

Divorce

No, Moses did not ask God to allow divorce. Rather, Jesus explained that Moses permitted divorce “because of the hardness of your hearts” ([Matt 19:7–8](#))—indicating that the provision came from God through Moses as a concession to human sinfulness, not as something Moses requested.

Divorce was already occurring in Israel when the Mosaic covenant was established, and the law regulated situations in which it might become common¹. God’s law did not commend, command, or approve divorce, but by failing to forbid it entirely—particularly in

[Deuteronomy 24](#)—God’s law tolerated divorce without imposing civil or ecclesiastical penalties¹. [Deuteronomy 24:1–4](#) represents a concession to humanity’s fallen condition; it neither approves nor encourages divorce or remarriage, though it allows both¹.

The legislation served protective purposes rather than promoting divorce. The law primarily protected women’s rights, including their right to remarry and protection from former husbands’ claims, and their right to dignity and self-respect in circumstances where they might appear powerless². A formal written divorce certificate was required, preventing husbands from simply abandoning their wives without legal documentation³.

Jesus’s teaching clarifies the original divine intent: from the beginning, divorce was not part of God’s design ([Matt 19:7–8](#)). The law’s implicit disapproval, despite temporary toleration of inequalities resulting from human hardness of heart, points toward a future restoration of the Edenic ideal for marriage².

Vows

Jephthah’s vow exemplifies the danger of hasty speech before God. When preparing to fight the Ammonites, he vowed that whatever came from his house to meet him upon his return would become a burnt offering to the Lord ([Judg 11:29–40](#))—a conditional promise made without forethought.

Scripture repeatedly warns against such impulsiveness. Ecclesiastes teaches that one should not be “rash with thy mouth” before God, since the distance between heaven and earth demands careful speech ([Eccles 5:2](#)). Proverbs describes vows made without reflection as “a snare” ([Prov 20:25](#)), trapping the speaker in unforeseen consequences. The wisdom literature emphasizes that once a vow reaches God’s ears, it must be paid immediately, for God takes no pleasure in fools—better never to vow than to vow and break faith ([Eccles 5:4–6](#)).

Jephthah’s tragedy unfolded precisely because he failed to consider what his words might cost. His own daughter emerged to greet him with celebration, and recognizing the implications of his oath, he tore his clothes in anguish, saying he could not retract words spoken to the Lord ([Judg 11:29–40](#)). The law permitted redemption through monetary payment in cases of vows concerning persons, yet Jephthah’s precipitous language—spoken in the heat of military preparation—bound him to an outcome he apparently had not imagined.

The narrative serves as a cautionary tale about the binding nature of vows. Deuteronomy establishes that whatever proceeds from one’s lips to God must be performed, as the Lord will surely require it ([Deut 23:21–23](#)). Jephthah’s rash foe was not his military enemy but his own unguarded tongue—a weapon that proved far more destructive than any battlefield conflict.

The Bible presents a series of covenants that structure God’s relationship with humanity and form the theological backbone of Scripture. Five major theological covenants appear in the Old Testament¹, though scholars debate whether additional covenants should be included.

The Five Primary Covenants:

The Covenant with Noah ([Genesis 6:18; 9:1–17](#))¹ — God promises never again to destroy all flesh by flood, with the rainbow serving as the sign of this covenant.

The Covenant with Abraham ([Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–21](#))¹ — God establishes an everlasting covenant, promising to be God to Abraham and his descendants and to give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. Circumcision becomes the sign of this covenant.

The Covenant with Israel ([Exodus 19:3b–8; 20:1–24:18](#))¹ — God promises Israel will become a peculiar treasure and a kingdom of priests if they obey His voice and keep His covenant.

The Covenant with David ([2 Samuel 7:4–17](#))¹ — God promises to establish David’s descendant’s kingdom forever and that he will build a house for God’s name.

The New Covenant ([Jeremiah 31:31–34](#))¹ — God promises to make a new covenant with Israel and Judah, writing His law in their hearts rather than on stone tablets.

