

Integrity and Fidelity in Covenant Relationship: Unraveling the Import of Exodus 6: 7 and its Lessons Today

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ABSTRACT

Life is lived in different types of covenant relationship that is supposed to be built on trust. However, the common problem is that many either wade into serious covenant relationships without evaluating the credibility of the partner and the sustainability of the partnership; or some who appear credible at the beginning soon turn incredible, resulting in the plethora of broken agreements and covenant relationships that we see today. This paper on integrity and fidelity in covenant relationship is a response, from the point of view of the Bible, to the need for sustained covenant relationships today. Using the exegetical approach to interpret Exodus 6: 7, this paper will identify and highlight the inherent qualities in the Covenant relation between God and His people and, eventually, using the analytical method, examine if and how (far) these perceived values of the Biblical Covenant can be used as a paradigm for today's covenant relationship. The findings, evaluations, results and conclusions of; together with the recommendations from this research, promise to be insightful and beneficial to covenant relationship within and outside religious circles.

Keywords: Integrity, Fidelity, Covenant, Relationship, Old Testament

INTRODUCTION

Man is a social being and, almost always, must live in relationships. While some of those relationships may come along naturally, there are others that must be personally contracted out of need or necessity. But whether a relationship is natural or not, and especially for those which are contracted for mutually beneficial reasons, there are some values that must shape those relationships in life. These values would need to be upheld for the sustenance of such relationships.

Unfortunately, the experience today is that many contracted relationships easily fall apart, most likely because these values are not appreciated or are not even known nor employed in relationships. Beginning from the human-human relationships of friendship, marriage, business pact etc.; to the divine-human relationships like it happens in man's fundamental option to be a child of God, the present day experience is incessant break down of those relationships and covenant. This worrisome development constitutes a problem that calls for attention towards solutions.

In today's society, relationship is the binding soul of religious and secular life. Ignoring the evident 'crack' in this very important aspect of life would be tantamount to risking the destruction of the very nature of human life – mutual collaboration and interdependence. Given that the Old Testament is undeniably an account of Relationships - God's relationship with Israel; and, given that the theme of Covenant is predominant in that same Old Testament, this work has thought it wise to begin the inquiry into the viability and sustainability of covenant relationships from some Old Testament input.

This research titled '*Integrity and Fidelity in Covenant Relationship: Unraveling the Import of Exodus 6: 7 and its Lessons Today*' is a response to the need to find a lasting solution to the perceived instability in covenant relationships today. Exodus 6: 7 is chosen for study because, even by face-value, it represents a typical call to relationship in the Old

Testament. It is believed that an analysis of this text would provide the needed direction to appreciating the demands of covenant relationships even today.

While this work may not, and does not have to, be a pioneer effort in scholarship to address covenant relationship, the approach of identifying and re-reading relevance into the particular Old Testament values that would guarantee successful covenant relationships fills a gap that has been yearning to be addressed in this regard. The significant originality of this work also borders on its broad application to benefit even extra-religious relationships, covenants and sometimes, by extension, contracts.

The aim is to exegetically study the covenant declaration in Exodus 6: 7, with the hope of uncovering, identifying, analyzing, projecting and applying relevant attitudes and values that would guarantee stability in Covenant relationships. The historical critical method of exegesis will be the dominant method used here. There will also be the need to use the analytical and descriptive approaches to drive down the research goal.

Probing an inquiry into the values of integrity and fidelity, as a starting point, suggested by an 'educated guess' regarding the passage, an in-depth analysis of the text promises to reveal more about the necessary demands of a successful covenant relationship. Squaring those demands against the experienced situation today, this research hopes to draw from its finding, viable values and a relevant attitude that, when applied, would not only re-enforce weakening covenant relationships, but will better guide aright any intending partners of future covenant relationships. At the end, apart from drawing relevant lessons from the findings of this research, before the conclusion, useful recommendations will also be made to promote successful covenant relationships in future.

EXPLICATION OF TERMS

In order to situate our research within focus, it is important to explain the usage of key terms here. These would include: Integrity, Fidelity, Covenant and Covenant Relationships.

Integrity

This has to do with the quality of convinced uprightness and responsibility that is transparent and evident enough for public attestation. It is the quality or state of being honest and having strong moral principles. But over and above this as a personal quality, integrity as invoked in this work emphasizes more the transparency of such quality in order to earn the confidence of the public over such claims of uprightness. Integrity must be attested to. One must not only be a person of integrity. He or she must also be seen and known by others to be a person of integrity. Associated qualities of a person of integrity include: honesty, giving and earning respect, generating trust, avoiding pride, responsibility, keeping promises, being truthful, avoiding pretense and avoiding eye-service.

Integrity is to have consistent strong moral and ethical principles based on the above values and to live one's life in such a way to earn the trust and confidence of other people that one has such strong moral principles. This research cannot agree more with Barbara Killinger on the meaning of integrity as "a personal choice, an uncompromising and predictably consistent commitment to honor moral, ethical, spiritual, and artistic values and principles" (Killinger, 2010). This is one value that this research is probing into in order to determine its relevance or otherwise in the drive to salvage the viability of covenant relationships.¹

¹ For more on the general understanding and meaning of integrity, read Barbara Killinger, *Integrity: Doing the Right Thing for the Right Reason*, New Baskerville: McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 2010, pp. 1ff; and Michael C. Jensen, "Integrity: Without it Nothing Works" in *Rotman Magazine: The Magazine of the Rotman School of Management*, Fall 2009, pp. 16-20.

