



**Ancient Covenants:
God Does Fulfill His Promises!**

by *Don Dainty*



Ancient Covenants:
God Does Fulfill His Promises!

By Don Dainty

© 1999 by Don Dainty



Box 5180
New Liskeard, Ontario
Canada P0J 1P0

1-800-258-5451
Canada Wide Toll Free
(705) 647-5424
Fax (705) 647-8366

Email: wmpub@ntl.sympatico.ca

Discover our website:

<http://www.nt.net/~wmpub/index.htm>

ISBN: 1-896331-60-2

Printed in Canada

Ancient Covenants: God Does Fulfill His Promises!

Introduction

The idea of Covenants between God and man is ancient and evidently everlasting. Exploration of this most important matter of Covenant, is a means of:

- a) bringing oneself into a state of awe at the all-encompassing sovereignty and power of the Creator and the majesty of His Messengers on earth,
- b) acquainting oneself with His 'Divine Plan', revealed aforetime, and unfolding with an astonishing precision as the passage of history confirms,
- c) and, as a result of these processes, confirming within oneself a deep, unshakeable faith, that is: consciously bringing oneself within the embrace of the COVENANT!

Two dictionaries define the word 'covenant' as follows: (1) a mutual agreement between two or more persons, to do, or refrain from doing, certain acts (Oxford); and, (2) noun – a solemn agreement, compact or contract, and verb transitive – to promise by solemn agreement (Compact Dictionary of Canadian English).

This general meaning, when applied to matters of religion, expresses binding agreements involving God and humanity. God's promises of benefits are conditional upon human obedience, otherwise we are destined to suffer the promised perils which result from disobedience. This was true as stated thousands of years ago, and it so remains today.

Bahá'í Texts on the Covenant

An immense amount of the Bahá'í Writings deal with this subject. Among these, is the following general description:

“The Eternal Covenant of God is the recognition of, and response to, His ancient Beauty through Whomsoever It may be revealed... Of this one Eternal Covenant all other Covenants form a part, whether that between God and His Messengers allotting each His degree of revelation, or those between His Messengers and the faithful, keeping alive, for a forgetful mankind, the fuller promise to come – the “Greater Covenant” to accept the next Messenger, and the “Lesser Covenant” of obedience to the appointed head of the divinely established faith.

“It is through conscious faith in God and His promises that man is lead to practise the right way of life, and it is this faith which constitutes the second birth of spiritual fire and understanding by which individuals attain their personal fulfillment. Awakened to the eternal qualitative life of the spirit, to spirituality, man grows more and more to display his faith in deeds of ever greater worth... With the fulfillment in this Day of the Eternal Covenant, the fruition of the earth is fore-ordained... God’s Will done on earth as in heaven.”

(Bahá’u’lláh, *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. xx & xxi)

The Twin Duties – Faith and Obedience

Bahá’u’lláh expresses very specific aspects of the Covenant in the following:

“The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the *recognition* of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. *Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof, hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed.* It behoveth every one who rea-

cheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to *observe every ordinance* of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 330-331)

The embracing of faith in God's Messengers, and deeds performed in observance of the ordinances revealed by those Manifestations of God, therefore become the twin inseparable duties enjoined on humanity in order that the promised benefit of 'attaining unto all good' be realized.

Thus does Bahá'u'lláh affirm an oft-stated principle of ancient Scripture. Of the many Covenant-related statements found in the Bible, a similar expression of this same Covenant is found in the general Epistle of James, the brother of Christ:

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto him, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith if it hath not works, is dead, being alone... Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only...”

(General Epistle of James 2:14-26)

And St. Paul, in Hebrews Chapter 11, which begins: “Faith is substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” eloquently testifies to this powerful combination of faith and obedience. He does this by describing the triumph over trials of a succession of numerous Biblical characters by obedience, in order to finally reap the promised reward in the end. One of these – the Covenant God made with Abraham regarding the Promised Land, is discussed further below.

Fulfillment of Ancient Covenants

The Eternal Covenant, the promise that God will send His Messengers to continually provide humanity with the necessary guidance for spiritual and social development, is eternal in the past and in the future. Some four to five millennia ago, Krishna stated His version of this Eternal Covenant, when He said:

“I produce myself among creatures, O Son of Bharata, whenever there is a decline of virtue and an insurrection of vice and injustice in the world; and thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness.”

