The Marriage of Adam and Eve: An Ancient Covenant

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THE MARRIAGE OF ADAM AND EVE:
AN ANCIENT COVENANT

by

RoseAnn Benson, Ph.D.

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Marriage of Adam and Eve:

An Ancient Covenant

RoseAnn Benson, Ph.D.

The David M. Kennedy Center

Master of Arts

The metaphorical marriage, as described by the Old Testament prophets beginning with Hosea, symbolized the relationship of God the bridegroom, to Israel his bride. This covenant relationship between God and Israel also symbolized the relationship God ordained between husband and wife. Literary structures, ritual patterns, and the Hebrew word which means "know" are common to ancient Near Eastern treaties and Old Testament covenants; most importantly, the marriage covenant. The marriage covenant is under the umbrella of previous covenants which a man and woman have entered into as part of the house of Israel. The terms "help meet" and "ruler" are the God-given roles to Adam and Eve which define the covenant relationship between husband and wife.

KEY WORDS: metaphorical marriage, marriage of Adam and Eve, covenant, “help meet,” “rule over”
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THE MARRIAGE OF ADAM AND EVE: AN ANCIENT COVENANT

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The Marriage of Adam and Eve: An Ancient Covenant

Introduction

Marriage between man and woman is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian family. The roots of marriage, as God ordained it, are found in the ancient scriptures of the Old Testament. Scholars debate the nature of the marriage relationship; some argue that it is a covenant, while others maintain that it is not.

This thesis will offer further evidence that marriage is a covenant. I will explore two types of marriage: metaphorical and literal. I will discuss the use of treaty/covenant forms, patterns, and terminology in the metaphorical marriage as related by Hosea and prophets who followed him, and the literal marriage of Adam and Eve with their God-given roles.

There are five main arguments against marriage in the Old Testament as a covenant: (1) none of the extant marriage contracts and laws from the ancient Near East stipulated an oath; (2) the covenant between Jacob and Laban referred to his promise not to take other wives (see Genesis 31:44–50); and (3) the term נִלְנָן, meaning covenant, in other citations is a literary metaphor and had no legal bearing. For example, the oath mentioned in Ezekiel 16:8 was taken by God the bridegroom, rather than by his bride Israel.¹ Further, Moshe Greenberg explained that this oath is part of the Abrahamic covenant promising the land of Canaan to the patriarchs and their descendants and “the solemn declaration of mutual obligation connected with the Exodus and covenant with

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the people,” rather than a reflection of marital practice. Thus, Milgrom and Greenberg asserted the “swearing” and “covenant” mentioned in the marriage metaphor are literary rather than literal.

Another implied marriage covenant, Malachi 2:14, witnessed against the unfaithfulness of the husband rather than the bride. Milgrom claimed that “it is the bride, not the husband, who was subject to the laws of adultery;” making it also metaphorical rather than legal. Although it appears in many instances that men were treated differently in regard to sexual relations, Deuteronomy 22:22–26 indicates that men also must comply with certain laws regarding adultery. Adultery was punishable by death for both man and woman if the relationship was consensual; however, if a man raped a married woman and she could not cry for help, only the man was liable for the death penalty. Proverbs 2:17 describes the adulteress “which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.” While some scholars cite this passage to explicitly identify marriage as a covenant, others believe it to be the covenant she shares with Israel and their God and not an individual covenant of marriage. Further, (4) Although Malachi is the chief pillar of the traditional identification of marriage in the Old Testament as a covenant, a primary problem is whether the text refers to a “literal marriage or to a symbolic marriage (whether to God, to the covenant, or to the priesthood);” and (5) The word for covenant, נְרָה, is absent from the biblical record of the paradigmatic marriage between Adam and Eve. Nevertheless, mere absence of the term does not exclude

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4 Milgrom, “Cult and Conscience,” 134.
covenant. George Mendenhall wrote "there are numerous references to covenants and covenant relationships where this term does not occur."

On the other hand, Gordon Hugenberger argued that marriage is a covenant and based his case on a reconsideration of Malachi 2 and other Old Testament passages. Most importantly, he noted the presence of *verba solemnia* and sexual union as the ratifying signs of the marriage covenant.  

Walther Eichrodt saw covenant as the central organizing idea in the Old Testament and a pervasive element throughout it. In 1951, shortly after ancient Near Eastern treaties became available for examination, Elias Bickerman found six literary structural elements that are common to these treaties and Old Testament covenants. Dennis McCarthy also noted a ritual pattern common to the process of covenant making. Herbert Huffmon wrote that the Hebrew word יָדָר, meaning "know," has legal significance in treaties, and, as previously stated, Hugenberger referred to the term יָדָר as signifying ratification of the covenant of marriage. Numerous scholars have identified the bridal imagery found in Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel both as a metaphor for

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God’s covenant relationship with the house of Israel and a description based on literal marriage.\(^{13}\)

**Methodology**

In order to explain the marriage relationship in the biblical world, this thesis will examine the ancient Near Eastern roots of particular words. I will use exegetical analysis of Old Testament scriptural passages referring to the marriage covenant and look at etymologies, metaphorical meanings, literary structures, and treaty/covenant patterns.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This study is limited to examination of: (1) the metaphorical marriage of the bridegroom God, to his bride Israel; (2) the literal marriage of Adam and Eve in the context of Old Testament covenants; and (3) the similarity in both metaphorical and literal marriages to forms, ritual patterns, and words found in both treaties and covenants. Since the purpose of this study is to focus on the marriage relationship as God defined it, it will not consider other ancient Near Eastern marriage documents. I will, however, examine the concept of covenant in its ancient Near Eastern context before examining it in relation to metaphorical and literal marriage.

**Organizational Format**

The first chapter explores the etymology of two key Hebrew words, מְרָה, “covenant,” and יַדַּר, “know.” I will discuss each of these words in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties and Old Testament covenants.

Building upon the broad foundation of covenant in general, the second chapter discusses the symbolism of a specific covenant, marriage. Additionally, I will explore the marriage metaphor of God’s relationship to Israel found in Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

In chapter 3 I will define literary structures, common patterns in treaty/covenant making, and the use of the word “know” in both metaphorical and literal marriage.

The fourth chapter explores the etymology of the Hebrew words יְרֵעַ כְּנֶדֶר, “help meet,” and מָשָׁל, “rule over.” Following the etymology of “help meet,” I will discuss Eve in that role. After elucidating the etymology of “rule over” I will examine Adam’s role as a “ruler.”

In chapter 5 I will discuss the marriage standard, citing the union of Adam and Eve as the prototype. As additional examples of how great patriarchs and matriarchs interact within their God-given roles, this chapter also addresses the marriages of Isaac and Rebekah, and Lehi and Sariah.

The sixth chapter focuses on the general history of Israelite covenant making followed by the more specific covenant making in marriage. I will discuss God’s requirements regarding covenant status, fidelity, and Hebrew/Israelite marriage patterns.

The final chapter contains a list of findings and conclusions based on the previous five chapters.

Significance and Value of the Study

If marriage were merely an agreement between two parties, then it could be entered or exited with ease. The man and the woman would agree to a mutually beneficial
relationship and remain together only as long as the marriage was jointly useful, valuable, helpful, advantageous, agreeable, or desirable. However, if marriage were a divinely sanctioned covenant relationship, then it constitutes a sacred bond between a man and woman. Since God’s authorization gives it more serious connotations, it may only be exited with God’s approbation, even if the union no longer seems mutually beneficial to the parties. This research will provide a more complete understanding of the sacred and binding nature of the ancient and eternal covenant of marriage by showing God’s expectation of fidelity to covenant obligations.
Chapter 1

Etymological Backgrounds of “Covenant” and “Know”

A covenant is a formally sworn agreement and a foundational term that defines relationships between man, woman, and God. According to Walther Eichrodt, covenants are the central organizing concept of the Old Testament that gives it structural and literary unity.¹ Elias Bickerman was the first to point out, in general terms, the similarities between the Old Testament covenant pattern and ancient Near Eastern treaties. For example, covenants and treaties often have common literary structural elements.² Both covenants and treaties also use the term “know” to indicate mutual recognition of a legal relationship.³ Comparing the covenant pattern of the Old Testament with the Ancient Near Eastern treaty pattern gives a fuller and more complete understanding of the meaning of the covenant relationship and establishes a foundation for discussing a particular covenant, the marriage covenant of Adam and Eve. Thus, as we look at the etymologies of the terms “covenant” and “know,” they are often defined in terms of a treaty.

Etymology of “Covenant”

The Hebrew word נְבֵלָה, meaning “covenant,” has a somewhat unclear etymology and may be derived from or associated with several different sources. According to Botterweck and Ringgren, the original meaning of “covenant” is not “agreement or settlement between two parties,” but had a primary implication of “imposition, liability or

obligation.” In the Old Testament, בְּרִיָּה has three primary associations: (1) it is an agreement or covenant between persons such as a treaty, a constitution between monarch and subjects, an agreement or pledge, an alliance of friendship, and marriage; (2) it is a contract or covenant with an animate object such as an animal, an inanimate object such as stones, or a metaphysical idea such as death; and (3) predominantly it was a covenant between God and mankind. Following are six possible roots from which בְּרִיָּה could be derived.

1. It may be derived from the root בָּרַה, meaning “to eat, dine,” as a celebratory meal associated with oath taking and as a ratifying act of covenant making. Examples of oath, covenant, and feast are found in associations between men, such as we see between Isaac and Abimelech, Ahuzzath, and Phichol (see Genesis 26:26–31) and between Jacob and Laban (see Genesis 31:44–54). These same three elements—oath, covenant, and feast—are inferred in the Holy Days: Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), Feast of Weeks (first fruits), and Feast of Tabernacles (ingathering) that God required Israel to observe by coming to his designated place (see Exodus 23:14–17; Deuteronomy 16:16).

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2. It may be derived from the root הור (2), meaning “to choose,” referring to the
“selection of conditions of the covenant to be ratified,” or “to look,”
(compare to the Akkadian barāti, “to look”), as evidenced from its parallel
usage in Isaiah 28:15, 18, with הור meaning a compact. הור means “seer,”
“vision,” “revelation,” or by implication in Isaiah, a “covenant.”

3. רבי is identical to the Akkadian birīt, which means “between” or “among,”
indicating a covenant between two parties.

4. It may be derived from the primitive root בהר, meaning “to cut or strike”
which would be associated with animal sacrifice. Another meaning
associated with this word is “to create” or “fashion by cutting,” always a
divine activity.

5. It may be derived from ברת, which means to “purify ceremonially or with
sacred rites.”

6. It may be associated with the Akkadian word birētu, meaning “clasp” or
“fetter.” These meanings are supported by the Akkadian and Hittite terms
meaning “bond” as in treaty. This concept of a binding settlement is also
found in the Arabic aqd, the Latin vinculum fidei or “bond of faith,” and
contractus, the German Bund, and the Greek synthēkē, harmonía, synthēsía,

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7 Old Testament Word Studies, s.v. “ברית.
8 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. “ברית.” See also Brown-Driver-Briggs, s.v.
12 Brown-Driver-Briggs, s.v. “ברית.
13 Old Testament Word Studies, s.v. “ברית.”
and *synemosyne*, meaning “binding or putting together.” The metaphor of a bond explains the use of “strengthening” or “fastening” to convey the idea of “validity” or “reliability” of the treaty. Thus we find in Akkadian, *dunnunu riksāte*, translated literally, “to fasten the bonds,” meaning to establish a valid and reliable treaty.\(^{14}\)

All of these possible etymological roots provide nuances to the meaning of בְּרִית. Associating feasting and/or sacrificing with the making of a covenant, adds a ritualistic element to covenant making. Derived from words meaning binding strengthens the notion that a covenant is intended to be a lasting relationship. Isaiah’s parallel use of בְּרִית and חֵרֵם indicates other connotations of covenant, particularly that covenant making implies having a vision of the future. In the Old Testament, the most common meaning of covenant is an agreement between two parties.

**“Covenant” in an Ancient Near Eastern Context**

Based on the foregoing observations, covenant, in its broadest sense, can refer to any agreement among parties with no verbal expression, for example, “a handclasp or a meal in common may constitute a covenant.”\(^{15}\) Further, a covenant can exist without the word בְּרִית being mentioned.\(^{16}\) However, there are essential elements in Old Testament usage and understanding of בְּרִית. A covenant is a relationship with a non-relative that involves obligations and is established though an oath.\(^{17}\) Most scholars agree that an oath

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\(^{14}\) *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “ברית.” The Greek word for annulling a bond is λυέιν, meaning “to loosen.” Therefore, if a bond is fastened by making a covenant it must be loosened if the covenant is disavowed or broken.


statement was essential to the covenant. A covenant, as used in the Old Testament, was not merely an agreement or a contract. It was much more. It was a pledge and a personal commitment to fulfill the obligation of the agreement. It was the oath statement which made the obligation binding between the covenant parties. An agreement lacks the essential oath statement to make it binding. A contract is a private legal and economic agreement. Thus, neither agreement nor contract is an accurate synonym for covenant; however, we find oath and covenant as paired expressions indicating they are synonymous terms.

The term “covenant” is often paralleled with “oath,” and the phrase “to make [cut] a covenant” with “to swear.” Stephen Ricks, observed that “the oath statement [itself] is an indispensable element of the oath.” Usually, the oath statement is followed either by a witness invocation or a curse formula. God was the ultimate witness to and executor of all oaths. In the covenant paradigm we can see the elements of covenant, swearing of oaths, and ritual cutting of animals for sacrificial purposes.

The primary paradigm for the covenant formula in the Old Testament is found in the preamble to the Decalogue, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2). God declared his role as

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21 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. “הָעְבִּד.”
23 Ricks, “Oaths and Oath Taking in Ancient Israel,” 44.
suzerain over the house of Israel based on leading the children out of bondage in Egypt. Thus, he set the stipulations of the covenant that the people agreed to saying, “All the words which the Lord hath said will we do” (Exodus 24:3). Following the common consent of the people, Moses wrote the words of God and prepared an altar made with twelve symbolic pillars for sacrifice. After making burnt and peace offerings Moses solemnized the covenant with blood. He sprinkled blood on the altar, re-read the covenant to the people to which they reaffirmed their obedience, and completed the ritual ceremony by sprinkling blood on the people.

False swearing of oaths was strictly forbidden in the third commandment of the Decalogue. Thus, Israel recognized its gravity in covenant making (see Exodus 20:7). Both oaths and covenants may contain statements, witnesses, and curses. However, as mentioned earlier, covenants often contain other elements such as a preamble and historical prologue. Thus, a covenant may have many elements, but the one essential factor which it must have is the oath. Accompanying the swearing of the oath was a sign such as uplifted arms, ritual sacrifice, or some other token.25

The offering of sacrifice(s) was a sign of covenant making with God, as illustrated in this verse, “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psalm 50:5). The Old Testament Mosaic law required the cutting of the sacrificial animal in a particular way, with the oath taker passing between the parts (see Genesis 15:9–10, 17; Jeremiah 34:18–20). From this symbolic witnessing of the covenant comes the Hebrew idiom, “to cut a covenant,” meaning “to make” a covenant.

which ye built not” (Joshua 24:6–13). Having established the “suzerainty” of God, Joshua
exhorted the people to turn away from other gods and to serve the Lord (see Joshua
24:14–15). The people swore an oath to serve and obey the Lord, with themselves as
witnesses (see Joshua 24:16–24). Joshua completed the covenant ritual by writing “these
words in the book of the law of God” (Joshua 24:26) and setting up a stone monument as
a further witness of the covenant the people had made with God (see Joshua 24:26–27).

Etymology of “Know”

The Hebrew root word יְדַע, meaning “know,” is common to most Semitic
languages and has a wide variety of meanings that can be figurative, literal, euphemistic,
or inferential.26 These meanings include: “to perceive” or “to understand;” “to come to
the knowledge of by seeing, hearing, and experience;” to know that which was previously

26 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. “יְדַע.” See also “Hebrew and Chaldee
unknown; “to be acquainted with,” “to know how,” and “to be wise.” Additional meanings are “to take care of [someone]” and “to know sexually, have intercourse with.” However, for the purposes of this study, “know” is used in the following two major contexts:

1. Sexual knowledge. The second major usage of “know” in the context of covenant is a euphemism for sexual intimacy.

2. God’s knowledge, knowledge of God, and ignorance of God. These three religious usages are characteristic of the special relationship between God and his people, Israel. Within this use of “know” is the covenant relationship that has parallels in ancient Near Eastern treaties.

