

The Apparent Tension between Faith & Faithfulness/Obedience in Old Testament Covenants

A Tension Relieved only in the New Covenant in Christ Jesus

The uniqueness of Genesis 15:6 in light of Romans 4, Galatians 3 & Hebrews 11 also refuting "Two Covenant Theology"

1. **Noahic Covenant**
 - a. **Genesis 6:18, 8:20-6:17 (ONE)**
 - i. Creational, Everlasting (as long as the earth endures), Sacrificial Ritual
2. **Abrahamic Covenants** (Paul, in Galatians 3:15-25, attributes greater significance to these over the Mosaic Covenants).
 - a. Genesis 15:6 is a very unique statement in the Old Testament. Throughout history, the uniqueness of this statement was overlooked with an emphasis on Abraham's faithfulness (obedience) which was indeed exemplary yet imperfect.
 - i. Prophets did not exalt Abraham for his **faithfulness** due to aspects of his lack of trust in (or losing sight of) God's promises on occasion. (Example: fleeing to Egypt, impregnating Hagar, etc.).
 - ii. Nevertheless, Abraham's **faith**, which indeed was expressed in obedience (*cf.* James' epistle), is his prominent characteristic. Those who exhibit similar faith are his children and share in the blessings of the divine promises.
 1. This distinction between faith & faithfulness becomes clearer throughout God's progressive revelation. Nevertheless, the fundamental aspect that one is viewed as righteous, NOT by keeping the law or performing any deeds (because the Mosaic Law had not yet been given) but, by trusting in the promises of God is evident in the beginning from Genesis 15:6.
 - a. Romans 4, Galatians 3 and Hebrews 11 emphasize this understanding.
 - b. Genesis 12:1-3 General Overriding Promissory Statement - Sacrificial Ritual for both and related by the theme of Abraham's "seed." It is important to note that God always takes the initiative and accompanies His actions with Word.
 - i. **Genesis 15:17-21 (TWO)**
 1. **"Covenant between the Pieces"** = Promise of a Great Nation & Land
 - a. Unilateral obligation on the part of God
 - i. God alone took obligations; Abraham's response is faith/trust in God's promise.
 - ii. **Genesis 17 (established in Genesis 22:16-18) (THREE)**
 1. **"Covenant of Circumcision"** = Nations/International blessings (Creational), Kings and Perpetual Divine-Human relationship through Abraham's "seed"-(Isaac's line confirmed in Genesis 21:12). God's ultimate purpose for calling Abraham is to bless all humanity.
 - a. Bilateral obligations for both parties (Humans who enjoy benefits of God's promises here submit to covenantal obligations). Thus, there is the concept of an ethical code here, before the Mosaic Covenants.
 - i. Ethical-avoid irreproachable behavior is a prerequisite
 - ii. Ritual-male circumcision in order to maintain the covenant & enjoy its benefits
 3. **Mosaic/Sinaitic Covenants**
 - a. **Decalogue = Exodus 20:1-17, Book of the Covenant = Exodus 21-23 & Leviticus Sinaitic obligations (FOUR)**
 - i. Exodus 24: 3-8 – Sacrificial Ritual & followed Suzerain Treaties of the time in that Region.
 1. Bilateral obligations
 - a. God = make Israel unique; special treasure, priestly kingdom & holy nation
 - b. Israel/human=keep God's covenant by fulfilling obligations outlined in Exodus 20-23 & Leviticus
 - i. These laws were temporary, until the coming of Christ, and not able make anyone righteous. Instead, they served a revelatory purpose to illustrate the nature & character of God and the righteousness He requires.
 - ii. Main goal was to maintain divine-human relationship between God & Israel
 1. Not about what Abraham's descendants must do to inherit the land; because, that was already promised in Genesis 15 unconditionally
 - a. Established after the first stage of the "Covenant between the Pieces" was realized
 - i. The deliverance of Abraham's descendants from oppression in a foreign land (Egypt)
 1. God true to His promises in Gen. 15
 2. Instead, this covenant was about how Israelites must conduct themselves within the land as God's Chosen People.
 - a. Israelites, like Abraham, "must walk before God and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1) ***by maintaining ethical distinctiveness among the surrounding nations** according to God's instructions to Abraham (Genesis 17:2, 9-10). This is necessary to enjoy the anticipated divine-human relationship (Genesis 17:7-7) ***as well as retaining possession of the Promised Land.**