(Gita 4:7-8; Judge, p. 31)

In this series of ‘incarnations’ or Manifestations of God, Bahá’u’lláh, according to Shoghi Effendi, is the ‘reincarnation of Krishna’ (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 94), the ‘10th Avatar’ (Manifestation) and the ‘Immaculate Manifestation of Krishna’ (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 95). Continuing this theme, the Buddhists expect the ‘Maitreye Buddha’ of Universal Fellowship, the 5th Buddha (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 95). In chronological order, these promised, fulfilling ‘incarnations’ of the Buddha have been: (1) Buddha, (2) Christ, (3) Muhammad, (4) the Báb, and finally, (5) Bahá’u’lláh.

This statement regarding the successive, progressive sources of spiritual evolution is concisely stated in the Bahá’í Writings in the following terms:

“The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh should indeed be regarded, if we wish to be faithful to the tremendous implications of its message, as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations. These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Báb, have paved the way and anticipated with an ever-increasing emphasis the

advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages should be made manifest.”

(Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 103)

More Examples of Ancient Covenants

(1) *The Promised Land*: Most people are aware that the Bible states that God made a covenant with Abraham (around 4,000 years ago) to provide Him and his people a ‘Promised Land’. A detailed, historical background to this covenant is given in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, pp. 619-620.

In summary, when God ‘called’ Abraham, among the several blessings He promised to Him and to his descendents, was land, as follows:

“Now the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country (*the Kingdom of Mari in the Tigris-Euphrates basin*), and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

(Genesis 12:1-2)

Even though the several references in the Pentateuch (the first five Biblical Books) give varying dimensions to this land, the Abrahamic Covenant – the promise of land in general – was reaffirmed by God speaking to Moses in the following terms:

“And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out

from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.”

(King James Version, Exodus 6:5-8)

And so this Covenant is a major one in Jewish, and now world, thinking; and is, in addition, intimately related to another famous promise – that of the Dispersal and Return of the Jews.

(2) *The Dispersal and Return of the Jews*: The presence of the Jewish people in the Holy Land in our times is the culmination of a very old Biblical tradition spanning close to four millennia.

Well into the Hebrew process of realizing the goal of the promised land, we find the Prophet Moses commanding obedience to the Law. In the first books of the Bible, He describes the consequences of obedience or disobedience to the Law in the form of ‘Blessings’ or ‘Curses’, respectively.

The blessings of faithfulness to the Covenant are most attractive. These are described in the first 14 verses of Deuteronomy 28. The curses for disobedience are equally unattractive. These are described in the following 54 verses! The curses are remarkably well-defined and culminate with the following *devastating promises*:

“And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you *seven times* more for your sins.” (Leviticus 26:18, 21, 24, and 28), and “The Lord shall scatter thee among all the people from one end of the earth even unto the other. And among these nations thou shalt find no ease.” (Deuteronomy 28:64)

These curses are followed by the *equally uplifting promises* of eventual blessing:

“I will for their sakes remember the Covenant of their ancestors.” (Leviticus 26:45) and “And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, wither the Lord thy God hath driven thee. And shall return unto the Lord thy God and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart and with all thy soul; That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion on thee, and will return and gather thee from all nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.”

(Deuteronomy 30:1-3)

Evidently, long before the fact, the future of the Jews was outlined. Failure to abide by their Covenant would result in dispersal to the four corners of the earth, and persecution for a period of seven times, until God would remember His Covenant with them and cause their return to the Promised Land. In view of the history of the last 150 years, is not all this an intriguing example of Prophetic prevision?

Among the several important questions that arise, are:

- (1) how long is ‘seven times’,
- (2) when did the dispersal begin,
- (3) what history surrounds the final return, and,
- (4) who is ultimately responsible for this long-anticipated event?

