



Covenant from the Perspective of Biblical Studies

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Abstract

The Bible is a book of covenant wherein lies a couple of covenants beginning from pages of the first book to the pages of the last book. The Bible presents several different kinds of covenant between God and Israel or between God and individuals. The word itself occurs in 27 of 39 Old Testament books and in 11 of 27 New Testament books. The two defining marks of a biblical concept of covenant are its theocentric origin and its corporate inclusiveness; whenever there is pact, there is a demand that is to be carried out. At its core, covenant shapes the relational identity of both the divine agent and communal recipient in a relationship of correspondence. The biblical covenant is cumulated in the New Covenant. The new covenant accomplished what the old could not, that is, the removal of sin and cleansing of the conscience (Heb. 10:2, 22). The work of Jesus Christ on the cross thus makes the old covenant "obsolete" (Heb. 8:13). Thus, the aim of this work is to examine critically the indication of these Biblical covenants. To achieve a positive result one must look critically at various aspects of the covenant and its implicit meaning.

Key Words: Covenant, Theocentric, Bible, New Testament, Old Testament

Introduction

In the opinion of many biblical scholars, the concept of “covenant” forms the framework or backbone of the biblical narrative. Covenant is the master-theme of the Bible, which records the various ways throughout history that God has drawn humanity into a familial relationship with himself through divine oaths. Indeed, the Bible itself is broadly partitioned based on two covenants, the Old and the New. As such, this division of the biblical canon on the basis of covenant distinctions points to the undeniable centrality of the concept of covenant to biblical thought and Christian theology.

However, the biblical concept of covenant is so vast that a write-up of this volume can barely scratch its surface. More so, the concept and practice of covenant were not entirely unique to the nation of Israel. Covenants or treaties were commonplace in the ancient Near East as well as Greco-Roman culture as a means to forge and maintain relationships between individuals, families, tribes, and even nations. Similarly, African cultural institutions preserve communal bonds by sustaining shared values, traditions and collective identity across generations (Edem, 2022, p. 11).



Etymology and Meaning of the Term

The word “Covenant” is translated from the Hebrew word *bērît*, which in Greek is rendered as *diathēkē*. Scholars are not agreed on the etymology of the Hebrew word *bērît*. Nevertheless, the Akkadian root *birîtu*, meaning ‘fetter’ or ‘bond’ seems to be the most probable. Hence, the Hebrew word *bērît* would reflect the idea of a binding tie. Thus the term *bērît* signifies primarily a contract agreement. However, according to Hahn (2009), it is incorrect to view a covenant simply as a contract because generally, a contract involves the exchange of goods, whereas a covenant involves the exchange of persons. Unlike most contracts, covenants are not merely civil but sacred bonds, in which an oath is employed to call on God (or gods) to enforce the covenant obligations.

Despite the uncertainty over the etymology of the term, most scholars like Eichrodt (1961) agree that *bērît* came to signify a binding agreement between two parties. Covenant is thus a formal agreement or treaty between two parties with each assuming some obligation (Achtemeier, 1996). Similarly, Hahn (2009) understands it as a kinship bond between two parties, with conditions or obligations, established by an oath or its equivalent.

More elaborately and explicitly, a covenant is an enduring agreement which establishes a defined relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation to specified stipulations on the part of at least one of the parties toward the other, which is taken by oath under threat of divine curse, and ratified by a visual ritual (Gentry, 2012).

In the biblical context, the use of covenant is mainly theological, to express the alliance or even bond between God and His people in the course of salvation history. From the perspective of the Christian Bible, covenant presents God’s desire to enter into relationship with men and women created in his image. This is reflected in the repeated covenant refrain, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Exodus 6:6-8; Leviticus 26:12). In a secondary sense, *berît* signifies ordinance or law. Thus, the Mosaic Law became the covenant (cf 1 Kgs 8.21; Jer 11.1), so much so that to transgress the covenant was to transgress the Law (Dt 4.13, 23; Jgs 2.20).

