

ARE YOU PARTY TO THIS CONTRACT? ⇒THE COVENANT WITH NOAH⇐

One very simple example of a civil contract in the Bible is the contract between Abraham and Abimelech. The story of this is told in Genesis (Genesis 21:22-34). Abimelech was the local king of the area in Palestine where Abraham had settled for a while. A number of fears and problems had arisen between the two of them and these were sorted out by the agreement made between them. Abraham swore to keep faith with Abimelech and his descendants. Abimelech accepted a gift of sheep as a sign that Abraham's men had dug a well in dispute. The two then parted. The New English Bible calls this contract a "pact".

There are other contracts between people in the Bible, but the contracts which most concern us are those to which God is on one side and men on the other. The first explicit contract of this type is the one God made at the time of Noah. The full story is told in Genesis. (Chapters 6 to 9). The requirement placed on Noah was to build the boat, and take his family and animals into it (Genesis 6:18). Noah did what was required of him in this contract and, after the flood had subsided, God made his promises to keep his side of the contract. He promised never again to destroy the land and its inhabitants, including the animals, with a flood. (Genesis 9:11). The promise was made to Noah and his descendants, effectively therefore all mankind, and to all the animals (Genesis 9:8-10). Associated with the contract there was a sign. This sign was to be the rainbow. It was a particularly appropriate sign as it was associated with rain, the ultimate cause of flooding on land. A written contract, on clay tablets for example, would not have been very long lasting, and would not have been available to the whole of mankind. The animal sacrifices made by Noah might perhaps be considered as taking the place of a celebration meal between the parties to the contract. (Genesis 9:20). How many of us remember the contract God made with Noah and us when we see a rainbow in the sky? Perhaps we ought to! The contract was with the whole of mankind, so that does include us.

In the next chapter I want to move on to some of God's other contracts with men and see how the story develops.