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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE OLD COVENANT  
TO THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

by

Ashwani Kumar

Adviser: Kim Papaioannou

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE OLD COVENANT TO THE  
EVERLASTING COVENANT

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### Problem

The old covenant is often understood to be contrary to the new covenant. A distinction is made by such claims as the following: the old covenant represents the Old Testament, and new covenant represents the New Testament. The old covenant was made with only Israelites while the new covenant is made with the Church. The old covenant was based on works, and the new covenant is based on grace and is better than the old.

### Purpose

The goal of this study is to present evidence that the new covenant was not established because it was different in the content than the old or the old was faulty. This study will seek to demonstrate that the old and new covenants are actually the same in

nature or one in kind and belong to the one everlasting covenant. God has only one covenant and He called it My covenant, also known as the “everlasting covenant.”

### Method

The old covenant is often understood as a contract or an agreement but this study will focus on the fact that it was a relationship and will establish the covenant formula of everlasting covenant after an analogy with ANE treaties. The next section will apply this covenant formula to the Abrahamic, the old and the new covenants. The last chapter will deal with the differences and allegations against the old covenant.

### Conclusions

After careful study, it will be presented that God has only one covenant and it is known as the everlasting covenant. The divine covenants with Abraham and Israel, through Moses, along with the new covenant, can be viewed as successive stages of God’s single covenant of redeeming grace that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The only difference between the old and new covenant is that the things which were shadow: The earthly sanctuary, earthly priest, sacrificial system in the old covenant met their reality in the new covenant. This is not something that stands contrary to the old covenant but serves as a fulfillment of its types and shadows.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE OLD COVENANT  
TO THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

A Thesis  
Presented In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Ashwani Kumar  
2016

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Ashwani Kumar

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE            Ancient Near East

NKJV          New King James Version

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of Problem**

Many have written about the topic of the “Covenant.” In fact, The Calvinists have developed a specific “covenant theology”<sup>1</sup> that is regarded as the theological contribution to the Reformation. However this theology has taken more legalistic form.<sup>2</sup> But on the other hand Dispensational theology has taken the covenant theme completely to the other direction by setting a definite distinction between Israel and the Church,<sup>3</sup> the old covenant, and the new covenant.<sup>4</sup> This distinctive view has been widely accepted among many evangelical scholars, ministers and lay Christians.

A distinction is made by such claims as the following: the old covenant represents the Old Testament, and new covenant represents the New Testament. The old covenant was made with only Israelites while the new covenant is made with the Church. The old covenant was based on works (obey and live disobey and die) and the new covenant is

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Scott. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2005), Kindle edition, 166.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew W. Blackwood, *Commentary on Jeremiah : The Word, the Words, and the World* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), 191.

based on grace. The old covenant had circumcision of the flesh and the new covenant has circumcision of the hearts. In the old covenant the law was written on the tablets of stone, but in the new covenant the law is written in hearts. The most common accusation holds that it was faulty and impossible to keep and that is why people broke it. The old covenant had animals as a sacrifice and in the new covenant sees Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice which provides better promises, a better priest and forgiveness<sup>5</sup> etc.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this study is to present that the new covenant was not established because it was different in its content than the old or the old was faulty. Even a modern dispensationalist, Kenneth L. Barker concluded that the claim that “the Old Testament is a Testament of Law while the New Testament is the Testament of grace is a false dichotomy.”<sup>6</sup> This study will seek to demonstrate that the old and new covenants are actually the same in nature or one in kind (first is shadow and second is fulfillment) and belong to the one everlasting covenant. God has only one covenant and He called it “My covenant” also known as the “everlasting covenant,” which He establishes with different people throughout history and it also has its local promises, signs, and implications.

It is promissory in character and relationship in nature. The blessings and salvation are given by God and not earned by obedience.<sup>7</sup> The obedience to its

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 373.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth L. Barker, “False Dichotomies between the Testaments,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 25, no. 1(1982):3-16

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Blazen, “Salvation” *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, Commentary reference series 12 (Hagerstown, MD, Review & Herald Pub. Association, 2000), 276.

stipulations is by faith and is humanity's response to the covenant and for what God has done for them. "The divine covenants with Abraham and Israel, through Moses, along with the new covenant, can be viewed as successive stages of God's single covenant of redeeming grace that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ."<sup>8</sup>

### **Limitations**

This study will not deal with all types of covenants mentioned in the Bible. For example, God's people made covenants within themselves (Gen 31:44). God's people made the covenant with other peoples (Gen 21:27). The nations made covenants with other Nations (1 Sam 11:2). There are family and friendship covenants between Jonathan and David (1 Sam 18:3). The Bible also mentions a divinity to divinity covenant (2 Sam 7:12-16). But this study will focus only on the covenant that God made with His people, especially the Abrahamic, the old or Sinai and the new covenants.

### **Methodology**

This study will employ the descriptive and analytical method of research to clarify the misunderstandings regarding the relationship of the old covenant to the everlasting covenant and to the new covenant. First, it will be presented that old covenant was a relationship idea contrary to the agreement or contract. Second, that the old covenant belongs to the same everlasting covenant. Some have done this<sup>9</sup>, but this research will approach the concept differently by discussing the covenant formula according to a more

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<sup>8</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 344.

<sup>9</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 1980); LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition.

accurate analogy of the Biblical covenant and Hittite vassal treaties and by dividing the covenant into three parts, (1) the essence of the covenant, (2) the role of the sacrifice in the covenant and (3) the stipulations of the covenant.

After a careful study of the three major covenants in the Bible – the Abrahamic, the Sinai or old and the new covenant, this study will seek, to demonstrate that these three elements were always present in those covenants, thus making them a part of the same everlasting covenant. This study will also briefly focus on the fact that even in the period of the old covenant, it was God who took the responsibility to bear the consequences of the broken covenant by passing through the half cut sacrifice (in a way that was similar to what God did during the covenant ceremony with Abraham) and that was ultimately fulfilled at the cross. Such an approach thus makes the Sinai covenant also a promissory covenant, in contrast to the obligatory type.<sup>10</sup>

In the end, this paper will mainly examine the differences between the old and the new covenants and deal with the allegations against the old covenant mentioned above in the statement of the problem. The key questions to be addressed are: What are the continuities, discontinuities, between these two covenants? What is the role of the Ten Commandments in the new covenant? If the old and the new covenants are the same in nature, why is the later one called new? Why is the old covenant called faulty? Why did the old fail and the new succeed?

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<sup>10</sup> M. Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (1970): 184–203.

## CHAPTER 2

### DEFINITION AND MEANING

The term “covenant” is translated from the Hebrew term *berit*, the basic meaning of which is still uncertain. Scholars generally believe, however, that it refers to some kind of a bond or a binding agreement between two partners.<sup>1</sup> Either party is free to enter into the agreement or not as he or she chooses. But the Biblical term is somewhat different in meaning in the context of God’s covenant with His people especially as will be explained in the next section. The relationship of God’s people to Him is expressed in a *berit*. The Greek word *diatheke* can also be understood as a free promise on the divine side and an undertaking of obligations on the human side.<sup>2</sup> According to Palmer “A covenant is a bond-in-blood. It involves commitments with life and death consequences.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **Contract vs Relationship**

Traditionally covenant has been understood as a formal agreement<sup>4</sup> between God

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Weinfeld, ‘ברית. *berith*’ in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. II. Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977, pp. 253-56.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law* (At Issues), <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/covenants/cov-redemp.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub, 1980), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Cf *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary*, “A written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action.”

and his people. Where people need to perform certain duties mostly related to the sanctuary and the law, in order to earn God's blessing. Ultimately in the eyes of the people, perfect obedience became a way to attain salvation and to fail to perform these rituals was considered to be a rejection or loss of salvation. But the problem with this idea is that salvation by works was never God's plan, neither in the Old nor in the New Testaments: “. . . but the righteous shall live by his faith”<sup>5</sup> (Hab 2:4) and or “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

The reason that the covenant in the Old Testament was understood as an agreement or contract was because of the treaties and covenants (which people made with each other) were mostly of an agreement type in nature. So people came to the conclusion that God's covenant with people must be an agreement or contract.<sup>6</sup> But there are few problems with this idea. First, a contract is impersonal, and both parties are not obliged to love each other. On the other hand, the biblical covenant is a relationship idea where God asked His people to love Him “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deut 6:5). The love is present on both sides: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

The second problem with this idea is that a contract was negotiable, based on mutual agreement: thus both parties could agree or disagree to the stipulations. But the biblical covenant is nonnegotiable. The Israelites could not negotiate with God: they could not say that the Ten Commandments are too much, so let us reduce it to five and

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<sup>5</sup> Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” 184–203.

then we will establish the covenant. The biblical covenant ceremony is more akin to the Hittite –vassal treaties. As McCarthy notes, “One might almost wonder if these are truly treaties. They are so one-sided in making demands almost exclusively on the lesser prince that they must have been more or less imposed on him.”<sup>7</sup> The giver will stipulate the terms and the lower party either accepts or rejects the covenant agreement. In this case the stipulations in the biblical covenant which are the Ten Commandments as response of relationship are offered only from God’s side.

The third issue with the understanding of the covenant as a contract is that the contract is conditional and the terms can be revocable. On the other hand, in the biblical covenant the terms involved are irrevocable stipulations which are the Ten Commandments that cannot be changed or altered as God says “I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips” (Ps 89:34).

Fourth, the reward of being a party to the contract is automatic. If one party is doing fine, then after observance, they get the reward. For instance, if someone makes a contract with a builder to build a house in one month for a certain amount and if he does fine, he then receives the money. But in the Bible God already gives the reward and then establish the covenant. For instance, for the Israelites their coming out from the Egypt was a salvation experience and it was revealed on the day of Passover that the blood of the lamb which they put on the door post was the price God would pay for their salvation. Before God gave them any stipulations, He declares what He has done for them: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of

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<sup>7</sup> Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty, and Covenant : A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), 51.

slavery” (Exod 20:2). He not only gave the reward in advance, but also took the punishment on Himself – if the stipulations of the covenant were broken.

After careful analysis, it can be concluded that the biblical covenant is a manifestation of a relationship, rather than a kind of agreement or contract between two parties. The covenant is clearly rooted in a relational concept. “The word does not so much mean laws or stipulations. The Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants are not so much laws, but are rather reflective of a relationship between God and the people, a relationship conceived and ordered in a certain way. This is the nature of the covenant in both the Old Testament and the New.”<sup>8</sup> A similar idea is also supported by LaRondelle “The biblical idea of ‘covenant’ is therefore much more than an idea. It is an enacted reality, a living relationship with a risen Savior, a transforming experience that will bless others.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Relation of the Old Covenant to the ANE Treaties**

In his book *Old Testament Covenant*, D. J. McCarthy notes that the “Considerable impetus has been given to the study of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel by the apparent analogy between parts of the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern texts. By far the most important has been the comparison with treaty texts, especially those between sovereigns and vassals.”<sup>10</sup> But it was the classic work of George Mendenhall who first came forth with this critical exploration of the analogy between the treaties and

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<sup>8</sup> Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? : What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2007), Kindle edition, 284.

