COVENANT AND *FEAGAIGA*: A SAMOAN CONTEXTUAL READING OF EXODUS 19:3-6

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by

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ABSTRACT

The following research is an attempt to interpret a particular biblical text from a cultural reading of the bible. The primary aim is to highlight the contribution of local and contextual concepts and traditions in biblical interpretations. The Samoan concept employed here in this research is *feagaiga* which is also the word used to translate covenant/*berit* in the Bible. *Feagaiga* will be explored and analysed and it will then be compared to *berit,* the most common word used to translate covenant in the Bible. The focus of exploration will then be narrowed down to the particular text of Exodus 19: 3-6. The text will be investigated how a Samoan would come to understand the covenant relationship between Israel and God. The result of the exegesis will be read from a Samoan perspective of *feagaiga*. In this regard, Samoan readers of the bible will enhance their understanding of the bible and especially the covenant relationship between God and His people.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is about 8000 words in length, excluding the bibliography, has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: _____

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work in memory of my late grandparents:

Gaiai Taulafo Leaumoana and Puletoia'ava Luātutu Leaumoana;

and also to my lovely wife Sarai Alatasi Leaumoana.

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A great heart-felt thanks to all my families in Manono and Solosolo, and especially to my parents, brothers and sisters, in New Zealand and Australia. Thank you all for your words of encouragement and continuous support which always brings hope

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GOD BLESS YOU ALL!!!

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

WBC	**Word Biblical Commentary**
ABD	**Anchor Bible Dictionary**
NBC	**New Bible Commentary**
NBD	**New Bible Dictionary**
NIB	**New Interpreters Bible**
WBD	**Wycliffe Bible Dictionary**
BDB	**The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon**

Introduction

Reading the bible from the Samoan context is one of my interests as a student here in Malua Theological College. This is the main reason why I am attempting this exercise from a Samoan perspective. The selection of the covenant concept as a focus point of the thesis stems from the word *feagaiga* which is the Samoan translation of covenant in the Samoan Bible.

The *feagaiga* connection with the biblical covenant has ignited my interest in this topic and has eventually led me to writing this thesis. The word *feagaiga* is part of my identity as a born and raised local of the Manono Island. I grew up knowing very well the cultural and political significance of Manono. Manono is traditionally known as the Island of the *Feagaiga*; this will be explained further throughout this paper.

The following research is an attempt to interpret a particular biblical text from a Samoan perspective. The primary aim is to highlight the contribution of local and contextual concepts and traditions in biblical interpretations. The Samoan concept employed here in this research is *feagaiga* which is also the word used to translate covenant/*berit* in the bible. *Feagaiga* will be explored and analysed and it will then be compared to *berit,* the most common word translated covenant in the Bible. The focus of exploration then will be narrowed down to the particular text of Exodus 19: 3-6. The text will then be investigated historically and the result of the exegesis will be read from a Samoan perspective of *feagaiga* explored above.

Another conviction behind my topic is the need for Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS) members today to revisit God's *feagaiga* with Israel, in order for our church members to really understand and embrace our own covenantal

relationship with God as well. In this regard, a Samoan understanding of *feagaiga* will help to enrich our understanding of God's covenant with his people, as written in the Old Testament. In other words, a Samoan contextual reading of a biblical covenant text, will give Samoan readers a deeper understanding of God's covenant with Israel.

To fulfil the above task, the thesis will be structured as follows. The overall discussion of the thesis will be introduced here. The aim and purpose of this study, together with the methods and the development of the discussion is set throughout the individual chapters.

Chapter one will focus mainly on the Samoan Context; as in the Old Testament, *Feagaiga* in the Samoan context also has different nuances and uses. This chapter defines *feagaiga* based on early surveys regarding Samoan words and their English translations, together with the etymology of the word.   It also looks at a few applications of the *feagaiga* concept, for example, in the brother-sister relationship, in the Samoan Church context (*fa'afeagaiga*), and also in the relationship between *matai* titles, and even between villages and districts.

The second part of chapter one will focus on the Legend of Pili and his appointments. As a Manono resident, this legend is the basis of why Manono is culturally known as the Island of the *feagaiga.* The legend says that Pili, a warrior, ruled over Samoa; he then divided Samoa into districts and appointed his children to rule over them. These appointments came with special roles and duties. Tolufale, his younger son, was given the *feagaiga* title. It is this appointment that the thesis is interested in, especially with regards to the roles and the significance. The final part of the chapter includes an analysis of Tolufale's appointment as *feagaiga* with reference to other nuances of *feagaiga* discussed in the first part of this chapter.