Additional Covenants:

Some scholars identify the Edenic and Adamic covenants ([Genesis 2:16; 3:15](#))² and the Palestinian covenant ([Deuteronomy 30:3](#))² as distinct covenants. While the Bible doesn’t explicitly mention a covenant with Adam until [Genesis 6:18](#), many believe God made a “covenant of works” or “covenant with creation” with Adam³.

These covenants mark critical junctures in God’s plan of redemption, forming a framework through which God uses His people to bring about a Savior for the sake of all people and for deliverance from sin¹.

1. 1

Eric J. Tully, [Reading the Prophets as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Introduction](#), Reading Christian Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2022), [13–14](#).

2. 2

Paul S. Karleen, [The Handbook to Bible Study: With a Guide to the Scofield Study System](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), [35](#).

3. 3

Paul R. Williamson, “Covenant,” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), [2334](#).

Handshake

A handshake is not itself a covenant, but rather a ceremonial element that originates from covenant practices¹. The distinction matters: a covenant is a compact or agreement between parties, confirmed with formal procedures², whereas a handshake functions as one possible sign or gesture within that broader agreement.

The gesture of giving one's hand could serve as an oath-sign that solemnly depicts a covenant commitment³. Biblical examples illustrate this function: [Ezekiel 17:18](#) presents one of the clearest associations between giving the hand and covenant-making, where breaking a covenant is described as despising an oath after giving one's hand³. The hand symbolizes the person; giving one's hand to another represents the giving of oneself³.

However, a handshake sometimes took the place of an oath or was added to it², meaning it functioned as an alternative to or supplement for other covenant formalities rather than constituting the covenant itself. Other covenant ceremonies included removing a garment and handing it to the other party, changing names, cutting parts of the body, mixing blood, drinking from a common cup, setting up a memorial, planting a tree, or sharing a covenant meal¹.

The handshake's modern significance traces directly to these ancient practices. Many cultural practices taken for granted today have covenant roots, including the bride's name change in marriage, the simple handshake, and the raising of the hand to take a vow¹. So while a handshake carries covenant symbolism and can ratify an agreement, it represents a gesture within a covenant relationship rather than the covenant itself.

1. 1

Jack R. Taylor, [God's New Creation](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), [42](#).

2. 2

James Hastings et al., in [Dictionary of the Bible](#) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), [161-162](#).

3. 3

Gordon P. Hugenberger, [Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi](#), Biblical Studies Library (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), [211-212](#).

Lies and Consequences

The Gibeonites deceived Israel by disguising themselves as distant foreigners, presenting worn provisions and tattered clothing as evidence of a long journey, then requesting a covenant. ([Josh 9](#)) Israel's fatal error was accepting these provisions without seeking divine counsel. ([Josh 9:14–15](#))

The consequences of this oversight were severe. Israel's failure to inquire of the Lord became the root cause of a theological crisis.¹ God had explicitly commanded the destruction of the Hivites—the ethnic group to which the Gibeonites belonged—because their pagan practices would tempt Israel toward apostasy.¹ Yet Joshua had already sworn a binding oath to let them live. ([Josh 9:14–15](#)) Fulfilling either obligation—honoring the covenant or destroying the Hivites—would necessarily violate the other.¹

What made this failure particularly significant? Israel relied on sensory perception rather than consulting God, repeating a mistake they had made at Ai, where trusting what they could see led to military defeat.² God had specifically commanded Joshua to inquire through the high priest when facing uncertain decisions, yet Joshua failed to follow this instruction.¹

The root of the Gibeonites' success lay precisely in Israel's failure to inquire of the Lord about whether they should make the treaty.³ Had they sought God's guidance, they would have recognized the deception—they might have realized that provisions could have been obtained along the way, and reflection would have exposed the ruse.⁴ Instead, their failure to ask God resulted in a binding covenant sworn by oath, a wrong decision that would prove irreversible.⁴

1. 1

Adolph L. Harstad, [Joshua](#), Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2004), [393–394](#).

