

Salt in the Bible and the 28th Degree

28th Degree Essay

College of the Consistory

Submitted by:

David E. Amstutz, KCCH

Valley of Richmond

Orient of Virginia

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Except for some unimportant and simpler usages in modern naming the various meanings of -saltøstem from its use in the ancient literature. A large portion of this usage is found in the *Holy Bible*; which will serve as our focus for this essay.

How often and where is the word -saltø found in the *Holy Bible*? To answer this question reference will be made to the King James Version of the *Holy Bible* and to *Strong's Concordance*. The word is found in three forms: salt, salty and saltness. The distribution is as follows:

	Old Testament		New Testament
	<u>Hebrew</u>	<u>Aramaic</u>	<u>Greek</u>
Salt	29	2	10
Salty	1	-	3
Saltness	-	-	1
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	32		14

The Old Testament

We begin with the Old Testament. The two usages written with the Aramaic word for salt are both found in Ezra. In Ezr (6:9) salt is listed as a substance which must be provided to the priests in Jerusalem, day by day without fail. The salt was used along with wheat, wine oil and livestock for offerings. The second usage of salt in Ezra occurs when king Artaxerxes directs his treasurers to pay for what ever amount of salt the priest Ezra may prescribe. (Ezr 7:22)

The word salted is found in Ezk (16:4), and used to describe the symbolic circumstances surrounding the birth of Jerusalem, to wit: ðthou wast not salted at all, not swaddled at all.ö Evidently new borne babies were cleansed and dried by having salt rubbed on their bodies. This procedure makes intuitive sense given that the baby was surrounded with a saline solution during its development. This procedure may well have had its origin in civilizations older than the Hebrew. The origin could well have begun in Sumeria and passed to the Mediterranean with Abraham, or even before.

Of the twenty nine remaining usages of salt in the Old Testament: nine are in reference to the salt sea, five are used in reference to the valley of salt, three are in reference to salting the soil, one refers to Salt City (near Palestine) and one is in reference to a pillar of salt. The salting of the soil was carried on to destroy its productivity, such as the Romans did to the lands about Carthage. The pillar of salt refers to Lot's wife (Gen 19:26). The pillar of salt presumably symbolizes something, something not easily created, but also not durable ó like a beautiful castle fashioned of sand on the beach at low tide.

The ten remaining usages of salt in the Old Testament refer in four cases to meat offerings, in two cases to a covenant, twice in regard to a mysterious placing of salt in a fresh spring, once to the fact that miry and marshy lands are given to salt (Ezk 47:11) and once in reference to food seasoning. The last usage concerning seasoning occurs in Job

(6:6) where in conclusion we encounter the question: "is there *any* taste in the white of an egg?"

In the temple, meat offerings were salted. Three of the four Old Testament usages of the word salt with respect to meat offerings are found in Lev (2:13), and the fourth in Ezk (43:24). Lev (2:13) directs that: "neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt."

The casting of salt upon meat offerings, and perhaps the offering of salt alone were evidently symbolic of the covenant of salt. The word salt appears in two applications of the word covenant. We read that the covenant of salt in Num (18:19) was: "a statute forever; a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord." In 2Ch (13:5) the Lord God, "gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, *even* to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt." The covenant of salt is taken here as an acknowledgement that mankind needs salt and that salt exists for man to mine or to gain from the sea. Also, the God of Abraham expected that some of this vital substance be offered to Him along with other substances needed by men, e.g. wine, grain and oil. And, that covenants marked with salt were considered absolutely binding without any reservations whatsoever.

The mysterious salting of a fresh spring is described in 2Ki (2:20-21). The ground around Jericho was barren and the spring waters naught. Elisha then cast salt into the spring, declaring that the water would no longer bring death or the lands remain barren. Presumably the flow from the spring was very weak and the stagnant water was contaminated. The chloride ions would help to purify only that portion of the water they came in contact with. An increase in flow would bring fresh, uncontaminated waters from the spring veins. How the flow was increased by adding a vial (cruse) of salt must be a mysterious figurative expression.