The Bible is structured according to a sequence of divine covenants established between God and man, through the mediation of different individuals: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and ultimately Jesus Christ. Therefore, covenant is of different types and each type has its own particular method of processing it (Oko and Koko, 2024, p.21).

Constitutive Elements of Covenant:

The essential elements of biblical covenants include but not limited to:

- 1. Parties and witnesses to the agreement:** In each covenant, there were usually two parties of equal or unequal status making the covenant, and sometimes with a third party as proxy (often God or the gods in polytheistic religions) who was called upon to witness to and enforce the covenant obligations.
- 2. Stipulations of the covenant:** This section sets forth the covenant obligations imposed upon and accepted by the vassal. The dominant theme of the stipulations was the vassal’s loyalty and faithfulness, and for all controversies to be settled by the suzerain.
- 3. Oaths and imprecations:** In almost every case the central act of covenant-making was the swearing of an oath by one or both of the parties to the covenant. As avowed by Igbo (2021), in



the Old Testament, the oath confirms the covenant and gives the obligation its binding validity. The oath generally took the form of a self-curse. The covenant-maker called on God or the gods to inflict death or some other grave penalty upon himself should he fail to keep the obligations of the covenant (see Gen 21:31–32, 22:16; Josh 9:15; Ezek 16:59). As elaborated by Hahn (2009), a similar ritual self-curse was performed by cutting animals in two and passing between the carcasses (Gn 15:8–11, 17; Jer 34:18). This ritually represented the intention, “May I be slain like these animals if I do not maintain this covenant”. Thus, the most common expression for concluding a covenant is to “cut a covenant” (*karat berit*). The Bible records other ritual self-curses as well, for example circumcision (Gen 17:10) which expresses, “May I myself be cut off if I do not keep the covenant.”

Ritual Enactment (Ratification):

Most times the ritual had to be ratified with sacrifice (Ex 24:5) and blood (Ex 24:8; Zec 9:11). Ritual performances in African societies also function as visible acts through which communities preserve memory, identity and sacred values (Ekpo, Edem, & Edet, 2025). Often the covenant-making parties shared a common meal to confirm their new familial relationship (Gen 26:30, 31:54; Exod 24:11; Josh 9:14–15; Luke 22:14–23). The use of family terms “brother,” (1 Kgs 20:32–34); “father” and “son,” (Ps 89:2628; 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) and the exchange of clothing or weapons (1 Sam 18:3) or other gifts (Gen 21:27) or a simple handshake (Ez 17:18) could also express familial intimacy.

All these aspects are visible during the covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:3–11). The familial bond is illustrated by the shared meal between God and the elders of Israel on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:9–11). Such symbolic communal acts are comparable to indigenous performances that gather people together and renew their sense of shared history and belonging (Edem & Akpan, 2025). The legally binding oath is expressed by the solemn words of the people followed by the sprinkling of blood, a ritual self-curse (Exod 24:7–8) that binds them to obey all the legal stipulations enunciated in Exod 20–23. A liturgical ritual serves as the context for swearing the oath: sacrifices offered at an altar in a sacred place (Exod 24:4–5) while invoking the name of the Lord (Exod 24:7–8).

Types of Covenant

Covenants may be placed into two categories according to the status of the covenant-making parties: “human” covenants are between two human parties, whereas “divine” covenants include God as one partner. Covenants may also be categorized according to which party actually swears the oath that establishes the covenant. Thus we have:

1. Parity or Kinship:

This is a pact of mutuality concerning equal individuals. When both parties swear the covenant oath, a “kinship” or “parity” covenant is formed. This covenant type is labeled “kinship”



because the familial nature of the covenant-bond is at the forefront of the relationship, rather than the subordination of one of the parties to the other. The mutual swearing of the oath indicates that both parties accept responsibility for keeping the covenant obligations, resulting in an equal, or at least reciprocal, relationship between the two. Such covenants in the Bible include that between Laban and Jacob (Gen.31:44-54) or David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3; 23:18) Abraham and the Amorites (Gen. 14:13), Abraham and Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen.21:22-32), Abner and David (2 Sam. 3:12-13,21); husband and wife (cf. Mal. 2:14; Ezek. 16:8).

