בְּרִית עוֹלָם

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בְּרִית, "covenant," and עוֹלָם, "long time, eternity, perpetuity," are both nouns. How are they related?

Excursus: Modification of Nouns in English

In English we usually speak of the characteristics or qualities of a noun by means of adjectives. For example, we might say:

great king	(2 Kgs 18:19)
new covenant	(Jer 31:31)
rich and good pasture	(1 Chr 4:40)

In English we can also describe the characteristics or qualities of a noun by placing the word "of" and another noun after it. For example,

bird of prey	(Job 28:7)
tree of life	(Gen 2:9)

land of Egypt	(Exod 7:3)
bars of iron	(Ps 107:16)

In English, the former construction (adjective + noun) is somewhat more common than the latter (noun + "of" + noun).

Excursus: Modification of Nouns in Hebrew

Hebrew, like English, can talk about the qualities or attributes of nouns both by means of adjectives and by means of other nouns.

Here are a few examples of nouns modified by adjectives:

שֶׁ֫מֶן טוֹב	good wine
	(Eccl 7:1)
יָמִים רַבִּים	many days
	(Deut 20:19)
הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא	the great and awesome God
	(Dan 9:4)

Quite frequently, Hebrew describes the qualities or attributes of a noun by means of a construct chain.

Because a construct noun indicates a genitival relationship, the Hebrew construct chain is semantically equivalent to the English construction *noun + "of" + noun*.

Here are a few examples of Hebrew construct chains where the absolute noun describes or qualifies the construct noun:

אִישׁ רִיב	a man of strife
וְאִישׁ מָדוֹן	and a man of contention
	(Jer 15:10)
מִזְבַּח אֲבָנִים	an altar of stones
	(Exod 20:25)
בֶּן־מָוֶת	son of death (i.e., "a dead man")
	(1 Sam 20:31)

Summary: בְּרִית עוֹלָם

As we mentioned above, both בְּרִית and עוֹלָם are nouns. Together they form a construct chain: בְּרִית is the construct noun (thus we may translate it "a covenant *of*") and עוֹלָם is the absolute noun. We may therefore translate בְּרִית עוֹלָם as follows:

a covenant of perpetuity (or, eternity)

When speaking in English about a covenant that lasts for a long time (or forever), it is generally more natural to say "a perpetual covenant" or "an eternal covenant" than "a covenant of perpetuity" or "a covenant of eternity."

Notice what we have done in order to go from "a covenant of perpetuity" to "a perpetual covenant": we have transformed the second noun of "a covenant of perpetuity" (namely, "perpetuity") into an adjective, "perpetual." (In the same way, to go from "a covenant of eternity" to "an eternal covenant," we transformed the noun "eternity" into the adjective "eternal.")

Final Translation

a perpetual covenant

   or

an eternal covenant