

**Károli Gáspár University Of The Reformed Church Doctoral School Of
Theology**

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Mission in the Old Testament

/In the light of covenants in the Old Testament/

Thesis Booklet (Summary)

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Introduction

In my dissertation I attempt to explore an exegetical and biblical-theological issue, a theoretical as well as a practical question all historic churches are facing, namely, the basis and reaffirmation of the missional roots of the Church. It can be found existing in the Old Testament as a theological problem of how Israel – as the initial religious entity – represents JHVH throughout her private relationship with him, and how Israel defines herself in this type of relationship.

In my view, inclusive elements can be found even in the most exclusive-looking type of connection between JHVH and Israel which is the covenant. Furthermore, covenants could stand as an orientation point for readers of the Bible.

The structure of the thesis is following this method by interpreting covenants in their canonical order and exploring their religious, historical and exegetical background. In every part of the dissertation, I seek to raise adequate questions in order to find informed answers in terms of covenants' missional basis made in the Old Testament. These questions are helpful not only for our missional examination but also for gaining a better understanding of New Testament background. In my paper I examine the linguistic and structural essence of covenant based on the research history of the last century.

Tracing the biblical picture of covenant, I start with Noahite covenant and conclude with the intertestamental biblical literature with a special focus on the related Dead-Sea Scrolls. After the Noahite covenant, I explore the covenant made with Abraham, predecessor of faith, which is also related to the meaning and background of the practice and origin of circumcision, and Ismael's role in that concern. My focus is on Sinai's covenant in the next part, which is inseparable from Moses, who stands both as God's instrument and the people's leader with a fairly complex personality. Analysing David's similarly complex role and personality is the next significant point of my dissertation. In this chapter the main question is how Israel related to others in the context of Sion/Jerusalem and the promises made to David and his house. The proper exegesis of Deutero-Isaiah's vision on foreign nations' pilgrimage to Sion helps the researcher gain a clearer understanding of the inclusive attitude of the JHVH-Israel relationship. This is the sixth chapter of my dissertation focusing also on Jeremiah's New Covenant promise. The penultimate chapter is exploring Dead-Sea Scrolls vision on gentiles and covenant, especially in the Damascus Document. In the last, eighth

chapter of my dissertation, I investigate a possible Jewish missionary activity in the Ancient-times, and its presumptive affection on New Testament literature. I conclude my paper with a summary that concisely describes the main points of its content.

Along with biblical-theological monographs and studies, I have also used sources from Rabbinical Literature in order to get a wider theological horizon to better interpret biblical texts. Furthermore, several inscription and other texts remain from Ancient Times which are also great sources of theological, exegetical and religious-historical parallels to the biblical texts. In addition, where it is needed and possible, I have integrated thematical excurses to make a deeper insight to the topic, alongside with recommendations for further readings.

Theses of the Dissertation

1. The notion of covenant is the basis of the Old Testament's literature which stands as a backbone in the Hebrew Bible.
2. The technical term that Hebrew Bible predominantly uses for covenant is **בְּרִית**. The Hebrew term expresses a grace-based relationship between God and his people. In a more general sense, covenant means a contract-based relationship between two states or particular social groups.
3. Covenant in the biblical sense is inseparable from the literature of Ancient-Near East because it was inspired by its religious and political context. The Hittite literature has especially affected the biblical notion and models of covenant, which in some cases follows a genre of vassal treatment documents.
4. Noahite covenant was affected firstly by Babylonian literature. However, the root and the final meaning of it is different. The Babylonian story is searching for answers for the death of innocents, in the meantime the biblical story of the flood emphasizes the importance of human life.
5. Translation of **קַשֶּׁת** is exceptionally problematic. In most cases this Hebrew term means warrior bow and not rainbow. We can find a strong religious-historical parallel for it in the Pantheon of Syria-Phoenicia where the warrior god uses a warrior's bow to ruin the world. In Noah's story, JHVH uses it in an opposite way: to save the world.
6. Noahite commandments are the basis of covenant not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. In Acts 15, we can read that these commandments are

compulsory also for gentile-origin Christians. Consequently, rules of the Noahite covenant are the more general basis for covenant.

7. The covenant that was made with Abraham determines the New Testament's own framework. Nevertheless, Hagar and Ishamel are not merely negative persons in the eyes of P, JHVH's promises were given also to them. In that sense, Abraham stands as an 'ecumenical' predecessor who is able to bond different groups.
8. Circumcision is first of all not a bodily sign but rather a spiritual and existential process. In that process human-is accepting God as ruler. Circumcision is primarily, (but not exclusively) a spiritual process.
9. Abraham was the first 'resident alien' and in that sense he was the archetype of Israel, who was herself a sojourner. Subsequently, with the right treatment of strangers and with possessing social sense towards people from the margins was an ethical requirement for Israel.
10. According to Ex 19,6 every member of Israel has had priestly duties of their own. JHVH's chosen people were intended to demonstrate God to other nations by their relationship with JHVH. Obviously, it is an ambiguous interpretation because translation of מְמַלְכֵת כְּהֹנִים is debatable.
11. The Davidic Kingdom of Israel was not able to fulfil their paradigmatic obligation. However, even so the Old Testament never gives up on the ethical requirements placed upon Israel. Interpreting these promises and hopes as purely eschatological is not the Hebrew Bible's vision especially if we take a look at Sion-Psalms.
12. In the prophecies and visions of Deutero-Isaiah we see Israel as a mediator, either in a passive or in an active way.
13. Covenants that were made in the past were not upheld by Israel. Therefore, a new covenant was needed according to Jer 31, 31-34. This covenant is akin to circumcision; it first of all creates a spiritual and existential change in human heart, and it is not optional but the only way to follow God.
14. The Qumran community defined herself as the only rightful religious group of the covenant. Although it seems according to Dead-Sea Scrolls that the community had a negative attitude towards gentiles – they did the same to other Jews as well – their close relationship with JHVH could make JHVH belief appealing for others.
15. Jewish religion is not a missionary religion. Nonetheless, their relationship with JHVH could be attracting for non-Jews. The New Testament is aware of it. Proselytization

was a well-known fact during the Ancient-times, and we can find it in Letters of Paul in a polemic way.