2. Suzerainty or vassal-treaty:

A covenant might also be imposed by a greater power upon a lesser one. The greater power demands loyalty and obligates itself to the protection of the lesser one, such as Israel and the Gibeonites (Josh. 9) and the request by Jabesh-gilead of the king of Ammon (1 Sam.11:1-2). The vast majority of the references to covenant in the Bible are to such a treaty; a prominent example being the covenant that God makes with Israel at Sinai in which only the people of Israel invoke the self-curse (i.e., the oath) to fulfill the terms of the covenant (Deut 27:11–26). This is also called the “vassal-type” covenant, wherein the inferior party alone swears the oath. In this situation, the superior party imposes a covenant relationship on the inferior, who is often a rebellious servant.

3. Promissory or Royal Grant:

These “grant” covenants were frequently employed by ancient Near Eastern kings to reward faithful servants, often by granting them a piece of royal land (hence the term “grant”) in perpetuity. It requires no further action on behalf of the grantee. In this covenant form, the superior party assumes all responsibility for the maintenance of the covenant, in view of some prior meritorious action by the inferior. Biblical examples include the final form of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 22:15–18), and the Davidic covenant, especially as described in Ps 89:3–37.

Weinfeld (1970) differentiates between the vassal-treaty and the royal grant in this way:

1. While the “treaty” constitutes an obligation of the vassal to his master, the suzerain, the “grant” constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant.
2. In the “grant” the curse is directed towards the one who will violate the rights of the king’s vassal, while in the treaty the curse is directed towards the vassal who will violate the rights of his king.
3. In other words, the “grant” serves mainly to protect the rights of the servant, while the treaty comes to protect the rights of the master.
4. While the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed, the treaty is an inducement for future loyalty

Covenants in the Bible

In the Bible, there are six accounts of covenants between God and humans. These include: Covenant with Adam, Covenant with Noah, Covenant with Abraham, Covenant at Sinai, Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant. We shall elaborate more on them below:

a) The Covenant with Creation through Adam:

Whether or not a covenant is entailed in Genesis 1–3 continues to be debated. Some scholars like Williamson (2007) argue that prior to Genesis 6:18 there is not even a hint of any



covenant being established between God and humans. The absence of the Hebrew word for “covenant” in Genesis 1–5, however, cannot constitute an argument to demonstrate the absence of any covenant before Genesis 6:18. This is because as Gentry (2012) argues, it is fully possible in biblical literature to speak of a covenant without actually using the word. As such, the covenant with Adam may be referred to as a ‘tacit covenant’. Moreover, although the creation narrative (Gen 1-3) does not use the word “covenant” (*bērit*), there are various implicit or indirect indicators that a covenant is present between God and creation, mediated by Adam, as pointed out by Hahn (2009):

1. the creation account culminates on the Sabbath, which is the “sign” of the covenant elsewhere in Scripture (Exod 31:12–17);
2. in Gen 6:18, the verb used for the making of the covenant with Noah is not the usual one for covenant initiation (Hebrew *karat*), but a term indicating the maintenance or renewal of a preexisting covenant (Hebrew *hēqīm*). The similarity in language between Gen 6 and Gen 1 suggests that the covenant being “renewed” with Noah is the one present at creation;
3. In Hos 6:7 the prophet compares Israel with Adam in terms of covenant unfaithfulness: “Like Adam they transgressed the covenant.”

The creation or Adamic covenant bound God with Adam, whose status was Son of God (Gen 1:26–27, 5:1). The promise of the covenant was “life”. The condition of the covenant was to refrain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16–17); the corresponding curse was death (Gen 2:17). Consequently, a covenant initiated at creation is clearly indicated by the text of Genesis 1:26–28 as well as by elements in 2:4–3:24. Adam however failed to fulfil the terms of this covenant, and therefore, fell away from the grace promised by the covenant.

b) The Covenant with Noah

As it has been discussed above, whether or not a covenant per se is entailed in Genesis 1–3 is debated. This is because the first occurrence in the Bible of the word “covenant” (*bērit*) is in Genesis 6:18 and is in reference to the covenant with Noah. God says to Noah, “But I will establish my covenant (*bērit*) with you”. Adam and Eve’s breaking of the creation covenant introduces death into human history (cf. Gen 4:8) and begins a cycle of sin that ultimately necessitates the cleansing of the earth by the Flood. After the Flood, the original creation covenant is renewed with Noah (Gen 9:1–17), although with modifications: the once-peaceful relationship between man and nature has been marred (Gen 1:29–30; 9:2–6).