<sup>9</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer : An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 1556.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant : A Survey of Current Opinions* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1972), 10.

Israel's covenant in his book *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*.<sup>11</sup>

According to Mendenhall there are six characteristic elements found in the covenant structure of the Hittite treaty texts:

1) The Preamble identifies the author of the covenant, giving his titles and attributes; 2) The historical prologue describes the previous benevolent deeds which the Hittite king has performed for the benefit of the vassal. This important feature stresses the favors received as the reasons why the vassal is obligated to perpetual gratitude toward the great king; 3) The stipulations of the covenant describe in detail the obligations imposed upon and accepted by the vassal; the vassal was required to appear before the Hittite king once a year; 4) Provision for deposit in the temple of the vassal state and periodic public reading of the document; 5) The list of gods as witnesses and enforcers of the covenant; 6) The curses and the blessings formula as the reactions of the gods.<sup>12</sup>

This discovery has influenced many theologians to investigate the treaties and their relation to the biblical covenant. Some theologians, even Adventist like LaRondelle, find this historic background of the ancient suzerainty treaties between Hittite overlords and their vassals to be closely parallel to the covenant relation between God and Israel:

YAHWEH first mentions what He had done to Egypt and how He “carried you [Israel] on eagles’ wings” to Himself (Exod 19:4) before speaking His “words” (debarim) of the Decalogue to them. The Preamble of the Decalogue itself begins with a brief reminder of His redemptive act of delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage—establishing His identity and the reason for Israel’s obedience to this Redeemer God (Exod 20:2). The stipulations of the covenant are spelled out in the Decalogue in Exodus 20 supplemented by social laws in Exod 21–23. Three times Israel made a pledge to obey everything the LORD said (Exod. 19:8; 24:3, 7). The covenant was ceremonially ratified with the sprinkling of sacrificial blood (Exod 24:4–8). Curses and blessings are contained within the Decalogue (20:4–6, 11–12) and were pronounced later from two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim (Deut. 27–28). There is also specific mention of the covenant book that was read to the people during the covenant making (24:7). The tablets of stone had to be deposited within the “ark of the Testimony” (Exod

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<sup>11</sup> George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. (Pittsburgh, PA: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, summary of pages 32-34.

25:21–22), while the “Book of the Covenant” was to be placed “beside the ark of the covenant.”<sup>13</sup>

Though not everybody agrees that the Ten Commandments contain all these six conditions, yet theologians agree on the one point that there is a remarkable similarity between biblical covenant and the Hittite vassal treaties and the way the Ten Commandments actually function like the stipulations.<sup>14</sup> In fact, based on the Ancient Near East (ANE) treaty comparison, Weinfeld came with the valuable insight that the Abrahamic covenant was a promissory type of covenant, as opposed to the obligatory Sinaitic type.<sup>15</sup> But in the future chapters, it will be demonstrated that even the Sinai covenant belongs to the same promissory type of the covenant, similar to the Abrahamic and the new covenant.

It would be a similar mistake to interpret every detail in the treaties and imply exactly to the covenant, in a manner to what Augustine did in his interpretation of the parable of the good Samaritan. On the other hand, it would also not be a wise decision to reject the treaties entirely, for in its relation to the covenant, as it notes, there are clear similarities between them both. The best solution to this problem would be to understand the basic truth of the revelation that God wanted to convey to the people of that time. This is very similar to the way that Jesus did, when He used the parables which were known stories of that time to help people to grasp the truth that He wanted to explain to them. If the same formula is employed here, the message can be extracted without

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<sup>13</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 295.

<sup>14</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 131.

<sup>15</sup> Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” 184–203.

confusing it with the details. There are a few essential elements to learn from the treaties which can help us to better understand the biblical covenant.

Hittite kings made suzerain treaties with their vassal kings, a kind of peace or vassal treaty that would protect the vassal king; but vassal has to follow some stipulations written on the tablets of stone. The ceremony was done this way: there would be both parties present, and after reading the stipulations, the vassal king has to take an oath, and there would then be a sacrifice. An animal was cut in half, and the vassal king has to walk between the divided animal. This implies that if the vassal king violates the covenant stipulations, he has to bear the fate of the animal. There were two copies of stipulations one would remain with Hittite king and the other with the vassal king and some other regulations regarding this treaty were kept in the temple.

There are striking similarities between suzerain treaties and the covenant which God made with His people. For instance, in the covenant made with Abraham, there were two parties present, one stronger and one weaker. God asked Abraham to cut the animals in half (Gen 15:10). In Gen 26:5, God confirms that Abraham kept the stipulations, which is His law and commandments, in the context of the covenant. Whenever God's people renewed their covenant oath with God, this ceremony was performed.<sup>16</sup> But the most striking part of the Abrahamic covenant was that it was God who took responsibility for the broken covenant by passing through the cut in half sacrifice (Gen 15:17). This event was pointing to the Calvary, when God became a curse for us. This was the reason that the Abrahamic covenant is called a promissory covenant, which is the type of the new

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<sup>16</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 1980), 131-134.

covenant, but this paper will argue that the old covenant was also promissory.

There were three main factors which can be drawn out from this comparison of the covenant idea and most of the theologians agree about this: First is that the relationship between God and His people is the essence of the covenant, Second, the stipulations which are His Ten Commandments are requirements for His people as a covenant response from their side and third, the sacrifice which describes God's mercy though people broke the covenant, He is ready to bear the consequences which He ultimately fulfilled on the cross. In the next chapter, these three factors will be explored and described as the covenant formula.

### **The Covenant Formula of the Everlasting Covenant**

The expression “the everlasting covenant” is a distinctly biblical expression. It occurs 16 times in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. And God also called it synonymously “My covenant” fifty-one times in the Old Testament and two times in the New Testament, instead of calling it just a covenant. In the Old Testament, it was never mentioned in the plural. It is an everlasting relationship which God wants to maintain with His people, in the context of His salvation benefits and His desire to restore humanity and abide with them forever.

Whenever God established the covenant, it was a formalization of the existing covenant relationship which leads back to the covenant with Adam.<sup>17</sup> And it was this covenant which God established with Adam when he broke the first covenant (Hos 6:7). Gerhard F. Hasel comments: “In this sense, the covenant of God with Noah may be seen

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Scott. Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 75.

as a renewal of His covenant with Adam, to which the Bible points implicitly in Genesis 3:15.”<sup>18</sup> This relationship is the essence of the covenant discussed in the next section.

### The Essence of the Covenant

The relationship between God and His people is also defined as the essence of the covenant, as Rolf Rendtorff<sup>19</sup> suggests that the essence of the covenant is “I am your God, and you are my people,” which is a mutual relationship often compared with the marriage relationship.<sup>20</sup> The similar expression is found when God made the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:8) and with the Israelites (Exod 6:5, Lev 11:45). This expression can be found throughout the Bible 40 times and especially mentioned in the promise of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-33).

God enjoyed fellowship with Adam and Eve, but after their sin they were separated from God and could not have direct communication and dwell with Him because of their disobedience (Isa 59:1-2). God still continued to maintain communication with sinful human beings through nature, the sanctuary, the prophets, His Word, His Son and His Holy Spirit. These represented many attempts which shows that it is God's greatest desire to dwell with humanity once again, and that He is looking forward to it. That is why He established the covenant relationship. He claims us as His people and He, as our Lord and God, and expresses His ultimate desire to be with us forever. This relationship between God and His people will be for everlasting to

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<sup>18</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise : God's Everlasting Covenant* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 2002), 29.

<sup>19</sup> Rendtorff, Rolf. *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Jer. 31: 32, ‘. . . My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them’.

everlasting that is why it is called an everlasting covenant. The fulfillment of this relationship is recorded in Rev 21:3 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” This is the ultimate goal of the covenant relationship and everything else was secondary to making this possible.

The same expression is found in all the main covenants, “but whenever there has been a significant change in human experience, which affected humanity’s relationship with God, He has adjusted some of its application details to meet human needs at that time.”<sup>21</sup> That’s why there are some local promises and differences according to the particular needs of the person involved. For instance, Noah was promised in the covenant that God will not send a flood again (Gen 9:9-17). Abraham was promised a son and that He was to be the father of a great nation (Gen 15:18); and again it can be seen when God called Israel out of Egypt and formed them into his special people at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19-24). But these promises do not affect the ultimate promise of the relationship of the covenant when He said that “I am your God, and you are my people.” The covenant remains the same one as the everlasting covenant. “Thus the covenants made with all the patriarchs are so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same.”<sup>22</sup>

### The Role of Sacrifice

In both the treaties and the covenant, the sacrifice has a special role to play. In

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<sup>21</sup> Gudmundur Olafsson, “God’s Eternal Covenant and the Sabbath,” *Journal of Adventist Theological Society*, no. 16/1 (2005), 3.

<sup>22</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 190.

treaties, it was a part of the ceremony and illustrated the fate of the vassal king, that is, if he failed to keep the stipulations of the covenant. A Hittite king could already kill the vassal king if he does not agree to make the treaty; so a treaty functions as a second chance for the vassal king. As mentioned above, the covenant is a relationship that God wants to maintain with humans, which was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. There was a gulf of sin between God and humans which involved death and life. Human beings deserved death, but God provided a second chance by introducing a covenant of grace, which included the promise of the Messiah who would die for their sins and was represented by the sacrificed animal. Whether it was an animal that was cut in half in the Abrahamic covenant or the ceremonial system in the Sinaitic covenant, the sacrifice represented Jesus Christ and His death (John 1:29).

The sacrifice served three purposes in the covenant. First, it made it possible for sinful human beings to have a relationship with God to bridge the gap of sin. Second, it was used to ratify the covenant ceremony known as the blood of the covenant (Exod 24:8, Mark 14:24, Heb 9:20) Third, when they failed to keep the covenant, God gave them another opportunity to come back. He took the responsibility to bear the consequences of the breached covenant, all done as an added grace. It is interesting to note that whenever a covenant was made or renewed, the ceremony of a half cut animal and then walking through it was performed (Jer 34:18).<sup>23</sup> This was done in order to use it as a similar illustration used in the suzerain-treaty to show that this would be the fate of

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<sup>23</sup> In the Bible “making the covenant” is from Hebrew “*karath berit*” which means “cutting the covenant” this denotes the idea of cutting the animal as it was customary in ANE culture that the covenant was never established without cutting the animal. See, O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 1980), 131-134.

the one who was walking between the animal that if the person in question failed to keep the stipulations of the covenant.