“Know” in an Ancient Near Eastern Context

Sexual knowledge. In the sense of acquaintance or love, “know” is an oblique reference to sexual intercourse. For example, “Adam knew Eve his wife” (Genesis 4:1), and “he [Judah] knew her [Tamar] no more” (Genesis 38:26). Other scriptural phrases that denote sexual intimacy are: “he went in unto her,” “he took her, and lay with her” (Genesis 29:21, 23; 34:2).

Gordon Hugenberger asserted that sexual union, when consensual, was understood to be the marriage act and was the covenant ratifying oath-sign for marriage.

The Damascus Documents offer an even stricter view. In light of the laws of seduction (see Exodus 22:16) and rape (see Deuteronomy 22:25–29), “any sexual intercourse

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27 William Wilson, Old Testament Word Studies, s.v. “יָּדָהִי.”
28 Koehler and Baumgartner, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, s.v. “יָּדָהִי.”
29 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. “יָּדָהִי.”
30 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. “יָּדָהִי.”
31 Hugenberger, Marriage as a Covenant, 248–251.
between a man and an unmarried woman created a marital bond regardless of whether or not this was the couple’s intent.” The reasoning behind this interpretation is that an unbreakable bond results from becoming “one flesh.”

A clear example of sexual union as the sign of marital consummation is found in Jacob’s comments to Laban regarding Rachel, “Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her” (Genesis 29:21). This passage illustrates that sexual relations characterize the end of the betrothal period and the beginning of the marriage. Since Laban tricked Jacob by giving him Leah, Jacob complained about his deceit, but did not question the validity of his marriage to Leah because he had consummated the marriage (see Genesis 29:23). In contrast to licit sexual relations, the story of Shechem and Dinah shows that premarital sexual relations defiled a woman, regardless of whether or not it was consensual (see Genesis 34). Hebrew law prescribed the formalization of premarital sexual relations by marriage; however, the father had the right to refuse to give his daughter to a man who had raped or enticed her (see Exodus 22:16–17). In Hebrew social culture, consummating the marriage had a high priority. For example, a man whose marriage was not consummated was excused from battle (see Deuteronomy 20:5–7; 24:5).

Hugenberger also maintained that the stress on unity that often accompanies covenant making such as eating together and shaking hands is evident in God’s command that Adam and Eve “be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Sexual union literally fulfills the physical aspect of this divine injunction. “Since sexual intercourse is characteristic of marriage, and further, since licit sexual acts take place only between husbands and wives,

32 Aharon Shemesh, “4Q271.3: A Key to Sectarian Matrimonial Law,” Journal of Jewish Studies
for a couple to willingly engage in sexual intercourse may simultaneously imply the recognition of each other as husband and wife."\textsuperscript{33} The connection between "know" as a legal term in covenant making and "know" referring to a licit sexual union between husband and wife indicate that marriage is a covenant.

**God’s knowledge.** Significantly, the ancient Near Eastern words which are translated as "know" and "knowledge" stand at the center of treaty/covenant agreements between monarchs and peoples, between masters and those subject to them, and between God and his children.\textsuperscript{34} Ancient Near Eastern treaties described and codified relationships between peoples. Typically, treaty language described the monarch or master as the "suzerain" and those subject to that person as "vassals." The term "vassal" connoted a relationship of inferiority with a carefully defined link to the superior kingdom that was solemnized by an oath. As expected, such a relationship brought a set of reciprocal responsibilities to each party. Most often, these mutual responsibilities were written down so that they could be reviewed periodically.

The words "know" and "knowledge" indicated both a treaty relationship between kingdoms and a covenant relationship such as marriage, which is the common metaphor for Israel’s relationship to God.\textsuperscript{35} We can better understand the full meaning of "know" in covenant relationships by referring to ancient Near Eastern treaty terminology. The term "know" in these treaties exhibits technical meanings that have parallel uses in biblical covenant language: "to recognize a legal relationship" and "to recognize treaty

\textsuperscript{33} Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 267.  
\textsuperscript{34} Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew YADA," 31.  
\textsuperscript{35} Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew YADA," 31. See also Gordon Paul Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 269–273.}
stipulations as binding.” In a broad sense, a treaty defined the political relationship
between ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. “Know” conveyed the idea of a treaty
relationship and its obligations.

Similarly, in a religious context, the covenant between [the kingdom of] God and
the nation of Israel was a type of “suzerain” and “vassal” relationship. Within such
covenants, “know” conveyed the reciprocal obligations of the covenant relationship, well
known by both parties to the agreement. Specifically, in the covenant model on the one
side, God “knows” Israel as his children and thus recognizes his relationship to them. On
the other side, covenant “knowing” bound Israel to be obedient to the commandments of
God. As a consequence of obedience, God promised to “know” them by gathering them
for protection and blessings (see Deuteronomy 28–30). Although there are similarities
between treaty language and covenant language, it is important to recognize that treaties
are a temporary agreement, frequently between a superior and an inferior kingdom—and
superiority and inferiority changes over time. Conversely, covenants are characterized as
a binding and eternal link between both humans, who always remain in obeisance, and
God himself.

Old Testament references to the verb “to know,” in certain instances, indicates a
binding agreement or covenant. As Herbert Huffmon found, the technical meanings in
ancient Near Eastern treaties are similar to the covenant relationship between God and
Israel. God, the “suzerain,” “in his good pleasure fixes the terms,” and Israel, the
“vassal,” accepts them. God set forth his covenant relationship with Israel in this

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38 LDS Bible Dictionary, s.v. “covenant.”
declaration: “And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:7–8; emphasis added). In a reiteration of these covenant terms in Deuteronomy one can see clearly each side of the covenant. On the “vassal” side: “This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice” (Deuteronomy 26:16–17). On the “suzerain” side: “The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments. And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken” (Deuteronomy 26:18–19).

The prophetic anointing of a Hebrew king allowed him to stand for the people as a “vassal” to the “suzerain” God. Ze’ev Falk differentiated between the divine status claimed by other ancient Near Eastern kings and those of Israel explaining, “The king [of Israel] was thought to be appointed and even adopted by God; he mediated between God and the people and represented them before each other.”39 Notwithstanding the difference

in kingship, the same meanings of “know” which characterized ancient Near Eastern treaties also define the covenant relationship between God and Israel.

Common elements found in treaty/covenant relationships are the use of “know” in a variety of senses: mutual recognition of an exclusive relationship, promises of aid between the suzerain and vassal, re-acknowledgment demands and ceremonies, and lack of mutual recognition or treaty/covenant breaking with attendant consequences. Each of these senses of “know” is found in ancient Near Eastern treaties and in Old Testament covenants. To demonstrate the relationship between ancient Near Eastern treaties and Old Testament covenants I will give a few examples of each.

**Mutual recognition of an exclusive relationship.** The Hittite king Suppiluliumas, located in ancient Anatolia (modern-day central Turkey), wrote to a vassal, Huqqanas, in eastern Asia Minor, stating:

> And you, Huqqanas, know only the Sun (a designation for the Hittite king) regarding lordship; also my son (of) whom I, the Sun, say, ‘This one everyone should know . . . you Huqqanas, know him! Moreover, (those) who are my sons, his brother, (or) my brothers . . . know as brother and associate. Moreover, another lord . . . do not . . . know! The Sun [alone] know! . . . Moreover, any other do not know!*

This treaty relationship required that the vassal Huqqanas “know” [i.e. acknowledge] the king. Thus, Huqqanas must legally recognize the suzerain King Suppiluliumas, as well as the king’s sons and brothers. Huqqanas could look to no one else as his king. The language of the treaty implied a threat of negative consequences for recognition of any other ruler outside the king’s family. In the sense seen here, the verb “know” denotes an exclusive recognition or loyalty to the suzerain.

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*40 In the Old Testament examples all of the words translated as “know” or “knowledge” derive from the root ṣḥ*. 

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The first Old Testament example of the word "know" in a covenant sense appears in these words of God to Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19; emphasis added). God was confident that Abraham and his house would be obedient to his commandments, because they had a covenant relationship that each party recognized.

Perhaps the best parallel to some of the ancient Near Eastern treaty examples illustrating the exclusiveness of the covenant relationship is this exchange between God and Israel: "I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no gods but me: for there is no saviour beside me. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought" (Hosea 13:4–5; emphasis added). In this example, God, the "suzerain," tells Israel, his "vassal," to recognize no other God, for he has recognized no other people as his own, as stipulated in the Sinaitic covenant.

Promises of aid. The Hittite king Muwattallis made a treaty with his vassal, Alaksandus. The king stipulated the following about a third unnamed party: "As he [the rebel] is an enemy to you, even so is he an enemy to the Sun; [and] I, [the Su]n, will know only you, Alaksandus." Essentially, this treaty relationship assured aid from the king in case of rebellion against the vassal, Alaksandus, by the unnamed party.

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42 See also Amos 3:2; Genesis 18:19; Exodus 33:12; Jeremiah 1:5; 24:7.
44 Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew YADA," 32.
In the Amarna tablets found in Egypt, there is an actual case of a vassal requesting aid on the basis of a covenant agreement. The king of Amurru requested military aid from his suzerain, the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenophis III, to help fight against the Mitanni, a kingdom in western Syria, with this plea: “May the king my lord know me and put me under the charge of Paha(m)nate, my (royal) governor.” Here, “know” could more clearly be translated as “Let the king, my lord, take care of me,” or “May the king my lord recognize me as a legitimate [loyal] vassal,” and thus provide the support due to me.45

The following two examples together illustrate breaking and then re-establishing an exclusive relationship between the house of Judah and God. In the first, the kingdom of Judah under King Ahaz, who secularized his reign by joining the worship of God with that of the surrounding cultures, was caught between the exclusive recognition demands of two suzerains: the earthly kingdom of Assyria and the heavenly kingdom of God. What makes this particular interchange interesting is that it juxtaposes Judah’s treaty relationship with Assyria against its covenant relationship with God. While the specific wording of the political arrangement in the following quote does not contain the word “know,” because the passage features steps before a covenant is made, nevertheless, a treaty and a covenant relationship are clearly envisioned.

[King] Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king’s house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him. (2 Kings 16:7–9)

From this passage we learn that Ahaz, king of Judah, sought aid through a vassal relationship against his enemies, Syria and the Northern Kingdom, Israel, from the potential suzerain, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria. Apparently, in accordance with treaty expectations, the kingdom of Judah provided tribute, which he took from his own wealth and the temple treasury, and Tiglath-pileser came to defeat Judah’s enemies. However, God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell King Ahaz not to go to Assyria for aid. Thus, the highest “suzerain,” God, sent a messenger to his “vassal,” Ahaz, promising protection. Because King Ahaz trusted the earthly suzerain more than he did the heavenly one, the kingdom of Judah became entangled in a relationship with Assyria (see Isaiah 7:1–13). As a consequence of ignoring the commands of God, Isaiah prophesied that Assyria would eventually war against its vassal, the kingdom of Judah (see Isaiah 7:17–25).

The fulfillment of this prophecy took place during the reign of Ahaz’s son, King Hezekiah. However, the story and outcome provide a sharp contrast to that of King Ahaz. Unlike his father, Hezekiah worshipped only the God of Israel, was obedient to his commands, and listened to the prophetic words of Isaiah. Thus, Hezekiah honored the covenant relationship by serving and obeying God as his “suzerain” (see 2 Kings 18:3, 5–7; 2 Chronicles 31:20–21; 32:6–8).

King Hezekiah somewhat grudgingly paid the tribute due to the suzerain, King Sennacherib of Assyria, indicating he acknowledged the treaty that his father, Ahaz, had made and desired to avoid the threat of destruction (see 2 Kings 18:7, 14–16). Nevertheless, the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem and demanded a more exclusive treaty relationship. King Sennacherib wanted no competition from the “suzerains” in Egypt or in heaven. King Hezekiah sent his servants to seek counsel from Isaiah: “Isaiah said unto
them. . . Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land” (Isaiah 37:6–7). God promised the protection due to a “vassal,” and which Hezekiah requested.

Hezekiah’s response to an additional threatening letter of annihilation by King Sennacherib was to go personally to the temple, spread out the letter on the temple altar and again seek God’s protection (see 2 Kings 19:14–18; Isaiah 37:14–19). He pleaded, “Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand [Sennacherib’s], that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only” (2 Kings 19:19; Isaiah 37:20; emphasis added). While this appearance of “know” links to promises made by the Lord in a covenant setting, it comes closer to the sense of “to realize” or “to recognize.” Additionally, it is evident that King Hezekiah understood perfectly the difference in power and importance between the earthly kingdom of Assyria and the heavenly kingdom of God. He “knew” who his true king and “suzerain” was and willingly bowed before him as he asked protection for himself and his people. Hezekiah put to test the covenant promise of protection.

In response to Hezekiah’s faithful keeping of the covenant, God sent a one-person army against Sennacherib: “Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses” (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36). Thus, “know” in these examples meant a reciprocal promise to give aid, particularly, the vassal was dependent upon the suzerain to rescue him from a third party.
Re-acknowledgment. “Know” as an imperative is also used to order the vassal to reaffirm an already existing treaty. For example, the Hittite king Muwattalis wrote to his vassal, Alaksandus, “this tablet which I made (for) you, Alaksandus, [let them read it to you three time[es] yearly, year after year, and you, Alaksandus, know it.” In this case, the treaty relationship required a periodic public reading and thereby an acknowledgment by the vassal king of his dependent relationship to the suzerain.

The prophet Jeremiah connected the concept of “knowing” to a change of heart and a new covenant, but in the future, and from a Christian perspective, when Christ would fulfill the Mosaic Covenant (see Jeremiah 24:7; 31:31–34). One of Jeremiah’s charges against the priests is found in this passage: “The priests said not, Where is the Lord? And they that handle the law knew me not” (Jeremiah 2:8; emphasis added). This passage makes clear the problem in the kingdom of Judah prior to the Babylonian captivity. The covenant with God was no longer honored nor taught by the priests. The same problem had plagued the Northern Kingdom of Israel (see Hosea 4:1, 6). In ancient Near Eastern treaty terms, the protection legally due to the vassal by the suzerain was not in effect, because the vassal had broken the treaty. The Lord responded to covenant breaking by scattering of the houses of Israel and Judah. He then promised to resolve the problem of covenant breaking at a future time saying, “I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they

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47 *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. ἐγνω [yada], 454. In Egyptian the word “know” is sometimes compounded with “heart” indicating “the heart was considered the seat of knowledge and understanding.”
shall return unto me with their whole heart” (Jeremiah 24:7; emphasis added; see also Ezekiel 36:26–27).

Jeremiah continued developing the relationship of “knowing” and covenant in his prophetic writings: “I [God] will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:33–34; emphasis added). This series of expressions echoes the command of Muttawanis to Alaksandus, to review the treaty regularly. In general, the suzerain wants the vassal to remember him exclusively and expects a regular verbal reaffirmation of the treaty. However, God’s reminder does not only involve reading aloud the covenant obligations and consequences (see Deuteronomy 31:10–13). He will give Israel a new covenant and they will “know” it most intimately, in their hearts; a reference to the part of the body that the Israelites believed governs thought processes (see Psalms 64:6; Proverbs 2:2; 23:7). The figurative language lends insight into the different level of “knowing” required by an earthly suzerain and God. The earthly suzerain wants his vassals to know the terms of the treaty; however God wants his “vassals” to know not only the covenant stipulations, but to be in a relationship with him. A treaty read three times a year is a low level reminder of a relatively temporary commitment compared to a reminder of an eternal covenant and the covenant-maker that occurs with each beat of the heart.

**Lack of mutual recognition.** In the following illustration, a particular vassal has not honored a treaty made with the suzerain kingdom of Assyria. In a letter to an Assyrian king, a royal officer named Esarhaddon called the Cimmerians, barbarian
invaders from the north, “nomads, [for] they know neither an oath by the god(s) nor a sworn agreement [treaty].” Various translations render “know” as “they do not care for,” “they do not respect,” or “they do not recognize (as binding)”\(^{48}\) In this case, the suzerain “knows” or recognizes the legal power of a treaty as binding. Not surprisingly, whatever agreements the suzerain, Assyria, had attempted to force upon the wandering Cimmerians were ignored.

Failure to recognize the exclusiveness of the covenant relationship or covenant breaking, invokes curses upon the house of Israel as shown in this passage: “You only have I known [i.e. chosen] of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2; emphasis added). In this example, God, unlike earthly suzerains, acknowledged his selective attention to Israel which he had promised: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:5–6). God fulfilled his covenant obligations; however, his promise of punishment implied Israel’s failure to fulfill its covenant obligations, namely, lack of worshipping God exclusively. Commonly acknowledged is ancient Israel’s frequent introduction of the worship of foreign gods into their society (see, for example, 2 Kings 17:7–12; 2 Chronicles 28:2–4, 23–25; Hosea 4:12–5:4).