Fidelity

Etymologically drawn from the Latin *fides* meaning ‘faith,’ or *fidelis* meaning ‘faithful,’ the word ‘fidelity’ connotes a quality of unwavering trust and faithfulness to a cause, vows, obligations, duties, relationships, person or ideology. But ‘fidelity’ as implied in this research is not just the verbal profession of or mental assent to loyalty. It necessarily involves also, the verifiable consistent demonstration of such qualities. Conviction about a cause is the first step in fidelity. Profession of faithfulness follows such conviction but more importantly, the eventual unfailing loyalty is what truly defines ‘fidelity.’² Fidelity implies standing by one’s agreement or accepted code of conduct. This is another value that this work intends to probe into, still with the intention of determining ‘if’ and ‘how much’ this can be relevant in the search for sustainable remedy to broken covenant relationships.²

Covenant

Covenant appears to be a major term in this work. To that effect, in the course of explaining its usage in this work, it has become necessary that we explore more into the general appreciation of the word so that its eventual application either as a noun or an adjective would be better appreciated in the course of the work.³ The term “covenant” etymologically can be traced to two Latin words: ‘con’ meaning ‘with’ and ‘venire’ meaning ‘to come.’ Covenant connotes “coming together.” It presents a picture of two or more parties who come together to make a bond, agreeing on promises, stipulations, privileges, and responsibilities. Other synonyms for contract include, ‘Treaty,’ and ‘Partnership.’ It ordinarily means agreement. In a more focused context, covenant would portend a relationship between two persons or parties who make binding promises to each other and who work together to reach a common good. This could happen in religious and secular circles like in economic circles, politics, legal circles, and business. The most significant aspect of covenant is that it has to do with obligations and commitments.⁴ Generally understood, covenant refers to a binding agreement that bonds together two or more parties towards some mutually beneficial goal. Covenant is one of the most fundamental themes in the Bible.⁵ The entire salvation history hinges on this. From Genesis in and through the Old Testament, up until Jesus in the New Testament, God is seen to be in a binding relationship with man. This divine-human relationship or partnership is very significant in the Bible.⁶

Covenant, represented as ברית (*brit*) in the Old Testament, comes across in many instances of partnership between God and His people Israel. Some of the significant Covenants in the Old Testament include: The Covenant with Noah in Gen 8: 20 – 9: 17,

² For more insight on fidelity, see Carol L. O’Donnel, “Defining, Conceptualizing, and Measuring Fidelity of Implementation and Its Relationship to Outcomers in K – 12 Curriculum Intervention Research.” in *Review of Educational Research*, 78: 1, 2008, pp. 33-84.

³ Covenant can be considered as a noun when used separately to refer to the physical action of mutual agreement between parties. However, it can be used as an adjective when the idea of covenantal binding agreement is used to describe another thing, situation or relationship. As used in the title of this work, ‘Covenant Relationship’ here tends to invoke the adjectival value of the word covenant in order to describe relationships. Covenant here qualifies the noun relationship. Because of these nuances, it is meaningful to explore a broader appreciation of the word ‘covenant.’

⁴ Given the nature and demands of obligations and commitments in covenant relationship, it is important to see the reason for our inquiry into the extent of appreciation of the two values of ‘Integrity’ and ‘Fidelity’ in this research. Obligations and commitments work where there is integrity and fidelity.

⁵ For more explanation on covenant theology see Gerald Emem Umoren, “Masculinity in Old Testament Covenant Theology: An Interpretation of Genesis 17:1–21 and its Implication for Gender Sensitivity” in *Journal of University Scholars in Religion (JUSREL)* Issue 7, September 2017, pp. 194ff

⁶ Whitney Woollard refers to covenant as: The Backbone of the Bible. See his article Whitney Woollard, “Covenants: The Backbone of the Bible - Partnership Between God and Man” posted in 2018 on www.bibleproject.com and accessed on July 11, 2022.

where God promised He would not destroy the world by flood again; The Covenant(s)⁷ with Abraham in Gen 12 – 18 where God established, at many instances, upon Abraham's obedience of His design that he would be blessed and would be a father of the multitude of nations; Most importantly is the Covenant with Moses also called the Sinaitic covenant in Exodus 19 – 24 and which continues in Exod 31: 12-18 where God ratified before Moses, the promises He made to Abraham about the choice of his descendants - Israel; There is also the Covenant with David in 2Sam 7 where God promised that his kingdom will last for ever. It is interesting that these Covenants build on one another but the most significant of them all is the Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant because it is in that narrative that what God promised Abraham is ratified officially and Israel, once again and more meaningfully, is able to provide a platform for the Davidic Covenant. All those covenants constituted a partnership between God and His people. They all had obligations and commitments. By nature of the agreement, both parties (God and man) were expected to keep the terms of the commitment. Obviously God kept his own part of the Covenant but the people did not keep theirs. That was the beginning of problems.