2. 2

Robert Smith Jr., [Exalting Jesus in Joshua](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Brentwood, TN: Holman Reference, 2023), [131](#).

3. 3

R. S. Hess, "[Joshua](#)," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), [167](#).

4. 4

[NIV Bible Speaks Today: Notes](#) (London: IVP, 2020), [286](#).

Rainbow

The bow in the clouds presents a fascinating interpretive debate among scholars, with two competing views about whether it functions as a war bow.

The Hebrew word *qeshet* (bow) describes a hunting or warfare tool, and many scholars conclude that the bow in the sky represents God's warrior bow, which He hung up as a symbol that He was done warring with humanity.¹ Throughout the Old Testament, "bow" refers to a weapon of war or a dispenser of wrath, so the bow placed in the sky was not merely a curve of light but represented an archer's bow—a weapon.² However, this bow is not strung tight with arrows at the ready, pointing toward the earth; it is loose and hanging at the warrior's side, pointing into the heavens, signifying that God is no longer at war with those who have found grace.²

Yet other scholars reject the war-bow interpretation entirely. Scholars like Wenham and Westermann note that when *qeshet* means "rainbow," it is modified by the phrase "in the clouds," and thus dismiss the idea that the rainbow symbolizes God's weapon of war.¹ Although the notion of divine archers is well known in Israel and its ancient Near Eastern neighbors, the rainbow in the flood narrative has nothing to do with this tradition and signifies nothing more than "a natural phenomenon after rain or a thunderstorm."³

The most nuanced position recognizes both dimensions: the sight of this bow laid aside and relaxed, without its bowstring, provides a new perspective as "a sign recalling Yahweh's pledge never again to inflict destruction on the earth and its inhabitants, symbolizing the end of the deadly conflict between Yahweh and the world he created."³ Whether understood as a literal war bow or as a rainbow with warrior-bow imagery, the sign communicates divine mercy rather than judgment.

1. 1

Douglas Mangum, Miles Custis, and Wendy Widder, *Genesis 1–11*, Logos Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2026). [See [here](#), [here](#).]

2. 2

Nancy Guthrie, *The Promised One: Seeing Jesus in Genesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). [See

The Number 7

Yes, both episodes employ the number seven in ways that align with its broader biblical significance. Seven functions throughout Scripture as the covenant number, signifying God's covenant relationship with humanity¹, and both narratives demonstrate this symbolic weight.

Abraham's gift of seven ewe lambs to Abimelech served as a witness to their agreement regarding the well ([Gen 21:28–30](#)). This transaction established a binding arrangement between the two parties—a covenant moment sealed through the symbolic number. Seven appears in human covenants with one another, including treaties of peace¹, and Abraham's action reflects this pattern.

The hanging of Saul's descendants operates differently but within the same symbolic framework. Seven men from Saul's line were delivered to the Gibeonites and hanged ([2 Sam 21:6–9](#)). This wasn't arbitrary—the number signals completeness and finality. Seven represents punishment to those who violate the covenant¹, and Saul's house faced the full weight of divine judgment through this covenant-laden number.

The Hebrew word for oath or covenant is etymologically bound to the word for seven¹, underscoring why this number recurs in moments of binding obligation—whether establishing peace or executing judgment. Both Abraham's gift and the execution of Saul's descendants invoke seven not as coincidence but as a theological marker: these actions carry covenantal significance, touching on God's relationship with His people and the consequences of covenant faithfulness or breach.

1. 1

Richard Chenevix Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1886), 63–64.

Generational

The Semitic words for oath and swearing derive from the same root as the number seven, and this connection appears explicitly in Beer-sheba's name—established when Abraham and Abimelech swore mutual allegiance using seven ewe lambs as the ritual object¹.

Isaac inherits not just his father's covenant but also its symbolic language. When a similar dispute arose between Abimelech and Isaac over wells, and agreement was finally reached with an oath, Isaac's servants reported a successful new well, which Isaac named with the Hebrew numeral for seven¹. The number seven thus marks the same covenantal moment across generations—the same place, the same parties (or their successors), the same symbolic gesture.

