, demanding obedience and sacrifice;
- The Lord is faithful even if we are faithless;
- If a covenant is broken by man, God never renegs on his commitment of love;
- Our disobedience does not render the covenant void;
  - But thanks be to God, a broken covenant can be renewed;
- Covenants may seem impossible to keep, but our magnanimous God , on his side, promises his presence, and his power to keep us true to covenant;

- The breaking of binding vows of covenant is no trivial matter, often leading to devastating consequences, not merely for ourselves but for future generations.

In dealing with Salvationist covenants such as the Officer's Covenant, Soldier's Covenant and the Marriage Vows today, Ramsay reminds us of the privilege we have of entering into deep and rich covenant relationships with God which should never be taken lightly, or superficially. This is in contrast to the 'present age' when we live in a world where promises are easily broken, where contractual agreements are often disregarded, where divorce is common and vows ignored with a shrug of the shoulders. As soldiers we promise 'to make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world' the standard for our lives.

Should some readers have taken up this book thinking that 'covenant' is an out-dated word belonging to the Bible and the past,

they will quickly be made aware of its contemporary relevance for Christians, and for Salvationists in particular.

Read this book with your Bible in hand, and make some inspiring and challenging discoveries.

Eva Burrows  
General (Rtd)  
Melbourne  
August 2010

## PREFACE

### ABOUT THIS BOOK

### BACKGROUND

This short book has been a few years in the making. My first article on this topic was published in the December 2005 issue of the *Journal of Aggressive Christianity* (more commonly referred to as JAC). When I was encouraged by the editorial staff of JAC to consider writing a book, my initial thought was to simply produce a compilation of previously published articles on this topic. Others encouraged me to do further work in order to reduce the redundancy that is often evident when articles are published over time on the same topic. What follows is the result of much prayer, research, collecting, revising and updating previously published articles pertaining to various Old Testament covenants. Each chapter in this short book is based upon works previously published in Salvation Army periodicals. I have greatly appreciated the insights of the many people who have reviewed my work on this topic over the years. Thank you.

## PURPOSE

This book isn't meant to be an overwhelming discourse on covenantal theology. There are multitudes of voluminous works that have been published on this important topic over the years. I would particularly recommend Commissioner Edward Read's comments on this topic in 'Keepers of the Covenant': that book is both insightful and easy to read. 'Praise The Lord For Covenants' is meant to briefly examine some of the attributes of covenants made with or before the Lord. It is meant as a practical help for those of us considering entering into a covenant. It is my hope that this book will provide us with some real food for thought from various Old Testament covenants that still have a great deal of value for those of us living our lives as new creations on this side of the cross.



## CONTROVERSY

I have not shied away from controversy over the years; neither have I necessarily sought it. Covenants: this is a topic that can be a lightning rod for disagreement. There has been much controversy surrounding especially the marriage covenant in recent years. Politicians, clergy, media and others have had much to say about whether or not the State (or even the churches) should marry two people of the same gender: this topic has certainly contributed to some significant divisions in our society. In much of the western world about half of all marriage covenants end in divorce. In parts of Canada it is even more common for a person never to marry the other parent of one's children, even if the couple does continue to live together 'until death do they part'. These days it is not uncommon for various churches and Christian organizations to have as a part of their leadership team people who have been married twice or even thrice. Polygamy has even grabbed headlines relating to various Muslim

groups abroad and Mormon groups at home. This book does not explicitly weigh in on any of these controversies. This book does not intend to offer the final word on the topic of covenants but rather it is meant to further the discussion. It is meant as a resource for those who are considering entering into a covenant with or before the Lord. This book is meant to look at a few interesting passages about covenants in the Old Testament; examine what God, the author and/or the redactor may have meant by them and consider what applications these stories may have for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond.

## THEME

In examining the pericopes contained in this book, we have noted a couple themes that are common to the selected Old Testament passages:

- 1) It is very important for us to respect our covenants: be they marriage, Soldiership (Salvation Army membership) or other covenants that are made with or before the Lord.
- 2) God is faithful to His covenants even when we are faithless.

If you are convinced of these two things from reading these humble reflections and are able to apply them to the covenants in your own life then I believe that this short book has served its purpose.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

Over the years I have revisited and revised a number of the articles contained in this book. Out of respect for the office of the International Literary Secretary and *The Officer Magazine*, I have mostly left the articles that first appeared in that publication in their original form. These articles form the first 3 chapters of this book. The editorial staff of the *Journal of Aggressive Christianity* (JAC) has

been kind enough to give me a free hand to update the articles that were first published in their journal. Thank you.

I have always believed that one should draw one's opinions from Scripture examined in context. This often poses a challenge for those of us who feel directed by the Lord to write on a particular topic or theme. The way that I have attempted to address this problem is through a contextual-exegetical examination of a number of pericopes that address the topic at hand. In doing so I seek to learn what God has to say to us through these passages.

This book is not meant to be an exhaustive study. It is my hope that as I continue to research the beautiful topic of covenants that I will continue to be able to share my offerings with you in the years to come.

It is my prayer that the Lord will bless the reader of this book.

## PREFACE TO AN EARLIER ANTHOLOGY OF ARTICLES

The *Journal of Aggressive Christianity* addresses many important issues for Salvationists in today's world. JAC, drawing upon the rich tradition of our primitive Salvation Army, examines eternal truths within the context of the contemporary Salvation Army world. Contained in the following pages are a few of the insights on various covenants that have been included in its pages as well as a couple of introductory articles from *The Officer Magazine*.

I hope that the information included here will be of use to anyone considering entering into a covenant relationship be it as a Salvation Army soldier, officer, as a spouse, or any other contractual relationship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'M. Ramsay', written in a cursive style.

Captain Michael Ramsay  
The Salvation Army



-1-

COVENANT:  
THE THREE-LEGGED RACE.

The three-legged race is always fun to watch. Some people seem to run it with ease while others fall down and trip all over each other. I've seen dads tied to their kids who've simply picked them up and run with them without breaking the tie that binds. It is a lot of fun. The secret is that the winning couple is the pair who moves in sync with each other so that with every stride each matches their partner. Two independently minded people determined to do their own thing have no chance!

It is like that with covenants. The origins of the most commonly translated word for covenant (*Berit[h]*, used 286 times in the Hebrew Bible) refers to being bound, tied or even shackled together, not unlike the three-legged race.

We in the Salvation Army are a covenanted people. Our covenants are dear to us. They can certainly be one of our organisational strengths. General Clifton wrote in his third pastoral letter that our covenants are one of the main ways in which the Lord



chooses to provide opportunities for us to join him in his work for the salvation of the world. A covenant is more than a promise; it is more than a legal contract. It is a sacred covenant through which the Lord binds himself to us. Covenants are important.

Salvation Army soldiers pledge to uphold our movement's doctrine and, among other things, to abstain from all that can enslave the mind and body. We officers covenant to make soul-winning a primary focus of our lives. The Lord binds himself to us in these covenants. As Christians we are all yoked together with Christ.

Commissioner William Francis wrote in the Canadian *Salvationist* in June 2008: 'The key to upholding our sacred covenant is staying close to God, keeping faith with him.' This is significant and this relates very closely to the three-legged race.

Any of us who have ever been in such a race with our children – or years ago with our brothers and sisters or parents – will remember the challenges it represents. When one partner tries to move at a different pace than the other, neither goes anywhere very quickly.

I am sure I am not the only person who has fallen on the ground laughing as my partner has started heading in the wrong direction. It's difficult to move, let alone win the race, when the one you're yoked to is going in the opposite direction to you.

It's the same with our covenants. If we tie ourselves to God in a sacred vow and do not follow him closely, it's impossible to even finish, let alone win, the race and experience victory with Christ. Once we've committed to the race, we need to press on towards the goal and not give up. If we try to go our own way, our covenant is of little or no use to us or to our Heavenly Father.

If we move in step with each other, bound together, with our arm around our partner, relying on his strength, the race is easy and the child can often move even faster than if she were running on her own. If we remain faithful to our covenant and allow our Heavenly Father to put his arm around us we will find it easier to walk in step with our Lord. At times, often when things are most challenging, we

will find he is actually carrying us towards the finish line where we will celebrate victory in Jesus.