Infidelity to the terms of the covenant caused lot of problems in the Old Testament. It was against the background of this incessant breakdown of the agreed or implied terms of partnership that the prophets started prophesying about the New Covenant in Jer. 31: 31-34, Ezek 36: 22-32. But the 'Old Covenant' was not abrogated. The infidelity of the Israelites broke that covenant. Those adverse effects of the broken covenant were felt by the Israelites. They lost so much of the privileges of their adoption and election by God. However, while they were unfaithful, God was still faithful. This again, explains how relevant the value of mutual fidelity was in the preservation of covenant relationships.⁸

Covenant Relationship

"Covenant relationship" as mentioned in this work refers to any partnership or relationship that is based on such agreement that is supposed to be binding. This is an understanding of 'Covenant' in a loose way that would include even contracts and other unilateral and bilateral bonds that imply a call to commitment. "Covenant relationship" in this work, therefore, refers to any and every type of partnership with binding potentials that are supposed to regulate responsibility and commitment. This type of relationship is not limited to religious or spiritual circumstances, it extends beyond those to include all other relationships bound by agreements. The word 'relationship' is used here as a noun while 'covenant' is used as an adjective. Therefore, any relationship that reflects the basic characteristics of a covenant, even in the loose sense, qualifies to be addressed in this research. This is very inclusive because the defining criterion is the type of binding force as we would have in a covenant. This means that to a certain extent, even contractual relationships can also be included here. All human-human relationships defined by agreement and binding force would also belong here. Covenant relationship captures virtually all types of relationship. However, the starting point is the more demanding and more engaging relationships defined by covenant relationships as mentioned above. This would naturally begin from the 'God-man covenant relationships' before extending to the 'man-man covenant relationships' (Hillers, 1969).

⁷ Understood loosely as agreement, partnership or relationship with God, Biblical account presents multiple covenants with Abraham. Ranging from the blessing pact, to circumcision and to the gift of the land. It is possible to also talk about the covenants with Abraham.

⁸ Here lies the driving force of the argument of this research. If Old Testament covenant relationship suffered so much set back because of infidelity, can the breakdown in today's relationship have any thing to learn from the Old Testament experience? This keeps this enquiry active...

APPRECIATING COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS IN LIFE

Life is lived in community. Man, evidently, both a religious and a social being. Man's life is full of relationships.⁹ From the point of view of man to man and that of God to man, there is need for dependence. But even if it is not or the sake of dependence, inter-relationship gives meaning to human living. Apart from the natural blood relationships created in and by family ties, daily living gives room for relationships ranging from religious fundamental option to physical partnership as in friendship, marriage, treaties, sales etc. All these relationships, as agreed to, would require some stability and basic sustainability. Relationships should be built on trust.

Today, the real situation seems to be different from ideal. The 'why,' is the first reason for this research – the loss of the value of integrity - and later, the 'how to fix this,' will be the next inquiry (the place and role of the value of fidelity) building towards finding an enduring attitude for the benefit of covenant relationships in future. A comparative analysis of the real from the ideal situation would better expose the need and engineer the search for solutions.

The Ideal Situation

This is to project what covenant relationships are supposed to be. Covenant relationship, as an agreement between two parties related by virtue of such bond, is supposed to be binding, sustainable, with responsibilities and mutual benefits. Covenant relationships are supposed to witness convinced tendency to loyalty and faithfulness. Covenant relationships are relational and personal¹⁰ Man can be in covenant relationship with either God or man. Relating with God entails a sacred agreement eliciting some fundamental option by man for God. In such case, whether it is explicitly demanded or not, some responsibility is implied on the part of man.

A covenant relationship with man means that a formal agreement is reached between two or more persons to do or not to do something specified. That agreement is supposed to be kept binding. Backing out of a covenant agreement does not necessarily nullify it but injures its desired workability. Therefore the ideal situation in covenant relationship is that of unflinching loyalty and fidelity to the terms of agreement. However, any level of fidelity must first be measured by the integrity of the partners before the agreement is made. The ideal situation would be that intending partners would build some personal integrity from where the value of trust would generate fidelity.¹¹

The Real Experience of Covenant Relationship Today

The real experience of covenant relationship today is very different from the ideal situation presented above. The very values that regulate covenantal relationships are neglected today. People who are not trustworthy and people who lack integrity have ventured into covenant relationships to deceive. In some cases, the deception is mutual and in other cases, the superior partner feigns integrity only to lure the subordinate partner into a relationship that he or she soon abandons. The resultant effect is broken covenantal relations.

⁹ Cf. John H. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, pp. 56ff.

¹⁰ This is different from a contract because contracts are not terminal and do not necessarily imply personal relationship. A contract just exchanges goods and would not necessarily entail lasting relationship. For example, a contract is invalid if one of the parties violates it whereas a contract remains intact even if one of the parties breaches it. Covenants, on the other hand, are very relational and personal. A covenant is sealed while a contract is signed. However covenants could be seen as a type of contract while contracts cannot be called a covenant.

¹¹ The unfortunate situation, because of which this research is made, is that this ideal situation is not truly reflected in the real situation. The very necessary values of integrity and fidelity are either not present or not invoked. The obvious result is the worrisome break down of covenant relationships today and the effects are destructive of meaningful human living.

It should be noted that covenants can be broken but not abrogated. This makes it very difficult for the desired mutual benefits to grow. In relating with God, man has often failed to keep his own part of the agreement whereas God is always faithful. This is the reason why present day Divine-Human relationships are not yielding the fullness of the desired benefits. Though it is not abrogated, but the infidelity of the human partner harms its full effectiveness.

