

GE2125 The Bible: Its History, Literature and Influence

(Semester A, 2017/18)

The New Covenant and the Covenants in the Hebrew Bible

The New Testament is named after the “New Covenant” established by Jesus. In what sense is this covenant new, or different? Discuss the major similarities and differences between the New Covenant and the covenants in the Hebrew Bible, focusing on the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants.

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Establishing a covenant means having an agreement between two parties. There are two types of covenants in Bible, which is bilateral and unilateral. The bilateral covenant is a conditional covenant that binding both of the parties for the fulfillment of the agreement, meaning both of the parties agree to follow certain conditions, or the covenant would be broken if one side of the parties has failed to fulfill the responsibilities (“Abrahamic Covenant”, n.d.). On the other hand, the unilateral covenant is an unconditional covenant that having an agreement on both of the sides, and only one side of the parties require to take the responsibility for the covenant (“Abrahamic Covenant”, n.d.).

Passing between the pieces of the animals is a ritual means both of parties are committed to the covenant and keep it to fulfillment (“Abrahamic Covenant”, n.d.). The major similarity is that both of the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant are unconditional covenant that the Lord is the side of the parties to take the responsibilities for the covenant, the fulfillment only made by God alone (“Abrahamic Covenant”, n.d.). When Abraham is having a ritual with God, God caused Abraham to fall asleep. And the flaming torch and smoking furnace, which represent God alone move in between of the halves of the animals, meaning that the covenant is a promise by God and He has bound Himself to the covenant and the fulfillment only fell upon Him alone (“Abrahamic Covenant”, n.d.). In addition, Abraham is identified as closely similar with Christ (Gal 3:29) because his obedience typifies the obedience of those obtain justification for his descendants (Vasholz, 2004). And Abraham's faithfulness assured the blessings to Abraham and his posterity. Most importantly, Abrahamic covenant and new covenant also receive the promises of God and credited as the righteousness by faith (“Abrahamic Covenant”, n.d.).

The main difference is that only the New Covenant comes could the Old Covenant be fulfilled. The promise of Abraham is truly fulfilled until the savior come. The promise of

having universal blessing in Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled through Christ (Walvoord, 2008). Only Jews in Old Covenant could receive salvation while all mankind who believe in Jesus, no matter they are Jews or not, could receive salvation in New Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant carries the implications and models the blessings that eternal well-being would only be obtained through the good works of his posterity, a truly righteous One Jesus Christ, related to New Covenant (Vasholz, 2004).

The similarity is that both of the Mosaic Covenant and New covenant are pointing to need of the savior. The Mosaic Law revealed our sinfulness and our need for savior. The Mosaic Covenant cannot save people or give them a new life because no one can obey the law perfectly. The coming of Jesus Christ is not to abolish the law but to fulfill it because Christ as a perfect priest and He became a perfect sacrifice. Jesus comes to fulfill the promise made in Old Covenant (“Mosaic Covenant”, n.d.).

The difference between mosaic covenant and new covenant is that mosaic covenant is a bilateral agreement that both parties, God and human also have the obligations to the covenant while new covenant is a unilateral covenant. Mosaic Covenants is a conditional covenant that the promise and blessing of God related to the obedience of the Mosaic Law. And God would punish the Israel if they are disobedient and He would bless them if they are obedient. Both of the blessing and curse are also related to the conditional covenant (“Mosaic Covenant”, n.d.). The other difference is that the Law was given through Moses while the Grace was given through Jesus. The Law of God exposes sin, revealed the desire of God that we need to have holiness in the way we live while the Grace of God covers sin, is the only way for us to live in godliness. (“Old Testament vs. New Testament”, n.d.).

To concluded, The Mosaic covenant revealed the Israel's unfaithfulness. And the replacement

of the new covenant did void the curses of the Law because it point backward to the type, Abrahamic covenant, point towards to the New Covenant, which fulfilled the demands of a most holy and righteous God. Through the promise of Abraham, Israel inherited the land. But, maintaining the prestige as a nation and possessing the land came by Moses. The obedience to the Mosaic covenant will tie to the earthly/nationalistic blessings which is promised to the nation. Even the blessings were promises, but they were promises made under the condition of the nation's allegiance to their Lord (Vasholz, 2004). The Kingdom of God must be entered through Faith (Vasholz, 2004).

So, the main similarity of New Covenant and Old Covenant is that all human being need the savior due to the fall and Christ is the savior that we can only have eternal life and abundant life through Him (Keathley, 2004). The contents of most of the Old Covenant pointed to the Messiah who would save people out of darkness and New Covenant revealed the savior Jesus fulfilled the prophecy. So, the Old Covenant work as a foundation, preparation, aspiration and expectation of Christ, expecting that Messiah as a prophet, King, Priest and suffering savior that die for the sin of man and reign (Keathley, 2004). And New Covenant work as a manifestation of savior and His work and the fulfillment of the prophecies (Keathley, 2004).

The main difference is the established covenant. The original purpose of God and Israel's high calling is to establish the Kingdom of God through a priestly community that would trust the invisible God to manifest the ruling through them. Through his people, mankind would mediate God's rule on world from the beginning. And the nature and character of God's Kingdom will be manifested to the world through the obedience and faith of blessed Israel that the nations would also share in God's blessings. (Vasholz, 2004). So, God's chosen people, the Jews, is the group who established the covenant with God and received the

promises in Old Covenant. While all mankind who believe in Jesus, no matter they are Jews or not, could receive the promise and establish covenant with God in New Covenant. The physical blessing in the Old Covenant paved a way to the spiritual blessing in New Covenant (“Old Testament vs. New Testament”, n.d.).

And the Old Covenant put emphasis on the Mosaic Law, which is about the Law of the Lord and it kills while a new covenant put emphasis on Spirit, which is come to give life. New Covenant was established by Jesus that He came as a fulfillment of the Law. In Old Covenant, the central places to worship is the temple and earthly tabernacle and there are many details in the festivals, offerings because it based on Law. However, we can worship with the heart and Spirit and heavenly tabernacle in New Covenant because Jesus is the center of the worship as He offered himself as the way, the truth and the life (Compelling Truth, n.d.). So, people no longer need to find the atonement in fulfilling the law but believe Jesus to receive the forgiveness and eternal life (Compelling Truth, n.d.).

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