As we will mention a few times in this book, the Lord is faithful to his covenants even when we are faithless. However, when we rebel against our covenants, when we strain against the tie that binds, various difficulties arise: we certainly do not enjoy the full benefits of covenants the way we should. This has some interesting implications for those of us who enter into covenants with the Lord and this brings us nicely to the example of Samson. Samson was covenanted to the Lord for his entire life. He did not always live up to his covenantal responsibilities. I invite you to turn the page with me and find out what happened with Samson. Note: You may wish to read Judges 13-16 in your Bible first.



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COVENANT:  
THE EXAMPLE OF SAMSON.  
Judges 13-16

In his *Officer* article 'Till I Die' (November / December 2008), Captain Stephen Court made a good point about our soldier's covenant when he pointed out that it does not come with an expiry date. This is significant. We can't simply declare that we no longer feel called to be a soldier or that we no longer agree with every aspect of the covenant, then pick and choose which parts we adhere to and which we disregard.

I'm reminded of Samson. Samson was bound by a covenant without an expiry date (Judges 13:7), a covenant that he didn't even willingly enter into (Judges 13, see 1 Samuel 1, Luke 1, Leviticus 27:28, 29), a covenant that he either didn't like to obey or at the very least struggled to keep.

Samson, like a Salvation Army soldier, was not to drink nor was he to defile himself. He was a liar at times (Judges 16:7ff). He was a killer (see Judges 14:19); he visited prostitutes (Judges 16: 1); he put himself and others ahead of God at times (Judges 14: 17); he disobeyed his vows. Samson transgressed his covenant with God. But

the Lord did not forsake him (see Judges 16:22, Romans 3:3, 4).

Sometimes in his life Samson, like many of us, was better at following the Lord's direction than at others. At various times he was greatly used by God and experienced the great blessings that accompanied his covenant. Samson drew on the strength of the Lord and was used by God to accomplish His purposes. At other times Samson sinned.

Every time in his life that Samson turned to and drew on the strength of the Lord, the Lord delivered him. No matter what Samson did, the Lord did not leave him. He still reaped the benefits of his covenant with the Lord until one very significant day.

I'm sure it was a surprise to Samson, who had lied, visited prostitutes, sinned and transgressed his covenant in his life, that one day after the covenant made on his behalf by someone else had been violated by someone else (see Judge 16: 18), the Lord's strength of his covenant was not available to him (Judges 16:20).

Samson disobeyed his covenant and finally - after being given many chances - the Lord allowed him to experience consequences of

disobeying his covenant. Samson was blinded, bound and imprisoned (Judge 16:21).

But the story does not end there. This is significant. Samson did not fulfil his vow. Samson sinned. Samson disregarded his covenant. Because he did this, he suffered the natural consequences but the Lord did not release him from his covenant (see Judges 16:22).

God is faithful even when we are faithless. God did not forsake Samson. When Samson repented, turned to the Lord and drew on the strength of the Lord that was provided through his covenant, the Lord used Samson to save his people and Samson is now forever remembered as a hero of the faith (Hebrews 11).

This is important for Salvation Army soldiers and officers. We, like Samson, are bound to God through a covenant that does not have an expiry date before we die (see Romans 7:2, 3). As such, if we do not live up to our covenant, like Samson, we will find that we are not as effective as we could be and we will find that we will suffer the consequences of disrespecting our covenants.



However, no matter what we have done, no matter how far we have strayed, no matter how many times we have fallen short of our covenantal promises, while we are still alive there is still the opportunity to turn to the Lord (repent) and draw on our covenant and his strength.

This is one of the many benefits of covenant. Unless otherwise specified, we are bound to God until we die. As this is the case, rather than suffering the natural consequences of struggling against our vows, let us defend them with zeal and continue to draw on the strength of the Lord. Then, like Samson, we will surely see many people saved (in this example of Samson the Israelites were delivered from their oppressors: Judges 13:4; see also 14:5 and 16:23-31).

If we make a promise to or before God, He is true to our promise until it is fulfilled. This is really exciting. We saw that God was very patient with Samson. God always wanted him to walk in a proper covenant. He loved Samson. Samson still suffered the natural consequences of rebelling against this covenantal tie that will not

break. He was tied to God. God was going in one direction and Samson was going in another and it was disappointing that Samson made those choices. However, when Samson did change (repent) and call upon the Lord asking God to use him one last time for the Lord's purposes, the Lord did. Samson was used by God to deliver His people. It is the same with us. As long as we live God is always calling us back to covenantal faithfulness to Him.

On the next pages we are going to look at a specific portion of the Nazirite vow that Samson and others have taken. I think that you should find it very interesting. I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Numbers 6 and peruse it first.

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NUMBERS 6: HABEAS CORPUS AND  
COVENANT.

We Salvationists have sometimes been compared to the Nazirites of the Old Testament. The Nazirites, like us, are people bound by a covenant to the Lord. One aspect of their oath that obviously parallels our Soldiership Covenant is the promise to abstain from alcohol. (As is stated in the Soldiership Covenant, this action is a result rather than a cause of what we believe). Another parallel is that both Nazirites and Salvationists are easily identified as such. Salvationists have their uniform; Nazirites wore their hair long. A third aspect of the Nazirite vow which I suggest has applications for our soldiership covenant – though less immediately obvious – is their prohibition against contact with dead bodies.

Numbers 6:7 states specifically that the Nazirite is not to come in contact with a dead body, even if the deceased person is the Nazirite's own parent. The Nazirite is not allowed even to attend a funeral ceremony.

Ordinarily, the Israelites have important responsibilities pertaining to the passing of one's parents, even though it would make

them ceremonially unclean (Numbers 5:2, 19:11; Leviticus 21:1-3). But a Nazirite is not allowed to be unclean even for the sake of a parent (Leviticus 21:10-12). One had to choose between one's family responsibilities and one's responsibilities to God (see Leviticus 21:10-12; Matthew 10:35,12:22-48, 19:29; Mark 3:23-35, 10:29-30, 13:1-28; Luke 8:19-21, 14:25-26; John 19:27).

Here, then, is something to consider: God is more important than anyone else in the holy person's life. To the covenanted Nazirite and to the covenanted soldier, to the devoted spouse and to the fully committed Christian, God comes first. What good is it to gain the whole world and yet lose your own soul? (Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36).

It is important to note that there are consequences for not living up to our covenants, even if we transgress them by accident. Number 6: 9-12 are important verses for the Nazirite and, I suggest, equally significant for soldiers in The Salvation Army or anyone else entering into a covenant with the Lord.

If a person dies in the Nazirite's presence, the Nazirite is still guilty of sin. Even though the Nazirite did not mean to break his vow, it was still broken and he needs to be restored in his covenant relationship.

Numbers 9-12 (NIV): 'If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing—the seventh day. Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head. He must dedicate himself to the LORD for the period of his separation and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation.'

However, even though one is guilty of breaking a vow, the covenant remains in place. It is even renewed: the previous days do

not count; he or she gets a fresh start. This is important. The covenant remains until it is fulfilled. We are not released from covenants and vows simply for disobeying them. This is serious. The covenantal tie is not broken when we disobey God. Even when we are faithless, God is faithful (Romans 3:3,4). There are consequences for transgressing the covenant. There are natural results of not living up to our vows, our promises, our covenants with or before the Lord – but we are not released from them for simple disobedience. This is one of the notable aspects of covenants that we enter into with and before the Lord.

When we disobey our covenants there are consequences but He is still there for us. Until the successful completion of our covenants (if it has an expiry date) or until our death (if it does not) our covenants remain intact, binding us to the Lord (Romans 7:1-3).

Covenants that are made with or before the Lord are very important and there are many benefits to them. As far as the Nazirites are concerned, when they transgressed their covenant, God was still there for them. This is good news; God had such high hopes for them

that when they did slip up, He let them start over again. God wanted them to fully experience the blessing of successfully completing their covenant and they could. It is the same with us and this is a real blessing.

