

# Covenant of Salt – You Gotta Serve Somebody by Chris Suitt

A number of years ago, during his “Christian” phase, Bob Dylan wrote a song called “*Gotta Serve Somebody*.” In this song, Dylan mentions all kinds of people, lifestyles, and professions. Yet the bottom line for every person, no matter who they are or what they do, is that they must serve somebody – either the devil or the L-RD. You can dress Satan up with all the religious finery you desire (1 Cor. 8:4-6), but in the end, it is still Satan and not the one True God (1 Cor. 10:18-22). Whom you serve will be seen in your thoughts, words, and/or actions. I believe this truth is found in the little used Tenach phrase “Covenant of Salt.” Though it is used only three times in Scripture, it has great significance to the believer in Yeshua today.

The first time this phrase is found is in Leviticus 2:13 where the order of the words is “salt of the covenant.” The context of this passage is the grain offering, which was to have salt added to it. But the Spirit didn’t stop with just the grain offerings. He had Moses write in the same verse that the Israelites were to “add salt to all your offerings.” Thus, all offerings made by the Israelites to the L-RD, not just grain offerings, were to have salt added to them.

The second usage, found in Numbers 18:19, is also in the context of offerings. This time, however, the word order has been changed to “covenant of salt”. In Numbers 18, the L-RD tells Moses to instruct Aaron and the Levites that it is their responsibility to take care of the Tabernacle. Moses was also to let them know that “all the holy offerings the Israelites give Me I give to you and your sons as your portion and regular share.” This was their allotment, as

they were not going to receive any inheritance in the Land because G-d was their inheritance. All the offerings, except for the burnt offerings, belonged to them. G-d was letting them know that He Himself was going to provide for them through the offerings given by the people. "Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the L-RD I (G-d) give to you...It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the L-RD." The Kohanim were to serve G-d and trust Him for their livelihoods.

The last time the phrase is found is in 2 Chronicles 13:5. In this particular passage the L-RD gave the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever through a "covenant of salt." Although the previous two usages are found in the context of offerings, this one is clearly devoid of them. The 2 Chronicles passage appears to be totally unrelated to the previous two usages, yet is it? Since the Bible itself never directly defines the phrase in any of these passages, how does one discover what G-d is trying to tell us through them? Equally important, what does it mean to the believer in Yeshua today?

Some scholars point out that salt was used as a preserving element. It was added to the meat to help it stay fresh longer, until the priests could eat it. Others point to the prohibition of eating meat containing blood; salt was applied to the offering (after it was killed and the skin removed) to aid in the removal of the blood from the carcass. Salt was therefore seen as a cleansing or purifying agent as well.

I have only one problem with these two lines of reasoning. Salt was to be "added to all your offerings", including the grain offering, which had no blood. The burnt offerings, which were to have salt, were never to be eaten by the priests as the entire animal was consumed by fire (Lev. 1).

Therefore in those cases no preservation or cleansing agent would be needed. Furthermore, it couldn't just be related to the Kohanim, as the phrase "covenant of salt" was also used with David, who was from the tribe of Judah. Thus the meaning of the "salt covenant" had to mean something other than preservation, prevention from eating blood, or cleansing.

One scholar noted that "salt had an enduring quality and therefore in the Middle East salt was used in ceremonies to seal an agreement. Hence, the idea may simply be that G-d's call upon the Kohanim and their service should endure, i.e., overcome all things." I believe this definition is heading in the right direction, but it doesn't go far enough as it is used in connection with the House of David and the Israelites who presented the offerings. Something more is going on with this "covenant of salt". Could it be that the "covenant of salt" was all about a relationship with G-d based upon trust?

The people were to trust G-d by giving the salt that was put into their offering. Their G-d would provide for them and they were to give back out of love and obedience. The priests and Levites were to trust G-d by serving Him without a land inheritance like their brothers. Their G-d would provide for their livelihood while they were away from their cities which were interspersed throughout Israel. David and his sons were to trust G-d as the King and serve Him, believing He would keep the throne moving through David's line long after David and his sons departed the scene.

When we break down the phrase into its component words and put them back together again, this is the truth I believe the L-RD is trying to convey in the phrase "covenant of salt": He desires a relationship with His people based upon trust that is seen in their actions and, eventually, through a changed life.

The first word in the phrase, "covenant", is the Hebrew word "*bĕriyth*" (ברית). This word basically means an agreement or alliance between two parties where each party makes a pledge to keep their end of the bargain. The first time this word is found is in Genesis 6:18. Noah was to build the Ark and gather the animals. If Noah would fulfill his end of the bargain, G-d would get them safely through the coming storm. This took trust. In order to go through the embarrassment of building a boat so far away from water, in order to start gathering supplies for animals which he had quite possibly never seen or even heard of before, Noah had to trust G-d to keep His end of the bargain.