Years ago, when asked regarding the duration of ‘seven times’, a Rabbi expressed the following view: “Seven times represents a very long time.” But, it is possible to be more specific. The traditional interpretation of a ‘time’ using widely-accepted principles, provides the following Biblically-rooted equalities: a ‘time’ is a ‘day’; a ‘day’ is a ‘year’; a year is 12 months of 30 days each; therefore, a

'time' is $12 \times 30 = 360$ years; so seven times = $7 \times 360 = 2,520$ years - indeed, this is a long time!

Regarding the starting point of this period of dispersion, authorities express minor differences of opinion as to the historical dates of the reign of a key figure – King Ahaz. One source suggests that he was King of Judah (the southern kingdom) in 741 BC, and another in 735 BC, and there are no doubt others. The first date is used here. It is suggested by J. Llewellyn Thomas, F.R.C.S., in a text entitled *The Assyrian Invasions and the Deportation of Israel*, published by the Covenant Publishing Company, 6 Buckingham Gate, S.W.I., London, UK in 1937.

In 741 BC, Ahaz was evidently attacked by King Pekah of Israel, his northern neighbour, the latter in alliance with Rezin, King of Syria. In his distress, Ahaz approached the Prophet Isaiah for reassurance that the 'two smoking firebrands' would not prevail against him. Isaiah accordingly then pronounced that:

“Within three score and five years (65 years) shall Ephraim (the northern Kingdom of Israel) be broken that it be not a people.”

(Isaiah 7:8)

How dramatic for Ahaz! This is indicating the ultimate destruction of Ahaz's enemy in 65 years from 741 BC, i.e. 676 BC. At this time, the above reference indicates that the fourth Assyrian invasion of Israel occurred. The invasion was led by the Assyrian King, Essar-Haddon. This episode not only resulted in the wholesale removal of the people of the Kingdom of Israel, but also, a humbling of the people of Judah to the state of vassals. Judah eventually suffered the same fate of wholesale deportation around 590 BC. So, the process of dispersion of the Jews *began*, in earnest, in 676 BC according to the reference, as foreseen by Isaiah.

Then, if one determines the date after an expiry of 'seven times' or 2,520 years from 676 BC, one arrives at the date of 1844 AD. It should be around this date that the return of the Jews to Holy Land would begin, in earnest – and much more as well!

What did happen in 1844 AD? Islamic power was beginning to weaken under British influence in the 19th Century. The Sultan of Turkey was forced to sign the 'Edict of Toleration' with Britain on March 21, 1844 AD. This document helped to free Christians from persecution and death in the Holy Land, adding to an already increasing mood of Islamic tolerance. This beginning of a broadening tolerance was part of the divine processes, initiated in the spiritual sense by the Báb in 1844, and ultimately permitting the historical return of the Jews to the Holy Land in earnest after a chequered history of dispersal and foreign domination.

Who was it that would bring to fruition the promise of the ancient Covenant that God made with Abraham to provide the Jews with their Promised Land? Isaiah gives us a clue when he says that such will be accomplished by the remnant of Jesse, the Lord, Who:

“... shall set up an ensign for the nations and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”

(Isaiah 11:12)

So it is the Lord, the descendent of Jesse, Whom the Bible styles the Lord of Hosts, the King of Kings, the Glory of the Lord, Michael the Arch-Angel of the Jews, etc., Who would be ultimately be responsible for the fulfillment of this Ancient Covenant. The nations of Turkey and Britain acted as His instruments in the actualization of the Creator's 'Divine Plan'. Finally, what do the Scriptures state regarding Bahá'u'lláh's relationship to Jesse? A portion of a pertinent citation from Isaiah provides and answer:

“And there come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord...”

(Isaiah 11:1&2)

To begin, it should be pointed out that Bahá'u'lláh, the 'Glory of the Lord', does indeed claim, as we shall see, to be that descendant of Jesse. Regarding Bahá'u'lláh's lineage, Shoghi Effendi, *Guardian of the Faith*, and a designated Interpreter of its Writings, states:

"To Him Isaiah, the greatest of the Jewish prophets, had alluded as the 'Glory of the Lord', the 'Everlasting Father', the 'Prince of Peace', the 'Wonderful', the 'Counsellor', the 'Rod come forth out of the stem of Jesse' and the 'Branch grown out of His roots', Who 'shall be established upon the throne of David', Who... 'shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth'."