“Knowing,” or making covenants, binds or obliged the “suzerain” God, to bless or curse his “vassal” Israel, dependent upon her recognition of him. Hosea prophesied: “My people [Israel] are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected

knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast
forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children’ (Hosea 4:6; see also 5:3-5;
emphasis added). Isaiah made a similar prophecy: ‘Therefore my people [Israel] are gone
into captivity, because they have no knowledge’ (Isaiah 5:13; emphasis added). ‘‘The
knowledge’ is an abbreviated form of the expression ‘the knowledge of God’’ and refers
to ‘‘learning and obeying the will of the covenant God in devotion and faithfulness,’’ and
is a response to God’s saving act of bringing the children of Israel out of bondage in
Egypt. Huffmon conjectured that the ‘‘lack of knowledge’’ most likely refers to
covenant obligations with God.

Summary

The term ‘‘covenant’’ may be associated with several Hebrew root words,
including a compact between two parties, feasting, selecting, providing, and binding. The
oath statement is essential to the covenant, because it makes the obligation binding.
Sacrifice may accompany covenant making and is the source of the Hebrew idiom ‘‘to cut
a covenant.’’ Thus, a covenant is a mutual agreement solemnized by an oath and often
other ritual or symbolic acts, such as setting up a stone. The Hebrew word meaning
‘‘know’’ is significant in treaty/covenant relationships as an indicator of a legal

50 Huffmon, ‘‘The Treaty Background of Hebrew YADA,’’ 37. Joseph Smith affirmed the
dangerous ramifications of not seeking knowledge from God: ‘‘A man is saved no faster than he gets
knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the
other world.’’ Joseph Smith, History of the Church (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:588. If, as
Huffmon contends, knowledge means covenant obligations, then Joseph Smith’s prophetic warning teaches
that a person is saved no faster than s/he makes and keeps a covenant relationship with God. If a person
does not understand his covenant obligation, then that person will be brought into captivity by an enemy of
God. Thus, Joseph Smith could prophecy, ‘‘if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life
through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to
come’’ (D&C 130:19; emphasis added). Those who make and keep covenants with God will enjoy special
privileges and rewards in his kingdom.
relationship which required prescribed signs of acknowledgment and agreement. It is also a euphemism for sexual relations; licitly, it is a symbol of marriage. By defining covenant and understanding the relationship of the word “know” to treaty and covenant making I have established a broad foundation for determining whether or not marriage, metaphorical, such as Hosea described it, or literal, such as the marriage of Adam and Eve, is covenant based.
Chapter 2
The Metaphorical Marriage Covenant

Having defined the word “covenant” and noted its similarity to ancient Near Eastern treaties and as the relationship God has with his children, as well as the use of “know” in both treaties and covenants, I will now look at Old Testament symbolic usage of marriage, a particular covenant. Marriage is a common Old Testament metaphor symbolizing the covenant relationship between God and Israel. In the marriage metaphor God is the bridegroom and Israel is his bride, thus, Israel is often referred to in feminine pronouns. The metaphorical marriage reflected the literal marriage and is, therefore, important in establishing the marriage of Adam and Eve as covenant based. God’s relationship with Israel was intimate, and he expected absolute fidelity. It was a “suzerainty” relationship; God set the terms of the relationship and Israel willingly agreed to them.

The Lord established his covenant with Abraham because of his faith and righteousness. He promised Abraham that he would bless his righteous seed. A recurring theme beginning in Exodus is concern for “my people.” However, by the time of the prophets Hosea and Isaiah, Abraham’s seed had “transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:5; see also Hosea 6:7). By their actions the people did not claim God, nor could he claim them, for he announced, “she is not my wife, neither am I her husband” (Hosea 2:2).
At Sinai, God designated that his relationship with the house of Israel was to be covenant based.\(^1\) One of the best-known themes of the prophetic literature is the marriage bond symbolizing the covenant relationship between God and the House of Israel.\(^2\) This figure of speech is unique in the entire ancient Near East and found only in the Old Testament.\(^3\) The prophet Hosea was the first to equate symbolically the Sinai covenant and marriage. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel built upon his symbolism.\(^4\)

**Marriage Symbolism in Hosea**

During the period before Assyria took the Northern Kingdom captive, *Hosea*, whose name means “deliverer,”\(^5\) received the prophetic call to minister to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, a nation deeply involved in idolatry. God commanded the prophet Hosea to take a wife who was an adulteress. “Most likely this means a woman who subsequently proved unfaithful to her husband and became promiscuous, though she was not necessarily such at the time of the marriage.”\(^6\) Hosea’s wife, *Gomer*, was called “a wife of whoredoms” (Hosea 1:2). In Hebrew, her name means “to end, cease, or fail.”\(^7\)

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\(^4\) Most commentators believe that the marriage and births represent actual events in Hosea’s life, because the nature of prophetic symbolism required that the divine message be represented in actual events. James Luther Mays, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 23. Thus, demands to renounce adulterous behavior apply literally to Hosea’s wife, Gomer, and figuratively to the nation of Israel. Kruger, “Israel, The Harlot,” 110–111. See also Peifer, “The Marriage Theme in Hosea,” 140.


\(^6\) Peifer, “The Marriage Theme in Hosea,” 140.

Gomer was a metaphor for Israel, a “land which hath committed great whoredom” and which, as a result, would end, cease, and fail (Hosea 1:2). His marriage was symbolic of his message to an apostate and covenant-breaking people who had departed from the Lord.  

Gomer bore Hosea three children. The Lord designated their names as signs to indicate to the people the consequences of their whoredoms. According to divine instruction, Hosea named his firstborn son Jezreel, meaning “God will sow.” Jezreel, the fertile Plain of Esdraelon, was the name of the site of the slaying of the remainder of the house of Ahab, as well as of the priests and worshippers of Baal by King Jehu approximately 100 years before Hosea prophesied. Ahab was a powerful, but particularly wicked, king of Israel. Although Jehu had “done well in executing that which is right, . . . he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel,” and he worshipped the golden calves (2 Kings 10:28–31). Thus, he was told that his posterity would reign in Israel only four generations (2 Kings 15:12). Further, the Jezreel valley would be the place where Assyria conquered Israel and took them away to scatter them (Hosea 1:4–5). The second child, a daughter, received an equally foreboding name, Lo-ruhamah, which means “no mercy.” Her name was a warning to Israel that they would be taken away and given no quarter by her conquerors. The third child was a son named Lo-ammi, which means “[you are] not my people,” a warning to Israel that God would not claim the disobedient and covenant breakers as his (Hosea 1:4–9).

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8 Sidney B. Sperry, *The Message of the Twelve Prophets* (Independence, Mo.: Zion’s Printing, 1941), 31. According to Mays, “Baal was the male figure in the in the fertility drama. Israel was the female figure who gave herself to Baal in return for the gift of fertility through the land. However, God, because of his rescuing Israel from bondage in Egypt, has an exclusive covenant with Israel, and is therefore the legitimate husband. This exclusive relationship prohibited all syncretism and is the basis for the cry against harlotry and adultery; one which was more than theological metaphor. Mays, *Hosea*, 25.”
Thus, the names of prophet’s wife and children prophesied that the Northern
Kingdom of Israel would come to an end. Israel’s only hope for deliverance was through
heeding their prophet, Hosea. Unfortunately, Israel did not repent and her destruction was
imminent; a people for whom God could have neither mercy nor whom he could call his
own. When Assyria took these “children of whoredoms” captive, they lost their identity,
for a time, as members of the house of Israel, as heirs of the Abrahamic covenant, and as
God’s people.

The second chapter of Hosea begins in the form of a legal proceeding by Hosea
against his adulterous wife. The children were invited to enter the divorce litigation in an
attempt to urge their mother to reform. Nevertheless, the proceeding is held, not to
declare a divorce, “she is not my wife, neither am I her husband,” but for the purpose of
reconciliation (Hosea 2:1). The husband is not concerned with his legal right to divorce
his guilty wife, but wanted her back.10 Despite the impending doom of Israel as the
disloyal and whoring consort of Jehovah, the Lord loved Israel. He pleaded for her to
forsake her whoredoms. He reminded her that he had taken his bride out of Egypt and
into the wilderness of Sinai, a type of “honeymoon,” speaking tenderly to her, though,
she would in the future forget her marriage covenant (see Hosea 2:13–15).

Hosea was then commanded to “love a woman” (Hosea 3:1). Some commentators
conjecture this unnamed woman to also be Gomer, because it best serves the dual
symbolism. First Hosea was commanded to marry a woman and now to love a woman.11

9 “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary, s.v. סְפָרִיא הָאָדָם,” Strong’s 8157.
10 Mays, Hosea, 36–38.
11 Mays, Hosea, 55–56. See also Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, 3rd
Perhaps, as is intimated in Hosea 2, Gomer had returned to harlotry, and he must purchase her for fifteen pieces of silver, or half the price paid for a slave, in order to redeem her (see Hosea 3:1-2). Perhaps the bride price was also a symbolic indication that Israel, at this point, was of little value to her true “master.” As Mays explained it, “The command sets up an analogy between Hosea and the adulterous woman on the one side, and Yahweh and faithless Israel on the other.”\(^\text{12}\) The persistence of God with Israel in the face of betrayal is played out in the symbolic re-purchasing by Hosea of Gomer, a woman who had deserted him. In the divine bridegroom’s dealings with his wife he does not resort to his legal rights to divorce or execute her, but instead, he patiently seeks reconciliation (see Deuteronomy 24:1; 22:22).\(^\text{13}\)

“In that day” and “afterward” are synonyms for a future time when the bride, Israel, would “return and seek” her bridegroom, the Lord (see Hosea 2:18; 3:5). God promised that Israel would call him “my husband and not my master” (Hosea 2:14, 16). The Hebrew points to a play on words. The Hebrew word צלפחד means “my master, possessor, or husband,” and is a symbolic name for Jehovah,\(^\text{14}\) as well as a reference to the Canaanite storm god.\(^\text{15}\) Further, נב is a term for man as a partner and counterpart of the woman, נב (see Genesis 2:23). נב is derived from a verb that emphasizes the legal right “to own” or “have rights over.” The intimate and personal term for husband, נב, points to the full and unqualified way in which Israel will give herself to God, in contrast

\(^\text{12}\) Mays, Hosea, 56.
\(^\text{13}\) Mays, Hosea, 40, 56.
\(^\text{15}\) New Bible Dictionary, 2\(^{nd}\) ed., ed. J. D. Douglas, et al., s.v. “Baal.” See also Mays, Hosea, 25, 48. The versification is different in the Hebrew Bible. This phrase is found in the Hebrew Bible in Hosea 2:18.
to the master, בנות, to whom she is legally bound. Thus, God promised that his bride would “know” [recognize and make covenants with] him and would be faithful to him, because she no longer worshipped the Canaanite Baal. She would learn to be faithful because of her suffering during scattering, and she would seek him (see Hosea 3:4–5).

Israel’s elimination of the epithet בנות in favor of נשים will indicate she is no longer a mistress to Baal but a wife bound in the marriage covenant to God. In the day of their new covenant, an eternal relationship, Israel would become as innumerable as the sand of the sea, and they again would be declared “the sons of the living God” and live in peace (Hosea 1:10; 2:18).

Marriage Symbolism in Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah, whose name means “the Lord is salvation,” was married to a woman prophetess who bore him sons. Their names were also signs (Isaiah 8:18). Isaiah’s first son was named Shear-jashub, meaning “a remnant shall return,” or a prophecy of captivity with a promise that a remnant would return from captivity (see Isaiah 7:3). In accordance with revelation from God, Isaiah named his second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which has connotations of “hasting [the enemy], to the booty or swift to the prey,” or “he hastens the prey” (Isaiah 8:3). In the context of Isaiah’s prophecy to the Kingdom of Judah, it was a warning that the Assyrian attack on the Northern Kingdom was imminent. As a sign to King Ahaz, according to James Ward,

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16 Mays, Hosea, 48.
19 Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, Understanding Isaiah (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 81.
Isaiah prophesied of a third son: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," meaning "with us [is] God" (Isaiah 7:14).  

Isaiah’s children were the offspring of a prophet and a prophetess, their names symbolically prophesying the future of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The name of the first son, Shear-jashub, prophesied the captivity of Judah; Babylon would take her captive, and in his mercy, Jehovah would redeem a remnant. The name of the second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, pronounced Jehovah’s impending judgment upon Israel; Assyria would sweep down and take captive the Northern Kingdom. The name of his third son, Immanuel, was the first and lesser fulfillment of the sign given by the Lord through Isaiah to King Ahaz. From a Christian perspective, the second and greater fulfillment of this prophecy was in Jesus Christ, as the son of the virgin, Mary. Immanuel, in both cases, was born of a pure and chaste woman who was a prophetess. His name testifies that despite the prophecies of destruction for both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, God was watching over the house of Israel and would at a future time redeem his children through his presence with them. 

Throughout the book of Isaiah, the Lord promised a new relationship with Judah, if she repented. He bade her to come unto him with such well-known phrases as: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). The Lord reminded Judah of their marriage covenant saying, “Where is the bill of

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20 James M. Ward, Amos and Isaiah (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1969), 192. “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary,” s.v. “יִרְמָא, יִרְמָא,” Strong’s 6005. We might suppose Isaiah’s wife was called a prophetess because this passage intimates that she is the one who named him Immanuel.

21 Parry, Parry, Peterson, Understanding Isaiah, 72–74. Parry, et al. state that Maher-shalal-hash-baz is the first fulfillment of the “Immanuel prophecy.”
your mother’s divorcement, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away” (Isaiah 50:1). He had not divorced or sold her, but awaited her repentance and return to him. She thought she was forsaken, like a wife of youth is divorced in her old age, but God assured her it was only for a short time that he deserted her when he was angry at her unfaithfulness (see Isaiah 54:6–8).

In the latter days, the Lord promised to treat her with everlasting kindness and mercy, and she will sing, because she will have numerous offspring; her children will fill her tent and more (see Isaiah 54:1, 2, 8). God’s bride will no longer be ashamed nor remember her widowhood (see Isaiah 54:4), “For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called” (Isaiah 54:6).

In the day of his new covenant, the Lord promised that he will cleanse his daughters and that he “will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain” (Isaiah 4:5–6).

Isaiah culminated his marriage imagery by promising that Israel will be a crown of glory and a royal gem in God’s hand. She will no longer be forsaken or desolate, meaning divorced or widowed, but will be married (see Isaiah 62:3–4).22 Isaiah then likened the marriage of a young man who marries a virgin and rejoices over his bride to

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22 Parry, Parry, and Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah*, 548–549.
the marriage of God to Israel and his rejoicing over his bride (see JST Isaiah 62:5). God sent Immanuel as a sign and promise that he would redeem Israel, his bride.

Marriage Symbolism in Jeremiah

Jeremiah began his discourse as a prophet with the marriage metaphor. The Lord commanded him to say, “I remember thee, the kindness of youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase” (Jeremiah 2:2–3). However, Judah committed two sins: “they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). Jeremiah reminded Judah that the children of Israel had made a covenant with God in Sinai. Further, the house of Israel was regarded as “firstfruits,” or a holy offering belonging to God and not to be for profane or common use. Yet she had turned away from God. Jeremiah compared it to turning away from the sure fountain of living waters and digging leaky wells that could not hold water. In a graphic sexual analogy, Jeremiah compared Judah’s incontinence to a camel in heat who cannot be restrained and whose suitors need not pursue her to find her, since she seeks them (see Jeremiah 2:23–24).23 In disbelief at Judah’s rebellion and apostasy, the Lord asked, “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? . . . Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents (Jeremiah 2:32–34). God asked stinging questions: could a young woman forget her clothing and jewels that make her attractive and beautiful or

23 Other graphic images of harlotry and adultery are found in Jeremiah 4:30–31; 5:7–8.
could a bride forget her wedding dress? It would be equally absurd that Judah should forget God. Judah set her course to seek “love” and instead of the skirt of the Lord spread about her as a sign of their marriage (see Ruth 3:9), her skirts are full of blood, evidencing the actions that accompanied her apostasy.

More rhetorical questions regarding marriage fidelity are posed in Jeremiah 3.