Genesis 9:8–17 describes the covenant, its parties, and its sign. Genesis 9:11 specifies the obligation that God places upon himself, the promise he makes to Noah and to the entire human race through him: “Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth”. Here, the oath that usually upheld a promise or pact is lacking, but in its place, there is simply a sign (bow) which serves to remind God of his promise. Therefore, this covenant is a promissory one.



c) The Covenant with Abraham

God continues the process of the redemption of mankind with Abraham. God makes at least two covenants with Abraham in Gen 15:1–21 and 17:1–27. Genesis 15 establishes the initial covenant between Abraham and God, solemnizing the earlier promise that Abraham would become a “great nation” (Gen 12:2).

The promises of the Genesis 15 covenant include numerous descendants for Abraham and a land to call their own. God binds himself to his promise, by the symbolic ceremony of the covenant. Abraham was asked to cut the sacrificial animals in two (Gen.15:9-21). Customarily, the two covenanting parties would pass through the cut pieces in order to “cut the covenant”. But the fact that Yahweh alone passed (symbolically) between the pieces indicates that Yahweh alone contracted the obligation. It was a unilateral covenant on the part of Yahweh.

Genesis 17 augments the earlier Abrahamic covenant by including a promise of kingship for Abraham’s descendants (Gen 17:6), and the expectation that Abraham would become not just one but “many nations” (Gen 17:5–6). Also included for the first time is the covenant obligation of circumcision (Gen 17:9–14). In Gen 22, after the near sacrifice of Abraham’s “only begotten” (Hebrew *yāhîd*) son, Isaac, God swears a covenant oath to Abraham reiterating earlier covenant promises. Wenham (1998) makes the salient point that for God to swear by himself gives the oath a special solemnity and weight.

Therein God also confirmed the promise of blessing to all nations through Abraham’s seed (Gen 22:18), a promise given earlier in Gen 12:3 but not included as a provision of the covenant. In Gen 22:15–18, the Abrahamic covenant reaches its final form. From every indication therefore, the remaining divine covenants recorded in Scripture are grounded in the Abrahamic covenant. This means that the Abrahamic covenant becomes the basis of Israel’s existence. On it rests the claim to the land of Canaan and a unique relationship with God.

d) The Covenant at Sinai through Moses (Mosaic/Sinaitic Covenant)

The book of Exodus records the flight of Abraham’s descendants from Egypt and their assembly at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive a covenant from God through Moses. This covenant had within it the potential to fulfill the promises given to Abraham of great nationhood, kingship, and universal blessing. As hinted in a previous page, the framework of the Sinai Covenant has significant affinities with suzerain-vassal treaties from the ancient Near East. They contain similar elements:

- the identification of God as the Suzerain and enumerating his gracious saving acts on Israel, which represent the favours already granted to the vassal, and in turn necessitate obedience and loyalty from the vassal (Exod. 19:4-6; 20:2);
- the covenant stipulations which is essentially the imposition of obligation. In this case it is the Ten Commandments or Decalogue which contains both positive obligations and prohibitions which Israel must faithfully observe (Exod.20:3-23:33);
- the treaty recital (Exod. 24:7);
- the list of witnesses to the treaty which included the heavens and the earth, mountains and rivers (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28), and "this book of the Torah" (Deut. 31:26).