In the next few pages we will examine in detail one of the most significant areas of covenant and covenantal responsibilities for us today. The questions arise: what if someone makes two covenants with (or before) God that contradict each other; are we bound to keep both? What if we are tricked into making one of those covenantal promises? I would recommend that you have a read through Judges 2:1-5, Joshua 9, and 2 Samuel 21 as you reflect upon these questions.



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**RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF  
COVENANT - JUDGES 2**

Judges 2:1,2: The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.’ Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?”

This is a disappointing but significant passage from which to launch the stories of the Judges. Reading a few verses further (Judges 2:3-5) we learn why the Israelites and their allies suffer hundreds of years of oppression: the cycle of sin, enslavement, repentance, deliverance, and sin again repeats until Israel finally descends into civil war and anarchy. This whole downward spiral stems from one disobeyed promise, a disregarded covenant.

How we live in our covenant relationships has significant implications; our promises, our covenants are precious to God. The Lord promised His people that He would never break His covenant with them (Judges 2:1; see Leviticus 26:42-44, Deuteronomy 7:9). As

such, instead of being released from our covenants before the Lord simply for disobeying them (see Romans 7:2), there are often serious consequences that result from taking our covenants lightly (see Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13).

This is important for us as Salvationists to remember because we have the opportunity to enter into rich and strong covenant relationships with the Lord in the form of our Officers' and Soldiers' covenants (see Appendices II and III). It is important for all of us living in the new covenant era of the post-resurrection world and especially for those of us living in the so-called 'First World' where litigation, broken contracts, and divorces occur on a daily basis both inside and outside the churches. As Christians we should all know to what we are agreeing when we enter into a covenant with the LORD as either a partner or a witness.

## COVENANTS ARE GOOD.

Covenants made with and before God are good things. The Lord uses covenants to give us direct access to strength, security, and blessing. The Lord made a promise to Abraham (Genesis 12) that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him and this promise is ultimately fulfilled through Jesus Christ. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would occupy the land promised to him (Genesis 15). The Lord is keeps His word. He does not break His covenants. He is bound to us through His covenantal ties that will not be broken.

These ties are strong and trying to break them – like trying to snap out of iron shackles – will be unsuccessful and will naturally result in unpleasant consequences. Judges 2:3: “...you have disobeyed me.... Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them [the Canaanites] out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.” It is important for us to remember that

there are consequences that result from rebellion against our covenants.

The episode around this covenant referred to in Judges 2 is particularly interesting. It relates to the covenant of Genesis 15 and it refers also to the covenant experience of Joshua 9. God commanded Israel not to make a covenant with the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 20:16-18); God told the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites. (This was after the people of Canaan had graciously been given 400 years and still did not repent of their own sins, see Genesis 15:16.)

## THERE ARE NATURAL RESULTS OF REBELLION AGAINST COVENANTS.

The Israelites did not follow in a proper covenant - Joshua 9:3ff: "...when the people of Gibeon [who were Canaanites] heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse [they tricked them]: they went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded

with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and mouldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, ‘We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.’”

Notice that the Canaanites lied to Joshua and the Israelite leaders: the leaders were tricked when they made the treaty with the Canaanites (Joshua 9:15). They did not first discuss the matter with God and in making this covenant they disobeyed their earlier covenant with the LORD.

Betraying a promise to YHWH is not a trivial matter. In the book of Judges alone (and the breach of this particular covenant will come up again in other books: Joshua 9, 2 Samuel 21) generations of people suffer as a result of their forefathers’ broken promise to God. For hundreds of years their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and even more than that experience the consequences of continuing in rebellion against this covenant and this promise. The

natural results of not respecting our covenants with or before God - whether or not we are tricked into them, whether or not we consult God before we call Him as a witness (Joshua 9) - can be devastating. There are consequences for ignoring our covenants and betraying our promises.

#### A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE FROM THE MARRIAGE COVENANT.

This should be easily understandable for us because this same thing still happens in our world today. Think about the children who are raised in broken homes. Think about the children whose parents rebelled against their marriage covenants before God (See Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-14; Luke 16:16-16; Mark 10:1-12; Matthew 5:32, 19:9: You will note in these references that – even if one argues that you no longer need to cohabit with your partner in marriage – there is still no New Testament provision for marrying a second or

subsequent spouse while your covenant partner is still alive.) One is not released from one's covenants simply by disobedience to them. God takes all of our covenants seriously. There are consequences for not walking in a proper covenant.

Some of the consequences for rebelling against the marriage covenant through divorce are immediate and some of the immediate consequences are the struggles of how to raise a child in two separate homes with two separate sets of rules. Some of the immediate consequences are the challenges pertaining to the fact that the problems that led to the divorce were obviously never resolved: mom or dad still moved out. Some of the immediate consequences of disregarded marriage covenants are that children from broken homes are more likely to be 'latch-key kids' and less likely to have access to all the material and emotional support that their peers do. Some of the immediate consequences include the possibility that, at best, on any given night one may only receive a good night kiss from one of their single parents.



But there is more than that in our world today: there are consequences for future generations as well. Many people who get divorced once wind up getting divorced twice or even thrice. Children of divorce are more likely to be divorced themselves thus perpetuating the devastating cycle that contributes to generations and generations and generations going without the emotional, spiritual, and other support that only comes from strong marriage covenants.

This is sad because there is a great benefit from continuing in a strong covenant relationship but when we stray from it there are often devastating results. As one continues to read through the book of Judges, it becomes obvious that much misery comes as a direct result of the Israelites' disobedience to their covenants with the Lord. There are consequences for not walking in proper covenants.

## WE ARE NOT RELEASED FROM COVENANTS FOR BAD BEHAVIOUR.

Relating to the disobeyed covenant in Judges 2, we learn from Joshua 9 that the Israelites were tricked into making this covenant agreement with the Gibeonites (who are Canaanites). They didn't realize that in so doing they were defying their previous promise to God. They entered into this new agreement under false pretences. The Gibeonites lied to them but that doesn't change the fact that Israel is now bound through the covenant her leaders made with the Gibeonites before God (Joshua 9:18; Judges 2:2). The leaders themselves are well aware that they are bound to keep this covenant (Joshua 9:18). When the Israelites find out that they have been tricked, they don't nullify the agreement: they realise that it is not within their authority (or power) to do so; Israel does not attack the Gibeonites. They don't attack the Gibeonites because –even though they have been lied to, even though they have been tricked, even though they have been

deceived – they are still bound to God and the Gibeonites via this treaty. Simply disobeying a covenant does not render it void (see Numbers 6; Judges 2:1; Romans 3:3-4, 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-14; Luke 16:16-16; Mark 10:1-12; Matthew 5:32, 19:9). There are consequences for disregarding a promise but disobeying a promise made before God does not render that covenant void (Romans 3:3,4).<sup>1</sup> God says, through His angel, Judges 2:1: “I will NEVER break my covenant with you.” The covenant with or the covenant before God is not nullified; the ties are not severed just because one disobeys God.

There is another interesting point about the agreement that Israel enters into here (Joshua 9) setting the stage for the book of Judges. Israel enters into a covenant with God first (see Genesis 15:7-21; Exodus 34:12-13; Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13) and this covenant says that He will give them the land and that they will not

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<sup>1</sup> Notice that in a rare NT command attributed directly to God himself (1 Corinthians 7:10,12) – rather than being of human origin - even if a divorce is permitted, remarriage is not. Just because the original covenant is disobeyed does not mean it is rendered broken. It does not mean that one is released from it; God is faithful even when we are unfaithful (Romans 3:3,4). Cf. N.T. Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” p. 37. See also N.T. Wright, “The Law in Romans 2.”

make a covenant with the Canaanites: they will instead destroy the present inhabitants of the land. Then the Israelites –without consulting God– enter into the second covenant with the Gibeonites (who are Canaanites) promising that they will not destroy them and in the process Joshua and the Israelites disobey the first covenant agreement with God.