If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man’s, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou has played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me. . . . Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat with them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness. . . . Thou hadst a whore’s forehead, thou refused to be ashamed. Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth. (Jeremiah 3:1-4)

Under Hebrew law, if a man divorced a woman he could not re-marry her; to do so “would cause the land to sin” (Deuteronomy 24:4). Thus the question, how can Judah who has been unfaithful to her covenant with God by lying with so many others, return to him; and the accusation, “thou hast polluted the land.” Sadly, Judah was unabashed by the guilty and hard look of a harlot and refused to return to the friend of her youth, God.

“Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel” (Jeremiah 3:20). Nevertheless, God never divorced the house of Israel. Hence, there was hope: she could return to him and he could redeem her.

Despite her treachery, God was ready to forgive Judah, if she would acknowledge her sins and return to him: “Return, thou backsliding Israel . . . and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful . . . and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God . . . .
Turn, O backsliding children . . . for I am married unto you” (Jeremiah 3:12–14).

Eventually, Israel will recognize that only God can heal her backsliding and she will attest, “Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel” (Jeremiah 3:23).24

**Marriage Symbolism in Ezekiel**

The most extensive description of a marriage preparation and covenant ceremony is found in Ezekiel 16.25 In these passages the bridegroom Jehovah clothed, fed, and cared for his bride, Israel. He loved her and covered26 her nakedness.27 He washed and anointed her with oil; clothed her in embroidered work, fine linen and silk; bedecked her with ornaments, bracelets, ear rings of gold and silver; and placed a jewel on her forehead and a crown upon her head. The bridegroom made Israel beautiful and perfect (see Ezekiel 16:7–14).28 The Lord cared for her completely and gave her only the finest

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26 The actual phrase is “Thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness.” The Lord loved us first as demonstrated by His atoning sacrifice. To spread one’s skirt over another is an allusion to marriage (see Ruth 3:9). The covering that the Lord provides for our protection is His atoning sacrifice.
27 See Romans 13:14; 2 Corinthians 5:4; Galatians 3:27; Mormon 9:5. Many biblical commentators interpret Adam and Eve’s nakedness as being literally without clothing, however, it can have much deeper implications, as it probably does in this passage of Ezekiel. Adam and Eve in their nakedness, became aware of their nothingness compared to God. Perhaps they realized they had been innocent, but were now culpable and in need of covering by the atonement. Their attempt to cover themselves with aprons of fig-leaves was inadequate; therefore God made them coats of skins to cover them (see Genesis 3:7, 21; Moses 4:13, 27). See John A. Tvednes, “Priestly Clothing in Bible Times and The Garment of Adam,” in Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism, ed. Donald Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 653. See also Louis Ginzburg, Legends of the Jews (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1983), 96: “I knew at once that I was stripped of the righteousness in which I had been clothed.” See also “Gospel of Phillip” 58.10–17: “Do not despise the lamb, for without it, it is not possible to see the king. No one will be able to go in to the king if he is naked.”
28 These are allusions to temple ordinances and the Lord’s ability to make us complete after we have done all we can. (see D&C 76:50–59).
adornments. Further, he swore an oath and entered into a covenant declaring that Israel belonged to him (see Ezekiel 16:8).

However, “in mistaken reliance on the power of her beauty, seduced by the flattering attentions of the world around her, she who was so highly exalted forgets her past and her wonderful deliverance, and dishonours herself and her husband by surrendering as any harlot would to her adorers. . . . She sinks to being a common prostitute who serves the demands of the whole public.”29 Israel had “played the harlot,” poured out fornications,” made “images of men,” committing “whoredom with them,” sacrificed her sons and daughters offering them “to pass through the fire,” and built a “high place at the head of every way” (see Ezekiel 16:15–25). Both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom made foreign alliances with kingdoms from Canaan to Chaldea, including Egypt and Assyria, instead of recognizing her covenant with God who promised to protect her. Judah created idols and built altars on hilltops for worship, and even sacrificed her children to the fire-god, Moloch,30 forgetting that she had covenanted to worship only God who had brought her out of bondage in Egypt and led her to the promised land.

As a result of “playing the harlot,” the Lord warned Judah that both her “lovers,” as well as those whom she hated would discover her nakedness (see Ezekiel 16:35–37).31 God would judge her harshly, “as women that break wedlock and shed blood” (Ezekiel 16:38). Her former “lovers” would overrun her, and strip her of her clothes and jewels

30 The place of the idolatrous worship of the fire-god Molech was in the valley of Hinnom, south and west of Jerusalem. J. D. Douglas, ed., New Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Hinnom.”
31 Because of Israel’s wickedness she was no longer covered by the atonement. The Lord’s covenant of protection is based upon recognizing he is the “suzerain” by being obedient to his commands.
(see Ezekiel 16:39–41). God compared Judah to kingdoms that he destroyed or that had been brought into captivity; the Hittites, Amorites, Sodom, and Samaria, implying the same will occur to her because of her “adultery,” for she had “despised the oath in breaking the covenant” (see Ezekiel 16:59).

However, God promised there will be a future rapprochement with his bride, the house of Israel: “Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed. . . And I will establish my covenant with thee: and thou shalt know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 16:60–62). These are explicit connections between marriage and covenant. God will remember the covenant he made anciently with Israel and will establish a new covenant with Israel; and Israel will acknowledge God as her sovereign.

Summary

From these symbolic images, the covenant relationship of Israel with Jehovah was compared to a marriage. Prophets to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms used this metaphor to graphically illustrate fidelity to God and spouse. Through symbolic names of prophets, wives, and children, Israel was graphically taught the expectation of God the bride groom, for his bride Israel. By covenant, Israel belongs to God, and only he can fulfill the glorious promises of the covenant. Although Israel forgot him and was an adulterous consort, he did not give her a bill of divorcement, nor will he ever forget her, for he says, “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me” (Isaiah 49:16). Their covenant relationship is binding and when Israel repents the Lord will make a new covenant relationship with his bride.
Although Milgrom and others concluded that the metaphorical marriage only pertained to God's relationship with Israel, Falk pointed out that the metaphorical marriage must have a corollary in literal Israelite marriages in order to have meaning.\(^\text{32}\) Thus, the metaphorical marriage covenant reflected the nature of Israel's relationship with God. Alternately, the relationship God had with Israel was symbolic of the marriage covenant between a husband and wife, for example, Adam and Eve.

Chapter 3

Literary Structures and Ritual Patterns in Covenant Making

Having found specific reference to the words “covenant,” “oath,” and “know” in the metaphorical marriage, I will now look at literary structures and patterns in covenant making. Elias Bickerman first recognized literary structures common to both treaties and covenants.¹ Klaus Baltzer defined the forms that fit into each element of this structure.² Dennis McCarthy further noted a ritual pattern common to the process of covenant making.³ Herbert Huffmon identified the word γνώσις as a legal term with two common elements: mutual recognition and a binding agreement.⁴ It would appear that if several of these elements characteristic of treaties are found in the context of metaphorical marriage such as Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel wrote about, or literal marriage such as Adam and Eve’s, then we may assume that a covenant is being made.⁵

Literary Structures in the Metaphorical Marriage

Since God’s metaphorical marriage with Israel is covenantal, we should expect to find the literary structures associated with covenants in the writings of Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Introduction of the speaker. The introduction of the speaker is a preamble that designates who the speaker is, and thus, who it is that grants the covenant.⁶ In Hosea,

⁵ McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, 6.
Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel the Lord established that he was the one speaking and commanding his people through his chosen prophet. The throne theophany or personal divine call narrative described by these same prophets and others made clear the pattern God used to entitle his prophets before he gave them their assignment and message, and they became his “watchman” on the tower (see Ezekiel 1–3; Isaiah 6). Thus, prophets were authorized to speak in the first person as though they were God in what might be termed “divine investiture” of authority. Often, the Lord’s words are even more clearly identified with “thus saith the Lord God,” or “the word of the Lord came to me saying” (Hosea 3:1; Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 2:1; Ezekiel 16:3).

**Historical prologue.** The historical prologue is the antecedent history and presents a brief historical retrospective of the relationship between the parties. This history is intended to provide the legal precedent for the covenant. Israel’s relationship with God is set forth in Exodus 20: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2). God established himself as the “suzerain” by rescuing Israel from the bondage of Egypt. He then set the stipulations or commandments his “vassal” Israel must accept.

**Stipulations.** The stipulations are a statement of substance. The relationship is defined in terms of positive and negative imperatives. The first part of the stipulations section is the conditions of the covenant. The second part of this section is the confirmation of the covenant by oath. The stipulations of God’s covenant with Israel, their metaphorical marriage, were stated in the law, particularly the apodictic

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8 Baltzer, The Covenant Formulary, 22.
pronouncements of Exodus 20. Thus, as we look at Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, in general, the particular stipulations were not reiterated. The implication is that they were known and did not need to be restated. However, the Lord admonished Jeremiah to remind the people:

Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers. (Jeremiah 11:1–5).

All four prophets had one metaphorical theme expressed by using a form of the Hebrew roots נַּךְ and נָכָה, meaning adultery, whoredoms, harlotry, and apostasy. The graphic use of sexual terms to teach covenant obedience is evident in the writings of each of these prophets. The people knew the covenant terms, for they were read aloud to them on particular holy days. Thus, in general, the prophets detailed how Israel was not keeping her part of the covenant stipulations and the consequences of this disobedience.

Document. The document itself is a written copy of the covenant and generally follows a “legal schemata.” The “marriage” document is Israel’s covenant she made at Sinai, written by the finger of God upon stone tablets and kept in a holy place, the tabernacle (see Exodus 32:16; 40:3). Israel recognized the covenant came from God, for it was one they agreed to and read at regular intervals, as is clear from numerous passages (see Exodus 20:22; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4:1, 5, 9; 5:1–4; 29; 31). Isaiah referred

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10 See also David J. Clark, “Sex-Related Imagery in the Prophets,” The Bible Translator 33:409.
11 Baltzer, The Covenant Formulary, 27.
symbolically to this "marriage" document when he asked, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away?" (Isaiah 50:1). Further, although the covenant was written on stone tablets, the Lord was more concerned that this covenant be written in the hearts of the people, just as he engraved those who covenanted with him on his hands (see Isaiah 51:7; 49:16).

Calling upon gods or God. The invocation of the gods as witnesses is found in ancient Near Eastern treaties; however, in the case of a covenant between God and his children, God is both a party to and the guarantor of the covenant. Although God was not expressly named as a 'witness,' he was considered to be present throughout covenant ceremonies to which he is a party. In some cases, heaven and earth, stones, or angels are invoked as witnesses (see Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:27; 1 Enoch 100).\textsuperscript{12} Old Testament passages called upon God to witness oaths between two individuals; however, God himself was the witness in his covenant relationship with Israel. He spoke with his messengers, the prophets, and they delivered his message in the first person. He was the ultimate witness of the covenant that he gave personally to Moses on Mount Sinai. Nevertheless, in order for the rest of those camped at the base of the mountain to claim kinship with Israel, God, angels, and others were called to be witnesses of the covenant with God. Moses said, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Pronouncement of cursings and blessings. Cursings pronounced the consequences if the obligation was broken. The blessings were the current status quo

\textsuperscript{12} Baltzer, \textit{The Covenant Formulary}, 24–25.
and acknowledged to be present.  

13 The Lord made clear that this covenant and oath had one purpose, to make the children of Israel his special people as he had promised their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Deuteronomy 29:13). The blessings pronounced upon Israel for keeping their covenant with God were itemized in Deuteronomy 28:1–14, such as blessings and bounty upon home and labors, fruit of the body, ground, and animals, rain in its season, and protection. Equally, the cursings for breaking their covenant with God were delineated in Deuteronomy 28:15–68. All of the previous promises were rescinded so that there were not blessings and bounty but “cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed” (Deuteronomy 28:20). Pestilence, sickness, enemies, darkness, oppression, slavery, and scattering were the cursings pronounced upon Israel if she were disobedient to her covenant.

Moses gave instructions for the dramatic teaching of the blessings and cursings of the covenant when they entered into the promised land. The tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin were to stand upon Mount Gerizim to announce the blessings upon the people. Opposite them on Mount Ebal, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali were to pronounce the cursings upon the people. The ritual began with the Levites shouting a series of cursings to which all the people were to answer, “Amen” (see Deuteronomy 27:11–26). The Levites probably faced eastward, thus the blessings were shouted from Mount Gerizim to the south, or on the right hand of the Levites, and the cursings were shouted from Mount Ebal to the north.

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or on their left hand. Moses announced that the covenant included all. He enumerated captains of tribes, elders, officers, all the men, wives, children, strangers in their camp, from the highest to the lowest positions, with all that were present that day, and also those not present (see Deuteronomy 29:10–11, 14–15).

After entering into the Promised Land and conquering the cities of Jericho and Ai, Joshua built an altar at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim and followed the directions Moses had given him. The shouting of blessings and cursings across a relatively narrow valley was surely a spectacular auditory, visual, and spiritual rite designed to impress deeply upon the minds and hearts of the Israelites who they were in God’s eyes, and what possibilities lay before them and their posterity, dependent upon their choices. After the ritual enactment of the covenant, Joshua read the law, the blessings and cursings, and all that Moses had commanded (Joshua 8:30–35).

Hence, the people knew the covenant stipulations. Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all prophesied to apostate people; thus, their words were prophetic reminders of the specific cursings that would occur as a result of breaking the covenant. Each prophet also testified of great blessings “in that day” when Israel would return to the Lord and become faithful to her covenant.

God instructed Hosea to prophesy that Israel will fail and he will not extend mercy to her, because he could not call her his people. Israel had not recognized his hand

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14 The temple doors face eastward, signifying the direction of the rising sun, the glory of the Lord, the direction of the star at the birth of the Savior, and the direction from which the Son of God will come (Ezekiel 10:19; 43:2; Matthew 2:2; 24:27). The right hand is the favored hand for the Lord’s sheep, or those who follow His commandments and are blessed. The left hand is associated with goats, those who are not obedient (Matthew 25:33). Additionally, the north is associated with the place where Lucifer wanted to sit (Isaiah 14:13). According to the choice placed before them by Moses, the right signified life, whereas the left signified death (Deuteronomy 30:19).
in blessing her with food, drink, silver, and gold. Thus, these blessings would be taken away. Further, God pronounced his judgment, “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). Israel was taken captive for breaking the covenant.

In Isaiah, the Lord declared that Israel, the inhabitants of his promised land, “have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left” (Isaiah 24:6–6). Thus, destruction would be the curse for disobedience to the covenant.

The Lord commanded Jeremiah to remind the people of the Sinai covenant and to formally accuse them by using the legal term “conspiracy."

A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers. (Jeremiah 11:9–10)

The accusation was followed by a pronouncement of judgment: “Behold I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them (Jeremiah 11:11).

In Ezekiel the Lord blessed his bride, Israel, until she was disobedient to her covenant. He enumerated her instances of covenant breaking and then judged her, “as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged” (Ezekiel 16:38). The judgment curses are listed: she will be thrown down, stripped of her clothes and fair jewels; she will be stoned and killed by the sword; and her homes will be burned (Ezekiel 16:39–41).
In summary, the metaphorical marriage between God and Israel contains or alludes to all the literary structures Bickerman identified with ancient Near Eastern treaties and biblical covenants.

**Treaty/Covenant Ritual Pattern in the Metaphorical Marriage**

McCarthy noted five elements that are a common ritual pattern associated with the process of treaty and covenant making and which may also be present in the metaphorical marriage. I will examine the writings of Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel for the elements of this pattern. The pattern is most clearly seen in Ezekiel; however, the writings of Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah also allude to this pattern. In illustrating the God/Israel relationship, these prophets do not stick solely with marriage to express God’s existing relationship or the redefined and clarified relationship. In explaining God’s relationship to his people, Israel may be a child—sometimes a little girl and sometimes a little boy—a beautiful maiden, a bride, or a faithless harlot.

Negotiations based on existing relations. Covenant making begins with negotiations based on existing relations and may be a mere formality with polite expressions or a give and take type of bargaining. In Hosea the Lord declared “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hosea 11:1). The background relationship of leading Israel out of bondage in Egypt is alluded to in this passage, and that Israel as a tribal and national group was in its infancy. In Isaiah, God reminded Israel that he created, formed, and redeemed her, testifying, “I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine” (Isaiah 43:1). Additionally, he reminded her of her great progenitors, Abraham and Sarah, further confirming the idea that the Lord knew Israel

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before her birth in the Exodus (Isaiah 51:1–2). Israel’s early relationship with God was established by Jeremiah in this passage: “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness” (Jeremiah 2:2). In Ezekiel, the Lord reminded Israel of her birth in the land of Canaan among Amorites and Hittites. No one else cared for Israel except the Lord. Further, the Lord made clear infant Israel could not have survived without him; he nurtured her and commanded her, “Live” (see Ezekiel 16:3–6).