### The Stipulations of the Covenant

The third element of the covenant formula is the stipulations of the covenant. The stipulations included the terms which held that the vassal king has to obey in order to receive the protection from the Hittite king. Furthermore, it would also prove that he is keeping the treaty. There were two copies of the stipulations that were written on the tablets of the stone for both the greater and the lesser prince. These were the requirements of the covenant or treaty. “Those who kept the stipulations were covenant-keepers, while those who violated them were covenant-breakers.”<sup>24</sup> In the Bible, Adam broke the first covenant because he failed to keep the stipulation of the covenant which was not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Following the covenant of grace, which God renewed with the people, there were always stipulations. When God wanted to renew the covenant with Isaac, which He made with Abraham that He will bless him with descendants and give them this land, God testified that the reason He was going to bless Isaac was also because his father “...Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen 26:5), which can be understood as the stipulations of the covenant or at the very least he had the command of circumcision to obey. In the Sinai covenant also, the stipulations are found, which includes obeying the Ten Commandments<sup>25</sup> also known as the words of the covenant

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<sup>24</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> See William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 131

(Exod 34:28). According to Exod 32:15, Moses had two tablets of stones which were engraved on both sides. According to Meredith “Two tablets were two copies of the covenant this interpretation is confirmed by the fact that it was normal to have two copies of stipulation in the treaty text.”<sup>26</sup> Both God and His people were present at the same place, near to the Sanctuary; therefore, both copies were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. This is the same law that God wants to put in the heart of His people under the promise of the new covenant: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jer. 31:33), this law is clearly referring to God's Ten Commandments. John Calvin wrote, “God does not say here, ‘I will give you another Law,’ but I will write my Law, that is, the same Law, which had formerly been delivered to the Fathers.”<sup>27</sup> This serves as the stipulations of the new covenant.

The obedience that is by faith is not to earn salvation but it is our response from our believing hearts to the covenant relationship and an evidence of our appreciation of God’s love and sacrifice for our salvation – which is His side of covenant relationship. Even under the new covenant, keeping the Ten Commandments shows that the covenant relationship is being kept – which also includes the Sabbath commandment. Meredith interestingly comments that “the Sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words similar to the suzerain treaties, it was representation of Yahweh. The creator has stamped on world history the sign of the Sabbath as his seal or ownership and Authority.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 19

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 10:4, 132 (Lecture 123 on 31:33).

<sup>28</sup> Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary*, 18-19.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE COVENANT FORMULA IN OTHER COVENANTS

After the analogy of treaties and the covenant, this study has established a covenant formula that consists of three main elements: The essence of the covenant, the role of sacrifice and the stipulations of the everlasting covenant. Now this study will examine the biblical covenants which God renewed with His people to find out how the covenant formula fits there and their relationship to the everlasting covenant.

#### **The Covenant with Abraham**

##### The Essence of the Covenant

This paper will trace now the covenant formula in the Abrahamic covenant and see how those three elements fit here. First, beginning with the essence of the covenant. “That Yahweh is Israel’s God and Israel is Yahweh’s people, is one of the central statements in the Old Testament. It is expressed in a variety of linguistic forms. Among these is one characteristic phrase, almost formula-like in character, which stands out clearly: ‘I will be God for you and you shall be a people for me.’”<sup>1</sup> But this promise was made first to Abraham in Gen 17.

When God called Abram out of the Land of Ur of the Chaldeans, He revealed Himself as Yahweh, seen as the personal name of God. The reason that God would bless

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf. Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1998), 11.

Abraham was that he could convey this blessing to other – “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3). God used Abraham as a missionary to proclaim His name and reveal the plan of salvation to others. As LaRondelle has suggested, that “with the blessing pronounced on Abram and through him on all human beings, the creator renewed His redemptive purpose.”<sup>2</sup> The local promise of the covenant was to be an heir to Abraham because of his need, but the essence of the covenant remained the same.

First, the essence of the covenant with Abraham was that God can be their God and he and his descendants can be his people for eternity. This formula is very much connected to the covenant itself. “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” (Gen 17:7-8).

Second it can be noticed is that it is called an “everlasting covenant” and “My covenant.” In Gen 17, Yahweh, being God of Israel, is expression to be the essence of the everlasting covenant.<sup>3</sup> Thus God was seeking to communicate that this is the same covenant that He will also establish with the descendants of Abraham, which Sinaitic

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<sup>2</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 637.

<sup>3</sup> Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1998), 50.

covenant God established with the children of Israel. It must be noted, however that when Abraham failed to keep this covenant by not trusting God and going into Hagar to fulfill the promise. God gave him another chance in Genesis 17 and introduced circumcision to remind him of his disbelief. The reason God did not punish Him was because it was God who took the responsibility to bear the consequences of the breached covenant in Gen 15, which leads us to the next step of the role of sacrifice in the Abrahamic covenant.

### The Role of Sacrifice

The covenant with Abraham is the first one which contains similarities with the ANE treaty ceremony, especially the cutting of the animal into halves. Ellen White also confirms its relationship to the Abrahamic covenant when she says that “the Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement.”<sup>4</sup> God used these customs to illustrate for His people what He was doing with them and what it means. For instance, when God asked Abraham to cut animals into half and told him that He is going to establish a covenant with him, Abraham would have easily understood its significance by the customary treaties he knew from the surrounding nations and peoples.

God did a similar thing again with Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son which was normal in the Canaanite culture: even King Manasseh sacrificed his son in the fire (2 Kgs 21:9). The interesting fact however was that God did not want Abraham to sacrifice his son, but was using this incident to illustrate that it would be His Son who would be the ultimate sacrifice. So even if there are some similarities between the

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 137.

surrounding culture and the biblical messages, but this does not mean that outcome was also the same; sometimes God wanted to teach something that to the contrary, such as Jesus' use of parables to illustrate the truth He wanted to teach. Even in the process of a ratifying ceremony of the covenant with Abraham, God was showing something unusual regarding the treaties, though they had striking similarities.

In Hittite-vassal treaties the ceremony of the sacrifice plays a similar role, as in the covenant. First, it was used to ratify the covenant or treaty. The animal was cut into half and the halves were placed opposite to each other. The second use of sacrifice was that it was used to illustrate something further. After reading the stipulations, the vassal king passed through the cut animal and this act illustrated the fate of the vassal king if he failed to keep the treaty.

A similar thing happened during the covenant ceremony with Abraham. God asked him to cut the animals: "And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other ..." (Gen 15:10). When God made the covenant with Abraham, it was clear that God was representing Himself here as a higher prince and Abraham as the lesser prince or vassal king who needs mercy and protection from God. So according to the treaty ceremony it should be Abraham who would pass through the cut-in-half animal. But the Bible says that "When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces" (Gen 15:17). Scholars agree that it was God who was passing through the animal that was cut in half. "The meaning of this solemn covenant suggests that God pledged Himself, as symbolized by the sacrificial death of animals, to the unconditional certainty of His plan to fulfill His promises to Abram. This implies that God took upon Himself the obligation of the

covenant.”<sup>5</sup>

This is the main reason that the Abrahamic covenant has been, most of the time, defined as the same kind of the new covenant. That is why Weinfeld concluded that the “Abrahamic covenant is a promissory type covenant as opposed to the obligatory Sinaitic type covenant, which is in the form of a suzerain-vassal treaty.”<sup>6</sup> But it was presented that the Abrahamic covenant has similarities to the suzerain-vassal treaty, yet Weinfeld still distinguishes it from the Sinai covenant, just because it was not Abraham who passed through the cut-in-half animal. He misses the point because what he wanted to occur was the same thing that what was in the treaty; but God wanted to teach an important lesson by doing it differently.

#### The Stipulations of the Covenant

The third element which is still to be investigated (and the most difficult task) is the stipulations of the covenant in the Abrahamic covenant. Most scholars believe that the Abrahamic covenant does not have any stipulation because it does not mention any such during the ceremony process. “For them the Abrahamic covenant is a lot like the Noachian covenant. Neither includes a historical prologue or stipulations (i.e., obligations imposed on the servant of the covenant) and therefore neither looks very much like a suzerainty treaty.”<sup>7</sup> Horton denies its relation to the suzerain treaty, just because he cannot perceive any stipulations in those covenants.

Once again there are misunderstanding of the implication here: the reward was

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<sup>5</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 679.

<sup>6</sup> Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient near East,” 184–203.

<sup>7</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 42.

based on the obedience in the treaties. In the Bible it is opposite, God did not bless people based on their obedience, but He required obedience because He first blessed them. God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and then He asked them to keep the Ten Commandments. He did not say, you first show me if you can keep the stipulations or not, and then I will bless you. When God blessed Abraham and promised him a son and to give him descendants through this son, this was his reward which motivated him to obey God and His commandments. So to say that Abraham did not have any requirements from God to obey Him would be contrary to the Scripture where it is written that “because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen 26:5), including, at the very least that God gave him the commandment regarding circumcision (Gen 17:9-10).

God promised Abraham that He will establish His covenant with Isaac (Gen 17:21). God did not speak of another covenant, but referred to the same “My covenant”. It must be noted in Genesis 26 when God repeated His promise to Isaac that He made to Abraham by saying: “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 26:3-4).

Notice the wording here that God used “He will establish the oath which He swore to Abraham” which was to clearly express the idea of a renewal of the Abrahamic covenant to Isaac. But the most interesting part is that God testified as to why He was establishing the promise or covenant with Isaac was “Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen 26:5).

This verse thus clearly refutes the claim that Abraham did not have any stipulation or commands to keep, like the Sinai covenant.

It is not within the scope of this paper to deal in great detail to prove that these commandments were actually the Ten Commandments of God; but there are a few important facts to be considered. 1) The clear analogy of treaty and covenant demands the presence of the stipulations, not to earn salvation, but as a relationship response to show that the covenant is being kept. 2) The word used in Gen 26:5 for commandments in Hebrew is *מִצְוֹת* (*miswotay*) and it is also used in the scripture for the Ten Commandments, especially in the context of giving them to Israel in Exod 20:6. 3) Most readers believe that the Ten Commandments were given only at Sinai covenant. But notice in Exod 16 that already God asked the people to observe the Sabbath when they failed to keep it. “And the Lord said to Moses, How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?” (Ex 16:28). Once again the Hebrew word used here for the commandments is *מִצְוֹת* (*miswotay*) from Gen 26:5 and is used in a plural form which cannot be only for the Sabbath command. This clearly shows that the people were already aware of the Ten Commandments, otherwise God would not accuse them of breaking them. 4) God commanded Moses to place the Manna before the “testimony” (Exod 16:34). In Exod 31:18 and Deut 4:13 clearly states that “testimony” is the Ten Commandments of the covenant. 5) Ellen G White wrote about this: “Noah taught his descendants the Ten Commandments. The Lord preserved a people for himself from Adam down, in whose hearts was his law. He says of Abraham, ‘He obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.’”<sup>8</sup>

As can be readily seen in the covenant formula of the everlasting covenant, please

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<sup>8</sup> Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 1945), 296.

note the following: The essence of the covenant which is the covenant relationship, the role of the sacrifice which points to Jesus and His sacrifice and The Stipulations of the covenant which are the Ten Commandments were present in the Abrahamic covenant. Thus these facts make it a part of the continual revelation of God's everlasting covenant. And, the further it goes, there will be more light of the revelation of God shed upon the topic. But unfortunately, these revelations have been understood differently and various scholars have divided the biblical covenants, seeing them as being contrary to each other, especially in the way that they see the Sinai covenant as being opposed to the new covenant. But now this study will move to the main part of this paper, which is the Sinai or old covenant, and analyze some of these claims and apply the covenant formula to it.