#### THE BOTH / AND OF COVENANT.

Israel is understandably held to its original agreement with YHWH. It is understandable that Israel suffers the consequences for disobeying God by making this competing covenant (Judges 2:2-3; see Exodus 34:12-13; Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13). What is interesting, however, is that the Israelites are also held accountable to this new covenant made before God with the Gibeonites even though they made it contrary to the expressed command of God (see 2 Samuel 21; Joshua 9, Exodus 34:12-13; Numbers 33:55; Joshua

23:13). The Israelites disobeyed God in making this second covenant but they are still held accountable to it. God holds them accountable to both covenants: the one that He initiated and the one that He forbade.<sup>2</sup>

In Judges 2 we read the consequences of breaking the first covenant with God and in 2 Samuel 21 we see the consequences the Israelites suffer for breaking the second, competing covenant with the Gibeonites many years later. God holds us to our promises. As is evidenced here, whether we are lied to, tricked, or even enter into a covenant that is against the Lord's commands, God holds us to our covenants that are made with Him either as a witness or as one of the parties Himself.

2 Samuel 21:1-5:

During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years [people die]; so David sought the face

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<sup>2</sup>There were natural and logical consequences for the Gibeonites after their deception as well. They were saved but, as per the earlier instructions of Moses (Deuteronomy 20:10-15; cf. Joshua 16:10; 17:13; Judges 1:28, 30, 33, 35), they became forced labour for Israel (Joshua 9:21).

of the LORD. The LORD said, “It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.” The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.) David asked the Gibeonites,

“What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the LORD's inheritance?”

The Gibeonites answered him, “We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” David asked.

They answered the king, “As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the Lord 's chosen one.”

So the king said, “I will give them to you.”

2 Samuel 21:13-15: “David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up. They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.”

Even though the Israelites disobeyed God by entering into this covenant with the Gibeonites (and suffered their due consequences for disobeying the terms of the covenant with God), when they transgressed the Gibeonite covenant - even though it was made against the expressed will of God - God did not even answer their prayers until they made it right.

## CONCLUSION.

I would like to reiterate and re-emphasise a couple of important things: One, God does not sever His covenantal ties that bind us to (or before) Him; two, He is faithful to His promises even if we are faithless (Romans 3:3,4). This is important for us to remember. We should not enter into our covenants lightly. I don't believe that God says we can simply declare (through the courts or otherwise) that our partner did not live up to the marriage covenant and so we are no longer married (see Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:10-14; Luke 16:16-16; Mark 10:1-12; Matthew 5:32, 19:9). I don't believe God says that simply because we disobey our Soldiership agreement we can throw out our covenant. I don't think the tie is broken. I don't think that God says that just because we decide not to be Officers anymore that we are released from our vow to 'make soul-saving the first purpose of our lives.' I think that this covenant referred to in Genesis 15, Joshua 9, Judges 2, and 1 Samuel 21 points to the fact that God doesn't break



His covenants with us and as such there are consequences if we try to break that tie that binds (see Chapter 5).

This brings me to another point of emphasis: covenants are not punishments; the consequences of rebellion against our covenants are the results of our own actions. As we have already pointed out, the origin of the Hebrew word for ‘covenant’ comes from a root word meaning, ‘to be shackled together’ (see Chapter 7). The image of a covenant then is of one being tied to God through a promise. One can compare a covenant with God (be it through marriage, Soldiership, Officership ...) to being seatbelted into a train (or SkyTrain or subway car or LRT), with God being the train. When we are belted in the train and ride comfortably in it – following the Lord’s leading - we wind up where He is going a lot faster and a lot easier than if we travel the tracks on our own strength. This is the benefit of a strong covenant with the Lord. However, once we are strapped in, if we try to go our own way or try to tie ourselves to something going in a different direction, it will not be a pleasant experience. The seatbelt doesn’t

break. Disobeying our covenants is like jumping out of the train and trying to run in the opposite direction while we are still belted to it. It is going to hurt but this is not God's fault. He doesn't throw us from the train and because God is faithful this covenantal tie is so strong that it won't break. What we suffer are the natural results of our own actions. This is what happened in the stories of the Judges. God, wanting the Israelites to experience the full rest of the Promised Land, entered into a covenant with Abraham and then with Israel. They willingly belted themselves into His train but later the Israelites also tied themselves to the Gibeonite train that was going in a different direction and they suffered the consequences of their actions. This is exactly what happens to us when we don't respect our covenants.

There is good news in all this though and this good news is a great strength for covenanted people: no matter how many times we are faithless and jump off that train; no matter how many times we try to break the covenant; no matter how many times we throw ourselves on the tracks, under the wheels of the 'God Train', the Lord is faithful.

While we are still alive there is opportunity to return to the Lord; the covenantal chain will not be broken (see Romans 7:1,2).

God is faithful and Jesus Christ himself is standing here as the new chain that binds all of us in our relationship to the Father. Jesus is the new covenant through whom whosoever may, will indeed be pulled back onto the train as we turn to the Lord. As this is the case, instead of rebelling against God and instead of pulling against the tie that binds, let us give our whole lives to the Lord. Let us buckle up, lean back and enjoy a fully sanctified ride on His train because His train is bound for glory.

A key point of this book to which we keep returning, is that God is faithful to His covenants even when we are not. Even if we go astray, He never stops calling us back to Him as long as we are alive. It is exciting that God does not give up on us and when we are bound to (or before) Him in a covenant as long as we live the tie does not break; the strength of that covenant is available to us should we decide to turn back to Him and follow in a proper covenantal relationship.

In the next chapter we will look at God's promise of the Good News that all of the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12:3). We know that this promise is fulfilled in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is exciting and we are going to examine in depth the ratification ceremony of the agreements that God makes with Abraham (Genesis 12-17) and the subsequent ramifications for us today.

WHEN GOD IS BOUND –  
GENESIS 15:17-21

*Since first writing this article in the Journal of Aggressive Christianity, I have re-read 'Keepers of the Covenant' by Commissioner Edward Read: he addresses in detail some aspects of this covenant that we are examining here. I do highly recommend that book to everyone who is exploring the topic of covenants.*

In our world today people seem to be entering into covenants less and less frequently and the ones into which we are entering are being taken less and less seriously. In the western world, of the ‘till death do we part’ vows that couples take before God half are broken. Apparently covenants are not being taken any more seriously by those in the churches than by those in secular society. This is distressing. For the Salvationist this should be even more alarming. I have heard testimonies of some Salvation Army Soldiers rebelling against their covenants by drinking, smoking, gambling, and I have seen many others who are obviously flirting with that ‘which can enslave the mind and body’ (see Appendix II). I think we may try to walk away from our vows too easily; I am not convinced that God actually lets the ties of covenant fall as easily as some might like. I am not convinced that simply declaring a covenant void in the courts or elsewhere necessarily releases us from our covenants with God. There are some very good results of living up to our covenants but there are

also consequences for disregarding our vows. Making a covenant is not a trivial matter.

If you refer to Genesis 15:7 – 21 you will see an extreme covenant. One that is possibly even more extreme than our Soldiership agreement. This agreement is a very significant one in that it relates back to the Good News of Genesis 12, where God promised Abraham that all nations of the earth will be blessed through him, and it looks forward to Genesis 17 where the symbol of circumcision is introduced (17:11). This sign of the covenant, circumcision, may be less noticeable than wearing a uniform; however, it is no less extreme!

One interesting thing about the ceremony recorded in Genesis 15 and the earlier promise God made to Abraham is that the promise includes us today even though neither we nor our western nations existed at the time of this agreement (see John 8, Mark 3, Luke 3, Romans 2). Genesis 12:3 is the first time that the Gospel, the ‘good News’ (that all the nations of the world will be blessed through Abraham), is presented in Scripture and it is here in Chapter 15 that

God ratifies the promises with a contract (v.18) and a strange but significant, symbolic covenantal act.