- the ratification ceremony which included the sacrificing of an animal, sprinkling its blood and partaking of the ceremonial meal (Exod. 24:9-11). In this symbolic action the people are identified with the sacrificed animal. The implication is that the fate of the animal becomes the fate of the people if they violate their sacred promise.
- Blessings and curses are listed in Leviticus 26 and Deut. 27:11-28:68 (cf. 29:17-27). Obedience to the stipulations of the Sinai Covenant was perceived by the prophets as necessary for the continued existence of Israel on its land.

This promise of Abrahamic covenant fulfillment was not attained under the Mosaic covenant, however, because of the immediate violation of the covenant with the fashioning of the golden calf (Exod 32). The golden calf incident necessitated a remaking of the Mosaic covenant (Exod 34:1–35). Additional rebellions in the desert (Num 11; 12; 14; 16; 17), especially the idolatry and promiscuity at Beth-peor (Num 25), set the stage for yet another renewal of the Mosaic covenant described by the book of Deuteronomy.

e) The Covenant with David

Due to Israel's colossal failure to keep to the demands of the Sinaitic covenants, despite numerous renewals, God made yet another covenant with David as recorded in 2 Sam 7:5–16. Nonetheless, the word “covenant” only appears in later references to this event (2 Sam 23:5; Ps 89:19–37, 132:1–18; Isa 55:3; 2 Chr 13:5, 21:7; Jer 33:20–22). The terms of this covenant made David and his heirs sons of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26-27) and high kings over the earth (Ps 89:27; 2:6–9) who would enjoy an everlasting reign (2 Sam 7:13, 16) and would build the House of God—that is, the Temple (2 Sam 7:13). The covenant with David falls under the royal grant covenant, which is characterized by the unconditional promise of the king to the vassal as a reward for faithful service to the Suzerain.

Bouyer (1958) emphasizes that the Davidic covenant, like the Abrahamic covenant is primarily a promise, it is grace. Just as the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant is considered as valid forever. Not even sin will make God forget his covenant, because God “will not break his covenant” (Lev.26:43-45). The promises of God in the Davidic covenant are given unconditionally. The unconditionality of the Davidic covenant is explicitly stated: “He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him...” (2 Sam.7:13).

After a brief period of glory under Solomon, during which these covenant promises appeared to be visibly fulfilled (1 Kgs 4–10), the Davidic monarchy entered a long period of decline, beginning with the division of Israel into the ten tribes in the north and southern Judah (2 Kgs 12). During the decay of the divided people of God, the prophets spoke of a new covenant to come that would be unlike the unsuccessful Mosaic covenant. Simultaneously, the Davidic covenant would be restored (Jer 33:14–26; Isa 9, 11, 55:3; Ezek 37:15–28).

f) Promise of a “New Covenant”



The prophets spoke of the new covenant in different places at different times in a variety of ways. Sometimes they refer to it as the everlasting covenant (Jeremiah 32:36–41; 50:2–5; Ezekiel 16:59–63; 37:15–28; Isaiah 55:1–5; 61:8–9); other times they refer to a covenant of peace (Isaiah 54:1–10; Ezekiel 34:20–31; 37:15–28); and other times to a promise that God will give his people a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 11:18–21; 18:30–32; 36:24–32). Only once is the phrase “new covenant” actually used (Jer. 31:31–34). Nonetheless, in all, they are all referring to the same thing.

The making of this covenant points to an unspecified time in the future “the days are surely coming” (Jer.31:31). The parties to the covenant are identified as “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah”. These are also the parties to the Sinai covenant. However, the substance of this New Covenant is emphatically in discontinuity with the Sinai covenant: “It will not be like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD” (Jer.31:32). The substance of the former covenant had been broken by a history of unfaithfulness and rebellion by their ancestors.

In this covenant, the promise is not land or any other material benefit, but the restoration of the relationship with God (Jer.31:34). There are neither oaths nor curses and blessings, nor witnesses, nor ritual ratification. The single element of the Sinai covenant retained in this New Covenant is simply the stipulations. However, they are no longer any set of prohibitions or injunctions; no commandments or ordinances written on tablets of stone. Rather, Yahweh will be writing of the hearts of his people and the Divine Will shall be deposited in the conscience of the members of the covenant people (Jer.31:33).

