

Prayer

Lord of creation, time, and eternity, we praise You for revealing to us Your presence, power, and grace, and Your will for our lives. We are Yours because You have made us Yours. Enlighten us through Your Word and Holy Spirit to understand that, although we are fallen, You have raised us up. Inspire us to know that we have no cause to boast about having come to faith, but every cause to praise You for having brought us to faith. Grant us discerning minds to know that Your Good News points to who You are, and to what You have done for us. Inspire us to seek at all times to walk through life as You would have us walk. Empower us to share Your eternal truth with those near and far. We ask all this in the name of Your Son, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Read Exodus 19,20

Unit 8 draws on insights provided by archaeologists during the past century—discoveries indicating that covenants of various kinds were used extensively in the Ancient Near East. Of particular interest to Bible students are the Hittite Suzerainty (or Vassal) Treaties. In these treaties, a powerful ruler makes a treaty with a vassal (one who is not *equal* but *inferior*), and imposes certain obligations on him.

8A 1 If you were to enter into an *agreement* with a family member, or colleague at work, would you expect to determine all the contents of the agreement yourself?

An agreement is drawn up by two parties. Both participate in determining its contents.

2 If the president or royal ruler of a nation wanted to establish a relationship with you, would you expect that person to seek your opinion as to how things should be between you?

Hardly. It would be a one-way affair.

3 Use your answers to the above questions to explain the difference between the two covenants depicted in **ILLUSTRATION 8A**.

8B Study the structure of the Hittite treaty depicted in **ILLUSTRATION 8B**, and make an effort to memorize its six chief parts. The benefit of doing this will emerge in 8C.

8C Study the biblical passages listed below. What are the similarities between an ancient Hittite Suzerainty Treaty and the covenant God made with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai?

1 **Preamble:** Exodus 20:2a; 34:6,7a

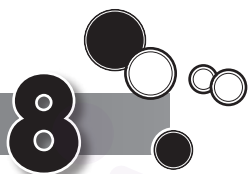
2 **Historical prologue:** Exodus 20:2b

3 **Stipulations:** Exodus 20:3–17; Deuteronomy 5:7–21

4 **Preservation and Re-reading:** Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:13; 31:9,24–26; 6:6–9; 31:10–13

5 **Witnesses:** Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; Joshua 24:22,27

6 **Blessings and Curses:** Exodus 23:20–33; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 27:15–26; ch. 28; Joshua 8:34



8D Use what you have learned about covenant formulations to show the difference between the covenants God made with:

1 Abraham

God made the covenant with Abraham. He did not seek input from Abraham concerning its contents. The contents of the covenant had to do with promises God made to Abraham. No reference is made to commandments Abraham is to obey.

2 The Israelites at Mt. Sinai

In this covenant, God introduces Himself, then makes reference to what He has done for His people in the past, and then gives the Israelites commandments (or guidelines) for living as His people. Although this covenant makes no reference to future promises, it does point out the “blessings” the Israelites will experience if they obey the commandments listed, and the “curses” that will overtake them if they do not obey them.

8E This section provides additional information about the similarities between a Hittite Suzerainty Treaty and the Sinai Covenant.

8F Recent archaeological discoveries reveal the similarity between the covenant God made with Abraham and that of an ancient Royal Grant Treaty.

- The ruler making a Suzerainty Treaty places the *vassal* under obligation to *himself*.
- The ruler making a Royal Grant Treaty places *himself* under obligation to the *vassal*.

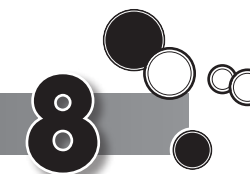
Discuss the difference between these two treaties.

The differences are dealt with in the explanatory notes for this section. In a Royal Grant Treaty, the vassal was seen as the beneficiary of the ruler’s generosity. The ruler states what he will do for the vassal.

8G Each item below is dealt with in the explanatory notes for 8G in the *Crossways Section 1* manual, pages 112,113.

Dig into and discover what the Bible has to say about the following:

- 1** The covenants God made with Phinehas (Numbers 25:10–13) and David, 2 Samuel 7.
- 2** The covenant God made with Noah, Genesis 9.
- 3** Ceremonies conducted when making and sealing a covenant, Genesis 15:7–21; 26:20.
- 4** Ceremonies to ratify a covenant, Exodus 24:1–8; 24:9–11.
- 5** Ceremonies observed to renew a covenant, Joshua 8:30–35; 24:1–28.
- 6** Ceremonies designed to heal the breach of a covenant, 2 Kings 23:1–3.
- 7** Ceremonies held when transferring power from one leader to another, 1 Samuel 12; 2 Kings 11:17–20; 2 Chronicles 23:16–21.



8 The ways God’s covenant with Abraham continued to give the Israelites hope, 1 Chronicles 16:14–18, 29:18; Micah 7:20.

9 The manner in which the ancient prophets used the covenant made at Sinai to warn their hearers of impending doom, Isaiah 1:2–4; Micah 6:1–8.

10 Ownership of the Holy Land:

Deuteronomy 4:25–28

Deuteronomy 5:32,33

Deuteronomy 11:13–17

Deuteronomy 28:15–68

Leviticus 25:23

Jeremiah 2:7

Hosea 9:3

Questions to ponder

1 In one segment of a made-for-TV movie titled *The Ten Commandments*, Moses passionately urges the Israelites to take seriously their “bargain” with God. How do you feel about the use of the term “bargain” in relation to the Sinai Covenant?

In relation to the Sinai Covenant, the term “bargain” is incorrect and inappropriate. God did not seek input from the Israelites when making the Sinai covenant. He defined the way things were to be between Himself and the Israelites.