Now before we go any further we should be reminded of a point that was raised in a previous chapters in this book: The Hebrew word for covenant here is *berit[h]* and when it is used in the sense it is here, it designates the beginning or the end of a contract (for more on this see Chapter 7). One thing that is striking about this particular contract is that it is only one of three in the entire Hebrew Bible where God himself is bound; the other two are with Noah (Genesis 17, Numbers 25:12) and David (2 Samuel 23:5, Psalms. 89:3, 28-29; 110:4). The image is that of God binding himself through a promise to Abram. In so doing, not only is God bound to the promise but also He is bound to the consequence of a broken covenant. This consequence, as we shall see, is more extreme than the consequences of a either a wedding vow or a Soldiership pledge – the consequence of breaching



this covenant, as Commissioner Read and others point out, is in all probability death (cf. Jeremiah 34:18-20).<sup>3</sup>

Now let's take a look at the whole contractual ceremony because it is peculiar in Scripture. God asks Abraham to bring him a number of different dead animals of varying (and mostly forgotten) significance and He has Abraham cut many of them in half (Genesis 15:9). Abraham stays by these bodies guarding them from animals that want to eat them (v.11) then he falls asleep in a 'deep and terrifying darkness (v.12).' Abraham is terrified as the Lord approaches him and says, verse 13, "know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. Wow, this is 'good news'! (sarcasm) – Abraham is terrified (v. 12) and the Lord meets

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<sup>3</sup> Death is the penalty meted out to those who violate this ceremony the only other time it is recorded as being enacted in the scriptures: Jeremiah 34:18-29. See Sarna, *Genesis*, pp. 114-115, Terence E. Fretheim, *The Book of Genesis*, 446. See also John H. Sailhamer *Abraham and the covenant (15:1-21)* and Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Pradis CD-ROM: Second Samuel/Exposition of Second Samuel/II. Epilogue (21:1-24:25)/A. The Lord's Wrath Against Israel (21:1-14)*. Cf. also Commissioner J. Edward Read, *Keepers of the Covenant*. (Whitby, Ontario: J. Edward Read, 1995) p. 15.

him with the comforting words of, ‘your descendants will be slaves for 400 years.’

This is great (sarcasm) and there is even more good news. God tells Abraham that his family will be slaves (later those who enslave them will also be punished) and another people will be allowed to run wild in their promised land until their sin reaches its absolute full measure (v. 16). There will be 400 years of sin and 400 years of slavery and now, “when the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and walked between the pieces [of the dead animals]. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram... (Genesis 15:17,18)”<sup>4</sup>

This is interesting: the 400 years of sin and slavery are signs of the covenant. They are not the contract itself. This section highlights a portion of the covenant and that portion states that Abraham’s

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<sup>4</sup> The fire and the smoke are interesting symbols here. They cast the reader’s mind ahead to the fire and smoke with which God leads the Israelites out of Egypt and to this very Promised Land. Some will also notice the similarity to the pillars of fire that settled above the people’s heads in Acts 2, which may or may not be making reference to the Exodus and by extension this earlier passage as well.

descendants will eventually possess this land that he is on. And what is the sign that they will possess this land? The sign is that they will be in slavery for 400 years and Abraham will never even see this sign.<sup>5</sup>

We remember as well that this is one of the few times in Scripture where it is actually God who is bound by a covenant. Here it is ONLY God who is bound by the covenant. It is God (represented by a smoking firepot with a blazing torch) who walks between the

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<sup>5</sup> Compare this to Moses' sign that the LORD is speaking to him (Exodus 3:11-12) and the sign of the Lord's faithfulness re: the provision of his people around the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:19-20). The Holiness Code in Leviticus (esp. Leviticus 25), as well as the prophecy of Amos (esp. 3-4) and numerous other portions of scripture testify that the Lord was faithful in fulfilling this agreement but as the covenantal talks are re-opened with future generations who are looking for a permanent territorial blessing for their offspring, it is granted to them albeit with conditions (pertaining to fidelity and caring for the poor and the land) which they did not fulfill (see Genesis 18:19; 26:5; Amos 3:1-2; Leviticus 25:2; 26:34-35; see also N.T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," *Pauline Theology*, Volume III, ed. David M. Hay & E. Elizabeth Johnson, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995): 37.) The blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:3) that was offered through Abraham stands fulfilled to this day. Remember also that the messianic prophecies to David are not tied to the physical land (2 Samuel 7) in that, of course, they are ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Also pertaining to the descendants of Abraham, we should neither forget that God can raise up descendants of Abraham from stones if need be (cf. John 8:31-41; Hebrews 11:8-12) and indeed he does graft all the nations into the promises of Abraham (cf. Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8, John 8, Romans 11). There is also a certain irony in this covenant in that the promise that all nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12:3) is ultimately fulfilled when God (Jesus) dies.

halves of the dead animals – not Abram. This is interesting because in so doing God says that He will pay the consequence for the broken covenant. He says that He is bound and that He will pay for it and that He will pay for it with His own life. This is quite a serious ceremony and this ceremony has parallels in ancient customs and literature but only in Jeremiah (34:18-20) in the Scriptures is this type of a ceremony mentioned and there it says:

...all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.

If the covenant fails after this ceremony, the one bound by it dies (Jeremiah 34:18-20). This is serious and this is like the ceremony that God has voluntarily taken upon Himself. In Genesis 15 it is recorded that Abraham does believe YHWH (and the LORD reckoned

it to him as righteousness, Genesis 15:6) even before the Lord goes to these great lengths to bind himself to this promise. This is important: Abraham believes God even before God covenants up to even His own life. Abraham believes God that he and Sarah will have children and that they will inherit the promised land and then God makes this deal by which He may even risk His own life. Then Abraham, at his wife's insistence, has sexual relations with his wife's slave (Genesis 16:3) and she becomes pregnant.

This is reminiscent of earlier in Genesis. Back in Eden, Adam takes matters into his own hands at his wife's prompting and she blames the serpent (Genesis 3) and sin and death enter the world and here Abraham takes matters into his own hands and his wife, Sarah, blames God (Genesis 16:3) after God has just entered into this most serious covenant. God has put a lot on the line. In the contract He may be bound to die but instead of relying on God, Abraham takes matters into his own hands: just like Adam, just like the People of Babel (Genesis 11), and just like too many of us, I fear.

Well, what about us? Are we any more faithful to our covenants than Abram was with God's life on the line? Do we really avoid all that may enslave the mind, body, and spirit, or do we rationalize that our indulgences are fine whereas other people's indulgences may or may not be? Do we keep our vows before God about forsaking all others 'until death do we part' or do we pretend that God releases us from those vows as soon as we no longer wish to be bound?

Years ago, I met a lady and I felt the Lord prompting me to give her \$500; she, I was led to believe, needed the money to go up north and gain the custody of her infant son. I gave her the money: that was a lot of money for me in those days. I gave this stranger the money at what I felt was the Lord's prompting and she told me that she would meet me there again on a certain date with the money. That time comes and goes. I continue to frequent that place over the next few months still with faith. Each time, however, this faith intermingles with more doubts until it gets to the point that I am

considering calling friends of mine to track her down and retrieve the money. My thoughts drift from faith to frustration.

I also think of a friend of mine, a godly man, through whom the Lord has taught me much. Before I ever met him, he felt the Lord telling him to witness to one of his employees. He was to tell him the good news of Jesus Christ. He believed the Lord but he did not act on that faith and the next day he learned that his employee had died that very evening.

Remember the Israelites with Moses on the edge of the land promised to them by God. Ten of twelve spies returned saying that they were afraid; they didn't have faith that they would receive the land promised to them (Deuteronomy 1; Numbers 14). The Lord was angered by this and told them that because they did not act in faith their generation would not inhabit the land. In response the people rise early the next morning and say, "We know we have sinned, we'll go do it now" but it is too late. God is not with them and they are defeated by their enemies. There are consequences for faithlessness.

Abraham, righteous Abraham, in the text before us, now has chosen to act on his own instead of trusting God. God pledged His life so that we may have faith and faithfulness (see Romans 1-3) but we are faithless many times over and what is the consequence of our faithlessness? God dies. God is fettered and bound in this covenant with Abram. As a consequence of Israel's sin in the desert a whole generation dies outside of the promise and as a consequence of our sin today, God dies: Jesus dies on the cross.

