

A FOUR-WEEK STUDY

Covenant

Berith — Bond, Pledge, Unbreakable Word

Shoe • Salt • Blood — and the eternal covenants of God



The Four Weeks at a Glance

One covenant form per week, building toward the covenants of God

Week 1 — Foundations & Types

What berith means, how a covenant differs from a vow or contract, and the three covenant forms Scripture uses.

Week 2 — The Shoe Covenant

A sandal handed over as a binding sign; Boaz redeems Ruth before the elders in Ruth 4:1-10.

Week 3 — The Salt Covenant

Mingled salt as a pledge of loyalty; Numbers 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5, Leviticus 2:13.

Week 4 — Blood & God's Covenants

The sacrifice, the walk between the pieces, and the covenants God swore to keep forever.

Each week: teaching, the biblical text, and discussion questions you can use as-is.

OPENING PRAYER — WEEK ONE

Father, You are a God who binds Yourself by oath. As we open Your Word tonight, open us. Teach us what covenant means, and let the learning become trust. In Jesus' name, Amen.



WEEK ONE

Covenant Foundations & Types

“A covenant, once cut, stands.”



Why Covenant Matters

The idea that holds the biblical story together

● The Bible is a covenant book

Our two testaments are literally two 'covenants.' The word frames the whole canon.

● It explains God's faithfulness

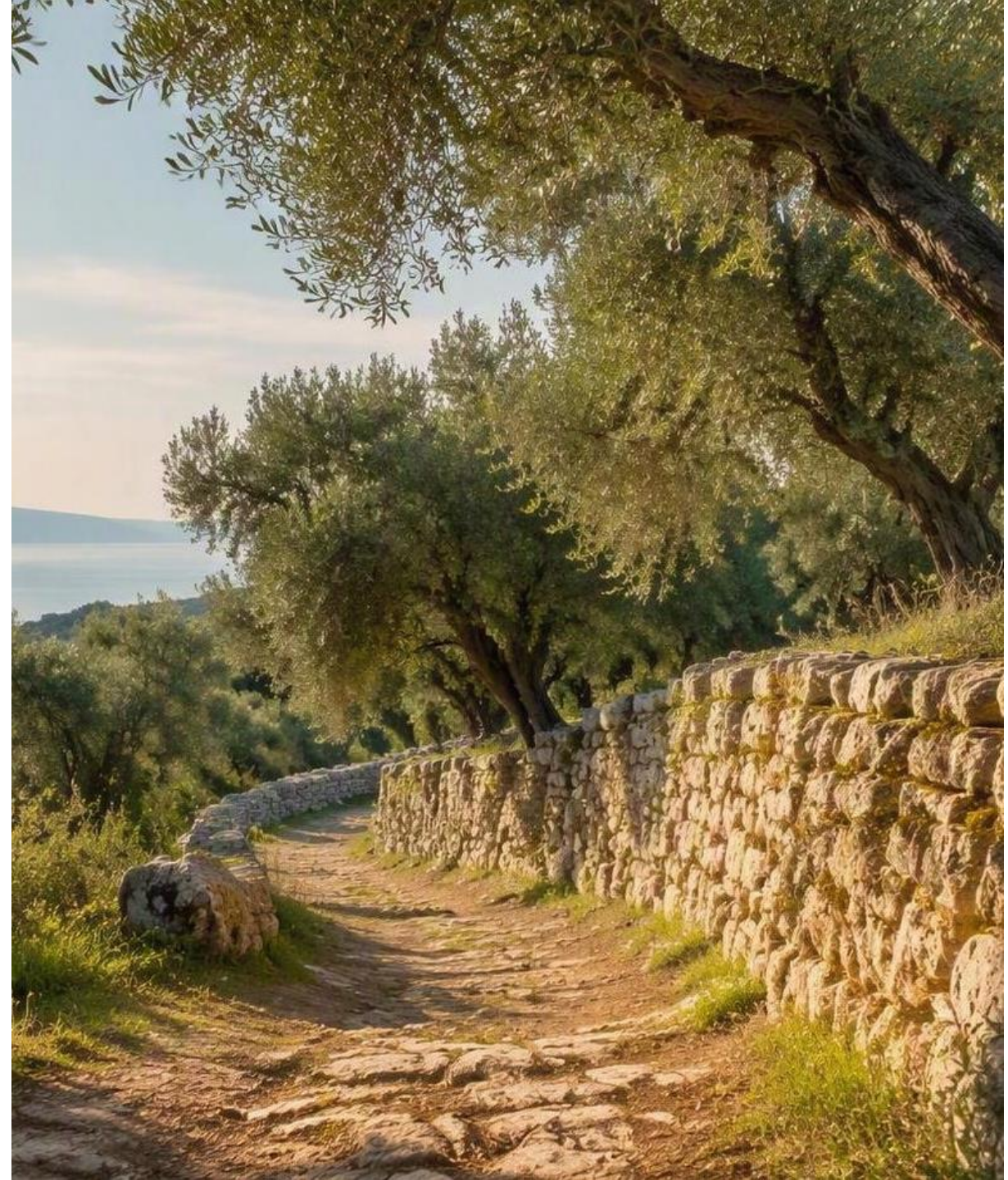
God does not merely intend good toward His people; He has bound Himself by oath.