2 A painful conflict has raged in the so-called Holy Land for many decades. Many Christians argue that support must be given to Israel because God gave them the land of Israel *forever*.

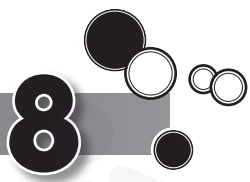
a. What is your opinion?

Passages such as Deuteronomy 28:15–68 state that, if the Israelites ignore the stipulations of the Sinai Covenant, the covenant curses will overtake them and they will lose the Holy Land (God’s property). God has not given ownership of any land to any person or nation. We humans are merely tenants on Planet Earth.

b. According to Leviticus 25:23, Jeremiah 16:18, and Hosea 9:3, who owns the “Holy Land”?

God owns the Holy Land—and all lands.

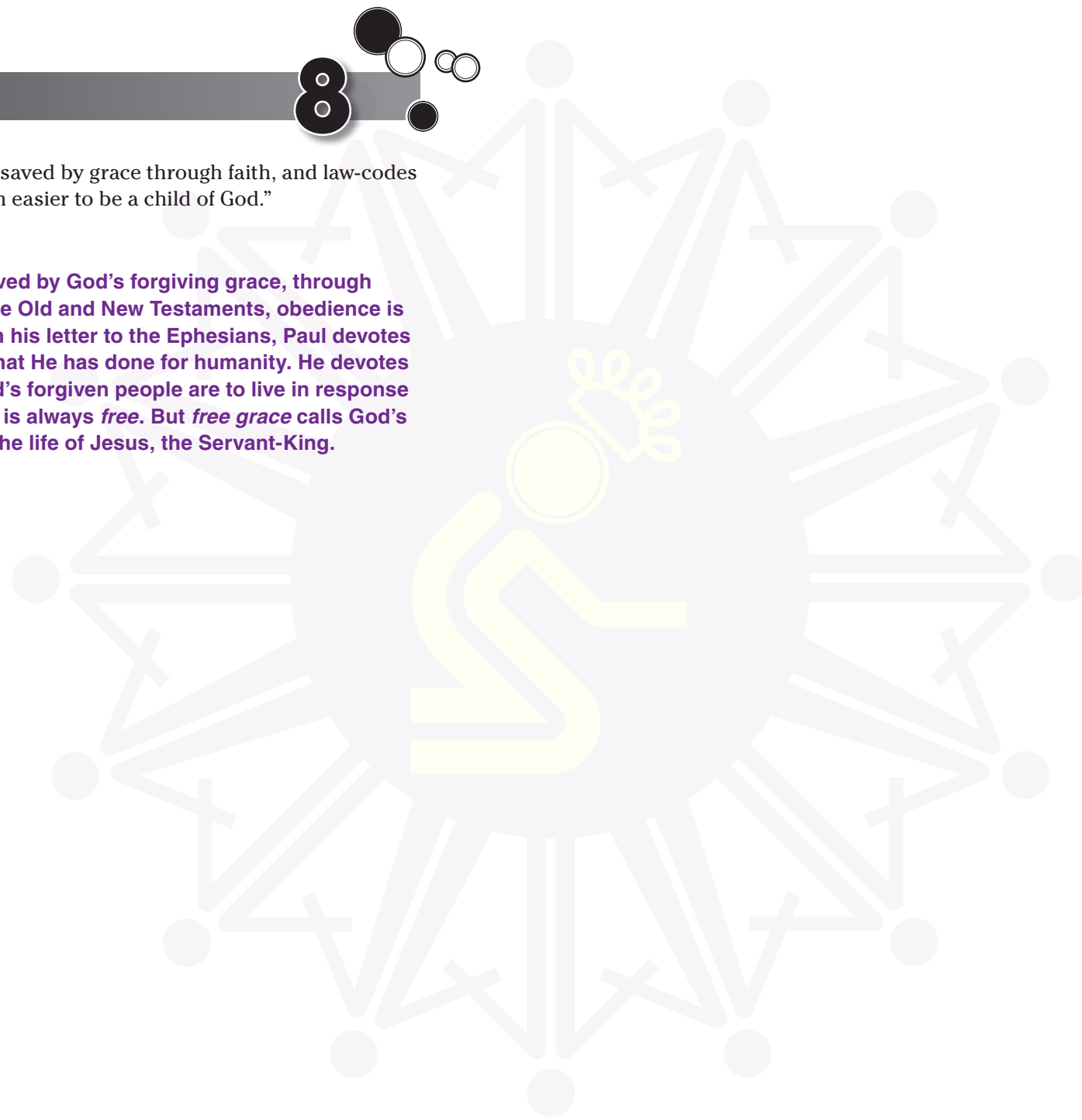
3 Some say: “Laws and commandments played a much bigger role in the life of the Old Testament people than they do in the lives of Christians today. After all, God rescued the Israelites from Egypt to reward



them for their faithfulness to Him. Today God's people are saved by grace through faith, and law-codes and obedience do not enter into the picture. It is now much easier to be a child of God."

Evaluate this opinion.

The opinion is false. God's people have always been saved by God's forgiving grace, through faith, for service to God and others. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, obedience is seen as a *response* system—never as a *merit* system. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul devotes the first three chapters to describing who God is and what He has done for humanity. He devotes the final three chapters of the letter to defining how God's forgiven people are to live in response to God's goodness and grace. Grace is never *cheap*—it is always *free*. But *free grace* calls God's people to *costly discipleship*—the pattern for which is the life of Jesus, the Servant-King.



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