- b. **Emphasis upon Covenant Fidelity** to maintain human-divine relationship which was already severely compromised with the golden calf episode (Exodus 32-33) = **Exodus 34:27-28 (FIVE)**
 - i. ****Failing to maintain their distinctiveness would result in expulsion from the Promised Land.***
 - 1. Problem is that this could jeopardize the fulfillment of God's ultimate objective to bless all the nations through Abraham's "royal seed."
 - a. Therefore, God guaranteed the preservation of Israel in the land until the arrival of Abraham's ultimate seed and covenant heir.
 - i. Reference Exodus 32:7-14
 - 1. Parallels God's promise to Noah for preservation of life/creation
 - b. However, this was not unconditional.
 - i. Reference Exodus 32:28, 33-34 & subsequent Assyrian and Babylonian Exiles.
- c. **Deuteronomy – for the new Israelite generation entering into the Promise Land (29:1) (SIX)**
 - i. ****Qualifies the conditional nature of Israel's unique relationship with God, especially in relation to their future occupation of the Promised Land***
 - 1. Chapter 30 verse 5: fulfillment of promises to Abraham in Genesis 15
 - 2. Chapter 30 verse 6: points to how the divine-human relationship promised in Genesis 17 will be sustained by an inner change applying to future generations mentioned in Exodus 29:14-15.
 - a. Reaffirms obligations within the "Covenant of Circumcision" for all future generations (Genesis 17; Deuteronomy 30:6-10)
 - i. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the means by which the fulfillment of these important ethical obligations will be carried out.
4. **Priestly Covenant = Exodus 28-29 (SEVEN)**
 - a. Numbers 18 indicates it is an everlasting/permanent covenant
 - b. Closely related to the Mosaic Covenants in that the priests facilitated the maintenance of the divine-human relationship between God and Abraham's descendants.
5. **The Davidic Covenant = 2 Samuel 7 (EIGHT)**
 - a. In this covenant, the promises made to Abraham become more focused in which the Davidic dynasty inherits the promises of the patriarchal covenant, and the special divine-human relationship, along with its blessings, belong primarily to the Davidic royal lineage.
 - i. Throughout redemptive history as recorded in Genesis through Kings, the focus shifts from the promises of the "Covenant between the Pieces" (Genesis 15) to the promises of the "Covenant of Circumcision" (Genesis 17); because, in the Davidic-Solomonic Empire, the covenant of Genesis 15 finds its most extensive fulfillment. Thus, we also reach the period of wisdom based on the fear of the Lord.
 - 1. Attention shifts from Abraham's national descendants to his royal descendants (Gen. 17:6,16; 22:18)
6. **The New Covenant = Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NINE)**
 - a. Both national and international implications: (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 55:3-5, 56:4-8, 66:18-24)
 - b. An ideal (faithful) Israel: (Isaiah 65:17, 66:22)
 - i. *****This "ideal Israel" was intended from the beginning of the nation's history but indicated that ethnic descent was neither sufficient (Genesis 17:14) nor essential (Genesis 17:12-13) for inclusion among the people of God.***
 - c. It is climactic and eternal with similarities & dissimilarities with the Old Covenants. The New Covenant fulfills and transcends the promises of the earlier covenants.
 - d. Jesus is the climax of the Old Testament's covenantal promises and curses (judgment), and He understood His death to be the inauguration of the New Covenant that would forgive & remove all sins through his blood sacrifice. (Matthew 26:28 & Jeremiah 31:34; Luke 22:20 & Exodus 24:6-7)
 - e. Romans 9-11: Overall purpose of this epistle is to encourage unity in the church by demonstrating how God has been faithful to His covenantal promises (Genesis 12:3) through the gospel events of Jesus.
 - i. *****The mystery of Daniel 2 & 7 is revealed to be the inclusion of the Gentiles as the true spiritual Israel in Ephesians 1, 3 & 5 by being united to Abraham (heirs) through faith in Jesus.***
 - f. Hebrews: The Holy Spirit rectifies the inadequacy of the human obligations in response to the OT covenants of those in relationship with God through Christ in the new covenant (8:10-12; 10:16-17)
 - i. Jeremiah 31:31-34 fully realized with the outpouring of the Spirit which indwells the Believer (cf. Joel 2, Wood).
 - ii. ***Hebrews 12:2 – Jesus is the author and perfecter of faith; He is our faith for us.***
 - 1. He showed a faith exceeding Abraham's which was revealed in perfect faithfulness to His Father and sinless obedience to His will reflecting God's holy righteousness.
7. Out of love for God comes moral behavior; fear (reverence) of the Lord- wisdom; faith in God's Word- faithfulness. We love God because He first loved us. Love, fear & faith come by grace revealed in God's past works & Word. God initiates.