### **The Sinai or the Old Covenant**

This study will seek to establish the fact that even the Sinai or old covenant belonged to the everlasting covenant. It was another revelation that had added significance regarding God's covenant and His redeeming act towards His people. In order to examine this, first the covenant Formula will be implemented. The study in this section will seek to demonstrate that even with the Sinai covenant the covenant formula was the same: the essence of the covenant, the role of the sacrifice and the stipulations of the covenant remains the same as in the Abrahamic covenant. In fact, the Bible testifies that it was actually the same covenant which God was about to renew with the Israelites. Heppenstall, interestingly enough, offers the following relevant comments:

In the first place, the covenant that God planned to make with Israel at Sinai was none other than the same covenant He made with Abraham. Three times in Genesis, chapter seventeen, the covenant made with Abraham is called the everlasting covenant. Nine times it is designated "my covenant." The occasion for God's plan to deliver Israel from bondage is that "God remembered his covenant with Abraham,

with Isaac, and with Jacob.” Exod 2:24.<sup>9</sup>

### The Essence of the Covenant

The essence of the old covenant is the same relationship which God wanted to have with Abraham and promised him that He would maintain the same with his descendants. First, God tells Moses that He appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and established His covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan (Exod 6:2-4). Then He continues by saying: “Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant” (Exod 6:5). The second time God is here speaking about the covenant with Abraham (Exod 2:24).

Then He expressed the essence of the covenant ““I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God” (Exod 6:6-7). “Hence the author of Exodus connected the patriarchs and the Exodus periods directly; for him, the Sinaitic covenant was theologically and historically a continuation of the Abrahamic promise.”<sup>10</sup>

First of all, regarding the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt, God calls it His redeeming act. So calling the Sinai covenant conditional, based on the obedience of Israelites, would be an unscriptural idea. Second, God mentions again the same formula that “I will be their God and they will be my people” who has brought you out of Egypt.

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law* (At Issues), <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/covenants/cov-redemp.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer : An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 750.

He repeats this covenant relationship often in the Pentateuch (Exod 29:45, Lev 11:45, Lev 22:33, Lev 25:38, Lev 26:44, 45, Num 15:41). But notice, after the golden calf incident, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves” (Exod 32:7). The reason God refused to call them His people was because they broke the covenant.

“Israel had to meet the same requirements as Abraham. They received the same sign of circumcision that God gave to Abraham. Both Abraham and Israel were brought face to face with the same covenant.”<sup>11</sup> Even Jewish theologian Martin Buber agrees that the Sinaitic covenant was not an innovation, but rather a reaffirmation of an already existing relationship –“a relationship which had previously been in existence.”<sup>12</sup> Because the covenant relationship is so important to God suggests the reason as to why God asked Moses “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (Exod 25:8). It is God’s desire to dwell with his people always. But the sin was still a problem for this relationship that is why God introduce the ceremonial system.

### The Role of Sacrifice

Moving to the second element of the covenant formula, the role of the sacrifice in the Sinai covenant, this study aims to demonstrate that its purpose and implications are the same as those contained in the Abrahamic covenant and bear notable similarities to the Hittite-vassal treaties. First, it was used for the purpose of the ratification of the covenant. Moses sacrifices young bulls,<sup>13</sup> pouring some of the blood on the altar (Exod

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<sup>11</sup> Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law*.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford, UK [etc.]: Phaidon Press, 1946), 31.

<sup>13</sup> Umberto Cassuto and Israel Abrahams, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, (Jerusalem, Israel: Magnes Press 1967), 311.

24:6) and sprinkling the people with the remaining, declaring “And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exod 24:8).

Though there is no text in Exodus indicating any cut in half animal ceremony, as in the Abrahamic covenant, yet in Jeremiah 34:18<sup>14</sup> God makes clear that it was done so: “. . . the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it, (New King James Version [NKJV])” This clearly demonstrated that they themselves took the responsibility to bear the consequences of the broken covenant. This is also the reason that the Sinai covenant was often misunderstood as an obligatory type, contrary to Abrahamic covenant, which was a promissory type because it was God who passed through the cut in half animal.<sup>15</sup>

Second, this ceremony represented Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, showing God’s responsibility for the covenant. But this was not yet revealed here in the first covenant ceremony with Israel (Exod 24) but in the second ceremony (Exod 34) when Israel covenanted with God. The children of Israel agreed to obey the stipulations: “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient’” (Exod 24:7). The Israelites overestimated themselves and thought that they could keep the covenant without the help of God. But when Moses was up on the mountain with God for

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<sup>14</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 1980), 131-134, who indicates that Zedekiah followed the covenant ceremony from Moses’s days. He argues that evidence within the text of Jeremiah 34 indicates that such a procedure was followed. Jeremiah 34:13 links it back to Exodus 21:1-3.

<sup>15</sup> Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” 184–203.

forty days (Ex 24:18), the children of Israel had already rebelled against God and shattered the covenant by erecting the golden calf and proclaiming “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exod 32:4). The Israelites openly refused to call God to be their God and to be His people by this incident and breached the very essence of the covenant. God also respected their decision and refused to call them His people (Ex 32:7).

This act of rebellion in breaking the Sinai covenant made it completely distinct from the everlasting covenant. Therefore, just because the Israelites broke the covenant, it was labeled as the old covenant-- something contrary to the new covenant, and in a manner similar to this, then every covenant should be called old. Adam broke the covenant (Hos 6:7), then God established the covenant of grace (Gen 3:15). But the people continually broke it and by the time of Noah everybody was seen as rebellious against God (Gen 6:5-7), and He decided to destroy everybody except Noah (Gen 6:8). Later He re-established His covenant with Noah. God established the same everlasting covenant with Abraham and promised him a son. Abraham failed when he distrusted God regarding His promise to give him an heir and had a child by Hagar. Paul meant in Galatians that this represented the old covenant experience of Abraham.<sup>16</sup> Thus that was the same covenant that God had established with Israelites (Ex 2:24, 6:4). “The reason for Israel’s failure was not that they were given a different covenant from that given to Abraham. God is no respecter of persons.”<sup>17</sup>

The believer can experience the old covenant even under the new covenant.

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<sup>16</sup> Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Whenever obedience is attempted based on our self-righteousness like Abraham (See page 56) and the stipulations of the covenant are broken, the covenant is breached. But believer can back again to God, repent of mistakes and renew the covenant with God, and He will forgive because He has taken the responsibility to bear the consequences of the broken covenant. This is the new covenant experience that is based on righteousness of Jesus Christ; yet this does not make the covenant faulty, but shows human weakness to keep the covenant through our own strength.

In a similar way, the incident of the Golden calf was a kind of old covenant experience, for the Israelites and the renewal of the covenant in Exodus chapter 34 was a new covenant experience for them. It is true that it cannot be applied to the historical old and the new covenants, since there were more differences just then to the experiential factor, especially in the fulfillment of the ceremonial system. Therefore, referring to the Sinai covenant or old covenant as only appearing in Exod 19 and 24 would be wrong. These chapters cannot be referred for the old covenant if it is already broken? Had it remained broken until Jesus established the new covenant in then it would be fair to accuse the old covenant of its failure; but it was renewed in Exodus chapter 34 after the intercessory pleading of Moses with God (Exod 32:11-14). The old covenant can be referred only to the covenant in Exod 34 and stipulations in Exod 20-23.

As Adam failed to trust God in his eating of the forbidden fruit and Abraham failed to trust God in his relationship with Hagar, they were blessed with a second chance. Likewise, the Israelites were granted another opportunity to continue in the covenant. The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God's law; and they readily entered into

covenant with God.<sup>18</sup> When they broke the covenant, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Savior revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings.<sup>19</sup> They were ready now to appreciate and experience the new covenant blessings.

Once again, the whole covenant ceremony is being repeated here, God asked Moses to “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke” which are the stipulations of the covenant (Exod 34:1). There should be animal sacrifice and especially the cutting-in-half of the sacrifice and the way the two pieces were placed opposite to each other, as it was always done.<sup>20</sup> But who passes this time between the animal?

In Exod 34:10 when God says “I make covenant” He was doing something spectacular which many fail to see. Notice carefully this ceremony has some differences from the previous one. Before the Israelites were not allowed to come near to the mountain of God, Moses was going to God and coming back to people to read out, or to tell the terms of the covenant. After agreeing to the stipulations, the people passed between the cut-in-half animal (Jer 34:18). But this time “The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.” (Exod 34:5).

According to the demand of the context of a covenant ceremony, it has the following: Two parties are present here, God and the Israelites, stronger and weaker, the latter getting a second chance to renew the covenant. There are new tablets of Ten

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<sup>18</sup> Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 371.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 1980), 131-134.

Commandments which are the stipulations of the covenant. There should be a cut-in-half animal<sup>21</sup> for the ceremony; now ceremony demands somebody to pass in the midst of it to take the responsibility of the covenant. That is what follows in the next verse “The Lord passed before him . . .” (Exod 34:6). The Hebrew word used here **אָבַר** (*abar*) for passing is the same word employed in Genesis 15:17 when God passed between the half cut animal. While God is about to take this step, He declares His reasons as to why He is doing this and it is that He is ready to die for them, even if they break the covenant again. And why is this? Because “. . . The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. . . ,” (Exod 34:6-7). God was not boasting about Himself by telling His character, but He was going to do, right there, something really unexpected and unusual which only a merciful and gracious God can do, who is ready to die for His people.

When Moses saw this, he was amazed regarding what God was about to do; so he pleaded with Him, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.” (Exod 34:8-9). Moses asked God to go in their midst. But why in the midst, when before they were not even allowed to come near to the God? The context strongly demands that it could be possible that the people were standing on both sides of the halved animal. God walked between the animal halves and declared that He made a covenant; and this time He takes the responsibility to bear the consequences

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<sup>21</sup> Though the passage does not indicate a half cut animal, the context of the covenant ceremony required it without cutting an animal covenant was never made.

of the broken covenant which He fulfilled on the cross, as LaRondelle suggestively notes:

While the Sinaitic covenant has added new revelations of God to the Abrahamic covenant, such was only intended to clarify the plan of salvation. The history of salvation demonstrates progressive revelation, an unfolding of a larger plan of redemption. God's covenants can, therefore, be understood as being one in essence, because God is the same gracious God yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>22</sup>

This act of graciousness on the part of God proves that even the Sinai covenant was a promissory type, very similar to the Abrahamic covenant where God promised that it would be fulfilled at the cross, and not the obligatory type. But notice carefully that stipulations still remained as part of the covenant. Norman Gully puts it beautifully:

It is the same unchanging God of love who loves humans, and relates to them in the everlasting covenant as it unfolds through Sinai and through Christ. Throughout the unfolding of the everlasting covenant, it is the same everlasting God, the same everlasting gospel, and the same everlasting law that are involved in calling humans into a saving relationship with their only Savior.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, the role of sacrifice here in the Sinai covenant was not only for the purpose of ratification, but also showed God's responsibility for the broken covenant. As mentioned, that sacrifice was introduced to bridge the gap of sin, once again here sacrifice was introduced in the form of the sanctuary system to bridge the gap of the broken covenant and provide another chance if Israel was fail to keep the covenant.<sup>24</sup> It illustrated that God would die on the cross for their sins, symbolized in the animal sacrifices of the sanctuary.

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<sup>22</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 344.