The same thing happens with other types of covenantal relationships like the human-human covenantal relationships. We have broken marriages, broken friendship, and other agreements that are broken because the values of integrity, trust and loyalty, necessary to facilitate and lubricate stability and sustainability in those covenant relationships, are not there. The partners have sacrificed fidelity on the altar of modernity and its attendant tendencies. The agreement is made in most instances but hardly are they sealed than the partners begin to discover apparent reasons for withdrawal. There is no commitment to the bond. They abandon the agreement and fabricate flimsy excuses for their infidelity and responsibility. There is so much mutual suspicion and coupled with the lack of patience, many covenant relationships are either broken or left in dormancy.

This picture of covenant relationships today is exactly the direct opposite of what it is supposed to be. The partners mistake covenants for contracts and seem to be oblivious of the fact that it would be better not to seal a covenant than have a broken yet un-abrogated covenant relationship that has more adverse effects on the parties concerned and on the community, by extension.

Most of present day relationships lack the basic qualities that would make them covenantal. The partners lack credibility. Many lack integrity. The level of infidelity is alarmingly high, and the impunity with which these agreements are broken, discourage future bonding. Covenant relationships – both between God and man, and, between man and man – are robbed of their desired nature in recent times.

COVENANT RELATIONSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is basically an account of relationships.¹² Also, no book would be a better resource on Covenant than the Old Testament. All we need to know about covenant and covenant relationship can be referenced in the Old Testament, so that drawing lessons from the successes and failures of the Old Testament covenant relationships, we can conveniently evaluate and redirect the course of present day covenant relationships.

The most basic type of covenant relationship in the Old Testament is that between God and His people Israel. The summary of this is implied severally in the divine declaration: “I will be your God and you will be my people.”¹³ But the Old Testament also contains other covenant relationships between man and man. It would not be wrong to say that the Old Testament attests to a diversity of relationships. Ranging from the relationship between God and man to relationships between man and man. But apart from being a book of relationships, it is a book of covenants – agreements, bonds and treaties. In this way, the covenant spirit has become the soul of the relationships we find in the Old Testament.¹⁴ It is from this background that the Old Testament comes across as a deposit of covenant relationships.

¹² Cf. Dumbrell, William J., *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984, pp. 5ff

¹³ This covenant promise is captured severally in the Bible especially in the Old Testament. The significant thing here is God’s initiative to take responsibility. He adopts and owns the Israelites.

¹⁴ For further reading on themes in Covenant relationship in the Old Testament, see William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, Exeter: Paternoster press, 1979, pp. 1ff.

The Old Testament Understanding of Covenant

In order to appreciate the theme of Covenant in the Old Testament and therefrom draw inspiration for today's covenant relationship, it is necessary to examine the understanding of the theme by generally exploring the Nature, Types and Elements of Covenants and covenant relationships in the Old Testament.¹⁵

The Nature of Covenant

Covenant, by nature, must accommodate a binding seal that guarantees permanence. The agreement in a covenant can be broken but not easily abrogated. It is this seal of permanence that characteristically identifies and distinguishes a covenant. By nature, a covenant demands the fidelity of the partners to some terms drawn up for their mutual benefits. Often this includes a ceremony where parties ratify their commitment by an oath. A Covenant has conditions, requirements and obligation and it is expected that these be fulfilled (Mendenhall & Heiron, 1992).

Types of Covenant

Depending on the point of view, scholars classify covenants into different types. Some classify as *conditional or unconditional*. Others classify as *Covenant of promise, Covenant of Law and Covenant of Grace*. More still, there are others who classify into *bilateral and unilateral* covenants. It is possible to find a synthesis of this and project as an objective classification but it would be good to first examine them as they are presented.

From the point of view of binding terms, a covenant is either conditional or unconditional. A covenant is conditional if the desired mutual benefits of the covenant are consequent upon the terms being met by both parties and on fulfillment of certain conditions. If the mutual fidelity is not a condition for the sustainability and viability of their relationship, then it CANNOT be said to be conditional. For example, the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional but the Mosaic Covenant was. An unconditional Covenant entails that two or more parties come together without necessarily leaving a condition for the fulfillment of the relationship.

From the point of view of covenant theology, covenant can also be classified as covenant of promise, Law and Grace. A Covenant of promise is also called a covenant of works. This is a type of conditional covenant where a superior party promises blessings in exchange for work by the subordinate party. The Covenant of law is also conditional but differs from covenant of work because the former demands the fidelity to existing law and regulations for the desired benefits whereas the later demands the active fulfillment, by work, of the terms of the agreement. Covenant theology also identifies yet another type of covenant called Covenant of Grace. Here, God takes the initiative, the subordinate party stands to benefit free of charge. Covenants of Grace are unconditional by nature.¹⁶

From the point of view of obligations, covenant could be unilateral or bilateral depending on how many people are obligated in the relationship. If it is one person then it is unilateral but if it is two people, then it is bilateral. In bilateral Covenant, both parties exchange promises to perform. This can be seen as the most significant classification of covenants as most other classifications can fit into this. All these classifications are interconnected. A *unilateral* covenant would be an 'unconditional covenant of Grace' while a *bilateral* covenant would be a 'conditional covenant of promise or work or law.'

¹⁵ For further reading on the nature of covenant in the Old Testament, see Vincent G. Nyoyoko, "Historical Origin and Development of Old Testament Covenant Concept." In *Studies in World Religions*, D. I. Ilega, (ed.), Ado Ekiti: Hamaz Global Publishing Co, 2001, 1-23.