Thus ultimately, the new covenant will be characterized by a complete internalization of the divine Law on the hearts of people (Jer.31:33, 34). As lucidly stated by Miller (2001), God will affect the human heart so that people can keep the covenant requirements. There will be no need for external enforcement, and consequently there will be a full and final dealing with sin. However, the New Covenant will not abrogate the Sinai covenant, for it is an “everlasting covenant”. The only difference is that God’s mode of dealing with the human partner has changed.

Fulfillment of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus

The NT uses the Septuagint term *diathēkē* 33 times for *berît*, although in non-biblical Greek *diathēkē* means “last will and testament”. In the NT *diathēkē* almost always means covenant. The continuity of the covenant theme of the Old Testament into the New Testament is therefore incontestable. Childs (1992) attests to the fact that in traditional Christian theology, a major feature which binds the Hebrew Scriptures to the New Testament is that of covenant.

The Gospels, particularly Matthew and Luke, clearly depict Jesus as the Son (heir) of David and thus the one to restore the Davidic covenant (Matt 1:1–25; Luke 1:31–33, 69; 2:4). At the Last Supper, Jesus explicitly identifies his body and blood as the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) promised by the prophets (Jer 31:31).

According to Hebrews, the New Covenant is superior to the old (that is, the Mosaic covenant) because it is established by a better mediator (Christ versus the Jewish high priests; Heb 8:6, 9:25); ratified by the supreme sacrifice (the blood of Christ versus the blood of animals; Heb 9:12, 23); and in a better sanctuary (heaven itself versus the earthly tabernacle; Heb 9:11, 24). For



these and many other reasons, Hahn (2009) affirms that the New Covenant infinitely surpasses the Mosaic covenant, and more so restores and transforms the Davidic covenant.

Thus, the authors of the New Testament, influenced by the idea of a new covenant, saw in the death of Jesus of Nazareth the beginning of it (Mark 14:24; 1 Cor.11:25), although that did not annul the first covenant given to Israel (Luke 1:72; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:17). The Letter to the Hebrews makes the greatest use of covenant language in the NT (e.g., Heb. 7:22; 8:8-13; 9:15;12:24).

The New Covenant is established at the Last Supper, a communal meal between the covenant-making parties analogous to Moses and the elders sharing a meal with God on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 24:11). On the other hand, Jesus's very words, "This is my blood of the covenant" (Matt 26:28), recall Moses's words when sprinkling the shed blood of the sacrificial animals during the ratification of the covenant on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:8). The Eucharist thus is both the family meal and the solemn sacrifice of the New Covenant.

Moreover, the New Covenant involves the fulfillment of the other covenants of salvation history, as well. Thus, Jesus is a new Adam (Rom 5:12–19) who makes us into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) thus fulfilling the Adamic covenant. He fulfills all the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (Luke 1:68–75, esp. 72–73). Even the Mosaic covenant, which to a certain extent is abrogated (Gal 3:19–25), is fulfilled in its essence by the New Covenant, which grants believers the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the very heart of the Mosaic Law, the commands of love for God and neighbor (Rom 8:3–4, 13:810; Matt 5:17, 22:37–40).

Thus, we can assuredly that the New Covenant is the Christian dispensation ratified by Christ's sacrifice on Calvary (Yonick, 2003). The work of Jesus Christ on the cross thus makes the old covenant "obsolete" (Heb. 8:13) and fulfills the promise of the prophet Jeremiah, and unlike the Mosaic covenant, the new covenant of Jesus Christ is intended for all mankind.