● It shaped daily life

Marriage, land, kingship, priesthood and worship all ran on covenant.

● It changes how we read

Once you see the covenant forms, dozens of strange passages suddenly make sense.



Berith: The Word Behind the Idea

The Hebrew term that characterizes every biblical covenant

berith

contract • bond • pledge — Gk. diatheke: will, testament

A covenant is not a statement of intention but a binding instrument. It creates a new relationship, with obligations, witnesses, signs and consequences attached to it.

Vow

A personal pledge. Under certain conditions it may be released, annulled or broken.

Covenant

Permanent **once** established. It ends by fulfillment — never by convenience.

Four Marks of a Biblical Covenant

What has to be present for a covenant to exist

Terms

What each party owes the other, spoken aloud so there is no confusion later.

A Sign

A physical token — sandal, salt, blood, bow, circumcision — that makes the bond visible.

Witnesses

Elders, family, heaven and earth. A covenant is public; a private deal is something else.

Consequences

What follows if the terms are broken. In the gravest form, the penalty is death.

When the Terms Go Unspoken

Four conflicts Scripture traces to terms never said out loud

Saul's Oath

1 Samuel 14 — Jonathan never hears the curse, eats honey, and is nearly executed for it.

Jacob & Laban

Genesis 29–31 — terms set, then altered ten times; settled only at the heap of witness.

The Gibeonites

Joshua 9 — a league cut without inquiry; the terms held, and the breach cost Israel dearly.

Abraham & Abimelech

Genesis 21 — a seized well, unspoken specifics, put right by an oath at Beersheba.

Where This Still Happens

The same pattern, in the rooms we actually live in

Marriage

Vows said aloud; money, in-laws, careers and children quietly assumed and never agreed.

Family & Money

Who cared for Mom, and was it a gift or a loan? Settled at the reading of the will.

Work

'Stick with us and we'll take care of you' — no terms, no timeline, no witnesses.

Church & Ministry

'Could you help in the nursery?' — eleven years later, with no end date and no exit.

The Ledger No One Was Shown

Where unspoken terms do their quietest damage

Friendship

You call, you drive, you show up at the hospital. You never said you needed it to run both ways — so they never knew there was a ledger.

In Us

We are wounded by failures the other person never knew were possible. Convicting someone under a law they never heard is Saul's oath, in miniature.

It Can Still Be Said

Abraham names the well before the covenant closes. Most grievances are one uncomfortable conversation away from becoming covenant.

Reading the Covenant Sign

Why God attaches something seen to something unseen

- **The sign fits the promise**

A war bow laid down, circumcision at the seed, salt that cannot be unmixed.

- **The sign is given, not chosen**

God names it in every covenant He cuts. Its meaning is His, not our sentiment.

- **God binds Himself to it**

'I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant' — Genesis 9:16.

- **The sign alone saves no one**

Circumcision profits nothing where the heart is uncircumcised — Romans 2:25-29.



Three Covenant Types in Scripture

Each uses a physical sign to make an invisible bond visible

1

The Shoe Covenant

A sandal is handed over. A transfer of right and standing, witnessed publicly before the elders.

2

The Salt Covenant

Salt is mingled. A covenant of loyalty — binding until each party can retrieve his own grains, which he never can.

3

The Blood Covenant

An animal is divided. The gravest bond: the parties walk between the pieces, pledging their own lives to the terms.

*The signs differ; the force is the same — the covenant outlasts the feelings of those who **cut** it.*

Where Do the Other Covenants Fit?

Three sign-forms, not a complete list of every covenant

1

Signs Beyond the Three

Circumcision (Gen. 17), the Sabbath (Ex. 31:16-17), a heap of stones (Gen. 31:48-52), the rainbow (Gen. 9). These are signs, not extra types — each belongs to a covenant already cut.

2

A Second Way to Sort

Scripture also sorts covenants by shape: royal grant, unconditional — Noah, Abraham, David — versus suzerain treaty, conditional — Sinai. That grid cuts across all three signs.

3

The Ladder Always Holds

Standing, loyalty, life. Even when the sign is not a sandal, salt or blood, every covenant sits somewhere on that ladder of weight.