¹⁶ Cf. Ronald Youngblood, "The Abrahamic Covenant: Conditional or Unconditional?" in *The Living and Active Word of God*, Morris Inch & Ronald Youngblood, (eds.), Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 31-46.

The Elements of Old Testament Covenant

Elements of Old Testament Covenant accommodate a lot of diversity even though certain constants are also involved. This is dependent upon the fact whether it is a divine-human covenant or a human-human covenant. Generally, two or more parties are involved.

In both Divine – Human and human – human covenant relationships, the basic elements include the fact that there is always a commitment to a binding agreement. It always involves promises or oaths. Normally there would basically be some physical sign or symbols. It would be sealed and would involve witnesses. Part of the elements is that a ceremony or ritual is performed to enforce it and, especially in most Divine-Human covenant relationships, it would involve negative consequences for breaking the terms, and benefits, for keeping the terms.

There are some peculiar elements in Human Covenants relationships in the Old Testament.¹⁷ They include:

1. Mutual personal commitment

This can be seen in Marriage agreements. An example is the situation of Hosea and the wife. Other mutual personal commitments that amount to covenant relationships between humans in the Old Testament include: Abraham and Ephron the Hittite; Rahab and the Spies – Josh 2: 8-14; David and Jonathan – 1Sam 18: 1-4, 2Sam 1: 26; David and Abner – 2 Sam 3: 12-13; and Solomon and Shimei 2Sam 16: 5-13; 19: 16-23.¹⁸

2. Tribal and National Alliances

Tribal and National Alliances can be seen in the covenant relationship between Abraham and the Amorites – Gen 14: 13ff; Abraham and Abimelech's people – Gen 21: 22-33; Isaac with Abimelech's people – Gen 26: 26-31; Jacob with Laban - Gen 31: 43-54; The Gibeonite covenant – 2Sam 21: 1-3; Gabesh-Gilead and the Amonites - 1Sam 11: 1-2; David and his Vassal States – 2Sam 8: 1-14; Solomon and Hiram of Tyre – 2Sam 5: 11 and 1 Kings 5: 1-2; Solomon and his vassal states – 1Kings 4: 21; Israel Judah and Aram – 1 Kings 15: 18-19; Ahab and Ben-Hadad – 1Kings 20: 31-34; Nebuchadnezzar and Judah - 2 Kings 24: 17; and Israel and Assyria Hos 12: 1;

3. Agreement between a King and his people

Other covenant relationships between Kings and their people include: David and Israel – 2 Sam 5: 1-3; Jehoida (Joash) and the Kings' Guard – 2 Kings 11: 4-8; Joash and Judah – 2Kings 11: 17; and Zedekiah and Judah – Jer. 34: 8-11.

4. Solemn Agreement by the people to obey the law of Moses

This solemn agreement is exemplified in what happened in 2 Chron 34: 3 when the Israelites pledged to remain in the relationship with God by keeping the law of Moses.

5. Metaphorical Covenants with things.

Covenant with stones – 2 Kings 3: 19; With Eyes – Job 31: 1; With Leviathan – Job 41: 4; With Animals and Birds Hos 2: 18; With Death – Isaiah 28: 15-19; With day and Night – Jer 33: 19-26; With Nations – Zech 11: 10-11

In all these elements, no matter how diverse the situations are, whether they are between God and man or between man and man, the basic values are invoked at least at the point of agreement. The value of fidelity stands out prominently and this analysis should send a signal to present day appreciation of covenant relationships. At this point, this research will

¹⁷ Different authors have described covenant in different ways. It is interesting to see how Prof. Nyoyoko toes a peculiar live in describing what he refers to as cosmic covenant. He explains its structure in Vincent G. Nyoyoko, "The Structure of Old Testament Cosmic Covenant: Its Relevance in Contemporary Society," in *The Oracle*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 2003, 94-105.

¹⁸ Cf. Vincent G Nyoyoko, "The Role of Women in the Old Testament Covenant Community" in *Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 111, No.1, 2000: 54-88.

focus on a pilot text, the analysis of which should reveal more insight into our search for sustained covenant relationship

Exegesis of Exodus 6: 7

Having x-rayed the general understanding of covenant and covenant relationship in the Old Testament, it is believed that a narrowing down to study a typical covenant declaration in the same Old Testament would bring a better appreciation of covenant relationship in the Old Testament. Exodus 6: 7 provides a platform for this

Analysis of the Text

In the analysis of this covenant declaration, there is need to pay attention to certain details. This will be easy through an exegetical study of the text as presented below:

The text in Hebrew

• וְלִקְחָתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהִנֵּיתִי לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וַיִּדְעֻם כִּי אֲנִי הוּא אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם

The text in Transliterated Hebrew:

wəlāqahṭî 'etkēm lî lə'ām wəhāyîṭî lākem lē'lōhîm wîda'tem kî 'ānî 'ādōnāi 'ēlōhēkem hammōšî' 'etkēm mittāḥat siblôt mišrāyim
(SBL Academic)

The text in English

“I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.”
(NRSV)

This covenant declaration has been presented in different forms in many places in the Old Testament covenant theology.¹⁹In order to better appreciate this verse, it is important to do a detailed analysis of the text within a larger block, establishing the authenticity of the smaller text, examining its literary context, examining its historical context, doing the formal analysis, before one can establish the meaning of the text and determine the theological principles that will be needed for its objective application.