<sup>23</sup> Norman R. Gulley, "God's Everlasting Covenant," *Perspective Digest* 19, no. 1, <http://www.perspectivedigest.org/article/122/archives/19-1/god-s-everlasting-covenant>.

<sup>24</sup> Notice carefully the sin offering was not introduced before this event of God passing through half cut animal, but only in the Leviticus. Because now God took the responsibility of the broken covenant so the sin offering was introduced to symbolize His death on the cross in the form of sacrificial animals in the sanctuary.

## The Stipulations of the Covenant

The third element of the covenant: The Stipulations of the covenant have a pivotal role to play in the Sinai or the old covenant. First, they were written by the finger of God and appeared to be officially on the tablets of stones and were pronounced in front of the people as the stipulations of the covenant. They were also known as the words of the covenant (Duet 4:13). According to Exod 32:15, Moses had two tablets of stones which were engraved on both sides. According to Meredith “Two tablets were two copies of the covenant this interpretation is confirmed by the fact that it was normal to have two copies of stipulation in the treaty text.”<sup>25</sup> Both God and His people were present at the same place, near to the Sanctuary; therefore, both copies were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. This shows clearer similarities with the Hittite- vassal treaties, where stipulations were also written on the tablets of the stones and were read in front of both parties before the ceremony.<sup>26</sup> Theologians agree that “Given the placement of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1-17) in the declaration of the covenant (Ex.19), they are understood as the stipulations of the covenant relationship.”<sup>27</sup>

“In the actual operative functions of the covenants of the Bible, there are two parties. Each enters into a relationship with the other. Each has some response to make in relationship to the covenant’s promises and terms.”<sup>28</sup> The Sinai covenant was not a contract but a covenant. It was not an agreement, but a personal relationship. Sinai covenant was a covenant of love. We would expect this from a God of love (1 John

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<sup>25</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 19

<sup>26</sup> David Noel Freedman et al., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 1118.

<sup>27</sup> Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 131.

<sup>28</sup> Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law*.

4:8).<sup>29</sup> God saved Israelites from the bondage of slavery, established the covenant with them and gave these stipulations as their response to the covenant relationship. But the people misunderstood it as a mean of earning salvation and it became for them as contract not a relationship.

God did not introduce law as a means of salvation, but He first saved the Israelites and then asked them to keep the stipulations, contrary to the ANE treaties. The keeping of the Ten Commandments would be Israel's response to the covenant relationship and what God has done for them. God characterizes the rescue from Egypt as His redeeming act toward Israel. “. . . I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God. . .” (Exod 6:6-7). It was God's love that He saved Israelites from bondage and the keeping the law would be a response of their love for God. Similarly, Eichrodt noted “Long before there was any human action in response, this love chose the people for God's own possession and gave them the law as a token of their special position of favor. To obey the law thus becomes man's response of love to the divine act of election.”<sup>30</sup>

Nothing was wrong with God's covenant at Sinai. It was not God's intent that the law be a burden of bondage to His people, for that is mutually exclusive to the covenant relationship that He had intended to have with them. John Oswalt is correct to state that “bondage” was “the result of their drift from one false lover to another.”<sup>31</sup> That is their dependence on sacrificial system for their salvation instead of loving God. The first

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<sup>29</sup> Gulley, “God's Everlasting Covenant.”

<sup>30</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament. Volume One* (London; Chatham: SCM Press; W. & J. MacKay, 1961), 94.

<sup>31</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 248.

commandment was to save them from such bondage: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3). “The preamble reminded them that God redeemed them through the Red Sea (vs. 2). With such a God, they didn’t need other gods.”<sup>32</sup> So law keeping was not a condition for salvation at Sinai. Hence, legalism is not an issue at Sinai. So calling the Sinai covenant conditional based on the obedience of Israel for their salvation or blessing would be unscriptural.

After investigating the covenant formula in the Sinai covenant, this study has shown that all three elements of the everlasting covenant are also present here in the Sinai covenant. The essence of the old covenant remains the same as that of the Abrahamic covenant –“I will be your God and you will be my people.” The role of the sacrifice has three purposes, similar to the Abrahamic covenant; first, it was used for the ratification of the covenant, second, it was used to bridge the gap of sin, third it illustrated God's responsibility for the broken covenant, pointing to the cross. The stipulations are 10 commandments given officially at Sinai. Therefore, the Sinai covenant or old covenant belongs to God's one everlasting covenant. “At each stage of development, the everlasting covenant is reaffirmed, and the process moved forward.”<sup>33</sup> The covenant that God made with his people at Sinai is to be our refuge and defense.<sup>34</sup>

### **The New Covenant**

The new covenant is often considered better than all other covenants in the Bible and therefore it is put into contrast with the old covenant, even in the context of

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<sup>32</sup> Gulley, “God’s Everlasting Covenant.”

<sup>33</sup> van Rooyen Smuts, “The Covenants: A Developmental Approach,” *Ministry Magazine* (February 2004).

<sup>34</sup> *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub., 2001), 1103.

forgiveness.<sup>35</sup> But this section of the study will demonstrate that the new covenant does not stand contrary to the other covenants in the Bible, but is actually a continuation of the same everlasting covenant of God. This will be done by tracing the covenant formula of God's everlasting covenant: The essence of the covenant, the role of the sacrifice and the stipulations of the covenant throughout the new covenant.

### The Essence of the Covenant

In the new covenant God does not introduce a new relationship that is contrary to the previous one. After looking at the promise of the new covenant, it is clear that the essence of the covenant remains, once again, it is essentially the same as the Abrahamic and the Sinai covenant again, as it says “. . . and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer 31:33). It is the same loving relationship God wants to maintain with His people. As LaRondelle argues, it's a repetition of God's previous covenant:

We need to look closely at the content of God's “new” covenant. Most features mentioned in Jeremiah 31 appear to be repetitions of God's previous covenant promises. The items of continuity in the new covenant of Jeremiah can be summarized in this way: the same covenant-making God (31:31, 33), the same law, “My Torah” (31:33); the same divine fellowship, “I will be their God” (31:33); the same offspring of Abraham, “they will be my people” (31:33) and the same forgiveness of sins (31:34).<sup>36</sup>

Even in the New Testament, the book of Hebrews supports the “essence” of the covenant in Heb. 8:10 “I will be their God, and they shall be My people”, and the “stipulations,” the Ten Commandments and “I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds” (Heb.10:16). Therefore, the covenant relationship which is the essence of the covenant, is the same in the new covenant.

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment, Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress press, 1977), 185-186.

<sup>36</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 1284.

As mentioned earlier, it is the greatest desire of God to dwell with His people. That is why He established the covenant relationship where He claims us as His people and He as our Lord and God and expresses His ultimate desire to be with us forever, the fulfilment of this relationship is recorded in Revelation 21:3 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” This is the ultimate goal of the covenant relationship, with everything else being secondary to making all of this possible. It is an Immanuel principle God with us. Therefore, it has the same covenant relationship as the everlasting covenant, just as Jeremiah promised a “new covenant” on two different occasions, first in 31:31–34. His promise in 32:37–41 serves as a parallel expression. Jeremiah called the new covenant an “everlasting covenant”<sup>37</sup> like the Abrahamic and the old covenant. The new covenant and the everlasting covenant are the same.

#### The Role of Sacrifice

The second element of the new covenant Formula is the role of the sacrifice, the sacrifice here, off course, is different than all the covenants, but it still does not stand in contradiction with other covenants. The sacrifice in the new covenant is the sacrifice of Jesus Himself, but even in all the other covenants the sacrifice was pointing to Jesus only, confirmed by John: “. . . Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Paul also confirms it, “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). The sacrifices in the Old Testament could not provide a solution for sin “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). But they

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

merely pointed forward to Jesus Christ who is a sufficient sacrifice for our salvation (Heb. 9:12).

Though the Sacrifice is different in the new covenant, its function remains identical to the other covenants in the Bible. First, it was used for the ratification of the covenant, as Jesus said: “This is my blood of the covenant” (Mark 14:24). The phrase “this is my blood of the covenant in my blood” draws directly from Exod 24:8, the inauguration formula of the Sinai covenant, and has parallels in Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, Heb 9:20, and also Heb 10:29 and 13:20.

Behold the blood of the covenant (Exod 24:8)  
For this is my blood of the covenant (Matt 26:28)  
This is my blood of the covenant (Mark 14:24)  
This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20)  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood (1 Cor 11:25)  
This is the blood of the covenant (Heb 9:20)  
The blood of the covenant (Heb 10:29)  
The blood of the eternal covenant (Heb 13:20)<sup>38</sup>

Jesus uses exactly the same phraseology as used in the inauguration of the Sinai covenant, and blood and covenant are always related together.

The second purpose of the Sacrifice in the covenant is that it functions as a bridge between God and sinful human beings to make possible the covenant relationship. As the writer of Hebrews put it “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22). Paul also argues that, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Rom 5:10). He also fulfilled the ceremonial system of sacrifice (Col 2:17).

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<sup>38</sup> Kim Papaioannou, “Sabbath, Covenant, Law and Paul,” unpublished: Quotation by courtesy of Kim Papaioannou.

Third, it illustrated that God took the responsibility for the broken covenant. As this study has presented, it was God who was passing through a halved sacrificial animal, thereby showing His promise to die for the disobedience of His people, pointing to His death on the cross; thus it was at the time of the cross in the new covenant when He fulfilled this promise. “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. With His stripes we are healed.”<sup>39</sup>

### The Stipulations of the Covenant

The third element of the covenant formula is the stipulations of the covenant, which are the Ten Commandments in the new covenant, as in the Abrahamic and the Sinai covenants. It is believed by scholars that the new covenant is based on grace and faith and therefore law or the Ten Commandments are no longer binding on the new covenant believers.<sup>40</sup> If the promise of the new covenant is carefully noted it has the same stipulations “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jer 31:33) which are God’s Ten Commandments. John Calvin wrote, “God does not say here, ‘I will give you another Law,’ but I will write my Law, that is, the same Law, which had formerly been delivered to the Fathers.”<sup>41</sup>

Many believe that Law or the Ten Commandments were only part of the old covenant, and that they are not valid under the new covenant and were abrogated at the cross. But Jesus made it very clear that “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law

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<sup>39</sup> Ellen Gould Harmon White, *The Desire of Ages*. (Mountain View, CA; Portland, OR: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 1940), 25.

<sup>40</sup> Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Leiden; NY: E.J. Brill, 1989), 21-68.

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 10:4, 132 (Lecture 123 on 31:33).

or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:17-18). The law does not serve only as stipulations but also as moral standard. Paul says that “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (Rom 7:7). John’s definition of sin also follows similarly “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

The covenant has a two-sided set of relationship of love, therefore, even in the new covenant the stipulations are the Ten Commandments. That is why Jesus said “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). John also emphasizes the same relationship and says “Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,” (1 John 2:4). C. F. Keil says that the “law of the Lord thus forms, in the old as well as in the new covenant, the kernel and essence of the relation between the Lord and His people.”<sup>42</sup> Gerhard von Rad concluded:

This *Torah*<sup>43</sup> is also to stand in the center of the new covenant which Jahweh is going to make with Israel ‘in these days,’ Thus, as far as the content of Jahweh’s self-revelation is concerned, the new covenant will make no change. Jeremiah neither says that the revelation given at Sinai is to be nullified in whole or in part . . . Nor does he in any sense suggest alteration or expansion of its content in the new covenant.<sup>44</sup>

The New Testament contemplation on Sinai rejects the keeping of law to attain

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<sup>42</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 38.