The New Testament

In the New Testament there are fourteen uses of the word salt. One usage is a reference to the fact that a fountain cannot bring forth both fresh and salt water (Jas 3:12) and a second to the use of tempered speech (seasoned with salt). The use of salt to describe tempered (wise and intelligent) speech is found in Col (4:16) and credited by Biblical scholars to the Apostle Paul. [A brief digression may be of interest. In versus 15 and 16 of the fourth chapter of Colossians reference is made to the Asian city of Laodicea. Laodicea was the city of the seventh church named by John of Patmos in his Book of Revelation, and is the basis for our word, laodicean meaning lukewarm or indifferent in politics or religion. The National spelling championship last year was won with the correct spelling of this word.]

There are twelve more uses of the word salt in the New Testament; all are in the synoptic Gospels: three in Matthew, seven in Mark and two in Luke. We begin with Mark. The gospel of Mark is considered the oldest of the three synoptic Gospels, and along with Q (the source) the origin of the content of both Matthew and Luke.

It is interesting to observe that all of the uses of the word salt in the synoptic Gospels are attributed to statements specifically said to have been made by Jesus Christ. Thus, in all of the New Testament, the word salt is used on 86 percent of the occasions by Jesus Christ. Recall too that the pages of the synoptic Gospels number barely more than one third of the entire New Testament.

Of all the uses of salt in the New Testament (14) half are found in the Gospel of Mark and these in only two verses, Mk (9:49-50):

“For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.”

In Mt (5:13):

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

In Lk (14:34-35):

“Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; *but* men cast it out.” [A portion of Lk (14:35) has been included here to facilitate comparison with quotations from Mark and Matthew.]

Surely the three are referring to the same thing, whether the words attributed to the authors of Matthew and Luke were taken from the Gospel of Mark or recorded independently is not important to this brief essay on salt. The Disciple Matthew was certainly the only one of the three who could have said to have heard the words directly from Jesus Christ. Mark was the companion of the Disciple Peter, and Luke was a co-worker of Paul.

The meanings seem to be that the Disciples have been taught (salted). They will be sacrificed; and like the Temple offerings, they will be blessed (salted). But if the Disciples fail in their teaching of others (lose that which they have received) then what they have been given will have been given for naught. They will be as unfit for the people as salt is for the soil; and other men (and women) will ignore them. There is no other source for the Disciples to obtain what they have already been given. They should pay heed and go forth, not disagreeing among themselves.

Summary

Salt has been used as substance and symbol (figuratively) by the oldest civilizations. As a practical matter we know well that salt serves as a drying agent, preservative, food seasoning and disinfectant. The ancients knew this too. Salts were available in deposits, which may have contained other minerals, and through the evaporation of sea water. The Dead Sea deposits are well attested to.

Salt came to use to signify alliance (covenant) among peoples and later with Deity. It is said, though I have not confirmed this, that the word for salt in Arabic also carries the meaning of compact or treaty.

Salt is necessary for producing Kosher meats. Salt was for a time used in "roasting" in colleges and universities "called "salting." Small portions taken by mouth have been used by some in baptism.

Salt does not lose its flavor. References to salt actually losing its saltiness must have been due to its dilution with other minerals. The figurative meaning of salt losing its flavor is quite another matter.

There may be resemblance between the use of salt by the ancients and sand by more moderns to signify a person's focus or determination. In more dramatic expression one might refer to grit.

Salt in the 28th Degree

The consumption of salt in the 28th Degree is but briefly alluded to in the literature available to me. The only 28th Degree reference to salt that I found in the writings of Albert Pike was in his Liturgy, Part IV (Pike, 1878, p.158). There Pike simply paraphrases Mt 2:13). Hutchens (2006) indicates that the candidate eats bread and salt prior to writing answers to the prescribed questions. But this occurs while the candidate is alone.

The historic convention of sharing salt signified a simultaneous act by two or more to bind them to an alliance or treaty. Such a taking of salt together was alleged to have preceded a meeting of Egyptian and Israeli leaders some years ago.

Eating alone, the candidate can not be sealing a bond or taking a commitment to the other knights of the order. Instead, he is committing himself to a bond with Deity.

References:

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