This research will first approach the text from the point of view of the larger block: Exodus 6: 1-8. This passage within which verse 7 is situated, generally presents God's promise of deliverance for Israel. There is not much problem of textual variance here especially because it has parallels in different other places of the Old Testament. This research would go with the final way this is presented in today's Scriptures.²⁰

Structurally, Exodus 6: 7 presents a somewhat chiasmic structure.

- (A) I will take you as my people,
- (B) I will be your **God**.
- (C) You shall know
- (b) That I am the Lord your **God**
- (a) Who has freed you from the bondage of the Egyptians

¹⁹ The essence of this declaration has been captured in many passages of the Old Testament. See Gen 17: 7; Exodus 6: 7; Deut. 4: 20; 7: 6; 14: 2; 26: 18; 2Sam 7: 24; Ezekiel 34: 24; 36: 28; Chron. 37: 27; Jer. 7: 23; 30: 22; 31:33. The basic form of this is that God takes the initiative and responsibility to invite Israel into a very demanding relationship. Whatever different forms these take, the communication of the basic form is what matters. Exod 6: 7 comes across as a typical example of that declaration and needs more analysis to unveil its meaning and lessons.

²⁰ There are no textual issues here and there is no need to be distracted with minor differences in presentations. The text of Exod. 6: 7 as presented in the text would be the working document the way it is presented.

This chiasmus can be analyzed thus:

1. *God will do something*
2. *God will take responsibility*
0. *...and the people will know that*
2. *The same God who would do something ...*
1. *...had already taken responsibility and had something in the past.*²¹

The interplay between God promising to do something and pledging to take responsibility is significant here. Above all, the reference to ‘knowledge’ of God as a proof of responsibility has a lot to say about the import of this covenant declaration as an invitation to commitment (Polak, 2009).

The center of this chiasmus is (C) and it points to the fact that Israel would *know* (*Yāda*). B&b identify the subject of action – God YHWH (יהוה), while A&a project the object of action (adoption and consequent release and freedom). Even from this structure an impression is created about a relationship between God and Israel. God seeks to convince Israel to know (*Yāda*). Knowledge here has the connotation of ‘realizing’ ‘appreciating’ and ‘believing’ that He, God, has all it takes to adopt them and redeem them. God is talking Israel into an unconditional covenant of grace. God, implicitly projects his integrity as a bargaining force for this desired covenant relationship.

The historical background of this text is important. The Remote background is that in Genesis 12, God had already promised Abraham and his descendants the gift of the land. In Exodus, Israel’s bondage in Egypt and their cries in desperation about their plight and the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, constitute the proximate background of this text.²² Even Moses, called by God in Exod. 3 was not very convinced of how the promise made to Abraham would be fulfilled. This is why God declared in promise and assurance that they would come to know (*Yāda*) and believe their adoption and redemption.

There is also the need to analyze this text literarily. Even though the verb is Qal perfect, but the context favors a future meaning especially because it is a promise. In an attempt to convince the Israelites of His resolve to do what he promised to Abraham, God made about six to seven “I will statements” within these seven verses of Exodus 6: 1-8: I will bring you out; I will deliver you; I will redeem you; I will take you; I will be your God and you shall know that I am YHWH; I will bring you into the land and I will give it to you. The perfect verb-endings and the future rendering of the meaning testify that the ‘deal was already done.’ It is within this context that one would appreciate the import of the covenant statement of Exod. 6: 7

It is good to also do a formal analysis of the text. God said: “I will take you as my people...” The verb ‘take’ (Lāqah) connotes physical dislodgement for the purpose of possession. The ‘I will’ statements define the action in a very trustworthy way. One sees the action, the implication and the effect of the action. The action implies ‘adoption.’ The implication of adoption is that God would accept and assume responsibility towards them. The result effect is that redemption and its attendant benefits which will be known to, confirmed and appreciated by the Israelites themselves. Again, even this formal analysis points to integrity and the importance of responsibility in covenant responsibility, for how was Israel to trust God? How were the Israelites to believe that God would honor His word? Here one can visualize the importance of integrity and fidelity.

²¹ Italics, for emphasis... For the structure of this text also see Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation*, Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991, p. 102ff.

²² For more on the import of God’s promise in covenant theology, cf. Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006, pp. 23ff.

However, a detailed analysis further shows that God spoke from a background of tested and proven ability to fulfill His promise. God communicated his Integrity and disposition to faithfulness with his promise. Israel was called to trust. It must be noted that while this covenant of grace statement would not include explicit conditions, there are implicit responsibilities expected of Israel. All that is expressed is in the verb (*Yāda* '). Israel would realize the integrity and faithfulness of God and be moved to respond in fidelity too.

Appreciating the Place of Integrity in Exodus 6:7

Exodus 6: 7 is a promise by God to adopt Israel and redeem them. It is a promise to enter into a relationship with Israel. It is a covenant statement where God takes the initiative to declare His resolve and ability to enter into a partnership with Israel.²³ Already Israel is in a fix. They are yet to tangibly experience this new 'Lord.' Their dilemma could be settled by a ray of true conviction. They would need to know (*Yāda* ') that who ever claims to be the subject of action had, not just the powers but the quality of moral uprightness that would guarantee that this is not a 'scam.' Israel did not yet 'know' God. It would be the deeds of God that would reveal God. The deeds of God would make Him known. These deeds, which actions already seen to be completed (as if in the past) and already effective and impactful, constitute what would help Israel to 'know' (*Yāda* '). This implied 'reservation' by Israel and the wooing promise by God can only be an invitation to 'integrity.'