**Clearer definition of the relation.** These negotiations result in a more definite relationship.²⁶ Carrying further the relationship with Israel and specifically Ephraim as a little boy, the Lord taught him to walk, carried him in his arms, healed him, fed him, and loved him (see Hosea 11:3–4). After enumerating Ephraim’s sins, the Lord expressed his deep love asking, “How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel” (Hosea 11:8). In Isaiah, the Lord expressed his care, love and close relationship with Israel by cleansing, leading, and protecting her (see Isaiah 4:4–6). In Jeremiah, the Lord made clear the relationship with Israel was not that of a servant or slave, she was a beautiful maiden and his bride (see Jeremiah 2:14, 32). Ezekiel detailed Israel’s birth and development into a beautiful young woman whom the Lord succored and for whom he cared. He declared that he caused her to multiply, increase, and wax great (see Ezekiel 16:7). Thus, God’s existing and well-defined relationship with Israel was familial. God had given birth, raised a child, and provided all that was necessary to produce a beautiful maiden to whom he was wedded.

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Symbolic affirmation. Often a symbolic affirmation, sign, or ritual ratified or memorialized the covenant. Hosea represented the Lord both in the symbolic meaning of his name, “deliverer,” and in his calling as prophet. Gomer, representing apostate Israel, was the Lord’s daughter who God commanded Hosea to marry and love. Although she was unfaithful, he must seek after her and, despite the difficulties, increase his level of patience and commitment to his wife. Hosea’s relationship with Gomer was intimate; they “know” each other and have children (see Hosea 1:3, 4, 6, 8).

In Isaiah, the Lord alluded to his marriage with his bride, Israel, in declaring that he had not divorced her (see Isaiah 50:1). Further, Isaiah praised the Lord, proclaiming, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

In Jeremiah, the Lord enumerated the sins of an unfaithful wife, thus alluding to their marriage. In Ezekiel, the ritual memorializing the covenant was symbolically stated in poetic form: “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness” (Ezekiel 16:8). To spread one’s skirt over another is an allusion to marriage, as well as sexual relations (see Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20; Ruth 3:9).

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18 The “skirt” or covering which the Lord provides to protect our nakedness is his atoning sacrifice.
Notice of covenant making. These steps are followed by a formal announcement or notice of the covenant. Hosea discussed the covenant in terms of it not being kept: “But they like men have transgressed the covenant” (Hosea 6:7); they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law” (Hosea 8:1). However, he also speaks of a future covenant. God rejoices “in that day” when “I will make a covenant for them. . . . And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord” (Hosea 2:18–20). Isaiah declared that Israel has “broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:5). Yet, the Lord promised that he will come to Zion and redeem the repentant. The Lord declared, “This is my covenant with them . . . from henceforth and for ever” (Isaiah 59:21). Israel broke the everlasting covenant. However, for those of Jacob who will turn from transgression, the Lord promised to make an everlasting covenant (see Isaiah 61:8). In Jeremiah we can see clearly in the following passage a reference to the old covenant, the marriage relationship, and the new covenant.

I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them . . . but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them. (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

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In Ezekiel, the formal affirmation that a covenant was made is clear in these words: “Yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine” (Ezekiel 16:8).

Association with a shrine. Finally, covenant making frequently occurs at a sacred place.20 It doesn’t appear that Hosea speaks directly or indirectly of the temple. However, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel allude to the temple in some form. Isaiah’s prophetic call was in the temple, and he referred to the “mountain of the Lord’s house.” Additionally, Isaiah made a rare Old Testament reference to eternal marriage saying “Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate” (Isaiah 34:16).21 Jeremiah announced that both the children of Israel and of Judah will seek Zion saying “let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant.” Zion is a mountain in Jerusalem and is symbolic of the Lord’s mountain, the temple. Ezekiel associated the preparation of the bride with rituals common to temple purity. For example, God washed his bride, anointed her with oil, clothed her with fine linen and silk, bedecked her with bracelets, chains, jewels, and earrings made of gold and silver, and placed a crown upon her head (see Ezekiel 16:9–13).

We have found all five elements, although the last is the least clear, of the pattern commonly associated with the ritual process of treaty/covenant making in the writings about the metaphorical marriage covenant by Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. I will next examine these texts for the use “know.”

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21 Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, Understanding Isaiah (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 313.
"Know" in the Metaphorical Marriage

As previously discussed, an additional evidence of covenant making is the use of "know," in the senses of mutual recognition of a binding relationship, and between a man and woman indicating the consummation of a licit relationship, marriage. It can also refer to an illicit sexual relationship such as adultery. Hosea "knows" Gomer his wife, because they have children. In addition, Gomer "knows" many others because she was called a "wife of whoredoms" and "an adulteress" (Hosea 1:2; 2:1). Gomer did not recognize "knowing" as a legally binding relationship. She consummated marriage but continued to "know" others. Isaiah promised that "in that day" his people will "know" the name of God, and "know" that he speaks to them (Isaiah 52:6). Although Jeremiah described Judah's sexual behavior in the graphic terms of a harlot, he promised that when the Lord makes his "new covenant" with the house of Israel that all will "know" only God (see Jeremiah 2:23–24; 3:1–2, 6–9; 31:31–34). In the Ezekiel account, Israel "knows" many consorts, but not her bridegroom. God described her as a harlot and a whore, accused her of fornications and whoredoms, and of having many lovers (see Ezekiel 16:15–37). Nevertheless, when Israel repents, God will restore his covenant and then Israel will "know," meaning recognize and be faithful to her Lord (see Ezekiel 16:62).

The metaphorical marriage between God, the bridegroom, and his bride, Israel, has evidence of literary structures, common ritual process patterns, and legal terminology associated with treaty and covenant making, as well as language related to the
consummation of marriage. Next I will examine the literal marriage of Adam and Eve to see if these same structures, elements, and legal terms exist here.

Literary Structures in the Covenant of God with Adam and Eve, and in their Marriage

While the metaphor of the bride and bridegroom in the writings of Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel symbolized the covenant between God and Israel and contained literary structures and other elements common to the ritual process of covenant making, the metaphor would not be understandable if it did not correspond with the literal marriage relationship.  

Thus, Kruger said, “It is obvious that the use of a specific image in a particular society demands a certain cultural milieu in which this image can function meaningfully.” If Adam and Eve’s marriage was covenant based, we should expect to find the literary structures associated with covenants. However, just as there were two relationships, one figurative and one literal, intertwined in the metaphorical marriage, so also were there two relationships surrounding the creation and marriage of Adam and Eve intertwined. One relationship was the “suzerain/vassal” association between God and Adam and Eve. God as the creator gives commands that they must follow. The other relationship was between Adam and Eve. Whether it was a “suzerain/vassal” or a “parity” association will be discussed in chapter 4. Because the two relationships are so closely related I will discuss them both.

Introduction of the speaker. The creation account in Genesis leaves no doubt that God, the creator, was in charge. He was actively involved in organizing all the elements,

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22 Falk, Hebrew Law in Biblical Times, 190.
animate and inanimate, for the earth. At the completion of each creative period he spoke, pronouncing his works of creation good. Adam and Eve were God’s crowning creation. At this pinnacle, “God saw everything that he had made, and, behold it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

**Historical prologue.** Following the creation of Adam, God took him and placed him in the Garden of Eden, instructing him to “dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Additionally, God brought the animals to Adam to name them. Thus, Adam was given commandments regarding his responsibilities with the plant and animal kingdom. However, God did not pronounce his creation good because there was no “help meet” for Adam. Thus God declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). The man Adam, his present creation, was not yet good. There needed to be an additional creation, and, he had determined to do it. As the creator of Adam and Eve, as well as their world, God had a “suzerainty” relationship with them.

**Stipulations.** God established with Adam and Eve several stipulations. (1) To remain in the Garden, they could eat from all the trees except the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17; 3:2–3). (2) Eve was a gift to Adam from God and was to remain with him. Adam, in responding to why he partook of the fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, said, “The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave be of the tree, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12). The idea that they must remain together is seen more clearly in the interjection of this additional phrase from the Joseph Smith Translation: “and commandest that she should remain with me” (Moses 4:18). Thus, God created a woman, gave her to Adam, and commanded them to stay
together. (3) Prior to Eve’s creation, God assigned her the role of “help meet” (see Genesis 2:20). After the Fall, God reiterated his command to Eve to remain with Adam, and Adam’s role as ruler of all his creations. Speaking to Eve he said, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16). The meaning of the God given roles, “help meet” and “ruler” will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Document. We have no documents recorded in the scripture; however, this is not surprising. Tucker reminds us why: “Primarily because the Old Testament preserves only narratives about covenants and covenant ceremonies, not covenant texts themselves.” Nevertheless, we see Adam and Eve’s acceptance of their “vassal” relationship to God in several passages. Adam accepted the gift of Eve and embraced her (see Genesis 2:23–24). Eve recognized the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge (see Genesis 3:3). Both of them responded to questions by their creator regarding their personal obedience to his commandments (see Genesis 3:9–13). Additionally, we learn that Adam formalized his relationship with God through the acceptance of covenant rituals. Adam received baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the priesthood (see Moses 6:64–68). In the relationship between Adam and Eve, Hugenberger maintained that Adam spoke verba solemnia before God: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). Similar declarations were made in covenant to David as king of Israel. All the tribes of Israel came before David in Hebron and affirmed his kingship proclaiming, “we are thy bone and thy flesh” (2 Samuel 5:1; 1 Chronicles 11:1).

Calling upon the gods or God. Since God gave Eve to Adam and commanded her to remain with him, it is apparent that he was present and involved in their marriage. God is the ultimate witness and he was an active participant in their creation and necessary interrelationship. Von Rad described this participation: “God himself, like a father of the bride, leads the woman to the man.”26 Thus, there was no need to invoke the name of God to act as a witness.

Pronouncement of cursings and blessings. While we have no record of Adam or Eve solemnizing their marriage with a blessing and cursing, we do have the blessing and cursing genre in God’s pronouncements regarding Satan, the ground, and Adam and Eve.

God blessed and instructed Adam and Eve to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Following Adam and Eve’s confession of disobedience in partaking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God pronounced the consequences of their disobedience. To Eve he said, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:17). To Adam God said, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground (Genesis 3:17–19). Additionally, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:24).

26 Gerhard Von Rad, Genesis (Philadelphia: Westminster), 82.
God cursed Satan for his role in the Fall, announcing, “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:14–15).

Although all the elements of McCarthy’s treaty/covenant literary structure cannot be definitively found, an argument from silence does not prove they never existed. The narrative in the scriptures indicates the presence of treaty/covenant literary structures between God and Adam and Eve, as well as between Adam and Eve. Further, one cannot assume that all covenants have every literary element. There is more than one covenant making techniques and more than one form of covenant. For example, not all the elements are present in Exodus 20; nevertheless, it is unquestionably a covenant.27

Treaty/Covenant Ritual Pattern in the Covenant of God with Adam and Eve, and in their Marriage

The following elements of McCarthy’s treaty and covenant ritual pattern are found in biblical passages regarding the relationship between God and Adam and Eve, and in their marriage.

Negotiations based on existing relations. A previous and “general” relationship is the initial basis for the treaty/covenant. The following passage illustrates the prior relationship that the man had to the woman: “And I, the Lord God, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam; and he slept, and I took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in the stead thereof; and the rib which I, the Lord God, had taken from man, made I a woman,

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27 McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, 5.
and brought her unto the man” (Moses 3:22). Although most commentators hold the “rib story” as figurative, it clearly indicates that Adam and Eve have a close relationship.

**Clearer definition of the relation.** Adam recognizes Eve as being like him more than in just a “general” sense. Unlike other creations of the animal kingdom that have arms and legs, but also fur, scales, or some other sort of covering, woman has his same type of flesh and bones. Adam declared this when he said, “This is now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh (Genesis 2:23). Adam underscored this close relationship declaring, “she shall be called Woman, [נָשָׁה], because she was taken out of Man,” [יִשָּׁה] (Genesis 2:23). Thus, God created woman “out of man” and by implication she was like man. Therefore, Adam rightly concluded she had a closer relationship to him than any other creation.

Further, Elohim, “brought her unto the man,” “gave [her] to be with [him],” and “commandest that she should remain with me” (Genesis 2:22; Genesis 3:12; Moses 4:18). These passages indicate that God married the two and stipulated that their relationship was intended to be binding.

**Symbolic affirmation.** Following covenant making there is a ritual that signifies, ratifies, or memorializes the covenant. There are several examples of symbolic words and actions which affirm the marriage of Adam and Eve as a covenant.

First is the verbal affirmation: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Christ clarified that these words are God’s declaration when he asked the Pharisees, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and
they twain shall be one flesh?” (Matthew 19:4–5). Christ then reiterated that God had bound Adam and Eve by covenant, saying, “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6).

Further, Christ clarified that God intended for this covenant to be binding when he responded to the Pharisees’ question regarding divorce: “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). Echoing the teachings of Christ against easy divorce, the apostle Paul stated that the Lord commanded, “Let not the wife depart from her husband. . . . and let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:10–11). Throughout this chapter of Corinthians, Paul established “a steady theme of loyalty to a married partner once that relationship is made.”

Other commands and actions affirmed the marriage covenant. Following the Fall, God commanded Eve that in the marriage [her] “desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16). Adam gave his wife a name, Eve, and prophesied that she is the “mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). God made Adam and Eve a garment of skins, thus confirming his role in their covenantal relationship with him and with one another (see Genesis 3:21).

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29 The meaning of the God-given roles of Adam and Eve will be discussed in Chapter 4.
30 Their attempt to cover themselves with aprons of fig leaves was inadequate (see Isaiah 28:20), therefore, it was necessary for God to cover them, making these garments sacred clothing. The skin came from an animal sacrificed for that purpose: the first death since mortality entered the world. From a Christian perspective, all things pointing to Christ, and in keeping with Old Testament symbolism, the animal sacrificed was possibly a lamb to remind them that the Lamb of God would be sacrificed in the meridian of time to cover their sins. Continuing this symbolism, wearing animal skins would be a reminder that the Lamb of God was their protection against the fiery darts of Satan (see Ephesians 6:11–17). Parry believes these vestments were archetypes for later sacral vestments belonging to the Israelite temple system. Donald Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, and Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), 145.
Perhaps the most significant symbol establishing a covenant is the “sign of the covenant.” Three major signs or tokens of covenants between God and man are found in the Old Testament. The first is the Sabbath, a sign that the Creation was complete (see Exodus 31:16–17). The second is the rainbow, a token of the covenant that God would never again send “a flood to destroy all flesh” (Genesis 9:12–15). The third is circumcision, which God commanded Abraham and all his children to observe as a token of their covenant (see Genesis 17:9–10). There is, however, a fourth sign or token when the covenant is the marriage covenant.

Hugenberger argued, “Clearly, sexual intercourse is the indispensable means for the consummation of marriage in the Old Testament and elsewhere in the ancient Near East. . . . It seems probable that sexual union functioned in this manner precisely because it was viewed as an oath-sign.” Thus, the statement “And Adam knew Eve his wife” (Genesis 4:1) is the sign or token of the covenant that officially signified that a covenant had been made.

Association with a shrine. Adam and Eve lived in Eden, which was the place of their marriage. Ezekiel calls Eden “the garden of God” and his “holy mountain” (Ezekiel 28:13, 14). Thus, Adam and Eve married in the garden of God’s holy mountain. The presence of God in Eden as he spoke with Adam and Eve made it sacred space. Eliade called the Garden of Eden the heavenly prototype of the temple. Further, it is the “Holy of Holies, and the dwelling of the Lord” (Jubilees 3:19). The covenant of Adam and Eve

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31 Hugenberger, Marriage as a Covenant, 279.
was sacred and holy, because God performed the marriage in a most sacred and holy place.

In summary, the scriptural account of the marriage of Adam and Eve contains elements of the covenant-making ritual pattern, further evidencing the nature of the relationship as covenant-based.

"Know" in the Covenant of God with Adam and Eve, and in their Marriage

The word "know" is not used in the Old Testament to define the relationship between God, Adam, and Eve. Nevertheless, the previous discussion regarding literary elements and covenant making patterns have illustrated that the relationship between God and his human creations was a "suzerain/vassal" association. However, we do find "know" used in further defining the relationship between Adam and Eve. As previously discussed, Adam "knew" Eve (see Genesis 4:1). Sexual union, the token of the covenant, indicated that Adam and Eve recognized each other as husband and wife and that their relationship was legally binding.