<sup>43</sup> The Torah here is understood by the writer of this paper as no alteration to the Ten Commandments in the new covenant.

<sup>44</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*. (London, UK: SCM Press, 1975), 213-214.

salvation (Rom 3:20-28), but doesn't reject the law as expected by God (6:15).<sup>45</sup> There is no command in the scripture that under the new covenant God's redeemed people will have a new law or an altered version of the law, differing from the Sinai covenant, but God declares "I will write my Law." As G. Walter Hansen put it, the Mosaic Law is "a permanent standard for all humanity."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, even in the new covenant, the Ten Commandments remain the Stipulations of the covenant, showing the true believer's attitude toward our covenant relationship to God. Actually keeping the Ten Commandments shows that the covenant is being kept and we belong to God as John puts it "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (1 John 5:2).

Many readers reject the seventh-day Sabbath because they think it was originated only at the Sinai covenant and was neither a part of the Abrahamic covenant nor of the new covenant.<sup>47</sup> This idea is contrary to the scripture because the Sabbath was already established at the time of creation much prior to the Sinai covenant and God rested, blessed and made it holy (Gen 2:1-3). God called the Sabbath also an everlasting covenant (Exod 31:16) and it would be kept even in the eschatological era (Isa 66:22-23).<sup>48</sup> It is already demonstrated that the Ten Commandments were already existing prior to the Sinai covenant and Abraham was keeping them (Gen 26:5) and are a part of the new covenant as well. But what about the Sabbath command?

Limitation of space and time do not permit to deal with the topic exhaustively, but

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<sup>45</sup> Gulley, "God's Everlasting Covenant"

<sup>46</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 107.

<sup>47</sup> Dale. Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ* (Sedona, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries, 2003), 392-395.

<sup>48</sup> Roy Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," *Journal of Adventist Theological Society*, no. 10/1-2 (1999), 330.

there are important points to be noticed which prove that the Sabbath is also a part of the new covenant. 1). There is no command neither in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament that the Sabbath command in the new covenant is altered or changed. 2). Jesus Himself kept the Sabbath regularly (Luke 4:16) and confirmed that nothing was to be altered in the Law (Matt 5:17-18). 3). The disciples kept the Sabbath even after the death of Jesus (Luke 23:56) contrary to the idea that Jesus blotted out the Sabbath on the cross. 4). According to the Bible even in the human covenant or testament, no man can “annuls, or adds to it” (Gal 3:15) and a testament is in force only after the death of the testator (Heb 9:16). Jesus inaugurated the new covenant with His blood on the cross and His disciples kept the Sabbath even after His death. There cannot be any possibility to alter the covenant anymore if it was established already at the cross without any changes in the Sabbath. 4) Paul kept the Sabbath regularly (Acts 17:2) and even preached to the gentiles on the Sabbath day (Acts 13:42). 5). There is even a command for the continuity of the Sabbath for God’s people in the New Testament (Heb 4:9)<sup>49</sup> and it would be kept by God’s people even in eschatological era (Isa 66:22-23).

After comparing the new covenant with the everlasting covenant formula, it can be seen that the essence of the covenant: “I will be your God and You shall be my people” and the role of the sacrifice which pointed to Jesus’s sacrifice and the stipulations of the covenant refers to the Ten Commandments, all three are present in the new covenant. Thus this makes it also a part of the everlasting covenant. “At each stage of development, the everlasting covenant is reaffirmed, and the process moved forward.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Gane, “Sabbath and the New Covenant,” 318.

<sup>50</sup> Smuts, “The Covenants: A Developmental Approach.”

## CHAPTER 4

### DIFFERENCES AND ALLEGATIONS

#### **Differences**

This paper has traced the covenant Formula throughout the three main Biblical covenants and related them to the everlasting covenant; but there are still some differences and allegations to deal with which seem against the old covenant. First, there is the need to shed light on the difference and later, one by one, to deal with different accusations that have been made against the old covenant.

Though the Old or Sinai covenant is the same in essence as the everlasting covenant, the Scriptures also show some differences. Most of the time these differences are used to make a distinction between the old and the new covenant especially found in the book of the Hebrews. By declaring the old covenant “Obsolete” “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). For the writer of the Book of Hebrews, the only point in which the old covenant is weaker than the new covenant is the sacrificial system: he mentions that it is “obsolete” and ready to vanish away (Heb 8:13). The majority of the theologians who support two distinct covenants interpret this verse to mean that the entire covenant idea is obsolete. What this paper suggesting, however, is that the “obsolete” he refers to not to the whole covenant, but the sanctuary and its rituals. When he writes that the new covenant is better than the old covenant, he means that the

heavenly sanctuary, the sacrifice of Jesus and the high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ are collectively better, especially when compared to the faulty priests of the earthly sanctuary and the symbolic sacrificial system of the old covenant.

The First comparison that the writer of Hebrews makes is about the sanctuary. He tries to say that in the new covenant, there is a heavenly sanctuary which the Lord himself made, not built by human hand, and that it is the true Tabernacle (Heb 9:11, 8:2). The earthly sanctuary was the copy of the heavenly sanctuary or a shadow of the original one; Moses made it according to the pattern which he was shown. (Heb 8:5). This therefore it makes the new covenant better than the old covenant because it has a real heavenly sanctuary.

The Second comparison is found in the book of Hebrews is between the earthly priest and the heavenly priest, who is Christ himself (Heb 2:17). As humans, the earthly priests were weak and sinful, and they needed to offer sacrifices for themselves as they did for others (Heb 5:2-3). Their human nature comes in direct contrast to our high priest Jesus Christ who is without sin (Heb 4:15). Where the earthly priests barely dared to go in front of the mercy seat in the sanctuary, which was a typology for God's throne, Jesus sat next to the real heavenly throne (Heb 8:1). All of which makes him a better high priest of the new covenant. This also gives us encouragement in our daily struggle "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:15-16). And even if we sin we do not need to be discouraged because we have our advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1).

The Third comparison is found in Hebrews chapter 10 is the comparison between the sacrifice of animals in the old covenant and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the new covenant. John tells about Jesus: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). This verse makes clear that animals sacrificed in the earthly sanctuary were a shadow of the true sacrifice. These sacrifices could not provide a solution for sin “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” Heb 10:4. But they merely, though necessarily, pointed forward to Jesus Christ who is a sufficient sacrifice for our salvation (Heb 9:12).

When the antitype commences, the type becomes obsolete. Thus, for example, the Levitical priest hood was superseded by the greater Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb 7-10). The Leviticus priesthood functioned as a type in one era and ceased to function when its antitype, Christ’s priesthood, began to function in the next era. Another example is the ritual of Passover, which Christ fulfilled and therefore superseded when He died on the cross (see John 19:14).<sup>1</sup>

If noted carefully, these differences are not something which stand contrary to each other but are the fulfillment of the things which are a type or shadow of the Christ who is to come (Col 2:17). As Kim Papaioannou has presented, there is a striking parallel between both covenants:

The Sinai covenant: (a) was established with Israel; (b) on the basis of the blood of sacrifices; (c) had Law; (d) had priesthood; (e) had a tabernacle; (f) had an ark of the covenant where the tables of stone were deposited. The new covenant is likewise: (a) established with Israel (Heb 8:8); (b) on the basis of the blood of the sacrifice of Jesus (e.g. Heb 9:7,12-25; 10:29); (c) has Law (Heb 8:10; 10:16); (d) has priesthood in Jesus (Heb 5:1-10)<sup>2</sup> (e) has a tabernacle in heaven of which the earthly was an exact copy (Heb 8:2,5; 9:11); (f) has an ark of the covenant (Heb 8:5; Rev 11:19). Indeed, the appearance of the heavenly Ark of the covenant in Rev 11:19 is accompanied by signs reminiscent of the theophany at Sinai.<sup>3</sup> These parallels should serve as a strong

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<sup>1</sup> Gane, “Sabbath and the New Covenant,” 318.

<sup>2</sup> Paul. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, UK: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993), 398-400.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Witherington, *Revelation* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 160.

caution against attempts to create an artificial dichotomy between the Sinai covenant and the new covenant.<sup>4</sup>

The “obsolete” is clearly the ceremonial system of the historical old covenant, its priesthood and animal sacrifices which were types of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ. This fulfillment of the old covenant ceremonial system of types in the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus, replacing the old covenant ceremonies, was definitely a historical transition.<sup>5</sup> The writer of Hebrews is not calling the covenant idea as “obsolete”

### **Allegations**

#### Works Vs Grace

The first and most serious accusation against the old covenant is that it was based on works. “Often the old covenant has been presented as God’s requirement of the law over against the forgiving grace of Jesus in the New Testament. Consequently, the old or Sinaitic covenant was considered to be teaching righteousness by law, or by works of law, so that divine law and divine grace were placed in total contrast to each other.”<sup>6</sup> Scholars have defined it as a covenant of works: As with Adam, the Sinaitic covenant made with Moses is conditional. “If Israel is faithful, the people “may live long in the land the LORD [their] God is giving [them]” (Exod. 20:12 New International Version).”<sup>7</sup> These two covenants have been interpreted by many Christians to represent two dispensations, “one, a dispensation of law, which continued until the cross; the other, a

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<sup>4</sup> Kim Papaioannou, “Sabbath, Covenant, Law and Paul,” unpublished: Quotation supplied by Kim Papaioannou.

<sup>5</sup> MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? : What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath*, Kindle edition, 1454.

<sup>6</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 732.

<sup>7</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 53.

dispensation of grace, when Christians are no longer under law but under grace.”<sup>8</sup>

The problem with this idea is that God did not have different ways of Salvation, as LaRondelle has emphasized: “We must ask a question, however: Did God introduce an entirely different way of salvation for Israel than for Abraham when God pronounced him righteous by believing in the divine promise?”<sup>9</sup> Such a concept seems to appear unreasonable. “We may not, therefore, pit the Sinaitic covenant made with Moses against either the everlasting covenant made with Abraham or the new covenant made with the disciples. All of the covenants thrive on promise and grace. Individuals were not saved by grace in Abraham's day and by law in Moses' day.”<sup>10</sup>

If God is dealing differently with people in the history of salvation, then God would be responsible to put people under bondage before Christ and under grace after. This would be a kind of strange, even arbitrary form of predestination. So the comparison between the Sinai and new covenants has nothing to do with God but has mainly to do with humans. Instead of depending on God by faith for obeying the covenant they made self-dependence the means of salvation. The human response to the Sinai covenant would have then been conceived of as a self-centered attempt to earn salvation, which is bondage.<sup>11</sup> Instead of looking for God’s grace and understanding His sacrifice in the ceremonies, the people performed these ceremonies to attain salvation.

From God’s perspective, the law at Sinai was preceded by a release of Israel from

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<sup>8</sup> Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law*.

<sup>9</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 733.