This agreement was based upon mutual trust. If Noah did his part, would he trust G-d to do His part? The answer is given right after G-d writes up the contract. Noah "did everything just as G-d commanded him." Noah showed his trust in G-d through his actions of living out the words of the contract, or covenant.

Now, sometimes these agreements are applied to both parties, as previously mentioned; at other times it was totally conditional upon one party. This is seen in Genesis 9:9 when G-d made a deal with Noah to never destroy the earth again by water. The passage never says Noah had to do anything but trust his G-d to fulfill His word. One can understand why G-d said this to Noah too. Noah had just gotten off the wildest ride of his life! I believe G-d was calming Noah's nerves a little here. When Noah stepped off the boat he could have been thinking, "I sure hope I never have to go through that again." And G-d comes to Noah's rescue, "Relax Noah, it's over. Neither you nor your descendents will ever have to repeat this heart-racing experience." Still, what would it take? Trusting in G-d's word. Every time the skies started clouding up, Noah would need to remember G-d's word – no more floods. As He trusted

G-d's word, peace would replace the anxiety. But first Noah had to trust.

More examples could be given, but trust is the basis of any "*bĕriyth*", or covenant. It's an agreement between two parties, based in trust, to fulfill their end of the deal.

Now let's consider the idea behind the Hebrew word for salt, "*melach*" (מֶלַח), a noun that comes from the root word "*malach*" (מָלַח) which means to rub to pieces or pulverize, to disappear as dust, or to season or rub with salt.

*Melach* is primarily used for the Salt/Dead Sea (Gen. 14:3; Num. 34:3,12; Deut. 3:17; Josh. 3:16), which will one day be made fresh again – Ezekiel 47:11. There is an important clue here for our understanding of the phrase "covenant of salt." Keep something in mind: this body of water was once salty or dead, but will one day be made fresh or alive again.

What I find interesting about *melach*, however, is the first time it is used in the Bible. In Genesis 19:26 Lot's wife is turned into salt for looking back. Though the word for covenant is not used in this story, the angel had an agreement with Lot. The angel would only destroy Sodom and Gomorrah after Lot and his family was out of town and had safely reached the city of Zoar. What did Lot's wife do? She did not keep her agreement to "not look back." It appears that she left her heart in Sodom with the accompanying lifestyle she left behind. In her heart, she didn't want to leave and thus was judged for it when she was turned into salt, or disappeared as dust.

This idea of pulverizing something in order to scatter it to the wind is also seen in Judges 9:45 when Abimelech destroyed the city of Shechem and poured salt over it. In

this story, the people of Shechem rebel against their leaders, Gideon's sons. The citizens of Shechem made Abimelech king, after which Abimelech wipes out every single son of Gideon, save one Jotham.

In order to right this wrong, G-d moves the citizens to rebel or break their agreement with Abimelech, who in turn wipes them out. Again, it is the same as Lot's wife. Just as she rebelled and paid the consequence for it, so did the city of Shechem.

*Melach* is not only associated with death, destruction, and judgment. It is also associated with the sacrificial system (Leviticus 2:13). Now stop for a moment and ask yourself, "What was the purpose of the sacrificial system?" According to Hebrews 9:11-10:18, sacrifices pointed to the One who would take the punishment or the negative consequences of all our sinful actions (death, destruction, and judgment) – Yeshua. In Him we find forgiveness and restoration to a relationship that was broken because we refused to trust our G-d and His way of living.

Continuing on, Exodus 30:34-38 uses *melach* in the process of making the Temple incense. David wrote in Psalm 141:2, "May my prayer be set before You like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice", both of which (incense and sacrifice) had salt added to them. Is it possible that salt aids our worship to G-d? Could every act of faith or trust/covenant (1 Corinthians 10:31) be an act of salting our worship?

Paul, as a Jewish Rabbi, would have known the above Tenach passages. In fact, Paul uses Temple and sacrifice images quite often in his writings. So when he penned the words in Romans 12:1-2 that we are to offer our "bodies as living *sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God", could he have

been thinking of the salt added to all the sacrifices? Paul goes on to say that once we offer ourselves to G-d, we are to let Him change our lives through changing our thinking, which in turn changes our behavior, glorifying and thus worshiping the G-d we say we love.