What's striking is the generational continuity. Isaac moves to Beersheba, where Abraham had spent years after his time in Philistine territory, and there the Lord confirms that covenant promises made to Abraham will continue through Isaac². Abimelech then comes to make a covenant with Isaac at that very location where his ancestor had made a similar covenant with Abraham, bringing his adviser and military chief to signal an official agreement between peoples².

The seven ewe lambs given by Abraham become the seven-named well dug by Isaac—the number bridges father and son, securing the same covenant across time. Isaac doesn't merely repeat his father's experience; he embodies the promise's continuation, marked by the same symbolic number that sealed the original agreement.

1. 1

A. F. Rainey, “[Beer-Sheba](#),” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), [1:448](#).

2. 2

Iain M. Duguid, “[Genesis](#),” in *Genesis–Numbers*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025), [1:241](#).

Number seven motifs

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The Hebrew word for oath or covenant is etymologically bound to the word for seven[\[1\]](#), underscoring why this number recurs in moments of binding obligation—whether establishing peace or executing judgment. Both Abraham’s gift and the execution of Saul’s descendants invoke seven not as coincidence but as a theological marker: these actions carry covenantal

significance, touching on God's relationship with His people and the consequences of covenant faithfulness or breach.

[1] Richard Chenevix Trench, [*Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia*](#) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1886), [63–64](#).

Your question appears to ask how the symbolic significance of seven “runs into” or continues into the next generation—perhaps referring to how the number's theological weight persists across time or how one covenant act echoes into future consequences.

The number seven carries consistent symbolic dignity throughout Scripture from beginning to end[\[1\]](#), functioning as a theological constant rather than an isolated occurrence. Seven operates as the covenant number—the sign of God's binding relationship with humanity, particularly with the Church[\[1\]](#).

What makes this relevant across generations is that seven marks sacrifice, through which the covenant, once established, is continually maintained and the relationship between God and humanity, which sin constantly threatens, is restored[\[1\]](#). This means the covenant doesn't exist in a single moment—it requires ongoing renewal and restoration across time.

The pattern extends into consequences as well. Seven appears as the number of reward for those faithful in the covenant and of punishment for those who break it or injure God's people[\[1\]](#). This suggests that covenant violations carry their weight forward—the judgment itself becomes a covenant-laden act, marked by the same number that sealed the original agreement. The seven hanged from Saul's house weren't arbitrary casualties; they represented the full, complete working out of covenant breach across a generation.

The generational dimension emerges because God's rest on the seventh day and sanctification of it establishes that the number seven carries significant meaning not only in creation but also in redemption[\[2\]](#). The covenant framework persists across time, binding one generation's faithfulness—or unfaithfulness—to the next through the same symbolic language.

[1] Richard Chenevix Trench, [*Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia*](#) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1886), [62–64](#).

[2] Robert I. Vasholz, [*Leviticus: A Mentor Commentary*](#), Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), [160](#).

Ah, now the pattern becomes clearer. The Semitic words for oath and swearing derive from the same root as the number seven, and this connection appears explicitly in Beer-sheba's name—established when Abraham and Abimelech swore mutual allegiance using seven ewe lambs as the ritual object[1].

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[1] A. F. Rainey, "[Beer-Sheba](#)," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), [1:448](#).

[2] Iain M. Duguid, "[Genesis](#)," in *Genesis–Numbers*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025), [1:241](#).

Karath berith literally means "cut a covenant,"[1] though the phrase functions idiomatically to mean "make a covenant." The expression likely originated from the practice of cutting open animal sacrifices during covenant ceremonies[1], similar to how English speakers say "cut a deal."

The idiom typically refers to initiating a new covenant that didn't previously exist[1]—examples include agreements between Abraham and Abimelech, or between nations entering into treaties. However, karath berith also appears in contexts where a covenant already exists, referring either to keeping its terms or to renewing and expanding it[1]. Jonathan and David's covenant was

“cut” three separate times, yet all three episodes functionally represent a single covenant, with the latter two serving as expansions or renewals[1].