The three types are a teaching grid, not a filing cabinet — the question is always what is staked.

How a Covenant Was **Cut**

The common pattern beneath all three forms

01

Terms Agreed

The parties settle what each owes the other, without ambiguity.

02

The Sign Given

A token is exchanged — sandal, salt or sacrifice — marking the bond as active.

03

Terms Recited

The covenant is spoken aloud before witnesses so that no one can later plead ignorance.

04

Memorial Kept

A meal, a stone, a name or a scar keeps the covenant in living memory.

Hebrew does not 'make' a covenant — it cuts one. The verb itself carries the weight of the rite.

Signs, Witnesses and Memory

Why ancient covenants were so physical

- **Nothing was written down**

In a largely oral culture, a public rite with a physical token was the record.

- **The sign could be inspected**

A sandal in your hand or salt in your pouch was evidence anyone could see.

- **Witnesses were the archive**

Elders at the gate remembered and could testify years later.

- **Memory was moral**

To forget a covenant was not absent-mindedness; it was betrayal.



Covenant Language in the Bible

Three phrases worth learning tonight

“Cut a covenant”

The standard Hebrew idiom. Something is divided or given up whenever a covenant begins.

“An everlasting covenant”

Not poetic exaggeration — a statement about the nature of the bond itself.

“Remember my covenant”

God 'remembering' is not recall but action: He moves to fulfill what He swore.

GENESIS 15:17-18

“A smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces... In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram.”

God puts Abraham to sleep and walks between the pieces alone. The covenant is **cut** — and God alone carries the penalty for its breaking.



Covenant Vocabulary

Terms we will use for the next four weeks

Berith

Covenant: contract, will, testament, bond.

Karath

To **cut**. The verb used for entering a covenant.

Goel

Kinsman-redeemer — the relative with the right to buy back.

Token

The visible sign that a covenant is in force.

Witness

One who saw the rite and can testify to it.

Covenant meal

Eating together to seal and celebrate the bond.

Keep these handy — each returns in Weeks 2, 3 and 4.

Covenant, Contract, Vow

Three words we often blur together

Not the same

covenant ≠ contract ≠ vow

A contract protects interests and ends when the exchange is complete. A vow binds one person and may be released. A covenant binds persons to each other and does not expire.

A contract asks

“What do I get, and when am I free of this?”

A covenant asks

“Who am I to you now, and what do I owe you for life?”

What Is an Oath?

The spoken act that binds a covenant

A solemn word

swearing by what cannot be moved

An oath is a solemn promise that calls a higher witness — God, heaven, the altar — to guarantee that what is said is true and what is sworn will be done. The covenant is the bond; the oath is the voice that seals it.

A promise says

“I intend to do this, and I mean it today.”

An oath says

“Let God deal with me if I fail to do this.”

Four Parts of an Oath

What has to be present when a man swears

The Words

The promise spoken plainly and aloud, so that it can be held against the one who swore it.

The Witness

Someone greater is called to hear — “as the LORD lives.” Scripture forbids swearing by lesser things.

The Gesture

A raised hand, a hand under the thigh, a sandal exchanged — the body confirms what the mouth said.

The Curse

The self-invoked penalty if the oath is broken. This is what separates an oath from a wish.

Oath Language in Scripture

Three phrases worth hearing carefully

“As the LORD lives”

The standard formula. The swearer stakes his standing before God on the truth of what he says.

“God did swear by Himself”

Having no one greater to swear by, God pledges His own name — Hebrews 6:13.

“Let your yes be yes”

Jesus points past the oath to the person: a covenant people should not need one to be believed.

Why This Still Matters

Taking covenant out of the ancient world

- **Our security rests on His bond**

God's commitment does not fluctuate with our performance.

