

sees the countryside as automatically superior to the city, the Bible gives no reason to believe that people in either locale are in a better or worse position before God or that one cannot live the godly life in either place. Deuteronomy 28:3 declares regarding those who obey God, "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field" (RSV). Correspondingly for those who disobey, "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field" (Deut 28:16 RSV; cf. Ezek 7:15 and 6:56).

See also ANIMALS; CITY; FARMING; FOREST; GARDEN; GROVE; LAND; LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY; MOUNTAIN; PASTURE; PLAIN; RIVER; VALLEY; WILDERNESS.

COURAGE

The Bible supplies us with a rich store of images for courage. This is no surprise, since the Bible is about small people accomplishing great deeds with God's help. The images of courage are as various as the mighty deeds celebrated in the biblical canon.

The vocabulary of courage is especially rich in the OT. Biblical Hebrew employs a number of idioms for courage, only some of which can be translated into English term-for-term understandably. One common expression for courage was the word **heart*. This usage corresponds roughly to our own; the English word *courage* comes to us from the Latin word *cor* ("heart"). The "bravest warriors" (Amos 2:16 NIV) of Israel were literally "strong of heart." Loss of heart meant a loss of courage. This could be expressed in a number of ways: the heart "goes out" (Gen 42:28, author's translation), "falls" (1 Sam 17:32, author's translation), "faints" (Job 23:16), "fails" (Jer 4:9, author's translation) or "melts" (Ezek 21:7). Hebrew idioms also linked courage with the **hands* and **knees*. Gaining and losing courage were expressed with the phrases "strengthening/loosening the hands/knees." (2 Sam 16:21; Job 4:4; Is 13:7; Ezek 7:17).

One striking feature of biblical depictions of courage is the close link between courage and the expectation of success. With the possible exception of David's **lament* for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19-27), the biblical writers never picture courage as a grim stoicism in the face of defeat. On the contrary the frequent exhortations to "be strong and courageous" are grounded on God's promise of success (Deut 31:6; Josh 1:6-9; Judg 7:9-15; 2 Chron 32:7; Hag 2:4; Acts 27:22).

Many dramatic biblical narratives recount how individuals acted on God's promises to gain victory in **battle* in the face of overwhelming human odds. In such stories as that of Jael (Judg 4:17-21), Gideon (Judg 7:1-25), Jonathan and his **armor bearer* (1 Sam 14:1-14), **David against Goliath* (1 Sam 17:1-54), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:1-30), and Hezekiah (2 Chron 32:1-23), the people of God, despite being outnumbered, take on the **enemy* with the belief that God's power is sufficient in their weakness. These narratives of bravery in battle helped to form

the self-understanding of the early church. Paul especially employed the language of courage in **warfare* as a metaphor for his own ministry (2 Cor 10:1-6) and for the ministry of the church as a whole (Eph 6:10-20).

Since **weakness* and **brokenness* are a large part of the human condition, obedience to God can require courage in all kinds of situations. Women like Ruth (Ruth 3:1-7), Abigail (1 Sam 25:14-31) and Esther (Esther 4:10-5:2) took huge personal risks to intercede for others. The magnitude of the task involved made the building of the **temple* an occasion for courage (1 Chron 22:13; 28:10); and in the building of the second temple, this was compounded by opposition and the harsh conditions of life for the returnees (Zech 8:9,13).

The early church, taking its cue from the courage of prophets who confronted kings (2 Sam 12:1-14; 1 Kings 18:16-46; 22:1-28; Is 7:1-25; Jer 36:1-32), sought and received the help of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news with boldness in all situations (Acts 4:29; 13:46; 18:26; Eph 6:19; Phil 1:14; 1 Thess 2:2).

Jesus himself went beyond the outer limits of human courage by daring to die, not for good people but for **sinners* (Rom 5:6-8). The author of Hebrews saw in Christ's display of courage the inner dynamic that drives all people who possess biblical faith. He characterizes the Christian life as one of **"boldness," *"confidence" or "courage."* (Heb 3:6; 4:16; 10:19; 10:35) Chapter 11 recounts the great **heroes of faith* as examples of those who did not "throw away" their "confidence" (Heb 10:35) because they were looking to the eventual reward of their faith (Heb 11:6, 13-16). The crowning example—the "author" of believing courage—is Jesus. His endurance of the cross (Heb 12:2-3) is the model to which those who are "losing heart" should look. After encouraging the readers to consider their sufferings a sign that they have become, like Jesus, sons of God (Heb 12:5-11), he closes with an exhortation to strengthen feeble arms and weak knees (Heb 12:12). This language, clearly borrowed from Isaiah 35:3-4, is a call to regain courage.

See also BATTLE STORIES; BOLDNESS; CONFIDENCE; FAITH; HEART; HERO, HEROINE; HUNTING; TREMBLING, SHAKING, BODILY ANGUISH.

COURT. See ROYAL COURT.