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 94/95)

Consequently, Bahá'ís believe Bahá'u'lláh, like Christ, to be descended from Jesse. Admittedly, objective proof of this descent beyond the simple assertion, does not appear to be possible. Just as in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, dates, archeology and history leave wide gaps in our knowledge that are likely never to be bridged.

Therefore, all Bahá'u'lláh's claims rest, in the end, upon the validity of His station as the Father, the Revelator of God's Will for the Millennium through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As such, He is apprised of all matters far above and beyond the ken and capabilities of mortal men, including matters of lineage!

(3) *Abraham's Line to be Blessed*: In connection with the Covenant that Abraham would be the progenitor of a blessed line (Genesis 12:1-2, see p. 5 above), about Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi confirms that:

"He derived His descent, on the one hand from Abraham (the Father of the Faithful) through His wife Keturah, and on the other from Zoroaster, as well as from Yazdigird, the last king of the Sasanian dynasty (641 AD). He was moreover a descendant of Jesse..."

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 94)

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá adds a new dimension, by indicating:

“Besides this, an especial blessing is conferred on some families and some generations. Thus it is an especial blessing that from among the descendants of Abraham should have come all the Prophets of the children of Israel. This is a blessing that God has granted to this descent: to Moses from His father and mother, to Christ from His mother’s line; also to Muhammad and the Báb, and to all the Prophets and the Holy Manifestations of Israel.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248 - 7th edition 1954)

It is comforting to realize that this World Redeemer, as a descendent of this blessed line of Abraham, will unite all those faithful to Christ’s Covenant with the ‘sheep of other folds’ (John 10:16) into one spiritual community, uniting humankind and building the sure foundation of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Finally, Abraham emerges as the ‘Father’, with a capital ‘F’, as it is rendered in the King James Version of the Bible. This capitalized Father reference is virtually unique in the King James Version, and is used for no other references save those referring to the Everlasting Father (Bahá’u’lláh in Isaiah 9:7), and God the Creator.

(4) *The Flood of Noah Revisited*: The above Covenants: 1) the Promised Land (4,000 years), 2) the Dispersal and Return of the Jews (2,520 years), and 3) the blessings bestowed on the line of Abraham (continual over 4,000 years), while ancient, all have their fulfillment in our time! And, there is one more such ancient tradition slated for actualization in modern times - the revisiting of the Flood of Noah. This is perhaps the most ancient of all the known traditions, in that Noah, according to at least one archeological study, lived some 6,000 years ago.

This magnificent tradition is summarized by Christ, in answer to questions from the disciples regarding the ‘time of the end’, as follows:

“But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark. And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

(Matthew 24:37)

So there is an ancient Covenant that the flood of Noah is somehow to be revisited at the time of the coming of the Son of man (Bahá'u'lláh), that is, at ‘end of the world’ as the disciples phrased it. *This idea is repeated twice in the above reference, presumably for emphasis, in order to be sure that we make efforts to comprehend its significance.*

Before doing so, however, it is important to note that, in Their Writings both the Báb (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 151), and Bahá'u'lláh (Tablet of Carmel, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 16, and pp. 169/70), make more than casual symbolic references to an ‘Ark’ as a place of refuge for those that believe, thus confirming the linkup of these ancient and modern Scriptural references.

Regarding the significance of this imagery, it took Noah and his family (those that believed in Him), 120 years to build their ark during a period of promised respite before the flood (Genesis 6:3), in order that it be a place of refuge from the tempests to come.

By analogy, the building of the Ark of Bahá'u'lláh, that is the Bahá'í Administrative System, was completed in the 120th year after the inception of the Bahá'í Faith in 1844, by the election of the Universal House of Justice in April of 1963.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, described this momentous event in its history, as furnishing:

“...the last stage in the erection of its world Administrative order.”

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 411)

After a further respite of seven years, additional to the 120 above, the much-mentioned forty years of rain and flood were to be-

gin. This period appears to be in correspondence with the expression 'heart of the age of transition' mentioned in several of the letters of the House of Justice, a transition from the former to a new order of affairs and characterized by trials (for example, the 'dark heart' in Wellsprings, p. 120/121).