<sup>10</sup> Van Rooyen. Smuts, “The Covenants: A Developmental Approach,” *Ministry Magazine* (February 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Gulley, “God’s Everlasting Covenant.”

slavery and God's leading of Israel to Sinai as the redeemed and set-apart people of God. The law was given at Sinai after Israel had been saved from Egypt. So law keeping was not a condition for salvation at Sinai.<sup>12</sup> Heppenstall comments:

It is incredible to believe that God could be held responsible for laying the groundwork at Sinai for what followed in Jewish history. It is equally monstrous to believe that God would stoop at Sinai to betray the people He had delivered from Egypt into a hopeless covenant of works, that He had freed from one bondage in Egypt only to lead them into another bondage of the spirit that finally deprived them of the last vestiges of freedom and brought about their destruction as a nation.<sup>13</sup>

C. F. Keil notes that God's people broke the covenant, but they blame the Sinai covenant for this.<sup>14</sup> Nothing was wrong with God's covenant at Sinai. It was not God's intent that the law be a source of bondage to His people, for that is mutually exclusive to the covenant relationship that He had intended to have with them.

#### Exclusive Vs Inclusive

The second allegation is made against the old covenant is that it was made exclusively with Israel and was limited to it only. But a careful study of the Scripture reveals that this claim is false. "The covenant always bore the whole of humankind in mind, and was always for humankind's benefit and was designed to promulgate the gospel of eternal salvation worldwide. The covenants were designed to be inclusive, not exclusive."<sup>15</sup> As Moses reviewed the history and experience of Israel, before entering the Promised Land, he reviewed the Sinai experience:

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<sup>12</sup> Robert S. Rayburn, "The Contrast Between the Old and New Covenants in the New Testament" Doctoral dissertation (University of Aberdeen, March 1978), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Heppenstall, "Law and the Covenant at Sinai," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 2 (1964): 20-21

<sup>14</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 39

<sup>15</sup> MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? : What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath*, Kindle edition, 430.

You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord your God, which the Lord your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here with us today. (Deut 29:10–15).

According to Olafsson: “This is also confirmed in texts like Isa 56:1-8 ‘ . . . even by those who were usually classified as outcasts, such as eunuchs and foreigners. Both they and their sacrifices were to be fully accepted in the temple, and the temple itself was to be a house of prayer for all the peoples’ and not just for the Jews alone.”<sup>16</sup>

Kim Papaioannou has arranged an instructive summary review of the biblical evidence on this issue:

When God renewed the covenant with Israel (Exod. 19–24), it was an open covenant. Participation was voluntary. Numerous individuals who had no direct descent from Abraham became part of the covenant. Joseph had married an Egyptian (Gen 41:45); Moses a Midianite (Exod 2:16–21); Caleb, already mentioned, was a Kennizite (Num. 32:12); Rahab a Canaanite (Josh 2:1, 2); Ruth a Moabite (Ruth 1:4); Uriah a Hittite (2 Sam 11:3). King David himself was only partially Israelite (Ruth 4:17). Not only individuals but whole groups of foreigners joined the covenant. In addition to the “mixed multitude” already mentioned, Canaanites not destroyed or expelled were eventually integrated, with the Rechabites becoming especially respected for their fidelity to God (Jer 35:1–19). David’s elite bodyguards were Philistines (1 Chr 18:17). During Esther’s time after the collapse of Haman’s plot, “many of the people of the land became Jews” (Esther 8:17). Esth 9:27 indicates that this wave of conversions continued even after the momentous events described in the book. Artaxerxes authorized Ezra to appoint judges for the people in the province “beyond the River” who knew the law, and to teach “those who do not know” (Ezra 7:25), possibly an authorization to convert people of other nations. During the intertestamental period, the Jewish king, John Hyrcanus, converted the whole nation of the Idumeans (Edomites) to Judaism on the point of the sword. Out of them came the notorious family of Herod.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that the covenants which are the renewal of

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<sup>16</sup> Olafsson, “God’s Eternal Covenant and the Sabbath.” 4.

<sup>17</sup> Kim Papaioannou, “All Israel Will Be Saved,” *Ministry Magazine*, (November, 2015).

the one same everlasting covenant were open for everyone. As MacCarty notes: “We may think of those with whom God made His covenant not as exclusive beneficiaries of God’s estate but rather as executors themselves, commissioned to notify the entire world that all nations of the earth have been listed as beneficiaries of this marvelous will—the gospel, resulting in life that glorifies God and lasts forever.”<sup>18</sup>

### Law in Hearts Vs Law on Tablets of Stone

The next allegation against the old covenant is that the Ten Commandments were written on the tablets of stone, which thus makes it inferior to the new covenant where the Law is written on the heart. This distinction is also known by a term “Letter of the law Vs spirit of the Law.” In order to support the idea of the superiority of the new covenant 2 Cor 3 is often used: The “tablets of stone” are reference to the Ten Commandments and they are called “ministration of death” in verse 3 and “ministration of condemnation” in verse 9. Later it is understood that the “ministration of death” and the “ministration of condemnation” are in verse 11. It is believed that they are replaced by “Sprit of living God” and now they become “ministration of the Spirit” in verse 8 and “ministration of righteousness” in verse 9.

If noticed carefully to the new covenant promise in Jer 31:31-33, it talks about writing God’s Law on the heart. The similar expression is found in 2 Cor 3:3 when Paul says “And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” The tablets of stone point to the Ten Commandments which God gave to Moses.

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<sup>18</sup> MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? : What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath*, Kindle edition, 437.

Paul is not telling that the tablets were abolished, but that the writing which was on the "tablets of stone" now it's written on the "fleshy tablets of the heart". In other words, in the new covenant, the Ten Commandments are written on believers' hearts. It is the work of the Holy Spirit which is making it possible to write them on the heart of the believer (2 Cor 3:3, 6, 8, 17, 18).

The writing of the law on the heart is not a new idea, even in the old covenant era God expected the people to 'transfer' it to their hearts so that their obedience would be from their heart and not just a blind following of an external list of requirements.<sup>19</sup> "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deut 11:18). "Most people in Israel did not enter into a heart relationship with God. So the law was merely external because God was deemed to be merely external to them. There is no covenant without a reciprocal heart-response."<sup>20</sup>

The same God who made a covenant with Israel at Sinai will make a new covenant with Israel and Judah. The problem with the covenant at Sinai was not with the covenant, but with the people's wrong response to the covenant. But even then there were always people who kept God's law in their hearts. As LaRondelle observes:

Indeed, pious Israelites have claimed that the law of God was in their heart, protecting their feet from slipping, and "giving joy to the heart" and "light to the eyes" (see Pss 37:31; 19:8). Another psalmist prayed, "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your command. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees.... I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. Oh, how I love your law!" (Pss 119:10–12, 16,

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<sup>19</sup> See Deut. 11:18, 16; 8:2; 10:12.

<sup>20</sup> Gullely, "God's Everlasting Covenant."

97).<sup>21</sup>

The “ministration,” therefore, refers not to the revelation itself, which was “written and engraved in stones,” but to the use that was made of it. Which means the incorrect use of this revelation could bring death.

#### Circumcision of the Heart Vs Circumcision of the Flesh

Another accusation that is often made against the old covenant, similar to the previous objection, is that in the new covenant there was circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:29) vs circumcision of flesh in the old covenant. But Scripture makes it very clear that even under the old covenant God asked people to “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deut 10:16). Thus it is quite clear in this instance that God was not speaking of a literal heart surgery, but was pointing to the same spiritual implications or dynamics that is found under the new covenant. That is why He repeats the same command— “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” (Deut 30:6). The problem was not with the old covenant, that is, whether or not it was a heart relationship, but the problem was with people who fail to understand this and enter into a deep heart relationship with God. As Thompson adds “Circumcision was never indented as a mere outward sign, but as a witness to an inward reality, the surrender of the whole life to the sovereignty of Yahweh.”<sup>22</sup>

#### Not the Same Covenant

The next allegation that results from a misunderstanding of the verse found in

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<sup>21</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 1304.

<sup>22</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 215.

Deut 5:3 which says “Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today” is based on the way that many argue that the Sinai or the old covenant was not the same in its very intent or nature as was the Abrahamic covenant. But the problem with this interpretation is that Bible is very clear that the covenant which God established with the Israelites was actually a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant (Exod 2:24, 6:5). Moses was and still is not emphasizing the difference between the covenants.

He is saying that each person must renew that covenant for themselves because during the time of the covenant renewal at Moab the great majority of people were not even born when God made covenant in Exodus. God made a covenant with Abraham; nevertheless, both Isaac and Jacob renewed that holy covenant for themselves (Duet 8:18). And it must be renewed by their descendants. They cannot be excused by saying that God made this covenant only with their fathers, and so it is not binding on them.<sup>23</sup> Salvation is a free gift and received individually each person must enter into the covenant with God who remembers His covenant forever and renews with everyone (Ps 105-8-10).

### Impossible to Keep

Another common accusation that has often been hurled at the old covenant is that it was impossible to keep, and that is why nobody was able to keep it. But this thinking will once more call into question God's justice and character as to why He would deal with people differently in different eras of salvation history. Even God made it clear to His people that it was possible to keep the covenant:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you

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<sup>23</sup> Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law*.

should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it (Deut 30:11-14).

Even at that time there were people under the old covenant who kept the covenant—such as Moses, Joshua and many others in Israel who “served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel” (Jos 24:31). It was impossible only if there is no faith in the justifying and transforming grace of God and only reliance on our inherent human abilities.

### Two Covenants in Gal 4:21-31

It is relevant to consider Galatians 4:21-31, a controversial passage that seem to promote the proposition of the two distinction covenants and to denounce the old covenant as being a covenant of works and uphold the new covenant of salvation by grace. Paul contrasts two sons of Abraham, “one by the slave woman and other by the free woman” (Gal 4:21-22). One was born “according to flesh” and other was “through promise” (Gal 4:23). After calling it an “allegory” Paul says that “these are the two covenants” and relates the “Sinai” covenant to Hagar which gives birth to the slavery. (Gal 4:24). It also corresponds to the earthly “Jerusalem of slavery” contrary to the “Jerusalem above which is free” (Gal 4:25-26) and corresponds to the free woman Sarah.

It is often understood that Paul is contrasting the old covenant with the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant here. But there are some problems with this understanding. First, Paul calls it as an “allegory” and this conclusion is *novum*, introduced by Paul himself, because the stories in Gen 16-21 do not speak of two different covenants through Sarah and Hagar. There is no Hagar covenant or reference to

Sinai in Genesis.<sup>24</sup> It would not be logical to contrast the Abrahamic covenant with the old covenant because the old covenant is none other than a renewal of God's covenant with Abraham. The second problem to this idea is that it would be completely illogical and contrary to think that God brought Israelites out of the Egyptian bondage that He can put them under another bondage. As mention earlier in the Paper "It is equally monstrous to believe that God would stoop at Sinai to betray the people He had delivered from Egypt into a hopeless covenant of works, that He had freed from one bondage in Egypt only to lead them into another bondage of the spirit that finally deprived them of the last vestiges of freedom and brought about their destruction as a nation."<sup>25</sup>

Paul wants to teach here that the people had turned the Sinai or old covenant into a covenant of rituals to achieve salvation. Similar to the Abrahamic covenant where Abraham first tried to get a son by his own works through Hagar contrary to "through the promise." The "Hagar" covenant is therefore an illegitimate covenant of works. The two sons were two different experiences for Abraham: one is righteousness by works which is Ishmael, and second is righteousness by faith, which is Isaac a promised son. A very similar thing happened at the Sinai some people turned the old covenant into righteousness by works but there were others who understood the importance of righteousness by faith (Heb 11). As Rayburn explains:

The "covenants" here [Gal. 4:21–31] have nothing to do with our division between the Old Testament and the New Testament. There is and always has been only one salvation and only one true relationship with God. . . . That salvation and that relationship is one of these two covenants in [Galatians] 4:21ff. The other is the religious situation which arises when that true relationship is spurned in unbelief and when legalism instead of grace is embraced as the true principle of

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<sup>24</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 2200.