Theological Significances of Biblical Covenants

1. Covenant Forms the Base and Center of Biblical Narrative

Horton (2006:13) was right to refer to biblical covenant as "the architectural structure... that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable variety." Likewise, Gentry (2012) argues that apart from properly understanding the nature of the biblical covenants and how they relate to one other, one will not correctly discern the message of the Bible and hence God's self-disclosure which centers and culminates in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The biblical story could thus be summarized thus: God created everything and made a covenant relationship with creation through Adam, the first man. Adam however, was not faithful to the stipulations of this covenant and so the entire created order fell out of God's grace and favour. However, God did not abandon his creation. Ever since, God has always been taking initiatives to restore man to this covenantal relationship with him, but man always lived short of the covenantal demands. And so, God successively made a covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Israelites. All covenants failed because of man's infidelity and rebellion. That is why the biblical story ends up by talking about a new covenant which would be far superior to the former covenants. This time, man would be able to live up to the stipulations of this covenant, buoyed by grace and no longer by law. Thus, Eichrodt (1961) insists that covenant is the central idea or notion upon which a biblical theology could be constructed.



2. God is in constant relationship with the world

Davies (2004) helpfully notes that the fundamental image behind each of the applications of *bĕrît* is the use of familial categories for those who are not bound by ties of natural kinship. In any covenant, the contracting parties freely enter into a special kind of relationship. Thus, by a ceremony or (quasi-) legal process, people who are not kin are now bound as tightly as any family relationship. Marriage is the best example and illustration of this. A man and a woman, who are not previously related, are now bound closer than any other bond of blood or kinship. This means that at the heart of covenant, then, is a relationship between parties characterized by faithfulness and loyalty in love.

This idea is even more astounding when applied to the covenant relationships which God establishes with men. In divine-human covenants, God takes the initiative to enter into such a bond of kinship with mortals. The implications of this are as mind-boggling as they are far-reaching. Thus, Wilson (2005:12) avers that “Covenant is all about relationship between the Creator and his creation. The idea may seem simple; however, the implications of covenant and covenant relationship between God and humankind are vast.”

3. God reveals himself to man through covenants

A covenant relationship requires a genuine and honest knowledge of the other partner. The covenants then, constitute a programme that reveals God. Only if we genuinely know him can we have a covenant relationship with him. We saw in the Abrahamic covenant and in the Israelite covenant at Sinai (Exodus) and Moab (Deuteronomy) that the covenant stipulations expound and unfold the glorious character (*shem*) of Yahweh and his lifestyle or way (*derek*).

God’s revelation of himself and his action in the world is uniquely seen in covenantal relations, starting with Adam and finding its culmination in Jesus the Lord. Indeed one can agree with Gentry (2012) that as we progress through the covenants, God discloses himself more fully, not merely as an abstract deity but as a personal being, a being-in-relation, and indeed as a unity of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

4. The Church as the People of God in the New Covenant

The biblical covenants teach us that Jesus is the last Adam and the true Israel. All of God’s promises, tied to creation and the biblical covenants, are brought to fulfilment in Christ. This is why the term “new covenant” can be applied to the church in the New Testament even though in Jeremiah it is applied to the “house of Israel.” In Christ, the antitype of Israel, all of God’s promises are ‘yes and amen’. We, as the church, the people of Christ, receive all the benefits of his glorious, effective, and triumphant work by virtue of our faith union with him. He, as our covenant head, wins for us our redemption, and all that he has achieved becomes ours due to that union.

Conclusion

This write-up cannot be concluded without drawing attention to the person of Rev. Fr. Prof. Vincent Gabriel Nyoyoko. To write of Prof. Vincent Nkoyoyo demands a confluence of reflection neither too pedantic nor complex, yet an uncommon discernment to illuminate for us his boundless enthusiasm for the vocation he has chosen both of God and for humanity: A priest, a



scholar and a teacher. He has lived and continued to live out the dictates of the covenant of the new law- the priesthood- which he entered forty-four years ago. Through his teachings and lectures he has constantly reminded us that we are covenant people, people set apart to serve and worship God. His contribution to the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene is enormous. He is indeed a sign of God's Covenant to the people who come across him.

Nevertheless, so far we have seen that the concept of “covenant” is a central biblical metaphor for the relationship between God and his people. Therefore, it is not surprising that the attempts of biblical theologians to find a thematic “center” of the Bible invariably return repeatedly to the subject of covenant. However, it is very important to note that covenant is not an “idea” to be held only in the mind. It is an “enacted reality” that ought to be manifested in the concrete choices of individuals who are party to the covenant.

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