- **Our promises are meant to hold**

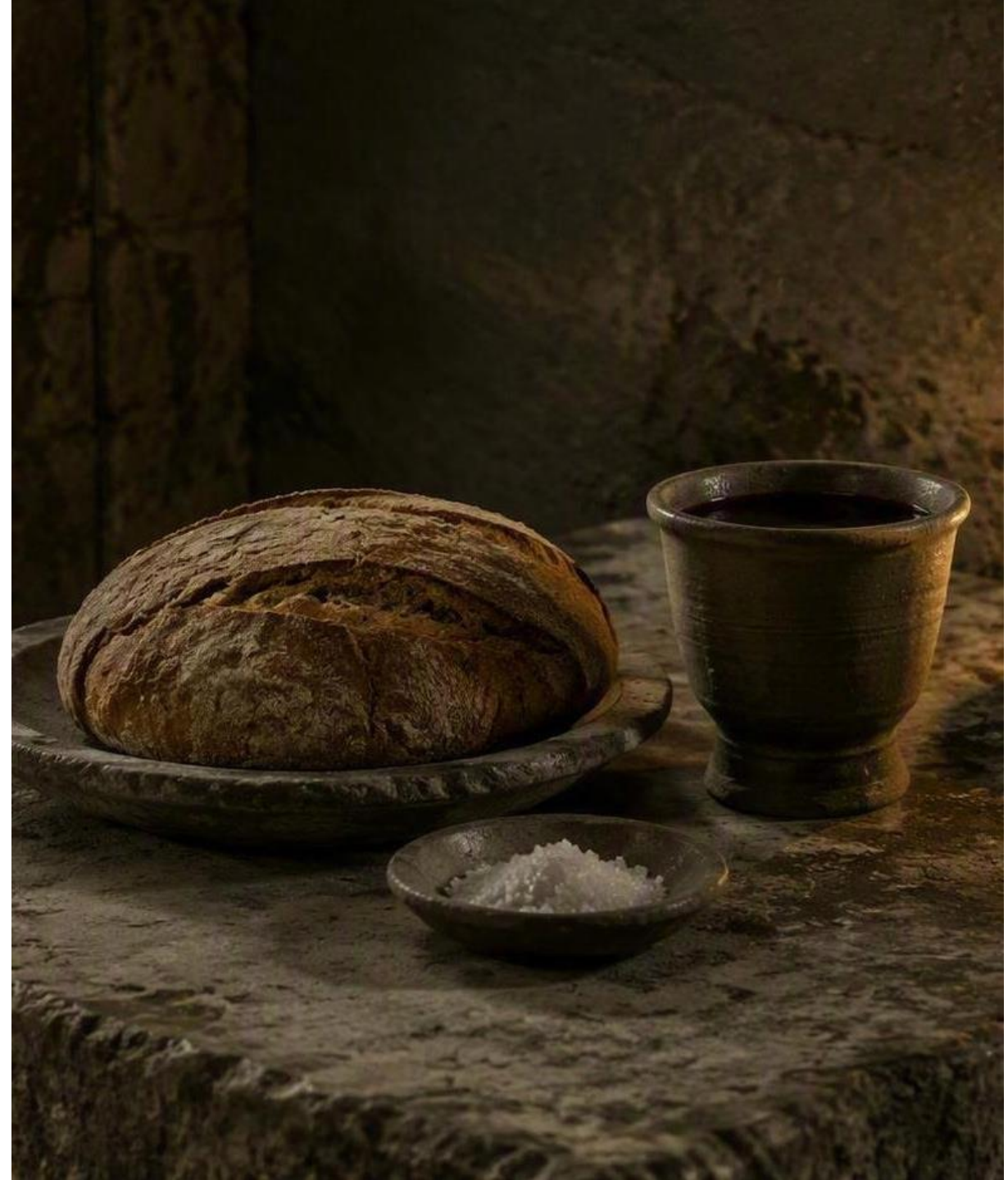
Covenant people keep their word when it costs them.

- **Our worship is covenantal**

The Lord's table is a covenant meal, not merely a memory exercise.

- **Our relationships deepen**

Covenant thinking moves us from 'what do I get' to 'what do I owe.'



Week 1 in Review

Six things to carry into next week

Berith

A covenant is a cut bond, not a casual agreement.

The four marks

Terms spoken aloud, a visible sign, witnesses, and stated consequences.

Unspoken terms

Where terms go unstated, both sides assume different deals.

The sign

Every covenant carried a visible mark that outlived the moment.

Not a contract

A contract trades goods; a covenant gives persons.

Genesis 15

God binds Himself to Abram and walks the pieces alone.

Week 1 — Discussion

Talk it through before we move to the shoe covenant

1

What did you believe 'covenant' meant before tonight, and what changed?

2

Why do you think God chose covenant rather than simply making promises?

3

Which of the four marks — terms, sign, witnesses, consequences — is most missing from how we make commitments today?

4

Where have you treated a covenant as if it were a contract?

5

What would change this week if you treated one relationship as covenant?

Take it home

Read Ruth chapters 3 and 4 in full. Note every place a right, a claim or a redemption is being transferred.

Next week

Week 2: the shoe covenant — how a single sandal settled a legal matter, and how Boaz used it to redeem Ruth.

CLOSING PRAYER — WEEK ONE

*Lord, we have heard that a covenant,
once cut, stands. Let that steady us this
week. Keep us faithful in what we have
promised, and rest us in what You have
sworn. Amen.*

Close the hour here. Keep it short, and send them home on the
thesis of the night.