We are not unduly compelled to make our covenants with and before God and God didn't need to make His promises to us. He didn't need to make His promise to Abram. Abram believed the LORD before God put His life on the line. However God did make this promise and an important characteristic of God, which we keep returning to in these pages, is that even if we do not follow through on our promises, He remains faithful. As we look ahead in our text from Genesis 15 we see that God is not unfaithful and in Genesis 21:2 it records that, "Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in



his old age, at the very time God had promised him.” So here it is- even though Abram may not have acted in a manner consistent with faith, ONLY God was bound here and as the covenant is fulfilled, God lives! God promised children to Abraham and God provided children to Abraham. God promised that his decedents would inhabit Canaan after 400 years of slavery and God provided that they inhabited the land after 400 years of slavery. Like the Apostle Paul says emphatically, centuries later, in his letter to the Romans, “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! (Romans 3:3,4; see Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:5, Hebrews 13:5).” No way. No! No! No! To repeat: God is faithful even and especially when we are not!

God promised Israel that they would inhabit the land and, even though they were faithless at the border, God still fulfilled this promise a generation later. My friend, who did not pray with his employee the night before his employee died, went on to be a pastor and never forgot the lessons the Lord taught him that night. My other

friend, the lady I met, just when I had almost given up hope that she would ever find me and return the \$500, she did and that's not the end of the story. Years later I came out of my house and there she was with her son. He was now 5 or 6. She knew our tenants and was visiting them. The Lord let me meet her son – the Lord let me see how He used His \$500 to help a child be raised by his mother. She, in her excitement at seeing me, grabbed her now school-aged son and said, “This is the man from the story I told you...” This child knows the stories of the miracles of God. Even though after I believed I had my doubts, the Lord used even me to do His will and He rewarded me in such a way that I will never forget it.

Isn't that the same for all of us? Jesus died on the cross because of our sin. Jesus died because of our faithlessness but God is true to His promises and Jesus is alive. Jesus rose from the dead! Jesus defeated death. He died for us and He rose again. Nothing we do can change that! Now all we need to do is not reject him; we can do that by remaining faithful and holy and by upholding our covenants. So

then let's not be like that generation of Israelites who rejected His invitation to the Promised Land and died outside of the promise. Let's not be like those who confess 'Lord, Lord' with their mouths but do not live up to their obligations. Covenants are important and God holds us to our vows; so instead of being faithless let us be thankful to God for His sacrifice, respect our covenants, and inherit the promise of eternal life.

Praise the Lord that He was true to His covenant with Abraham. Praise the Lord that He has shown Himself faithful to His eternal covenant even though humankind has been faithless many times over. Praise the Lord; He is faithful to his all covenants.

Genesis 12-17 addresses a covenant God made that affects all of humankind. In the next chapter of this book we are going to examine one that should strike a chord with anyone making a covenant in our society today: particularly a Salvationist. The Nazirite vow, which we looked at briefly earlier in this book, we will spend more time examining in the next chapter. As we do we will see that

there are a number of ways in which the Nazirite vow of the Old Testament (Numbers 6:1-21) is reflected in The Salvation Army's own Soldiers Covenant and that there are a number of provisions within this covenant that are significant for anyone who is considering entering into any covenant with or before the Lord.

NUMBERS 6:1-21: OLD TESTAMENT  
SALVATIONISTS?

*The speed reader who has read to this point in one sitting and the thorough reader who has tested the words written in this book against the measuring rod of Scripture will both note that I have included an earlier chapter on this same passage. The previous chapter highlighted the security that we who are bound in a holy covenant experience and the grace of God in granting us the opportunity to successfully complete the covenant, even in the face of challenges. The following chapter, while affirming the aforementioned, will explore the three primary concerns of the Nazirite vow and compare these to*

*our Soldiers' Covenant: abstinence from grapes, hair length, and the prohibition against contact with a dead body. We acknowledge that the scope of our Soldiership Covenant is much greater than these aspects of the Nazirite covenant but it does have some similarities and it is these similarities that are highlighted here. Where there is overlap with Chapter 2, I trust that you will find it useful and otherwise I would hope that you would forgive me for any redundancies.*

In The Salvation Army we have an opportunity to be separated for God through a wonderful covenant. Salvation Army Soldiers voluntarily take a significant oath. We enter into the Soldiership Covenant before God and this covenant that covers every aspect of our lives and is a wonderful tool to encourage us to be holy as the Lord our God is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15). There are a number of facets of our covenant that are similar to one recorded in

Numbers 6 through which the Lord greatly blessed the ancient Israelites: the Nazirite vow. The Nazirite vow was a special vow of separation unto the LORD and the LORD himself told Moses that if a man or woman wants to take this special vow of separation for the LORD then there are some things she must do (Numbers 6:1,2).

Before we discuss that, however, we should stop and reflect for a moment. Most of us, if we think about it, can probably name two or three famous people from the Bible who were bound to the LORD through this Nazirite vow: Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist. It will serve us well to keep these three in mind as we think about the Nazirite vow, recognizing that there are two key differences between the vows of these three and the typical Nazirite's vow:

- 1) None of these three people - Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist - entered into the covenant of their own accord;
- 2) These covenants made on their behalf bound them for their entire life.

This is different from most times a Nazirite vow was made: in general, the Nazirite vow was voluntarily entered into (by both men and women) for a specified period of time (Numbers 6:4). The fact that the Nazirite vow is typically not life-long marks a key difference between it and The Salvation Army Soldier's covenant as well as the Christian marriage covenant.

## GRAPES

Recognizing that the scope of the Soldiership Covenant is so much larger than the Nazirite vow, the Nazirite's covenant, as outlined in Numbers 6, is nonetheless very interesting for Salvationists as it does have some important similarities to our Soldiership vows that are taken before the Lord. Similar to the Soldier, the Nazirite "must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other



fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins” (Numbers 6:3,4).

As many of us know, Salvation Army Soldiers, as a result of our beliefs and our mission, also do not drink. We swear that, we “will abstain from alcoholic drink...and all else that could enslave the body or spirit” (see Appendix II). Abstaining from alcoholic drink is common to both the Nazirite and the Soldier. You can see how this would be beneficial for setting one apart for the Lord. In The Salvation Army, when God raised us up in London’s East End over a century ago, alcohol was one of the primary things that the Enemy was using to enslave people. They would even serve drinks to young children. We were separated from that societal evil of alcoholism for God.

Today, we can see how much good God can do in delivering people from alcohol still. I know that I have heard more than one

exciting testimony from people who have actually found God through the Alcoholics Anonymous programme. The first seven steps that they take in enjoying sobriety are as follows:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

In order for us to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him, we need to seek Him and when one truly seeks out God, He promises that we will find Him (Matthew 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10; see also Matthew 6:33). One friend of mine recounts frequently at AA meetings how when he told a priest that he didn't believe in God the priest asked him, "Well, what if God didn't believe in you?" This gave my friend some food for thought and he – like so many others through AA – came into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as he began his life of separation from alcohol.

There is much more than abstaining from alcohol to the Soldier's Covenant likewise there is more to this aspect of the Nazirite vow. This separation from alcohol for the Lord is part of the covenant but there is much more than that. The Nazirite is not permitted any grapes – not just fermented grapes- so *Welch's* grape juice is out of the picture as well as those little packages of *Sun-Maid* raisins that so many kids have in their lunches. Many people can easily find reasons

why one might want to abstain from alcohol for a time (at least) but why would one want to abstain from raisins, grapes, grape juice, etc.?

Grapes were generally seen as frivolous for the Israelites. They were seen as extra. They were dessert while they were in the desert (as they were in the book of Numbers). No one needs to drink grape juice; we can just drink water. This is reminiscent of the primitive Salvation Army. In the old days we were not allowed to wear earrings (see 1 Timothy 2:9) or even engagement rings. I have been told that Soldiers weren't even allowed to have a feather in their hats. These we seen as frivolous; they weren't necessary so why would we want to spend the money that God has given us stewardship over on something as frivolous as a feather or an engagement ring? In the Army today we have moved away from that and both my wife and I wear rings and many years ago I wore an earring as well (see Exodus 32:2-3, 35:22; Numbers 31:50; Judges 8:24). These days I know many good Salvationists who even have tattoos that they have received after they became Soldiers (see Leviticus 19:28)!