Additional References to Adam and Eve

Allusions in scriptures and Jewish legends give further information about the marriage of Adam and Eve, and link the metaphorical marriage covenant to the literal marriage covenant.

In Ezekiel 28, we find a direct reference to Adam in the Garden of Eden. The story of the primal man is found in the midst of an indictment and death lament regarding the King of Tyre. The imagery of the garden is the backdrop for this dramatic indictment. Two chapters detailing the richness of the natural resources in his realm

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precede the lament for this king, and his hubris in thinking he had created it (see Ezekiel 26–27). The King of Tyre was placed in a fruitful garden spot, made a king, but yielded particularly to the sin of pride believing he was “a God” (Ezekiel 28:2). As a result, God declared he would cast him out and that the king would die (see Ezekiel 28:16–17). In comparing Adam and the king, it is possible to learn new things about Adam. In this imagery, the King of Tyre [Tyre] reflects Adam in some ways. “King of Tyrs . . . thou seallest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty” (Ezekiel 28:12). By extension, Adam is represented as a king and is described as being the sum of wisdom and beauty.

“Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold” (Ezekiel 28:13). These stones are virtually identical to the ones that God directed Moses to place in the “breastplate of judgment” for Aaron and were symbolic of his priestly office (see Exodus 28:15–20). “Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire” (Ezekiel 28:14). According to this text, it appears one can argue that in the Garden of Eden, God anointed Adam a priest and gave him the responsibility to act as a “divine sentinel guarding the path leading to the presence of God.”

Although the Genesis account implies that God came down to Eden, in this account, Adam walked up and down to God’s holy mountain. Because of Adam’s sacred calling, God could have permitted him to walk up the holy mountain to his presence in “everlasting burnings” to converse with him (see Isaiah 33:14). Although the context of this metaphor is an indictment of and lament for the King

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35 Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” 139.
of Tyre, it appears to give additional information about Adam’s covenant relationship with God and his responsibilities.

An additional account of Adam and Eve’s marriage is found in Jewish legend. According to this legend, the celebration ceremony of this first wedding was unlike any other. God attired and adorned Eve and blessed the couple as the angels played instruments and danced before them.36

Summary

This chapter has dealt with the metaphorical marriage covenant between God and Israel, and the literal marriage of Adam and Eve. The purpose of this chapter was to examine literary structural elements, elements common to the ritual of treaty/covenant making, and the use of “know” in both metaphorical and literal marriage. Both the metaphorical marriage and the literal marriage exhibited these structures, elements, and word. Further, the scriptures link the metaphorical to the literal making it apparent that the marriage of Adam and Eve was covenant-based. In tying the metaphorical marriage covenant to the literal marriage of Adam and Eve, sacred places such as Eden, Mount Sinai, and the tabernacle—all meaning temple—found or legitimize the marriage. The sacred covenant binds Adam and Eve, Israel, and each individual to God. Further, God’s law of obedience to his covenant, the metaphorical marriage, underlies the literal marriage covenant.37

Chapter 4

Etymological Backgrounds of “Help Meet” and “Rule Over”

Not only is marriage a sacred covenant ordained by God; but within the marriage of Adam and Eve were two divinely assigned roles, “help meet” and “ruler.” Essential to defining the nature of the husband and wife relationship within the marriage covenant is understanding what is meant by Eve’s designation to be a “help meet” and Adam’s role to “rule over.” This chapter will examine the etymology of these two words and discuss Adam and Eve in these roles.

Etymology of “Help Meet”

The words “help meet” are found in Genesis in reference to a need of Adam. God noted, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). After Adam named all the animals the record states: “but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:20). The Hebrew words for “help meet” are וָרָעָה and וּנְבֶד נֵי and connected by the prepositional particle ב.

The Hebrew word וָרָעָה has two separate Semitic roots. The verbal root רָעָה means to surround as in “to protect or aid” and normally connotes help.¹ The root נְבֶד has the stative meaning of “be abundant” and an active meaning of “come together (in a group), form a mass, assemble.”²

² Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. רָעָה.
In the Old Testament, וּדָב is used most frequently with God as the agent who "helps" his children. To some, the word "help" connotes a subordinate or inferior position. However, in the Old Testament sense of God helping his children, that is obviously incorrect. Furthermore, in English, the word "help" means "to contribute strength, to assist, to save, rescue, or succor." Thus, Eve has a God-given responsibility to protect, aid, succor, assist, support, contribute strength, save, or rescue Adam. She is not divine assistance, however, on a symbolic level, she represents God, who created her to help Adam.

The second Hebrew word, וּדָב is expressed as a verb, as a noun used adverbially, and in the noun nāḏid meaning "prince." As a noun it means literally "front" or "face," but is only used as an adverb or preposition meaning "in front of, before," "opposite to," "immediately in front of," "corresponding," and "contrary, against." The primary meaning of וּדָב is "place opposite, place before, confront with." In Genesis 2:18 and 20 it means "as his counterpart" as in "suitable for him."

Generally, וּדָב refers to verbal and nonverbal communication such as "informing, making known, and revealing in the broadest sense." Interestingly, the semantic field includes the Hebrew verb יד, meaning "know," with the hiphil form of וּדָב, which is וּדָב.

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3 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. "דָב.
6 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. "דָב.
8 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. "דָב."
meaning “to cause to know.”

Perhaps another role of “help meet” is to act as a mirror in revealing or causing to know.

The Hebrew prepositional particle ה is attached to הב meaning “the like of, like, and as.” The adverbial noun הב further clarifies that “help” is not a subordinate position, because הב means corresponding or equal to. Thus, “help meet” conveys the idea of a suitable and equal partner whose responsibility is to protect, aid, succor, assist, support, contribute strength, save, and rescue which should be reciprocated.

**Eve as a Help Meet**

Eve as a “help meet” symbolizes the God-given and essential role of a wife to her husband. God assigned Adam to name the animals. Certainly Adam noticed they were paired, and that none were like him. Then Elohim said, “it is not good that the man should be alone; wherefore, I will make an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18; Moses 3:18). The first phrase, “it is not good that man should be alone,” declared that man is not complete by himself, even with all the plants and animals and his responsibilities for them. The second phrase, “wherefore, I will make an help meet for him,” tells us that God will provide a creation which will enable Adam to become complete. Adam’s solitude is literally helplessness.

Had the King James translators placed a comma between the two words “help” and “meet,” the meaning might be clearer. Today, the words “help” and “meet” have lost their original meanings. In sixteenth-century

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10 *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. “בּוֹוץ.”
13 Sometimes the words *help meet* are confused with the word *helpmate*. A *helpmate* is an assistant, partner, companion, and helper. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “helpmate.”
English, the two words meant fitting or suitable and could be applied to husband or wife. 

Eve was similar to Adam; however, she was neither inferior nor superior, but like and equal to him. The story of the rib is a poetic and metaphorical representation depicting the relationship of Eve to Adam. Biologically she is made of the same flesh and bone. Further, she is taken from a position that is neither superior nor inferior, but from Adam’s side. Thus, their relationship is rib-to-rib or side-by-side. As an equal helper, no hierarchical relationship exists between the primordial pair.

The relationship between Adam and Eve was designed to be complementary—each strengthening the other. Among all of the animal kingdom “there was not found an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:20; Moses 3:20), or none that was suitable for, equal to, or fitting for man. Adam recognized Eve as different from the animals that were brought to him to name. He identified her as being like him and equal to him when he said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23).

**Etymology of “Rule Over”**

Following their fall, God stated the consequences to Adam and Eve individually. After explaining the pain and difficulty that would be experienced in childbirth he said to

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14 The German translations from the Hebrew text are a little different than the KJV, Moses and JST versions. They incorporate some of the Hebrew meanings that are no longer understood in the English help meet. In the Luther translations it states, “ich will ihm eine Gehilfin machen, die um ihn sei.” “ich will ihm eine Hilfe schaffen als sein Gegenüber (*d.h. die zu ihm passt). A translation of the verse could be; I will make him a helper who is like him. The footnote adds the meaning I will create for him a help as his opposite who is suited to him. The Einheits Übersetzung states, “+. . . Ich will ihm eine Hilfe machen, die ihm entspricht.” A translation could be; I will make him a help who corresponds to him. The Collins German Dictionary (London: Collins, 1980), s.v. “entspricht.”

15 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “help meet.” In the seventeenth century the two words were improperly hyphenated and then made into one word with the rest of the phrase “for him” left out. By the nineteenth century helpmeet was no longer recognized as a word.


Eve, “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16). The Hebrew words יִמֶּשֶׂל בּ are translated in the KJV as “shall rule over you.”

The Hebrew root יִמֶּשֶׂל is the result of the blending of two roots; pro-semitic ml and sl. The former meaning to “be like, resemble, speak a parable, and sing a taunt song.” The latter meaning to “rule or govern.”

In general Old Testament usage יִמֶּשֶׂל reinforces notions of the divine creation of the world with God delegating to mortals power to exercise dominion. For example, God said to the male and female after he had created them, “have dominion [ml] over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). יִמֶּשֶׂל is most commonly used with the preposition ב, meaning “rule, have dominion over” in conjunction with human subjects. The preposition ב, which means over is only used twice.

In the political arena of the Old Testament, יִמֶּשֶׂל is associated with ruling and particularly with מֶלֶך, meaning “king.” In a specialized sense יִמֶּשֶׂל means “self-control.” Man is to rule over sin, his enemy (see Genesis 4:7). All the Old Testament texts with the word יִמֶּשֶׂל ultimately reflect the biblical idea of God as the ruler over heaven and earth. Although יִמֶּשֶׂל denotes familial and tribal authority, it most often suggests power over extensive territory. Further, since dominion originates as part of the divine governing order, יִמֶּשֶׂל also connotes the function of serving God. For example, יִמֶּשֶׂל is used

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18 *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. יִמֶּשֶׂל.
to describe the function of the sun and moon. They serve God as his “world clock” by “ruling over” the day and the night (see Genesis 1:16–18).23 God gave Adam and Eve dominion over all the animal kingdom, meaning they are to serve him as “game keepers” “ruling over” all that moves (see Genesis 1:28). Thus, in passages where ישן is used rather than שלם, an element of service, such as God’s “vice regent,” is intended.24 In summary, “rule” is based on power delegated from the supreme ruler, God. It conveys ideas of dominion over land and animals, is associated with kingship, has connotations of self-control, and is connected with serving God as a steward over assigned responsibilities.

Adam as a Ruler

Adam’s divine responsibility to “rule over” symbolizes the role God intends for all men. However, the misinterpretation of the phrase, “and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16; Moses 4:22), has probably caused more hard feelings between men and women than any other in the Bible. Many men have used an inaccurate interpretation of this phrase to justify unrighteous dominion over their spouses.

In the Hebrew Bible, the prepositional word used with ישן is ב generally translated as “with,” particularly in conjunction with the suffix י. Other meanings are “in,” “among,” “within,” or “into” rather than over.25 Donald Parry suggests the translation “and he shall rule with thee.”26 Although in all other cases of the word ישן

23 Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. “ישן.”
25 Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, s.v. “ב.”
26 This possible translation was suggested by Dr. Donald W. Parry. “ב is used with certain classes of verbs, though the explanation of its use may sometimes be doubtful. . . . that is: ruling, governing, and restraining.” ישן is one of these verbs. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, 89–90.
with the preposition ב in the Hebrew Bible are translated as over, these examples are not comparable to the one in Genesis 3:16. In many of these cases the word משלי indicates the relationship of a king to his subjects, or a suzerainty association. Since the case has already been made that משלי means equal partner, a translation of “over” may not fit the context. Perhaps the translation of משלי ב in the context of husband and wife does not have a clear English equivalent and “over” is the best word possible to indicate the divine role given to Adam.

The apostle Paul declared that “the head of the woman is the man,” clearly following the Genesis injunction of man as the presiding authority in marriage. However, he also indicated the mutual loving and caring that should exist between a husband and wife. They have each given themselves to the other and therefore their intimate relationship belongs only to their spouse. “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife” (1 Corinthians 7:3–4).

With the foregoing explanation we can better interpret the apostle Paul’s instructions:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies, He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (Ephesians 5:22–33)

The imperative for women to submit to men often has negative reactions. However, the list of synonyms for the characteristic “submissive” includes: obedient, pliable, meek, unpretentious, spineless, flexible, long-suffering, sheepish, modest, henpecked, shrinking, apologetic, gentle, humble, subservient, and forbearing. When this list of synonyms is measured against the Savior’s character some of the meanings are obviously inappropriate.  

However, “when one uses Christ as the personification of submission, a deeper definition unfolds. True submission requires restraint when one-upmanship is possible; the complete absence of pride when recognition is meted out; strength to stay the Spirit-directed course when letting go may be expected and even rewarded.”

This admonition in Ephesians to submit is in the context of family. Paul is comparing metaphorically the relationship that ought to exist between a husband and wife to Christ’s relationship with his Church. Anderson asserts, “This analogy suggests strongly that Christ taught all things necessary for salvation and certainly did not dictate in the ordinary choices of everyday life.” He is the head of the Church and presides over it because of his role as high priest who mediates the covenant between God and man (see Hebrews 9). “Christ is the model for priesthood leadership in the home because

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27 Camille Fronk, “Submit Yourselves . . . As Unto the Lord,” in Go Ye Into All the World (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 100.
29 Fronk, “Submit Yourselves . . . As Unto the Lord,” 102.
he taught gospel truths, because he was a perfect example of living the truths that he taught, and because in the end he gave his life for the disciples that he loves. Paul gives husbands the duty of following Christ as the model leader.”

Christ loves and nourishes His Church, considers it part of himself, and desires to bring it back to God pure, clean, and without blemish. Most importantly, he willingly died for it. The husband and wife must both willingly submit or subordinate, meaning place themselves in order. “Thus, men and women fit into the orderly arrangement of Church and family with equal dignity and importance before God.” In this scriptural context, being submissive means that a woman conducts herself with dignity and not as a doormat. Submission requires remarkable strength of character and especially devotion to covenant. God placed the husband as the head of the woman to preside in their marriage. He must love and nurture his wife, consider her part of himself, and desire to present their marriage covenant before God pure, clean, and without blemish. For this reason, a man leaves his family, joins with a woman, and they spend their lifetime becoming one in every sense of the word.

Summary

By looking at the ctymology of “help meet” and “rule over” we have begun to explain the roles of husband and wife in the marriage covenant. A “help meet” is an equal with the role of helping, supporting, aiding, and succoring. God’s comment that his creation, man, was not yet good indicated that the relationship is mutually beneficial as

31 Anderson, Understanding Paul, 289.
32 Anderson, Understanding Paul, 288.
33 Fronk, “Submit Yourselves . . . As Unto the Lord,” 102.
34 Perhaps the metaphor that Christ considers us part of him, and thus the man is to consider the woman as part of him is the reason woman is symbolically “taken out of the man” in the Genesis account.
each is incomplete without the other (see Genesis 2:18). “Rule over” means to govern and is associated with service. Further, although the association between God, Adam and Eve is a “suzerain/vassal” relationship, the etymology of both “help meet” and “ruler” clarify that the relationship between Adam and Eve is different. Their relationship is one of parity. They are mutual partners and meant to be equally yoked in their association to each other under their covenant with God.

Paul taught that the husband’s relationship with his wife was analogous to Christ’s relationship with the church. For the woman to submit to the man’s role as head of the family is a position that demonstrates strength of character and commitment to covenants made with God. Understanding these roles is important because they are part of the marriage standard set forth by God in the marriage of Adam and Eve.

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Chapter 5

The Marriage Standard

Just as the divinely given roles of “help meet” and “ruler” set the standard for the husband and wife relationship, Adam and Eve’s covenant marriage serves as the prototype of marriage. They are the standard and represent each husband and wife. In this chapter I will examine characteristics of their marriage, particularly the idea of oneness.

As additional examples of how great patriarchs and matriarchs interact within their God-given roles, I will also examine the marriages of Isaac and Rebekah, and Lehi and Sariah.