COURTROOM. See LEGAL IMAGES; JUDGMENT; ROMANS, LETTER TO THE.

COVENANT

The image of covenant or agreement is the primary way in which the Bible portrays the relationship between God and his people and (to a lesser extent) to the human race in general. While many horizontal relationships are described as covenantal (including **marriage* and various pacts between friends among enemies), the Bible's imagery of cover

focuses primarily on the covenant between God and humankind.

The Covenants of Genesis. We catch the first hints of the covenant motif in Genesis 2, where God establishes what is sometimes called a "covenant of works" with *Adam and *Eve. It is a covenant that establishes the obligations of the creature toward God, as well as an outline of the consequences for disobeying. God's part of the covenant is to establish Adam and Eve in a perfect world where all their needs are met by divine provision. Adam and Eve's debt of gratitude can be paid by obeying God's injunction not to eat from the forbidden *tree upon penalty of *death (Gen 2:16-17). This language of command will be an important part of the imagery of the covenant throughout the Bible.

The second covenant that we read about is the one God makes with Noah immediately after the *flood. Here the language is much more explicitly covenantal: "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you . . . that never again . . . shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen 9:8-11 RSV). This is a covenant with the entire creation, including nature as well as people—"a covenant between me and all flesh that is upon the earth" (Gen 9:17 RSV). The sign of this covenant is the *rainbow, "a sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (Gen 9:13).

While these are true covenants, the covenant of *redemption and grace that governs the Bible begins with *Abraham, and it is here that the main image patterns of the covenant become firmly established. Right at the outset, in the story of the call of Abraham, the most obvious rhetorical pattern is the language of command and promise: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Gen 12:1-2 RSV). The command implies an obligation of obedience on the human party in the covenant. The promise is essentially one of *blessing, which extends to a range of things, including land, descendants and the presence and protection of God. As Abraham obeys, a third motif is added to command and promise in the form of reward. This motif begins with Genesis 12:7, where God *rewards Abraham for his obedience by renewing and extending the covenant. Thereafter in the book of Genesis the renewal of the covenant in the form of command, promise and reward punctuates the action.

An important aspect of the covenant in Genesis and later is that it is an agreement between unequals. God is the sovereign being who initiates the covenant, who announces its conditions to people and who rewards the human recipients of the covenant with promise and blessing. Every time we hear the contractual language of the covenant as it enters the action, we sense at once that the speaking voice is a transcendent one, coming to earth from above, and that the covenant is something *conferred*

upon the human recipient. In that sense it is a covenant of grace, as seen especially in the case of *Jacob, who receives the covenant promise at Bethel before he has done anything meritorious that might deserve his receipt of it (Gen 28:13-15). Similarly in the ritual "cutting of the covenant" between God and Abraham, Abraham sleeps; and God alone, in the form of a smoking pot and flaming torch, passes between the animal carcasses, symbolic of the fact that the covenant belongs to God alone (Gen 15:7-21). There is a sense too in which God himself is the chief blessing conferred by the covenant, as hinted at when God tells Abraham "I am your *shield, your very great reward" (Gen 15:1 NIV).

The imagery of promise and reward is noteworthy for its extravagant magnitude or *abundance. The descendants promised to Abraham are variously compared to the dust of the earth (Gen 13:16), the *stars in the heavens (Gen 15:5) and the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17). God promises to make of Abraham "a great nation" (Gen 12:2), and from the covenant line "all the nations of the earth" shall be blessed (Gen 22:18). The same magnitude is present when the covenant promise is extended to Isaac (Gen 26:4) and Jacob (Gen 28:14).

The Exodus. Important developments occur as we see the covenant extended in the remaining four books of the Pentateuch. The primary change is that the covenant is no longer established with a series of patriarchs and their families but with an entire nation. The imagery that arises in renewals of the covenant is no longer individualistic but national, as the nation of Israel becomes "a people holy to the LORD your God," a people the Lord has chosen to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth (Deut 14:2 RSV).

A new image enters when God couches his covenant in terms of the suzerainty treaties of the ancient Near East. Hittite rulers (or suzerains) laid claim to the loyalty of their vassals in formal contracts whose ingredients included (1) identification of the suzerain in terms evoking awe and fear, (2) a historical prologue in which vassals were reminded of the king's acts of benefit to them and (3) obligations of vassals to their lord, including commands, a claim to absolute loyalty (along with a renunciation of all other political loyalties) and a statement of blessings and curses that will result from obedience or disobedience to the treaty. Both the Decalogue and the book of Deuteronomy bear resemblance to this contractual treaty motif, with the implication that they are not so much law as they are covenant. God's covenant with individuals and with the human race is essentially a treaty. God the great king enters into a relationship with his servant people. It is thus a political-*legal metaphor of God's relationship with his people. This covenant is not an agreement between two equal parties. Quite the contrary, it is a relationship initiated by a lord or suzerain with his vassal. The covenant makes certain requirements and stipulates both blessings and curses for the covenant

parties, depending on their faithfulness to the terms of the covenant. Thus in the Siniatic covenant of Exodus 19—20, we find God in the place of the suzerain and Israel as his vassal. Much of Exodus and Deuteronomy is commentary and exposition of the covenant initiated at *Sinai.