That being said, we do come back to our roots of self-denial for a time each year. During the Lenten season, The Salvation Army concentrates on missions and we used to even call this season ‘Self-Denial’. It is when we put aside money that we would normally spend on dessert, going out for dinner or renting a movie, for example. We are – for this season at least – to deny ourselves, take up our cross in this way for Jesus and His mission (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, see Luke 14:27). This self-denial is similar to the first part of the Nazirite vow.

## UNIFORM, LONG HAIR

The second condition of the Nazirite vow refers to the hair. Nazirites were not supposed to cut their hair for the whole time that they were separated from society for God. We, of course, are all familiar with the story of Samson (Judges 13-16; see Chapter 2). His haircut was the straw that broke the camel’s back. He strained against

his covenant more than once in his life but it was when he provided for his hair to be cut that the strength of his covenant was no longer available to him – for a time. This part of the vow is certainly noticeable, as the bulk of the Israelite men at this time wore their hair short. People separated for the Lord would let their hair grow long (Numbers 6:5; see Leviticus 21:12, 2 Samuel 14:25-26). It is a distinctive feature of their vow. The Nazirite would intentionally stand out, drawing attention to the fact that he is separated; he is holy unto the LORD.

This is similar to The Salvation Army uniform. We are noticeable when we are in uniform and if people know anything about the Soldiers' Covenant then they know that we are separated from a number of societal behaviours – all that can 'enslave the body or spirit' – specifically for God. They know we are separated for God. When in uniform, we are immediately recognizable to someone who finds himself in need of help from a servant separated for God. This has been an exciting part of ministry for me. I have literally had

people running up the street behind me yelling ‘Captain, Captain!’ and even ‘Priest! Priest!’ The uniform was also very helpful when offering emotional and spiritual care after Hurricane Ike struck Galveston Island in Texas and immediately following the explosion that hit Nipawin in Saskatchewan. After the latter tragedy, a number of evangelical pastors in the town lamented that they did not have some sort of uniform (like ours) to show themselves as distinct, separated for God. The uniform, like the Nazirite’s long hair, is a way that people can know that indeed we have been set apart; we have been made holy for God.

This is of course what holiness is: it is a setting apart, a separateness for God. Therefore when we don our uniforms, as every soldier in The Salvation Army is eligible to do, we are easily recognisable to people as an instrument of hope. When we are in uniform - as well as at all other times – let us strive to be holy as the Lord our God is holy (see Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7-8; 26; 1 Peter 1:15).

## HABEAS CORPUS?

A third aspect of the Nazirite vow, which I examined in detail in Chapter 3, that I would like to explore even more here, is their prohibition against contact with dead bodies. I believe that this has some valuable though less immediately obvious applications for our Soldiership Covenant.

Numbers 6:7 states specifically that the Nazirite is not to come in contact with a dead body, even if the deceased person is the Nazirite's own parent. The Nazirite is not allowed even to attend a funeral ceremony.

Ordinarily, the Israelites have important responsibilities pertaining to the passing of one's parents, even though it would make them ceremonially unclean (Numbers 5:2, 19:11; Leviticus 21:1-3). But a Nazirite is not allowed to be unclean even for the sake of a parent (Leviticus 21:10-12). One had to choose between one's family



responsibilities and one's responsibilities to God (see Leviticus 21:10-12; Matthew 10:35,12:22-48, 19:29; Mark 3:23-35, 10:29-30, 13:1-28; Luke 8:19-21, 14:25-26; John 19:27).

Here, then, is something to consider: God is more important than anyone else in the holy person's life. To the covenanted Nazirite and to the covenanted Soldier, to the devoted spouse and to the fully committed Christian, God comes first. What good is it to gain the whole world and yet lose your own soul? (Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36).

It is important to note that there are consequences for not living up to our covenants, even if we transgress them by accident. Number 6: 9-12 are important verses for the Nazirite and, I suggest, equally significant for Soldiers in The Salvation Army or anyone else entering into a covenant with the Lord.

If a person dies in the Nazirite's presence, the Nazirite is still guilty of sin. Even though the Nazirite did not mean to break his vow,

it was still broken and he needs to be restored in his covenant relationship.

Numbers 9-12 (NIV): ‘If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing—the seventh day. Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head. He must dedicate himself to the LORD for the period of his separation and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation.’

Even though one is guilty of breaking a vow, the covenant remains in place. It is even renewed: the previous days do not count; he or she gets a fresh start. This is important. The covenant remains until it is fulfilled. We are not released from covenants and vows simply for disobeying them. This is significant. The covenantal tie is not broken when we disobey God. Even when we are faithless, God is faithful (Romans 3:3,4). There are consequences for transgressing the covenant. There are notable results of not living up to our vows, our promises, our covenants with or before the Lord – but we are not released from them for simple disobedience. This is one of the significant aspects of covenants that we enter into with and before the Lord.

When we disobey our covenants there are consequences but He is still there for us. Until the successful completion of our covenant (if it has an expiry date) or until our death (if it does not) our covenant remains intact, binding us to the Lord (Romans 7:1-3).

## SEATBELTS AND CAR INSURANCE

Covenants in this way are like car insurance. One spring when my daughters and I were coming home from Tisdale, we were driving that highway like we did a couple of times every week when all of a sudden we hit black ice. We swerved into on-coming traffic then off our side of the road where the car proceeded to flip: it rolled over a time and a half. We did not see the accident coming and therefore could do nothing to prepare for it anymore than a Nazirite could prepare for someone suddenly dying in his presence. Even though the police investigators admitted that there was nothing we could do to avoid the accident, I guarantee you that the insurance company declared that the accident was our fault. This is the same with the Nazirite. YHWH Insurance, so to speak, declares that they are ‘at fault’ and demands payment. In this case the payment is their hair and as far as their clean driving record is concerned, they are required to

start over – but the insurance isn't cancelled. Similarly when any of us run into trouble our covenant isn't cancelled; it remains in place to protect us.

Covenants are also like seatbelts. In the car accident our seatbelts did not break. Even though the car was totalled, the seatbelts held. This is similar to our covenants before the Lord. Sometimes an alcoholic makes a mistake and has a drink. Sometimes a husband does not operate perfectly as a loving husband. Sometimes we might sin before the Lord and sometimes our lives just come crashing down around us. Likewise, when my car rolled there was that moment of panic as I looked back to see if my daughters were all right. To my relief they were safe and sound (even though we were all hanging upside down after the accident). We were all right because the Lord protected us through our seatbelts that did not break. We were safe and sound and soon restored to our normal life. For all of us when our lives come crashing down around us, we will be safe and sound as long as we rely on the strength of our holy seatbelt - our covenant

with the Lord. The Lord will not let His covenants break no matter what happens to the automobile of our life.

In our world today we know that Jesus died on the cross because of our covenantal unfaithfulness. Jesus died for our sins. But did Jesus stay dead? No. Jesus rose from the grave defeating sin and death and whosoever of us believes in him does not need to perish. As long as we are alive he is calling us to him and he is calling us back to him. As long as we are here, he is calling us to eternal covenantal salvation and eternal covenantal holiness. He is here now inviting us to join him, return to him, or grow closer to him (as the case may be) in an eternal covenant of everlasting life.

Therefore, when our lives come crashing down around us, we will be safe and sound as long as we rely on the strength of our holy seatbelt -our covenant with the Lord- because the Lord will not let His covenant with us break no matter what happens to the automobile of our life. So then, let us enjoy the security of this holy seatbelt and, like the ancient Nazirite, through our covenants, let us rely fully on His

strength rather than our own so that we may indeed be holy unto the LORD even as the LORD our God is holy.

It is wonderful that we serve a holy God who wishes us to be holy as He is holy. It is wonderful as well that He gave His life for us so that we may serve Him for always and forever. Covenant is certainly a seatbelt that binds us to His salvation. As this is the case I thought it fitting that the next chapter of this short book should concentrate on the actual meaning of the most common word for covenant in the Hebrew Bible (Berit[h]) as this word itself means to be strapped in, tied or bound.