Adam and Eve as Prototypes

Adam and Eve are role models for a husband and wife. Following Adam’s recognition of a companion for him was an injunction setting forth the proper relationship of husband and wife to their families and to each other. “Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Moses 3:24). Thus, God indicated from the beginning that marriage was to be the foundation of the society he was creating.¹

One of the first things we learn about Adam is that when Eve was deceived by Satan and partook of the fruit, Adam did also, not because he was deceived, but because God had given Eve to him and commanded her to stay with him (see Genesis 3:12; Moses 4:18; 1 Timothy 2:14). Since partaking of the fruit necessitated leaving Eden,² Eve

¹ Israelite marriage was usually patrilocal. Therefore, the word leave would be more accurately translated forsake. Gordon Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 70–71.


³ Joseph Fielding Smith, “Fall—Resurrection—Sacrament” Unpublished Talk, Given at the LDS Institute of Religion, Salt Lake City, Utah, 14 January 1961. Transcript approved by President Smith. “The forbidden aspect was not in the partaking, but instead had reference to Adam and Eve’s not being able to remain in the garden if they partook.”
could not remain with Adam unless he also partook. Thus, in order to stay with his wife, Adam willingly partook of the fruit, understanding in some measure the ramifications of his choice. God spoke to both Adam and Eve, asking each respectively what he or she had done. Although in a covenant together, each was, nevertheless, personally responsible for individual actions under their previous covenant of obedience to God (see Genesis 3:9–13).

God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden together. Together they labored, procreated, worshipped, and taught their children (see Moses 5:1–4, 12). Both of them heard the voice of the Lord and the commandment to worship him, and they were obedient (see Moses 5:4–5). With new understanding, Adam and Eve rejoiced together in their role of opening the door to mortal life and death, the blessing of children, the knowledge of good and evil, the joy of Christ’s redemption, and the promise of eternal life to all who will be obedient (see Moses 5:10–11).

As the standard of marriage, Adam and Eve learned to create unity by their actions. Although deceived by Satan, perhaps to some degree, Eve understood that they must partake of the fruit to fulfill the measure of their creation by multiplying (see Moses 5:11). After Eve had partaken, Adam then understood he too must partake “that men might be” (2 Nephi 2:25). Together they came to understand their foreordained role as heads of the human family, illustrated in their “song of rejoicing:”

Adam blessed God and was filled [with the Spirit], and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying “Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have
known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. (Moses 5:10–11)

Two additional examples from the scriptures illustrate how righteous patriarchs and matriarchs interact within the bonds of marriage.

**Isaac and Rebekah as Exemplars of the Prototype**

The Old Testament records that after Isaac and Rebekah did not have children for many years “Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife” (Genesis 25:21). Although we see Isaac beseeching the Lord on behalf of his wife, Rebekah was capable of her own divine interaction. During a difficult time in her pregnancy, “she went to enquire of the Lord” and the Lord answered her with prophecy (Genesis 25:22–23). Rebekah understood clearly her role in bringing forth children born under the covenant of Abraham. Doubtless she knew all the promises made to Sarah and Abraham regarding priesthood, nations, the Savior, and land. She also must have known that Isaac was the covenant son through whom the house of Israel would be born; therefore, her role as mother of covenant children was essential. Further, when Isaac, old and blind, “intended to deliver his first blessing, the birthright, to Esau, in spite of the latter’s disobedience and disloyalty,” Rebekah, much younger, seeing clearly, and perhaps more in tune with the spirit, interceded.  

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3 Erastus Snow explained Rebekah’s righteous role as a help meet: “From the story that is told of Rebekah helping her son Jacob to get the first blessing from his father Isaac, on purpose to secure the birthright from his brother Esau, many would be inclined to think that deceit, dishonesty and unrighteous means were employed to secure it, and they perhaps wonder why it should be so. This was really not the case; it is only made to appear so in the eyes of those who do not understand the dealings of God with man, and the workings of the Holy Spirit to bring about His purposes... The Lord therefore saw fit to take [the birthright] from [Esau], and the mother was moved upon to help the younger son to bring about the purpose of the Lord, in securing to himself the blessing through the legitimate channel of the Priesthood. And as you know, the father was induced to bless him and confirm this blessing upon him.” Erastus Snow, in Journal of Discourses, 21:369.
Isaac and Rebekah together succeeded in having children and blessing the Lord’s intended birthright son. Isaac entreated the Lord on behalf of Rebekah to secure the blessing of children. Rebekah intervened to bring about the purposes of the Lord in blessing her son Jacob.\(^6\)

Rebekah’s intercession did not minimize Isaac’s priesthood role and responsibility,\(^7\) but underscored the needed place of a wise woman who would follow the Spirit in making sure the human family is organized as God intends. Further, Rebekah told Isaac that if Jacob also married outside the covenant family as Esau had, her purpose in bearing them had been for naught (see Genesis 27:46). Thus, “Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan” (Genesis 28:1). Isaac told Jacob where to go to find a wife who was within the covenant family and then pronounced upon him the blessings of Abraham (see Genesis 28:2–4). Isaac and Rebekah worked together as partners for the blessing and benefit of each other and their family.

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\(^6\) Brigham Young testified of the importance of having the Spirit to guide us so that we can be organized as we were in our premortal existence. “Tell the people to be humble and faithful and be sure to keep the spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach them what to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction, so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it. They can tell the Spirit of the Lord from all other spirits; it will whisper peace and joy to their souls; it will take malice, hatred, strife and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness and build up the kingdom of God. Tell the brethren if they will follow the Spirit of the Lord, they will go right. Be sure to tell the people to keep the Spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized and in great confusion.” Joseph then showed me the pattern how they were in the beginning. This I cannot describe, but I saw it, and saw where the Priesthood had been taken from the earth and how it must be joined together, so that there would be a perfect chain from Father Adam to his latest posterity. Joseph again said, ‘Tell the people to be sure to keep the Spirit of the Lord and follow it, and it will lead them just right.’ Brigham Young, Journal History, 23 Feb. 1847.

\(^7\) Millet, “Restoring the Patriarchal Order,” 283.
Lehi and Sariah as Exemplars of the Prototype

After Lehi, Sariah, and their family left Jerusalem, Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem for the brass plates. While Nephi and his brothers were retrieving the brass plates, Sariah yielded to her maternal fears. What could have possessed her to allow her sons—her most prized treasures—to return to a land where its people had persecuted and tried to kill her husband? (see 1 Nephi 1:20).

Sariah mourned the loss of her sons, “For she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness,” and complained against Lehi “telling him that he was a visionary man” (1 Nephi 5:2). Lehi responded by agreeing with Sariah (1 Nephi 5:4). While Lehi had confidence in his sons’ safety because of what God had revealed to him, he recognized that hardship would challenge the faith of one not privy to the same vision.  

Lehi could have appealed to a misunderstanding of his role to “rule over,” quoting scriptural authority to control her and achieve his ends. Instead, he reverenced her motherhood and attendant concerns for her sons. He recognized her sacrifice. Lehi demonstrated respect and love for his wife by treating her as an important partner whose concerns needed to be addressed. First, he counseled with Sariah about his vision from God. He was respectful and loving in bearing his witness, with the implication that she too, could have a witness (see 1 Nephi 5:4–6).

Because Lehi exercised his God-given power as God intended, Sariah’s heart was open to the prompting of the Spirit. Doubtless she had been praying fervently, but Lehi helped create an environment conducive to her receiving from the Holy Ghost the much-needed hope that Lehi’s words were true. Lehi reassured her that Jehovah was watching

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over them, testifying, “I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 5:5). Lehi wisely did not use his position as patriarch to ignore her, to minimize her fears, or to silence her. Domination by authority as the sole basis for control is tyranny, the antithesis of the responsibility to which God had ordained him. 9

Summary

The marriages of Adam and Eve, Isaac and Rebekah, and Lehi and Sariah, are examples of husbands and wives as equal partners in a side-by-side partnership nurturing each other and their family. The challenges in each of these marriages are very different. Eve and Rebekah were leaders in helping guide their husbands. Only after Eve and Rebekah led the way did their husbands realize that they were following God’s intentions. Sariah complained and Lehi patiently helped her gain the vision he had. The elements of equality and service that are connoted in the Hebrew words מְשָׁלָה and וָאִישׁ are evident in both husband and wife.

The apostle Paul clarified the importance of the man and the woman together, stating, “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11). Thus, by divine designation, Adam, and all husbands, are to preside with tenderness, love, and patience in their marriage with their wives and co-equal partners at their sides. Likewise, by divine designation, Eve, and all wives, seek

9 “If authority were the sole basis for control of individuals, families, quorums, auxiliaries, churches, nations, or the world, then difficulties would soon be everywhere. Authority alone—without any other virtue—is simply dictatorship.” Arlyn L. Jesperson, “Learning to Lead Our Family—‘Without Compulsory Means,’” Ensign (April 1983): 53.
for their own testimony and revelation by the Spirit so that they may contribute strength and wisdom to the marriage covenant.
Chapter 6

Covenants in the House of Israel

Covenant history

Covenants are binding agreements between God and his children. However, contrary to the understanding of most scholars, covenant making with the house of Israel did not begin with Moses. Our covenant relationship with God began in the premortal world when the house of Israel already existed and we belonged to it. The house of Israel is God’s elect because it is “people of the Plan,” chosen “from before the foundation of the world.” Thus, Israel is not merely a mortal group of people related by kinship with Abraham but also a premortal group foreordained because of their faith in Christ.

Although the biblical history of covenant making appears to begin with Abraham, it actually began with Adam and was reconfirmed with all the patriarchs, the scriptures specifically listing Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The gospel covenant was preached from the beginning (see Moses 5:58–59; Moses 7:51-53; JST Genesis 8:23). The specific blessings of this covenant are recorded with Abraham. God promised the blessings of the gospel, priesthood, a numerous posterity including Christ, and certain lands for Abraham’s family and their righteous and obedient posterity (see Genesis 17; 22:15–18; Galatians 3; Abraham 1:2; 2:8–11). Thus, God continued his premortal covenant making in mortality with the first man and woman on this earth, Adam and Eve. Through faith in Christ and obedience to commandments, they belonged to his covenant family. Their covenant marriage to each other was under this larger umbrella of covenant membership in the house of Israel.

Covenant Status in Marriage

In speaking of his love for his children, the Book of Mormon clarifies who it is that the Lord favors and blesses. It is those who covenant with him. “Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. . . . And he loveth those who will have him to be their God. Behold he loved our fathers, and he covenanted with them ” (1 Nephi 17:35, 40). Thus, our covenant status reflects our love for the Lord and the extent to which he is permitted to bless us.

The basis of ancient biblical society was intimately associated with the idea of physical unity among family members who were bound by the same flesh, blood, and bones. Some scholars claim that, at least among the Hebrews, marriage patterns were endogamous within the kinship family primarily in order to increase the safety and strength of the kinship group and for the purposes of property and land inheritance. I would argue that these were not the most important reasons for kinship marriage. Instead, as the words of the prophets, such as Isaac, indicate and as some scholars affirm, the Hebrew/Israelite marriage patterns were due to the need to marry within the covenant relationship of God.

The Pearl of Great Price offers evidence that covenant status with God is important in selecting a marriage partner: “the sons of men saw that those daughters [of

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Noah’s sons] were fair; and they took them wives, even as they chose” (Moses 8:14). Just as Noah’s sons were called “sons of God,” so are those called today who hearken unto God (see Moses 8:13). The sons of men, or those who would not make and keep covenants with God, found the daughters of Shem, Japheth, and Ham desirable to marry. “And the Lord said unto Noah: The daughters of thy sons have sold themselves; for behold mine anger is kindled against the sons of men, for they will not hearken to my voice” (Moses 8:13–15). In this case, not marrying within the covenant family was called “selling” oneself. This term may be a reference to the custom of considering women as property, to which a man acquired sexual rights by marriage. An additional meaning may be that marrying outside the covenant was “playing the whore,” just as making alliances with foreign countries rather than relying on the covenant made with God was adultery.

Christ himself commented on the days of Noah when his disciples asked for signs of his Second Coming, “But as it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be also at the coming of the Son of Man; for it shall be with them, as it was in the days which were before the flood; for until the day that Noah entered into the ark they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage; and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be” (JS–Matthew 41–43). Christ’s words implied that there are at least two possible elements common to the destruction at the great flood and the destruction prior to his Second Coming. The

5 Mace postulated that the wife is possessed only within the context of a primary purpose of marriage. She belongs to her husband in the realm of sexual relations, but as a person is not possessed by him. The laws regarding fornication, adultery and divorce fall under the category of property, because it is the sexual relations that are under consideration. Mace, Hebrew Marriage, 191.
rampant wickedness that brought about the flood will also bring about the “end of the world.” Just as the flood surprised the unrepentant, so it will be in the latter days. The wicked will also be unaware of their impending doom. In Noah’s time, the men of the world found the women of the covenant attractive, and the women married outside the gospel covenant and the covenant of eternal marriage. Christ’s comments imply the same situation will occur in the last days.

The scriptures use a form of this same verb, “to sell,” to record that Esau sold his birthright covenant, and cheaply (Genesis 25:29-34). The scriptures record that we are “not our own,” for we were “bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). We cannot sell that which is not ours to sell. God’s covenant with the house of Israel is the foundational covenant. It is the umbrella under which all other covenants are made. God requires those who are under this covenant to make marriage covenants with others who also are under this covenant.

**Fidelity in the Marriage Covenant**

The Lord not only wants his children to enter into covenant marriage but also requires them to be faithful within this covenant. Both the Prophets and the Writings testified of the importance of faithfulness to the marriage covenant. Hosea opposed a double standard for men and women and was particularly incensed by men who led women astray. He declared that God would not punish the wayward women, for the men were responsible for corrupting the women (see Hosea 4:14).

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Malachi proclaimed that marriage was a covenant entered into before God and watched over by him.\(^7\) He eschewed divorce from the “wife of thy youth, . . . thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant” (Malachi 2:14). Malachi reaffirmed marriage as a covenant by alluding to oneness in the marriage of Adam and Eve with this rhetorical question:\(^8\) “And did not he make one, with a remnant of the spirit belonging to it?” He explained a major purpose of this oneness when he said, “That he might seek a godly seed” (Malachi 2:15).\(^9\) Emphasizing the seriousness of putting away a wife for frivolous reasons, Malachi cautioned, “Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. . . . for one covereth violence with his garment, . . . therefore take heed to your spirit” (Malachi 2:14–15). Thus, disloyalty to the marriage covenant is spiritually damning. Perhaps in those days, as in our own, the treachery and violence to the covenant can be hidden under a cloak of deception for a time, but the spiritual garment with which the Lord clothes his children, the atonement, cannot and will not cover covenant-breakers (see Isaiah 28:20).\(^10\)

Both the books of Job and Proverbs spoke of fidelity within the marriage covenant. Job did not permit lust (Job 31:1), and Proverbs encouraged rejoicing and satisfaction in love “with the wife of thy youth.” Following this counsel in Proverbs is a warning and consequence: those who are guilty of adultery “in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray” (Proverbs 5:15-23). Lust, adultery, and divorce were grievous sins

\(^7\) Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 129.
\(^8\) Hugenburger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 341.
\(^9\) Lehi and Jacob define a godly seed as consisting of children raised up unto the Lord to inherit a promised land (1 Nephi 7:1; Jacob 2:30).
\(^10\) The chiastic parallelism between Malachi 2:10-12 and 2:13-16 make clear the sacred nature of covenants, and that those who profane their covenants by interfaith marriage will be “cut off.” Hugenburger, *Marriage as a Covenant*, 341.
because they violated the marriage covenant. They also symbolized ways the children of Israel strayed from their covenant with God to be “his people.”

**Hebrew/Israelite Marriage Patterns**

Common to Hebrew marriages was an agreement between the groom and the father-in-law regarding a bride price to be paid by the groom or his father. However, the negotiations were not just regarding payment of the bride price, but also agreement that the future groom was acceptable to the father-in-law. As implied by Exodus 22:16–17, the father must agree to give his daughter to her suitor. Agreement on the bride price meant all elements of the negotiations were acceptable and sealed the betrothal of the couple; the groom’s payment of a bride price to the father-in-law preceded the wedding celebration (see Genesis 24:53; 29:18). The bride price was called the *mohar* or “purchase money.” The *mohar* was not to purchase the woman as a slave or concubine, but was a compensation gift to the family. As the bride’s family had given the best they possessed, their flesh and blood, the groom’s family must also give something as valuable in exchange. Payment of the *mohar* placed the two families on equal footing. The *mohar* established the prestige of the groom’s family, sealed the agreement between the two families making them allies, and transferred the patriarchal and legal responsibilities of the bride to the groom. Unlike wedding gifts today, the *mohar* was not a sentimental gift from the bridegroom’s family to the bride’s family but a duty that created and strengthened the new familial alliance. The betrothal of a woman was more

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11 The term agreement or contract is used to indicate the relationship entered into by the father and future son-in-law, however Falk states that, “Ancient Hebrew society did not have much use for agreements and contracts. A person willing to make a binding promise would give it a religious basis by attaching an oath to it.” Thus, betrothal and payment of the bride price would have been considered a covenant. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 87.
binding than today’s engagement because the law treated a betrothed woman as if she were already married. Evidence of betrothal and payment of the mohar in Hebrew history begins in the Patriarchal period with Isaac.