It's interesting that Revelation 8:3 uses this same imagery – incense on the golden altar (meaning the incense altar in front of the veil between the Holies of Holies and the Most Holy Place, where the coals from the outside bronze sacrificial altar were laid and incense was poured on top of the burning coals causing smoke). Do our lives smell (both the offerings and the incense) good to our G-d?

But there is more! Ezekiel 16:6 states that Israel was not born with a right to be G-d's child. When they were born their cord was not cut, they were not washed with water, rubbed with *salt*, or wrapped in clothes. No, G-d took them and made them His. The context here is that Israel was still living like her parents, the Hittites and the Amorites, in full idolatry mode. They were still tied by an umbilical cord to their mother. In other words, their behavior hadn't changed! Israel was still acting like her parents. And if her umbilical cord was not cut, she would die when the placenta started discharging from the womb after birth.

Again we discover that salt carries the idea of worshiping the one true G-d, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through Israel trusting their G-d by cutting her ties to her idolatrous parents/past. Israel needed to make a covenant of salt with their G-d to follow Him and worship Him alone.

The next two places where salt is used are also very insightful. In [2 Kings 2:20-21](#), salt was used to heal a body of water so it could be drinkable. Now think about

this for a second. When salt is added to water, one gets salt water, not fresh. You might use salt water to gargle, but certainly not to drink. Now imagine what was going through the minds of those watching Elisha throw salt into their putrid water hole.

“Elisha, hold on! You’re going to make the situation even worse! Are you sure the L-RD said to do this? It doesn’t make sense, Elisha. Why would you waste valuable salt by throwing it into an already bad source of water? You’re just throwing it away!”

Why would Elisha do it? Trust. After Elisha threw the salt into the water, it “became wholesome”. How would the people know it was good to drink? They would have to trust their G-d enough to dip their hand into the water and draw it to their lips. Pouring salt must have seemed like a crazy thing to do to them. But when it comes to walking with our G-d, isn’t this what it takes – going against the way we think to do what He tells us to do?

This is the same idea behind Job 6:6 when Job makes the point that salt is added to tasteless food to make it worth eating. Again, isn’t this just like our G-d to make something tasty out of two things that don’t belong together? The question is, “Will we trust Him?”

Furthermore, didn’t it take trust to give up the salt in the first place? Where did the salt for the sacrifices come from? The incense? The healing of the water? It came from the Israelites. Look at it from their point of view. Salt contained the very elements necessary for their survival.

During the Tenach times, Israel was primarily an agricultural society. They worked out in the sun for a living, which brought on a good sweat. Because of this,



they would need to replenish their bodies with sodium and chloride, of which salt is a good source. These two elements, along with potassium, are involved in everything you do from nerve impulse conduction to muscle contraction. If these three elements get out of balance in your system, you're not going to have a good day.

Now, here comes your G-d telling you that you must give Him some of your salt. Would you trust Him? Would you give your precious salt to Elisha to throw in your bad spring? Would you trust your G-d and add salt to all your sacrifices? This is why I believe G-d put the last usage of "covenant of salt" with the House of David. It ties the two ideas of salt and covenant together.

The Talmud says, "The world can get along without pepper, but it cannot get along without salt." (Yerushalmi Hora'yot 3:5) This tractate is referring to the 2 Chronicles 13:5 passage where G-d gave "the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt." Treaties were sealed in salt. Covenants were based upon trust. Giving someone your salt was a sign of that trust. And G-d was making a treaty with David to have his children sit on his throne forever, no matter how good or bad they were!

So when we put the words "covenant" and "salt" back together, it stands for the idea of two parties making and keeping an agreement with each other based upon trust. The word "salt" gives us the truth that we should trust our G-d enough to live with and for Him in our everyday lives. In the everyday decisions we encounter, we are to sacrifice our way of living and thinking and trust His Word.

The covenant gives us the thought that when we trust our G-d and live His way – our part of the agreement – He will change our lives for the better, one where no judgment is

needed – His part of the agreement. He can make life come out of the dead areas of your life. He can turn an unsatisfying life into a tasty one. Where we were once alone, we can now communicate with the G-d of the universe. Instead of fear and anxiety, we can have peace.

This covenant of salt is all about who you are going to serve: God or Satan? Serve Satan and be judged, eventually die, and spend your eternity with him. Serve God and be saved, and taste goodness both now and forever.

I believe we find this same meaning carried over into the New Testament. The Bible is consistent throughout because it is one Book written by one Author with one Message. In order to help us see this, we must use the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Tenach, to follow our words forward.