Exodus 6: 7 truly appeals to the integrity of God. In this covenant statement, God is the initiator and dominant partner. He is the one who must convince the other partner, Israel, and lead her to 'know' (*Yāda* '). He must prove that He is trustworthy enough. His integrity comes in here. God must come across as a being of unquestionable and consistent subject of strong moral and ethical principles; capable of unsettling the doubts of Israel about the redemptive powers of their God. The word that would drive home the covenant statement of Exodus 6: 7 is 'integrity.' In this one verse, God appealed to His integrity in His proposal and promise to Israel. God knew that He needed to bring Israel to 'know' this and so He appealed to His power, ability and resolve to produce results.²⁴ He appealed to His 'integrity.' The value of 'Integrity' would have a very important place in the materialization of this promised covenant relationship.

Appreciating the Place of Fidelity in Exodus 6: 7

As already established above, Exodus 6: 7 has a very important opening for the value of integrity especially on the part of the initiating partner of this covenant relationship. But of what use is integrity without fidelity? It is against this argument that one also sees the important place that Fidelity also has in this text. The initiating partner, God, does not only need to be a being of integrity, He also need to come across as a faithful God. This value of fidelity explains why God, earlier in verse 3, made reference to the promise He made to Abraham in the past. Between verses 3 and 5, God's review of the past is a shot at His value of faithfulness to past promises. It could be argued: 'Just as I was, or I am faithful to past promises, I will be faithful to these present promises. It is interesting to see how God explains in verse 3 that He did not make Himself fully known to the people of the past. Squaring that against the covenant statement in verse 7 that Israel would 'know' (*Yāda* ') that He God was faithful in carrying out His plans of adoption and redemption is an appeal to and a proof of

²³ Cf. Thomas B. Dozeman, "Exodus" in *Eerdman's Critical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, pp. 43ff.

²⁴ One must keep the flow of thought in the text. There is a promise by God to 'adopt' Israel; There is implication of this action – God would become their God – which God actually accepts responsibility of; and finally, the effects – redemption of Israel - are expected to be the proof of integrity. Think of it in this order: The promise; The Implications; and the resultant effects.

his faithfulness. The same God who needed to come across as a being of integrity also needed to come across as a faithful God.

But also on the part of Israel, when God says in verse 7 “I will take you as my own people and I will be your God,” He meant that Israel was to be ready for the implications of a new relationship. The proposal of adoption would implicitly come with the expectation of some sort of loyalty and faithfulness. This is where ‘Fidelity’ is also important in this covenant statement.

THE IMPORT OF SUCCESSFUL COVENANT RELATIONSHIP IN LIFE

It is desirable that covenant relationship be successful and yield the desired goals. The analysis of Exod. 6: 7 shows that this is an appeal for a relationship that is desired to be successful. Based on the important values of ‘integrity’ (especially on the part of the initiator), and ‘Fidelity’ (especially on the part of the benefitting partner, Israel, one cannot under-estimate the significance of successful covenant relationships in life.

Every covenant relationship gears towards some benefits which, in most cases, are always mutual. Whether the covenant relationship is between God and man or between man and man as we saw earlier, partners always look forward to a successful alliance. Success in covenant relationship means that the integrity and fidelity of partners would not be called to question.²⁵ It means that each partner would respect and keep to the terms of agreement with all its responsibilities, commitment and consistency. When a covenant relationship is successful, the partners’ initial goals are achieved. This mutual benefit plays out as encouragement to them and others for more meaningful relationships. In most cases, the benefits of a covenant relationship extend to ‘outsiders.’

On the other hand, a breakdown of any covenant relationship does have adverse effects on the partners and possibly, on others. The fact that a covenant can only be broken and not abrogated means that an unsuccessful covenant relationship will remain as a constant reminder of a failed project. This would be a painful reminder of irresponsibility and it can have adverse terminal effects on the partners and on others. One can only imagine the ‘frustration’ of breaking away from one’s fundamental option to remain in a relationship with God. Also, one can only imagine the trauma of failed marriages and other human covenant relationships.

The above constitutes the reason why a successful covenant relationship must be an ideal and cannot be down played. By extension, this conclusion calls for a more responsible enforcement of the values of integrity and fidelity in every covenant relationship. These are the major values that can guarantee sustainable and successful covenant relationships.

EVALUATION

Covenant relationship has become an important aspect of human life. Man cannot live in isolation. This research took interest in the fact that, as serious and as important as these relationships are, today’s partners easily fall short of what it takes to sustain those relationships and make them successful. Many covenant relationships today do not work out or at best break down no sooner than they are made. For an objective assessment of the situation towards a lasting solution, it was necessary to get to the Old Testament as the ‘book of relationships.’ It became important to examine, not just the Old Testament covenant theology in general, but a specific covenant statement in Exodus 6: 7.

²⁵ The need for these values in covenant relationship cuts across religions and races. The Annang people are called upon to project the same values of fidelity and trustworthiness. For more, see Vincent G. Nyoyoko, “Covenant making in Annang Society” in *AFE: Journal of Minority Studies*, Vol. 1, 1997: 81-93.