The phrase differs from a related expression: *heqim berith* means to “set up” or “establish a covenant.”[1] The two expressions sometimes overlap in meaning and are often functionally synonymous[1], though some scholars argue they distinguish between original covenant-making versus renewal of prior agreements. This distinction, however, is not valid[1].

Underlying the phrase is ancient ritual practice. The idiomatic meaning derives from a ritual associated with covenant-making, particularly the cutting apart of animals between whose separated parts the covenant parties would pass[2]. In Abraham’s covenant, God ratified the agreement by passing through the divided animals, thus guaranteeing his promise irrevocably[2]. This ceremonial dimension explains why “cutting” became the standard Hebrew expression for covenant-making across the ancient Near East.

[1] Duane A. Garrett, *The Problem of the Old Testament: Hermeneutical, Schematic & Theological Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020), [181–183](#).

[2] G. F. Hasel, “כרת,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), [350–351](#).

Karath — “cut a covenant,” but it means to “make a covenant.”[1] The verb *karath* literally means “to cut off, cut down.”[2] The phrase may have originated from the practice of cutting open an animal sacrifice when making a covenant (see [Gen 15](#)), but it is analogous to the English expression “to cut a deal.”[1]

Heqim — *Heqim berith* means to “set up” a covenant and is often translated as “establish a covenant.”[1]

The distinction between them matters less than often assumed. The two expressions sometimes overlap in meaning; they are often but not always functionally synonymous.[1] Some scholars argue that *karath berith* refers to initiating a brand-new covenant while *heqim berith* refers to renewal or expansion of an existing one, but this distinction is not valid.[1]

Importantly, *berith* implies first and foremost the notion of “imposition,” “liability,” or “obligation,”[3] rather than simply a mutual agreement between equals. A *berith* as a commitment has to be confirmed by an oath, which included most probably a conditional imprecation: “May thus and thus happen to me if I violate the obligation.” The oath gives the obligation its binding validity.[3]

- [1] Duane A. Garrett, [*The Problem of the Old Testament: Hermeneutical, Schematic & Theological Approaches*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020), [181–182](#).
- [2] John Rataczak, [*Bible Translations: A Closer Look*](#), Eleutheros Series (Eleutheros Books, 2012), [2:48](#).
- [3] M. Weinfeld, “[בְּרִית](#),” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), [255–256](#).

Berith is the Hebrew word meaning “covenant.”^[1] However, its significance extends beyond simple agreement between parties.

A berith is a solemn, legal bond in which one person sets the terms of the relationship and others are affected by the berith-initiator’s decisions—often expressed in a written document.^[2] Critically, a berith functions as a solemn, legal commitment between living persons—such as a dominant king and a weaker king, a husband and a wife, a father-in-law and a son-in-law, or the Lord and Israel. The berith-maker did not have to die for its requirements to be implemented; instead, it obligated the parties to keep their respective obligations as soon as it was ratified, functioning more like a political treaty between nations or a commercial contract.^[2]

The theological heart of berith lies in its binding nature. The outstanding characteristic of a berith is its unalterableness, its certainty, its eternal validity. The berith as such is a “faithful berith,” something not subject to abrogation.^[3] A purely one-sided promise or ordinance or law becomes a berith, not by reason of its inherent conceptual or etymological meaning, but by reason of the religious sanction added.^[3]

When applied to God’s relationship with humanity, berith emphasizes divine initiative and authority. The Lord set the terms through his promises and commands, and announced the consequences for breach of contract. His servants’ role in establishing these covenants was simply to say, “Yes, sir!”^[2]

- [1] Richard C. Gamble, [*God’s Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*](#), The Whole Counsel of God (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), [1:282](#).
- [2] Dennis E. Johnson, [*Walking with Jesus through His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures*](#) (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), [88](#).
- [3] Geerhardus Vos, [*Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*](#) (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), [23–24](#).