While a Covenant God made with Noah promised that the modern flood would not be a literal one (Genesis 8:21-22 and 9:11-17), the simile suggests an equivalent period of dreadful, earth-shaking human trials: loss of spiritual values, ascendancy of greed and material concerns exemplified by war, political and economic hardship, and suffering of all kinds. That is, sufferings of the sort the world is now experiencing, just past the mid-point of the promised 40-year period.

But the flood story continues past the present, to the ultimate completion of God's Covenant with Noah, through Moses to Christ and thence to Bahá'u'lláh.

There is an anticipated, gradual decrease in the severity of these trials over a period of 330 years (close to a total of 500 years from the inception of the Bahá'í Faith and half-way through the promised Millennium).

At this point, the episode of the 'dove' returning to the ark with the 'olive branch' occurs, indicating that the equilibrium of the world has been re-established, and the flood only a recent memory. A Bahá'í approach to explaining the significance of this return of the dove and olive branch, is that these symbols are widely accepted metaphors for the arrival of the anticipated 'peace on earth' characterized by 'good will on the part of all men'. Such a peace has been promised in all the Scriptures, but particularly in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, which sublime goal, He describes as the 'Most Great Peace'.

These, then, are major aspects of the 'time of the end', reflecting an overriding concern with material affairs – 'eating, drinking and marrying', while being offered the cup of life indeed, at the same time – a cup that is evidently destined potentially to be fully quaffed by humanity after the passage of a few centuries from the present time.

Conclusions

This generation is privileged to see all four of the Judaeo-Christian traditions described briefly above, in the process of a fulfillment displayed nightly on the TV screens of our living rooms all over the world.

Clearly God makes promises to humankind, enjoining positive responses from us in the form of obedience, but leaving the choices to ourselves. We make those choices mindful of the promised consequences of disobedience.

And it is also clear that He fulfills His promises even over unimaginably long periods of time. This was true thousands of years ago, and so it remains today.

Bahá'u'lláh confirms this dramatic human challenge and reality by commenting on present day afflictions, in the following words:

“So blind hath become the human heart that neither the disruption of the city, nor the reduction of the mountain in dust, nor even the cleaving of the earth, can shake off its torpor. The allusions made in the Scriptures have been unfolded, and the signs recorded therein have been revealed, and the prophetic cry is continually being raised. And yet all, except such as God was pleased to guide, are bewildered in the drunkenness of their heedlessness! Witness how the world is being afflicted with a fresh calamity every day. Its tribulation is continually deepening... neither hath the world been tranquillized, nor have the hearts of its people been set at rest. At one time it hath been agitated by contentions and disputes, at another it hath been convulsed by wars, and fallen victim to inveterate diseases. Its sickness is approaching the stage of utter hopelessness, inasmuch as the true Physician is debarred from administering the remedy, whilst unskilled practitioners are regarded with favour, and are accorded full freedom to act... Erelong, they will per-

ceive the consequences of what their hands have wrought in the Day of God.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 39/40)

That the Manifestations of God have always been gifted with insights which are not limited by time and space, that is, that they are spiritually transcendent and pre- eminent, is a belief that is supported by much substantial evidence from history in the form of the fulfillment of Their promises.

By such evidences, our faith in God and His Messengers can be deepened, and our desire to serve Their revealed purposes increased. That is, we can be better equipped to recognize, and be obedient to, Them. That is, we can abide within the Covenant!

NOTES:

NOTES:

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Books mentioned are available in most public libraries.

Local **Telephone** listings are often in your phone book under "*Bahá'í Faith*".

In Canada **Vision TV** broadcasts *Bahá'í Perspective* the first Wednesday and Thursday of each month (check local listings).

Please feel free to contact any one of the following:

Bahá'í World Centre Web Site:

www.bahai.org

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

7200 Leslie Street,
Thornhill, Ontario L3T 6L8

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

415 Linden Avenue
Wilmette, Illinois 60091

Bahá'í Information Line in Canada 1-800-433-3284 for recorded messages about the Bahá'í Faith, its teachings and perspectives on social issues, in English and French.

Bahá'í information is also available in many world languages.



ISBN: 1-896331-60-2
Printed in Canada