## BERIT[H]

*This short chapter is a transition between the book and the appendices. It more fully explains the meaning of the most common word for 'covenant' in the Bible. It is my hope that the detail contained in this short piece can add a greater appreciation to the earlier chapters in this book.*

Covenant is obviously an important concept in The Salvation Army with full membership requiring a signing of the Soldier's Covenant. It is also a very important idea in the Old Testament. The word 'testament' itself can be translated as covenant! *Berit[h]* is the most common term translated as 'covenant' in the Hebrew Bible: it appears 286 times thus proving it an extremely important word.<sup>6</sup>

The origin of this word is not entirely conclusive. It is a form of the word *brh*, which refers to the meal that accompanies the covenantal ceremony. *Brh*, however, is not the usual verb to indicate eating so this origin is not the most likely. *Berith* is identical to the Akkadian word *birit* which means "between" or "among" so that is a possible origin. Most probably though, *berith* comes from the Akkadian word *biritu*, which means "to fetter". This term designates the establishment or breach of a contract.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G.E. Mendenhall. "Covenant." In *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by George Arthur Buttrick. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1962), 715.

<sup>7</sup> M. Weinfeld. "berith." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck. (Stuttgart, W.Germany: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), 253-254; Cf. G.E. Mendenhall, 715.

As this root, *biritu*, suggests the original Hebrew meaning of the word would imply more of an imposition of terms rather than an agreement or settlement between two parties. Covenants are commanded (Psalm 111:9; Judges. 2:20) and can be seen as the same as a law or commandment (see for example: Deuteronomy 4:13; 33:9; Isaiah 24:5; Psalm 50:16; 103:18). The "covenant at Sinai in Exodus 24 is in its essence an imposition of laws and obligations upon the people (vv. 3-8)."<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of classifications of the various types of OT covenants that can be made: secular (where God is not one of the parties involved), covenants in which God is bound, and covenants in which Israel is bound.

Covenants where God is not one of the parties involved can be further classified as suzerainty, where a superior binds an inferior to terms the superior sets (1 Samuel 11:1; Hosea 12:1; Job 41:4, 5:23.); parity, where each party is bound by oath (Genesis 21:25-32, 26:27-

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<sup>8</sup> M. Weinfeld, 255

31, 31:44-50; Joshua 9:3-27; 1 Kings 5:12, 20:34); patron, where a superior binds himself for the benefit of an inferior (Isaiah: 28:15); promissory, which guarantees future performance of stipulated obligations (2 Kings 11:4-12,17; 2 Kings 23:3; Jeremiah 34:8; Ezra 10:3; Nehemiah 5:11-13, 9:38, 10:28-29).

Covenants where God, himself, is bound include the covenant with Noah (Genesis 17, Numbers 25:12), the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15, 17:1-14), and the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 23:5, Psalms 89:3, 28-29; 110:4).

The covenants where Israel is bound include the Mosaic covenant (see the Ten Commandments, Deuteronomy 27-28), the covenant of Joshua (Joshua 24), the reform of Josiah (2 Kings 23), and the covenant of Ezra (Nehemiah 9-10).

Covenants then can be made voluntarily or involuntarily, with or without obligation, and between equals, or superiors and inferiors; *berith's* origin is uncertain but it is probably derived from *biritu*, which means "to fetter".

So, who cares? Well, the Salvationist, I suppose, or more importantly the person contemplating a 'covenant' relationship with God. When you sign your covenant you are fettered, shackled, and bound. This chain cannot easily be broken. If it is, there are repercussions. So for potential Salvationists (and spouses), they should ask, "Is this the star to which God has asked me to hitch my wagon?" and for the Salvationist who tends to take the terms of the covenant lightly, remember that it is difficult to move when the one you are yoked together with is going in the other direction...BUT when you are following in a proper covenant, His yoke is easy! And really what can you accomplish on your own that won't be accomplished much more easily and effectively if you are shackled to the LORD!



## AFTERWARD: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Covenants are special to the Lord. It is through His covenant that He made with humanity that whosoever may, will indeed be saved. Jesus died on the cross completing the old covenant and rose from the dead ushering in the new covenant that is now written on our hearts.

Our salvation is a direct result of God's covenantal faithfulness. Our continuance in a state of salvation is reflected in our own covenantal faithfulness. We praise the Lord for the fact that He is faithful even when we are faithless.

It is my hope that this short book containing some brief thoughts on covenant will remind us that as we are bound to the Lord in a Salvific covenant that indeed we can be holy as the Lord is holy. It is my hope that the Lord will use this book to encourage us all to take advantage of that both for eternity and for here and now as well. How we operate in our covenants that we have entered into with or before God is indeed a reflection of our own state of salvation.

If we move in step with our Lord, bound together in a holy covenant, relying on His strength, life's race is easy and we can move even faster and more effectively than if we are moving on our own. If we remain faithful to our covenants we will find it easier to walk in step with our Lord. And, like in the three-legged race, at times, often when things are most challenging, we will find the Lord is actually carrying us towards the finish line where we will celebrate the victory in Jesus.

Praise the Lord!



# APPENDICES

## **ARTICLES OF MARRIAGE**

We do solemnly declare that we have not sought this marriage for the sake of our own happiness and interests only, although we believe these will be furthered thereby.

We promise that we will not allow our marriage in any way to lessen our devotion to God and our service in The Salvation Army.

We promise that we will use all our influence with each other to promote our constant and entire self-sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

We promise to make our quarters (home) a place where all shall be aware of the abiding presence of God and to train those under our influence for faithful service to Him in the Army.

We promise never to allow the cause of God to be injured or hindered in any of its interests without doing our utmost to prevent it.

We promise, should either of us from sickness, death or any other cause cease to be an efficient soldier, that the remaining one shall continue to the best of his or her ability to fulfil all these undertakings

## **SOLDIER'S COVENANT**

Having accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and desiring to fulfil my membership of His Church on earth as a soldier of The Salvation Army, I now by God's grace enter into a sacred covenant.

I believe and will live by the truths of the word of God expressed in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith:

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God; and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.

We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead - the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost - undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human

natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness; and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has, by His suffering and death, made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation. We believe that we are justified by grace, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be

preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked.

I will be responsive to the Holy Spirit's work and obedient to His leading in my life, growing in grace through worship, prayer, service and the reading of the Bible. I will make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world the standard for my life.

I will uphold Christian integrity in every area of my life, allowing nothing in thought, word or deed that is unworthy, unclean, untrue, profane, dishonest or immoral.

I will maintain Christian ideals in all my relationships with others; my family and neighbours, my colleagues and fellow salvationists, those to whom and for whom I am responsible, and the wider community.

I will uphold the sanctity of marriage and of family life. I will be a faithful steward of my time and gifts, my money and possessions, my

body, my mind and my spirit, knowing that I am accountable to God. I will abstain from alcoholic drink, tobacco, the non-medical use of addictive drugs, gambling, pornography, the occult and all else that could enslave the body or spirit.

I will be faithful to the purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to Him, and in His name caring for the needy and the disadvantaged.

I will be actively involved, as I am able, in the life, work, worship and witness of the corps, giving as large a proportion of my income as possible to support its ministries and the worldwide work of the Army.

I will be true to the principles and practices of The Salvation Army, loyal to its leaders, and I will show the spirit of salvationism whether in times of popularity or persecution.

I now call upon all present to witness that I enter into this covenant and sign these articles of war of my own free will, convinced that the love of Christ, who died and now lives to save me, requires from me

this devotion of my life to His service for the salvation of the whole world; and therefore do here declare my full determination, by God's help, to be a true soldier of The Salvation Army.



## **OFFICER'S COVENANT**

MY COVENANT

CALLED BY GOD

to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as  
an officer of The Salvation Army

I BIND MYSELF TO HIM IN THIS SOLEMN COVENANT

to love and serve him supremely all my days,

to live to win souls and make their salvation the first purpose of  
my life,

to care for the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, love the  
unlovable, and befriend those who have no friends,

to maintain the doctrines and principles of The Salvation Army,  
and, by God's grace to prove myself a worthy officer.

Done in the strength of my Lord and Saviour, and in the presence of  
(the following wording to be adapted to local circumstances) the  
Territorial Commander, training college officers and fellow cadets.