Another new development in the imagery of the covenant is that it is linked even more explicitly with a choice between obedience and disobedience, blessing and curse. The rhetoric is now one of a great either-or that requires a nation to choose or reject God. The classic text is Deuteronomy 11:26-32, where Moses sets before the people "a *blessing and a *curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God . . . and the curse, if you do not obey" (RSV). Near the end of his farewell discourse Moses uses the same rhetoric, putting "life and good, death and evil" before the nation (Deut 30:15-20). Deuteronomy 28—30 is an extended elaboration of the theme.

The extravagance of the imagery of blessing is still present, but it is given a larger scope that can appropriately be called national, in contrast to the more familial promises to the patriarchs. Thus Moses paints a picture of national prosperity in the Promised *Land when he outlines the results of obedience to the commands of God: God "will give the rain for your land in its season and grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be full" (Deut 11:14-15 RSV).

The Prophets. The state of the covenant is a dominant theme in OT prophecy, where a major image pattern revolves around the faithlessness of the chosen nation and its failure to live up to its covenant obligations. Isaiah 24:5 contains this list of parallel actions: "they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant." The covenant is variously portrayed as having been "broken" (Jer 11:10; cf. Ezek 17:15-19), "abandoned" (Jer 22:9 NRSV), "transgressed" (Jer 34:18), not remembered (Amos 1:9), "corrupted" (Mal 2:8) and profaned (Mal 2:10).

Yet among the five dozen direct references to the covenant in the OT prophetic books are numerous references to God's faithfulness to his covenant. Six times God promises to establish an "everlasting covenant" with his people (Is 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:20; 37:26). God holds fast to his covenant (Is 56:4) and keeps it (Dan 9:4). One could say that in many ways the OT is the story of God's continuing fidelity to his covenant in the face of his people's infidelity. One of the most powerful images of this is found in the Hosea 1—3, where the prophet takes the prostitute Gomer for a wife as a parabolic representation of God's faithfulness to his people. In this passage we find a picture of God's fidelity to a people who have broken faith and therefore have no claim on him.

The Davidic Covenant. The covenant that God establishes with *David (2 Sam 7:9-16) is carried over from the OT to the NT. In this covenant God promises a *kingdom to David's line that "shall be established

for ever." This is ultimately a messianic prophecy of what God will do for the human race in the redemptive work of Christ. Subsequently, in the prophets we are introduced to God's plan to make a "new" covenant with his people (see esp. Jer 31:31-34 and Ezek 34:25-32). This new covenant will be written directly upon the *heart, since the hearts of stone of God's people will be replaced by hearts of flesh (cf. Heb 8). Thus a living and beating heart is an essential image to the concept of new covenant.

The New Covenant. The covenant is not as pervasive and explicit in the NT as it is in the OT, though it remains an implied theological framework in which the person and work of Christ are understood as completing and fulfilling the OT covenant. Two-thirds of the NT uses of the word *covenant* appear in the epistle to the Hebrews. The dominant image patterns there identify the NT covenant as *"new" (Heb 8:8, 13; 12:24; 9:15) and "better" (Heb 7:22; 8:6). In terms of the theological argument of Hebrews, the new covenant is better because it is final, permanent and once-for-all, as well as being secured and mediated by *Christ instead of by human priests and the sacrifices they performed. The imagery surrounding the covenant in *Hebrews is thus strongly tied to sacrifice.

Other NT passages reinforce the motifs that reach their definitive expression in Hebrews. Elsewhere too the covenant is declared to be "new" (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6). As in Hebrews, the covenant is associated with *blood (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). By implication the OT sign of the covenant, *circumcision, gives way to communion as the sign of the new covenant (1 Cor 11:25).

See also ABRAHAM; CIRCUMCISION; DAVID; ISRAEL; LAW; MOSES; SINAI.

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COVER, COVERING

The fundamental idea of covering is that of concealment, either physically or metaphorically. What is covered is separated from and rendered unknown or unacceptable to potential viewers.

The biblical account offers a detailed description of the coverings made for various items and compartments associated with the *tabernacle and the *temple (Ex 37:9; 40:3, 19-21, 28, 33; Lev 16:13). The hiding of these items signified the people's inability to manipulate God. Viewing an object or person gives one the opportunity to study, evaluate, judge or control. The covering of the place of God's presence and the holy objects associated with it discouraged the people from thinking of God as easily comprehended and managed.

The image of concealment also relates to the removal of grounds for offense. In some passages God's outrage over an unjust killing is pictured as the blood of the slain lying exposed on the ground (Ge