This research, upon the exegetical analysis of the text, has not only discovered but has also confirmed that a covenant relationship in need of sustainability must accommodate, among other values, Integrity and Fidelity. This finding could explain the incessant unviability and breakdown of many covenant relationships today causing a lot of problems in religious and secular circles. Building on the findings of this research analysis, and, in an attempt to project a relevant solution to the current challenge, it is safe to make projections, draw lessons and put forward some recommendations before we conclude.

Lessons for Successful Covenant Relationship

At this point, in order to benefit from the enormous lessons derivable from the analysis of this text, it is first of all important to identify the possible theological principles that follow from the analysis. There is much we can learn from God; much from Israel; and, a lot about the preference of God in covenant relationship.

First of all, God wants to be known and appreciated as an epitome of integrity. Also, God wants to be appreciated as a faithful God. Again, God desires that every divine-human relationship should be a covenant of grace where man be the great beneficiary²⁶. Finally God presents Himself and wants to be appreciated as a promise – keeping God. These theological principles are also meant for adoption even as they promise to shape attitude. Since every man is a subject and object of relationships, the following lessons could help in appreciating the demands of covenant relationship. Every relationship grows with responsibility.

It is necessary and wise to weigh options before getting into covenant relationship. Patience would be a saving grace whenever one gets into a covenant relationship. Another lesson we have learnt from study of the passage is the need to give covenant relationships some further thoughts before one decides to join or not to join. It must be learnt that responsibility is to be a watchword in covenant relationship. It is also important that one understands that there is some difference between covenant and contract. There is need to also learn that difference between the two before one mixes up the two. An appreciation of the difference would prepare the parties' mind ahead of entering into any relationship and help them to know the implications or otherwise of the envisaged relationship.

Projecting Mutual Integrity and Fidelity as a Paradigm for Covenant Relationships

Integrity and fidelity are two values that must be in place if any covenant relationship is to succeed. This is the position discovered from the exegesis above. But these values must be mutually shared by the intending parties and by those already in relationship. The importance of integrity cannot be overemphasized. Integrity is a guarantee of desired fidelity. Only a man of integrity can be trusted in respect of disposition to remain faithful to the terms of the covenant. Any and every type of covenant relationship must first weigh, build up or appreciate mutual integrity and fidelity. Both on the part of the superior partner and that of the subordinate, mutual integrity and Fidelity must be present in covenant relationship and so this research projects mutual integrity and fidelity as a paradigm for covenant relationship today.²⁷

²⁶ Cf. Nichol森, Ernest W., *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon press, 1998, p. 56.

²⁷ Covenant Theology has a liberating power and this must be explored. Prof. Nyoyoko captures this in his work which is very relevant to the conclusions of our research on covenantal relationships. See Nyoyoko, Vincent G., *The Sinaitic Covenant: A Spirituality of Liberation in African Society*, Takoradi, Ghana: St. Francis Press, 2003, pp. 1ff.

RECOMMENDATION

In further attempt to arrive at a meaning knowledge of God and sustainable viability of covenant relationships, the following recommendations are proffered based on the findings of this research

1. Integrity must be determined before the expectation of fidelity in covenant relationship
2. It is important to consider and appreciate the terms of covenant relationship before contracting same. There should be no compulsion. It is safe to look before one can leap.
3. God's past should provide the confidence for the future 'partnership' with him
4. Integrity should be built as a preparation for covenant relationship. The values of integrity and fidelity should be taught and projected in schools
5. Fidelity must be understood to be consistent and unconditional
6. Man must be taught to draw from the values of God's divine-human relationship to build the human-human relationships

CONCLUSION

At the end of this research, it is all the more right, safe and, indeed necessary to conclude that the only way to salvage the present challenge of non viability or non sustainability of today's covenant relationship, is to learn, appreciate, employ and enforce all the wonderful values of relationship communicated in the Old Testament covenant declaration of Exodus 6: 7 which we have analyzed above.

It is also significant to uncover and appreciate the theological principles derivable from the covenant declaration of Exod. 6: 7. "*I will take you for my own and I will be your God.*" In this declaration, God comes across to communicate a lot of values that must henceforth shape covenant relationships. God comes across with the pledge of his responsibility towards his chosen people. He comes across in the assurance of his integrity. He comes across in his invitation to fidelity. He comes across to 'sanctify' every covenant relationship. He comes across to confirm the importance and relevance of integrity and fidelity in relationships. He comes across to teach that every one, as partner of a relationship with Him, must fulfill his or her part especially because He will surely always fulfill his own responsibility. He are invited to bond with God.²⁸

This, in theology, is a call to renewed trust that every and any covenant relationship with God is bound to succeed. On the part of our relationships with man, there is a significant lesson here. Man-to-man 'covenant relationships' as in marriages, legal and inter local agreements must revive the demands of integrity and fidelity. Where there are superior partners, even the superior partners are not exempt from the desired faithfulness in relations. And, if such responsibility is demanded of the superior partners, then the other subordinate partners should feel all the more committed to be faithful to the cause of relationships. Covenant relationships must never again suffer misunderstandings and break up. If the above attitude and design is adopted and enforced as a paradigm, the dynamics of covenant relationships in religious and secular circles will wear a new and brighter face. With the hope that the lessons and recommendations proffered here will also be taken into consideration, continued scholarship, pastoral theology and even social interrelationship will all share the gains.

²⁸ The idea of bonding with God is the implication of this text. This theme is well expatiated in Roland J. Faley, *Bonding with God: A Reflective Study of Biblical Covenant*. New York: Paulist, 1997, pp. 1ff.

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