

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? _____

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? _____

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

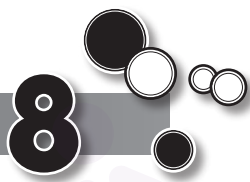
8B Study the structure of the Hittite treaty depicted in **ILLUSTRATION 8B**, and make an effort to memorize its six chief parts. The benefit of doing this will emerge in 8C.

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 _____

2 The Israelites at Mt. Sinai _____

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.

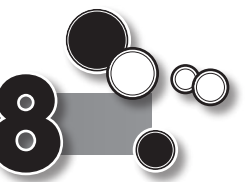
- The ruler making a Suzerainty Treaty places the *vassal* under obligation to *himself*.
- The ruler making a Royal Grant Treaty places *himself* under obligation to the *vassal*.

Discuss the difference between these two treaties.

8G 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?
- _____
- _____
- 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?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- b. According to Leviticus 25:23, Jeremiah 16:18, and Hosea 9:3, who owns the “Holy Land”?
- _____
- 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.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Prayer

Almighty, eternal, loving, and gracious God, we rejoice in Your assurance that, when we were baptized, You adopted us into Your eternal family. You declared us to be forgiven brothers and sisters of Your Son, Jesus the Messiah. As we remember our baptism, remind us that, in our Christian walk, You are the Giver and we are the receivers. We thank and praise You for revealing to Your people of old Your grace and Your will. We thank You for revealing to us, clearly and powerfully, Your will for our lives today—that we are to love and serve one another in the spirit and manner of Jesus. Remind us that everything we touch within creation has a sacred quality to it, for You made and own it. Teach us that in all we do, we are priests in Your Eternal Kingdom—a Kingdom in which we go to You for others, and to others for You. We ask all these things in the forgiving name of our High Priest, Jesus the Messiah. Amen.

Reading assignments are included in the questions.

9A The Israelites arrive at Sinai in Exodus 19:1 and leave it in Numbers 10:11.

- 1** How many chapters are devoted to the events at Sinai? _____
- 2** What does this suggest about the importance the Israelites attached to these events?
- _____
- _____
- 3** In what way were the law-codes given at Sinai to be understood as guidelines for:
- a. Copying God, Exodus 20:1,2 _____
- _____
- b. Living in community _____
- _____
- c. Witnessing, Deuteronomy 4:1–8, especially vv. 6–8 _____
- _____
- d. Experiencing joy, Psalm 119 _____
- _____

9B Today, the term “priesthood” gives rise to the image of a person wearing ecclesiastical robes in a church facility. According to Exodus 19:5b,6, how were God’s Old Testament people to understand the following?

- 1** Sacred things _____
- 2** Sacred occupations and callings _____
- 3** Their role as a “kingdom of priests” _____