<sup>25</sup> Heppenstall, *Law and the Covenant at Sinai*, 22.

righteousness. This point is, in our view, very clear in Galatians. The issues discussed here: legalism versus grace, unbelief versus faith, slavery versus sonship, and the two “covenants,” have nothing to do with our division between the time before Christ and the time after his coming. These issues are timeless.<sup>26</sup>

### **Failure of the Old Covenant**

The first and most common misinterpretation of the old covenant is that it failed because it was faulty (Heb 8:7). Second, there is a common misunderstanding when reading and interpreting the following words from Jer 31:31-32 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.” It is often interpreted that the new covenant would not be the same as the Old one because it was faulty. Note that this is why Hortons boldly express this interpretation: “The point could not be clearer: the new covenant is not a renewal of the old covenant made at Sinai, but an entirely different covenant with an entirely different basis.”<sup>27</sup> Thus there has often been a superficial reading of the New Testament Book of Hebrews (Heb 8:7) and the Old Testament Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-32) that has led certain scholars to blame the covenant of the Old Testament and reject the idea that it has a genuine continuation in the new covenant.

However, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states that God did not consider the first covenant to be faultless (Heb 8:7). But it could not be God Himself that was at fault in the presentation of His Covenant--for He is perfect (Deut 32:4). Neither could it

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<sup>26</sup> Robert S. Rayburn, “The Contrast Between the Old and New Covenants in the New Testament” Doctoral dissertation (University of Aberdeen, March 1978), 127.

<sup>27</sup> Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 55.

be His law, for that, too, is perfect (Ps 19:7). There was nothing wrong with the objective of the covenant which aimed at making fallen human to be once again be the children of God. Thus, there is only one possibility left to for a proper understanding of God's dealing with His human partners: It was a faulty human response to the covenant, not the covenant itself that was faulty. Otherwise it will once again bring God under the accusation of making a faulty covenant.

It is obvious that there can be nothing wrong from God's side. He cannot be charged either with desiring or planning a faulty covenant. He makes everything perfect. Therefore, the fault must lie with Israel.<sup>28</sup> Even the Bible, in both of the key passages in Hebrews and Jeremiah, points out that the fault that was inherent in the old covenant was to be laid at the door of God's faithless people and not to any fault in the covenant itself: "For he finds fault with them when he says: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah' (Heb 8:8) "my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord" (Jer 31:32). "So the comparison between the Sinai and new covenants has nothing to do with God or the covenants, but has everything to do with faulty and faithless humans and their improper response to God's offer of grace. God's covenant was not at fault, but the human response to it was at fault."<sup>29</sup>

The necessity for the renewal of the covenant was not because it was faulty, but because of the spiritual condition of the people who broke the covenant (Jer 21:32), the everlasting covenant: "The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have

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<sup>28</sup> Heppenstall, *The Covenants and the Law*.

<sup>29</sup> Gulley, "God's Everlasting Covenant."

transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isa 24:5). Most evidently God confirms that this covenant was broken from His perspective also: “And I took my staff Favour, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples.” (Zech 11:10). The problem was not with God’s covenant, but was with the people of Israel’s lack of faith, especially as it happened at Sinai after the incident of the golden calf when the people broke the covenant, that was then renewed in Exodus 34. It was not the fault of the covenant, but it was the professed people of God who were at fault! Likewise, God made it clear when He said that it was because “For they did not continue in my covenant” (Heb 8:9) that it had become necessary to renew the covenant. God’s people broke the covenant but then blamed the covenant for their faithless failure!

### **Why the New Covenant is Called ‘New’**

So far this study has sought to demonstrate that the new covenant is actually a continuation of the God’s everlasting covenant. The covenant formula of the everlasting covenant is present there and the new covenant can be viewed as consisting of successive stages of God’s single covenant of redeeming grace that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But one might ask, why is it called then “New”? “Some scholars believe that when God stated that He would make a new covenant, He had referred to a renewing of the covenant that was already in place since He was the same God, the covenant partners were the same Israel and Judah, and the intended heart-relationship was the same also.”<sup>30</sup>

“The newness of the new covenant must not stand in absolute contradiction to the previous covenants. A factor of continuity must be recognized. Jeremiah does not

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

condemn the old covenant. He condemns Israel for breaking the covenant (Jer 31:32; cf. Jer 2:5, 13, 20, 32).”<sup>31</sup> The substance, essence, and the relationship will remain the same. “The new covenant was called “New” not because its contents were new, but because of the fact that the people had lost sight of what God’s eternal character was all about.”<sup>32</sup> The same is true about the ‘new’ commandment of love (John 13:34). Its content was already present in the Old Testament (Lev 19:18 and Deut 6:5), but it had been largely forgotten by the people in the time of Jesus.

The first reason why God needed to renew the covenant, as mentioned above, was because the people “broke” it and “did not continue in it” However, there are also some positive reasons as to why it is called “new.” First, the earthly sanctuary system of sacrifice and the priesthood of sinful human beings and the animal sacrifices which were pointing to Christ had finally met their fulfillment in Jesus. The blood of bulls and goats which could not take away the sins was replaced by the perfect blood of Jesus. In the new covenant, there is a heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:2), Jesus as our high priest (Heb 8:1) and the blood of Christ (Heb 9:14).

It was only in such a setting that the people of God could understand the true meaning of these rituals in the Old Testament. The promises of the old covenant were not only faulty because Israel broke them, but because they were kept in self-dependence. Thus the better promises of the new covenant are also not better because they are kept, but because they are kept in God’s dependent by faith.

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<sup>31</sup> LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology*, Kindle edition, 1394.

<sup>32</sup> Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1928), 74.

A second aspect, as Skip McCarthy has expressed it, is that what makes it new was that “Jesus came in the middle.” The covenants were a progressive revelation of the everlasting covenant and God’s larger plan of salvation. The new covenant brought the revelation into its fullness and this was because Jesus revealed the character of God to the universe. The New Testament writer could better understand the Old Testament because it testified about Jesus (John 5:39). The whole scripture was about the person of Jesus and His ministry. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). They understood Jesus as the new Adam, the new exodus (the new “way out”), the new Moses, the new Israel, the new temple, the new king, the new Elijah, and the New Redeemer from exile.”<sup>33</sup>

The third factor is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament as a creating (Gen. 1:1-2), convicting (Ps. 51:9-12), converting (1 Sam 10:6-10), reviving (Ezek. 37:1-14), sanctifying (Ezek. 36:25-27), indwelling (Ex 31:1-3), miracle-working and all-pervading Presence who strove for the conversion of all humankind.<sup>34</sup> As people were unknown to Jesus Christ, though He was there likewise, people did not know much about the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Jesus manifested Himself in human flesh for a special purpose; and that was to pay the price for sin in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit also had this special ministry to carry the gospel of Jesus to this world. The Holy Spirit's work is not different in the New Testament era than it was in the Old. What is different is the “raw material” in the Old Testament and that

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<sup>33</sup> Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again for the First Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 55-75.

<sup>34</sup> MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? : What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath*, Kindle edition, 1194.

the Spirit works with these stories of the creation, the flood, the exodus experience, and the sanctuary system--all to impress the people's collective mind as to the means of their salvation. In the new covenant the "raw material" is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ-- which are far more effective than the types of the old covenant.<sup>35</sup>

This is the reason that the new covenant became more successful than the Old, not because it is different in substance, but things which were shadows in Christ, they received their fulfillment and meaning. The people of God thus received a fuller understanding of the message of righteousness by faith. This does not mean that in the Old Testament there was no righteousness by faith in fact the Bible says that "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." (Gen 15:6, Rom 4:3). It is also true that the people in the old covenant were also faithful and kept the covenant, and Hebrews 11 mentions some of them. But there was a time when most of the people discontinued being faithful to the covenant because God's message of love was covered over by tradition, human teaching and rules.

This also does not mean that under the new covenant everybody was able to keep the covenant. It can be found in the history, especially during the period of the dark ages that the Bible truths were laid aside by the traditions of men. The stipulations which are the Ten Commandments were altered and ignored, which is clearly a sign of the broken covenant. But there were always God's remnant people who kept His commandment and had faith of Jesus under the new covenant (Rev 14:12).

The commandments are not kept by self-dependence but by depending on God for our obedience under the new covenant. The Holy Spirit is writing them on the hearts of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 1313.

the believers and helps us to keep the commandments (Ezek 36:26-27). The provision made for the salvation by grace through faith and by imputed righteousness of Christ (Eph 2:8-9), does not abrogate the law, or lessen its holy claims; for Christ came to exalt the law and make it honorable and to reveal its changeless character (Matt 5:17-18). The perfect life of Jesus Christ assures us that Law can be kept by imputed righteousness of Christ and not by self-righteousness like the Israelites.

Thus it can be concluded that covenants with Abraham, the old covenant and all other covenants mentioned in the Bible find their reality in the new covenant and God's covenant throughout the ages belongs to one everlasting covenant.<sup>36</sup> There is only one everlasting God, only one everlasting covenant with many renewals, only one everlasting gospel and only one way of salvation in both the Old and the New Testaments.

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<sup>36</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 1980), 44.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

After a careful analysis of the old covenant by comparing it to the ANE treaties and after establishing a covenant formula, the essence of the covenant, the role of sacrifice and the stipulations of the covenant, some fair conclusions can be drawn. First; the old covenant was a relationship idea contrary to the contract and the old covenant belongs to the same everlasting covenant. The divine covenants with Abraham and Israel, through Moses, along with the new covenant, can be viewed as successive stages of God's single covenant of redeeming grace that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Second, the old covenant, as opposed to the new covenant, was not a different means of salvation established by God during Old Testament times, but rather, it was a relationship with Israel which was defective due to failure of the human party. So the new covenant does not supersede the old covenant in essence or by abolishing its stipulations.

The only difference between old and new covenants is that the things which were shadow: The earthly sanctuary, earthly priest and the sacrificial system in the old covenant met their reality in the new covenant. This is not something that stands contrary between the both covenants, but serves as a fulfillment of the shadow to the reality.

Third, even in the new covenant the stipulations are the same as in the old covenant-- the Ten Commandments including the Sabbath. It is our response to the covenant relationship as a sign which shows that we are faithful to the covenant and these stipulations are kept by faith in dependence on God and with the power of His grace.

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