According to the Septuagint, the Hebrew word for salt (“melach”) in Leviticus 2:23 becomes the Greek word “halas” (ἅλας). “Halas”, or salt, is used in Matthew 5:13 where Jesus states that we are “the salt of the earth.” Most Christian commentaries talk about salt as a preserving agent. As believers live for Yeshua, they slow down the decay of this planet. When believers are finally taken off the planet, the decay happens rapidly. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:21-22, if G-d didn’t shorten the days of Jacob’s trouble no one would survive the tremendous evil being unleashed.

I used to believe and teach this same thought, but not anymore. As I came to understand the Tenach concept of the Covenant of Salt, it made me re-examine this passage again. I discovered that the immediate context of Jesus’ “salt of the earth” statement is being persecuted for righteousness. He just got done telling those listening to Him on the

mountainside they would be blessed over and over again if they followed Him. One of those blessing was persecution! If one lives for Yeshua as “the salt of the earth”, one should expect to be insulted, persecuted and falsely accused. Jesus is telling His followers the reality of following Him – the good, the bad and the ugly truth of it all.

He continues this line of thinking in Luke 14:34-35. In this passage, Yeshua also uses salt in the context of counting the cost of being His disciple. He tells those listening to Him that they must love Him more than their family and their very life itself. Then after talking about calculating the cost of building a tower and going to war, He states that once salt loses its saltiness, it’s not good for anything, even for fertilizer. It has no value whatsoever, so He tells His listeners to listen up. Living for Him will not be a walk in the park. It will cost them something; so think about it before they begin the journey.

In Mark 9:42-50, Yeshua moves past counting the cost to actually living for Him. Salt is now used in the context of living in such a way as to not stumble other believers (“little ones who *believe in Me* to sin”). He goes on to emphasize His point by saying, “If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.” Notice Jesus changed the subject of the sentence from just anyone to you. Believers in Yeshua are to live in such a way that their lives will affect others in a positive manner.

After saying this, Yeshua then makes the statement “everyone will be salted with fire.” Wow! Will you trust your G-d enough to live His way even during the trials of life? Jesus finishes his discourse in Mark 9 with this, “Have salt (ἅλας/melach) in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

What's the big deal about being at peace with each other? It's a sign a believer trusts and is living for Yeshua in their everyday lives. Jesus said there would be three distinguishing marks of those who call themselves His disciples. One, they would love each other (cf. Jn. 13:34-35). Two, they would bear the fruit of a changed life (cf. Jn. 15:1-8). And three, they would live in unity (cf. Jn. 17:20-23). We are to be salted so others will know He is G-d! We are to trust our G-d enough to live His way seven days a week. When we do, the world will know we are His.

And guess what happens then? It's the point of Jesus' next statement in Matthew 5:14, "you are the light of the world." A light doesn't necessarily draw attention to itself. Its real purpose is to shine on something else so it can be seen. This is the context of His next statement, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." As we live a salty life, one based upon trust, people will see Yeshua in us and hopefully want a relationship with Him.

This is what the Spirit had written in Colossians 4:6, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with *salt*, so you know how to give an answer to everyone." The context is sharing the gospel of Yeshua. Paul told the Colossians to be wise in how they acted (trust in action) towards those who don't know Jesus so they could make the most of every opportunity to share their Yeshua story of how He had changed their lives.

How does this happen? It comes back to the point I made earlier in Romans 12:1-2, which I believe is the Covenant of Salt in action. As we offer our bodies as living sacrifices (salt was added) you are dying to self and living for G-d. How is this seen? Trusting G-d's Word (basis of a covenant)

and allowing Him to change your life on a daily basis (“transformed by the renewing of your mind”).

As you agree to worship Him through your every day actions, even when it costs you something or goes against your way of thinking, you’ll become salty, which will make people thirsty enough to ask, “Where do you find your peace in the midst of tough times? How can you live the way you do when everyone else is doing the opposite?” Those who are the salt of the earth will automatically be the light of the world and will be ready to shine their light on Jesus.

It is your choice. You gotta serve somebody. Your actions will tell whether you are serving the L-RD or Satan. What do your actions say about you? As a believer in Yeshua, if you don’t serve Jesus, your life will not only be unsatisfying, but it will also lose its meaning and purpose. You’ll become what Jesus said happens to salt that is no longer salty, “Trampled by men.” Why would anyone want to listen to you?

We are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice – choosing to trust G-d, rather than ourselves in our every day thoughts, attitudes, decisions, words and actions. We are to be salty, which in turn leads to being a light. Yet, you choose whom you will serve. And it’s like the song says, “You gotta serve somebody.” Who’s it going to be?

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