

Covenant of Salt



An important thread in the fabric of life in the East is the covenant of salt. We find this covenant mentioned in the Old Testament:

All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord unto thee and to the seed with thee. Numbers 18:19

And again:

Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?
II Chronicles 13:5

What is this covenant of salt? In the East, the taking of salt is a pledge, a promise of fidelity. If I come to your house and eat food with you which has been seasoned with salt, I can never betray you or do you harm. Even if you commit a crime and I am asked to testify, I cannot do it because I have eaten salt with you. Perhaps I may come to you and try to persuade you to do the right thing, but I would die before I would break the covenant of salt. In fact, the penalty for so doing, is death.

We find New Testament references to the covenant also. In Matthew 5:13 we find Jesus saying, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and be trodden under the foot of men.”

In the East we not only have salt in the form that is in America, but our salt also comes in large stone jars, twenty or thirty pounds in one jar. This jar stands on the floor

on the kitchen, and is like brown rock salt. The top of the jar is covered with a stone slab. Every morning the kitchen floor is washed with water, and in the course of time, the bottom of the stone jar becomes soaked with water so many times that the salt in the bottom of the jar actually loses its saltiness. By the time the salt is used down to the part which the saltiness has been leached away, the remainder is simply thrown out into the street and it is trodden under foot.

In Ezekiel 16:4 we find another reference to the covenant of salt concerning a childbirth custom. This verse says: "... thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all." After reading about the covenant of salt and its meaning, you can doubtless surmise that these phrases indicate that the person to whom they are directed is not reliable or truthful. The sons of kings and princes in the East today are still "salted and swaddled." A tiny bit of salt is rubbed on the baby to indicate that the parents intend to teach the child to be truthful. The baby is then wrapped in swaddling clothes. These are fine linen or silk strips two or two and one half inches wide which are wrapped round and round the baby's body to straighten him out; arms and legs and all are made straight as a ramrod. This is a sign to God that the parents will rear the child to be straightforward before the Lord, and free from crookedness.

The child is left in this position from fifteen minutes to two hours, while the parents meditate and make their vows to God concerning their sacred trust which was given them when they received the child.

Luke records the birth of the Lord Jesus; "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger..." (Luke 2:7). We know that that Mary was told by the angel that her son would be called the Son of God; therefore she rightly treated him as royalty and used swaddling clothes. I have been amused at hearing Western commentators say that these swaddling clothes must have been rags, since Mary and Joseph were poor and could not afford proper baby clothes. Some of the wealthiest people in India who send to Paris for fabulous layettes for their babies, still use swaddling clothes in order to carry out this ancient tradition.

As soon as a child is old enough to understand, he is told about having been salted and swaddled as a baby. A Hindu mother often says, "You were salted to pray seven times a day; you were swaddled not to be crooked." These mothers truly believe the saying, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it"(Proverbs 22:6). God bless you.

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