Patriarchal period. From the writings of the early Patriarchs, we see the care with which they chose partners for their sons, particularly the birthright son through whom the covenant family of Israel was to come. Marrying within the appropriate kinship and covenant family was essential; for example, note the attention with which lineage and covenant are declared in the marriages of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Genesis 11:29; 12:1-3; 17:19; 24:1-3, 15; 28:1-2; 29:5, 14).

Abraham married one of the daughters of his brother, Haran. “And Abraham and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram’s wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah” (Genesis 11:29). God gave new names to Abram and Sarai when he established his covenant with them and their seed. He changed Abram’s name to Abraham, meaning “father of many nations” and Sarai to Sarah, meaning princess (see Genesis 17:5-8, 15-16).

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13 In Genesis 20:12 Abraham explains to Abimelech how he could call his wife Sarah, his sister. His father, as patriarch of the clan was considered her father, although he was not her literal father. Genesis 11:29 intimates that Haran, brother of Abraham, is the father of Sarai. See also Mace, Hebrew Marriage, 2.
14 Although unclear, the Bible mentions in order Sarai, Milcah, Iscah, and Sarai. Jewish legend teaches that the Hebrew word Iscah is another name for Sarai. Referring to Sarai, legend reports, “She was a help meet worthy of Abram. Indeed in prophetic powers she ranked higher than her husband. She was sometimes called Iscah, ‘the seer,’ on that account.” Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews 1 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 68-69.
15 The practice of giving and receiving new names was common in Jewish custom and many other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Renaming often occurred at times of change or transition and signified new privileges and honors in association with the new name, such as the renaming as part of the coronation ceremony of kings. “The person who gave the new name was usually in a position of authority and could exercise power and authority over the individual named.” A new name also indicates a type of adoption into a new household. The Old Testament offers numerous examples of new names associated with new
Although Sarah was barren and past childbearing age, God declared Isaac’s miraculous birth, his name, and his covenant status. Thus, Abraham sent Eliezer, his servant, to find a woman of the covenant house for Isaac to marry. It was so important for Isaac to marry within the covenant family that Abraham made Eliezer swear that he would not seek a wife from among the Canaanites, but from Abraham’s own family. A further indication of the importance of marrying within the kinship family is the distance Eliezer traveled to find a wife for Isaac. The distance from Hebron to Padam Aram, Abraham’s homeland, is over 500 miles. Abraham, as patriarch and Melchizedek Priesthood holder, called for the blessing from the Lord that he needed, a worthy woman for his covenant son. Abraham was then able to prophesy to Eliezer, “The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father’s house” (Genesis 24:40). The scriptures make clear that the Lord directed both Eliezer and Rebekah. Eliezer asked the Lord for specific help in recognizing the woman “that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac” (Genesis 24:14). Further, Laban and Bethuel recognized the Lord’s hand in directing Eliezer and Rebekah to each other; and Rebekah, when asked if she will marry Isaac, simply says, “I will go” (see Genesis 24: 50, 58). Following agreement of Isaac as a suitable husband Eliezer paid the mohar to Rebekah’s mother and brother (see Genesis 24:53).

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divine callings or positions specifically relating to covenants or leadership positions: Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Joseph to Zaphnath-paaneah, Daniel to Belteshazzar, etc. Thus, in Jewish custom, receiving a new name marks a turning point in one's life, becomes a symbol of rebirth and being raised to a new life, and often represents the cutting off from worldly associations. Bruce H. Porter and Stephen D. Ricks, “Names in Antiquity: Old, New, and Hidden,” in By Study and Also by Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:504. See also Otto Eissfeldt, “Renaming in the Old Testament,” Words and Their Meanings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 70. Thanks to Rebecca Sybrowsky for sharing this note from her thesis.
Additional evidence of the importance of marrying within the covenant family is found in the biblical narrative regarding the marriages of Esau and Jacob. Esau married two Hittite women, “Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah” (Genesis 26:34–35). Rebekah lamented, “I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?”(Genesis 27:46). Hence, the patriarch Isaac specifically charged Jacob not to take “a wife of the daughters of Canaan” (Genesis 28:1). Instead of marrying one of his father’s brother’s daughters, one of Hagar’s or Keturah’s granddaughters, Isaac directed Jacob to his mother Rebekah’s home to find a wife from the daughters of Laban, her brother, who was of the covenant family, so that the blessings of Abraham would be given to him (Genesis 28:1–3). Esau now chose in his own way to follow the counsel of his father and took a wife from among the daughters of Ishmael (Genesis 28:8–9).

In one Jewish legend Rebekah and Laban made an agreement of marriage for their children while they were still young. Arranged marriages were common, and in Hebrew society, a “betrothal is so binding that it is legally almost equivalent to marriage itself.”16 According to the legend, Leah was to marry Esau, and Rachel, Jacob; however, when Leah grew old enough to marry, the reports she heard about her future husband made her cry so much that her eyelashes dropped out, hence the comment that she was “tender eyed” (Genesis 29:17).17 In light of this legend, not only was Esau unfaithful to his birthright, but also to the family marriage agreement. Jacob, in marrying Leah, kept

16 Mace, Hebrew Marriage, 26.
17 Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, 1:359.
the family honor by fulfilling an agreement his family had made.\textsuperscript{18} The comment by Laban, “It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn” (Genesis 29:26) becomes more comprehensible in this context. While there is no evidence that this legend is accurate, it appears plausible as an explanation for Laban’s seemingly deceptive behavior.

Jacob, as directed by his parents, traveled to the home of Laban his uncle and after paying the appropriate mohar, married his daughters Leah and Rachel. He had children by them, as well as by their handmaidens Zilpah and Bilhah. When Jacob “sought for the blessings of the fathers,” he was given a new name, Israel, “one who prevails with God,” and told that through his posterity all the children of the earth were to be blessed with the gospel covenant (Genesis 32:24–30). Now, rather than making a covenant with one patriarch, God made covenants with the posterity of Israel in order to fulfill this prophecy. Hence the house of Israel was based not only on a blood relationship, with the majority part of the posterity of Jacob, and thus Abraham, but also in a rich tradition of covenant making with God.

Mosaic period. As Moses organized the children of Israel, the law specifically directed them not to marry the inhabitants of Canaan (see Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3). Marrying within the covenant was taught symbolically in the law: “Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together”

\textsuperscript{18} Although Leah was given to Jacob by deception, sexual union made the marriage valid and irrevocable. Hugenberger, \textit{Marriage as a Covenant}, 279.
(Deuteronomy 22:9–11). Further, warnings by prophets and judges called upon Israel to marry within the tribes (Joshua 23:11–13; Judges 3:5–7; 1 Kings 11:4–11). From these scriptures, the two main purposes for covenant marriage appear to be: (1) to avoid idol worship, thus honoring only God, and (2) to thereby merit his protection and help.

When the house of Israel entered Canaan to inherit the land that had been promised to their fathers by covenant, marriage within tribal Israel took on an additional measure of importance. Each tribe was given a portion of the promised land, and the land was to pass to the sons so that it would remain in the family and the tribe regardless of whom they married. However, if a man did not have sons, the land went to his daughters. In response to the inquiry of the daughters of Zelophehad regarding their deceased father’s inheritance, the law demanded that these daughters marry within the tribe, so that the land inheritance would not move from tribe to tribe (see Numbers 27:1–8; 36:2–9). Thus, land inheritance began to take on some importance in marriage patterns.

**Period of the Judges.** Just as Esau’s parents were devastated by his choice of wives, one can also sense deep disappointment in the words of Samson’s parents when he announced his marriage plans. Samson told his parents, “I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife” (Judges 14:2). Implied in this statement is a demand that his father negotiate and pay the bride price for the Philistine woman. In response Samson’s parents asked him, “Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?” (Judges 14:3). The fact that the Israelites were constantly at war with the Philistines was not the reason for their disappointment. Samson’s parents lamented his marriage plans because the Philistines were
uncircumcised, or not of the covenant the Lord made with Abraham. For Samson’s father to have to negotiate a wife for his son from the enemy of Israel and a non-kinship family was a great disappointment.

In the story of the Levite and his concubine, except for the 600 men who escaped to the rock Rimmon, the other eleven tribes wiped out the tribe of Benjamin because of their tolerance of evil among their tribe (see Judges 19–21). The tribes of Israel had made an oath not to give their daughters to Benjamin as wives. In order not to break their oath but to prevent the extinction of the tribe of Benjamin, the tribes went to Jabesh-gilead, the one city which did not send support in the battle against Benjamin. They killed all the inhabitants of the city except for 400 virgins, which they gave to the Benjamite men for wives. Still falling short of 200 women for the surviving men of Benjamin, the tribes gave the Benjamite men permission to kidnap tribal daughters at the festival in Shiloh. This gruesome story illustrates both the great importance of marriage within the tribal family of Jacob and the importance attached to the continuation of each tribe as part of the flesh, blood, and bone of the kinship family.

**Book of Mormon.** In the Book of Mormon, Lehi sent his sons back a second time to Jerusalem for the specific purpose of obtaining wives, “that they might raise up seed unto the Lord in the land of promise” (1Nephi 7:1). Lehi would have known the law and its restrictions on certain marriages because he grew up during the time of righteous King Josiah, when the “book of the law” was found and read to all the people (see 2 Kings 22–23). When Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem it was at the direction of the Lord and to a specific family, Ishmael’s, perhaps a family with whom they were well-acquainted (1Nephi 7:1–2). The Book of Mormon identified the family of Lehi as from the tribe of
Joseph. Ishmael was also from the tribe of Joseph. They each represented one branch of Joseph’s tribe, Manasseh and Ephraim respectively (Alma 10:3). Knowing the Hebrew marriage pattern of marrying first cousins, and knowing that Lehi was a prophet of God who followed the ancient covenant marriage pattern, we might suppose that Ishmael is a kinship relative, perhaps a brother of Sariah.

**Post-Exilic Jews.** After the captivity in Babylon, those returning to Jerusalem were commanded to marry only endogamously. Those Jews who returned with Ezra and Nehemiah covenanted with the Lord to put away their “strange wives of the people of the land: . . and such as are born of them” (Ezra 10:2–3). As evidence of the apostasy that occurred in Babylon, even many of the Levites had married foreign women, contrary to the law, which was particularly strict on those who served in the temple. Their names were recorded, evidently to prevent them from serving in the temple. Additionally, Ezra and Nehemiah recommitted the people to keep the law of Moses, and the people specifically covenanted, “we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons” (Nehemiah 10:29–30; see also Ezra 9:1–2; Nehemiah 13: 25). These Jews recognized their sinful condition and desired to obey the law strictly in order to be blessed (Ezra 9:10–14).

It appears that during this time the mother’s lineage took on renewed importance among the Jews. According to Mace, in a fully patriarchal society, the relationship of the

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19 Snow, Erastus, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:184. Some scholars are unsure Snow is a credible historical reference, hence the following information is included. Elder Erastus Snow, was an 1835 resident of Kirtland, OH who attended the Elders school. He also visited Joseph Smith in Liberty jail. Brigham Young ordained him apostle five years after the death of Joseph Smith. In a discourse at Logan, in 1882, he stated that Joseph Smith taught that the record of Lehi that was stolen contained Ishmael’s lineage that was of Ephraim.

20 See also Ezra 10:4–5, 10–12, 16–19; Nehemiah 10:29–30.
father and son determined descent. The Genesis examples of Hagar, Keturah, Rachel, Leah, Zilpah, Bilhah, Rachab, and Tamar indicate a lack of concern about who the mother was, whether she was first wife, concubine, slave, or harlot. \(^{21}\) However, perhaps Hagar, Zilpah, and Bilhah were part of the covenant family because of their relationship as handmaidens to covenant women. Further, even repentant harlots can be adopted into the covenant family. If the lineage of the woman was unimportant as Mace postulated, wives for Isaac and Jacob surely could have been found much closer to home.

**New Testament Jews.** An indication that faithful Jews continued to practice tribal marriage six hundred years later is found in the New Testament. The lineages of Zacharias and Elisabeth are carefully recorded to establish the right of their son John to be a high priest in the Aaronic Priesthood (see Luke 1:5). \(^{22}\)

Nevertheless, strict adherence to kinship and tribal marriage patterns is not found in the Savior’s family. We can see from the list of those in Christ’s lineage from Abraham through David to Joseph and Mary that even the Son of God did not have perfect ancestry. Christ’s list of progenitors includes Tamar, of unknown, but suspected Canaanite lineage who was misconstrued as a harlot; Rachab, a harlot of known Canaanite lineage; Ruth, a Moabitess; and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite and ill-gotten wife of David (Matthew 1:1–16; Luke 3:23–38). Thus, at the conclusion of priesthood rights by strict membership in the tribe of Levi, the crucial factor in covenant marriage was no longer familial kinship, or even kinship in the family of Jacob, but

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\(^{21}\) Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 68.

\(^{22}\) *LDS Bible Dictionary*, s.v “Aaronic Priesthood.”
membership in God’s family as a result of making and faithfully keeping covenants with him.

Summary

God desires his sons and daughters, those who hearken to his voice and have made covenants with him, to enter into marriage covenants with others who have done the same. The major stipulation of covenant making in God’s eyes is fidelity. He requires those who have made a covenant of marriage to be faithful to it. Early marriage patterns among the patriarchs were within the kinship family, often between first cousins, with the man marrying the daughter of his father’s brother. Acceptance of the future groom and payment of the bride price were part of betrothal negotiations with the bride’s father. As the kinship family grew larger, particularly by the time of the Egyptian sojourn, marriage partners were not necessarily found among those so closely related; nevertheless, marrying within the family of Israel was important. Although significant, factors of physical safety and strength as well as land inheritance were not the primary considerations of the Hebrews in marital decisions. Rather, eternal covenants that promised spiritual safety and strength in addition to an inheritance in God’s kingdom were the focus for those who knew and were obedient to the covenant.
Chapter 7

Findings and Conclusion

Covenants form the basis of God’s relationship with humans, and specifically the house of Israel. Under the umbrella of covenants that individuals may make with God, as part of the house of Israel, is the marriage covenant between man and woman. Marriage is the fundamental unit of organization that God ordained in the beginning and, as explored in this thesis, is a covenant between man and woman.

Findings of this Study

1. The Hebrew word נְנֵי, meaning “covenant,” has connotations which include a compact between two parties, feasting, selecting, providing, and binding.

2. Covenant and ancient Near Eastern treaties are linked linguistically, structurally, ritually, and legally.

3. The dual usage of the Hebrew word יְה, “know,” as a legal term in treaty/covenant making which bound the parties to their agreement and as an oath ratifying sign of marriage evidences that marriage is a legally binding covenant.

4. The metaphorical marriage between God and Israel is covenant based and intended to be “everlasting.” Because it symbolizes the literal marriage between a husband and wife, the literal marriage is also everlasting.

5. The literary structures, the term “know,” and the covenant making ritual pattern were found in both the metaphorical marriage and the literal marriage, each one giving evidence that marriage is a covenant.

6. The God given roles of “help meet” and “ruler” are not hierarchical but indicate that the woman is of equal status with the man. Thus, marriage is a bilateral and reciprocal
parity covenant between equal partners under the unilateral suzerainty covenant of God.

7. Eve in her role as “help meet” symbolically represents God, who created her to help Adam.

8. According to Paul, Christ—the great High Priest—mediates the covenant between the House of Israel and God. Husbands are to act as Christ in presiding over the covenant of marriage.

9. In practice, the roles of “help meet” and “ruler” involve partnership, leadership, and service by both husband and wife.

10. God requires marriage within the covenant family of the house of Israel and fidelity to both covenants—to him and to one’s spouse—for those who would be called “his children.”

**Conclusion**

Although some scholars are not convinced that marriage is covenantal in nature, the weight of evidence presented in this thesis indicates that marriage, as found in the Old Testament, is a covenant. The covenant literary structures, the ritual pattern of the covenant making process, and the binding legal nature of the word “know” in treaty/covenants and marriage demonstrate that marriage is a covenant.
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