Chapter two will focus mainly on the scholarly views about the concept of 'covenant' especially its different nuances and use in the Old Testament. Special interest will be on the term *berit* since this is the most common word used to refer to covenant in the Old Testament. The focus will then be narrowed down to a specific text, Exodus 19:3-6, in the final part of the chapter. The exegesis of the text will be a historical investigation of the selected text. The main aim of this exercise is to highlight what *berit* is and its purpose. What is its theological significance? Who are the parties involved? What are the roles of each party? These are just a few of the more significant questions that this chapter endeavours to answer.

Chapter three consists of the comparative study or an analysis of chapters one and two. I will look especially at similarities and differences of the two concepts. The significance of the analysis will be drawn and will be used in the next part of the chapter. The final part is an attempt to re-read the biblical text, Exodus 19:3-6, from the Samoan context using the understanding of the *feagaiga* concept discussed in the previous chapters.

The conclusion will be a recap of the Samoan reading that was possible through the analysis in chapter three and the exegesis in chapter two. It will also look to some of the questions raised here in the introduction, and see whether the re-reading of Exodus 19:3-6 from a Samoan context, really helps enrich our understanding of the biblical text and especially the concept of covenant.

Chapter 1

FEAGAIGA IN THE SAMOAN CONTEXT

Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is on the concept *feagaiga* in the Samoan context. The chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter will discuss a definition of *feagaiga*. Moreover, this definition will be further highlighted in the discussion of three relationships that are generally understood as *feagaiga* in the Samoan context. These are: *feagaiga* in the brother-sister relationship, in the relationship between *matai* titles (village and district setting), and also in the Samoan church context (*fa'afeagaiga*).

The second part of this chapter will focus on the Legend of Pili and his distribution of power among his children. According to Samoan traditions, Pili, a great warrior and ruler, divided Upolu, Manono and Apolima into districts and appointed his four children (Tua, Saga, Ana and Tolufale) to rule over them.[1] These appointments are associated with special roles and responsibilities. It is in these appointments that the traditional names of the three main districts on Upolu originated from and are still recognized today. Tolufale, his youngest son, was given the *feagaiga* title, and was given the district called, *Aiga i le Tai* (Family in the sea) as his residence.[2] These include the islands of Manono and Apolima, which are situated between Savaii (the big

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[1] The islands under The Independent State of Samoa consist of four main inhabited islands. These are Savaii, Upolu, Manono and Apolima (listed in land mass size from biggest to smallest). Pili's appointments did not include the largest island Savaii.

[2] Some traditions argue that Tolufale is female. This is why she was called *feagaiga*. However, the general consensus agrees on Tolufale being male. The only connection to a female perspective is to do with the roles and responsibilities associated with the title *feagaiga*.

island of the Samoa Islands) and Upolu. It is this appointment of Tolufale as *feagaiga* that the thesis is also interested in, especially with regards to the meaning of the *feagaiga* in the appointment, its roles, responsibilities, and its significance. The details of this legend will be discussed below.

1.1 *Feagaiga* - Survey of the different nuances of the concept *feagaiga* in the Samoan Context

1.1.1   A Definition

According to George Pratt, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, who compiled the first Samoan dictionary**,** *feagaiga* simply means an establishment between different parties.[3] Pratt then gives three examples of relationships that embodied this *feagaiga* concept. These are: (1) relationship between brothers and sisters and their children; (2) between chiefs and their *tulafale* (orator); and (3) an agreement or covenant.[4] The two different parties in the *feagaiga* have specific roles and responsibilities which are adhered to in order to maintain the unity of the *feagaiga* relationship.

About 100 years later, G. B. Milner in his Samoan Dictionary describes *feagaiga* as an agreement, contract, treaty, or the signing of.[5]   A perfect example of Milner's definition in today's society is the agreement or covenant between a church parish and their *faifeau* – this is the most common *feagaiga* relationship carried out by the Samoan

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[3] George Pratt, "Feagaiga," in *Pratt's Grammar & Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, reprint 1862; 1977), 118.

[4] Ibid.

[5] G. B Milner, "feagaiga," *in Samoan Dictionary* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 1960), 8.

people today.[6] The *feagaiga* between the church parish and their *faifeau* consequently confers the title of *fa'afeagaiga* to the *faifeau*.[7]

Furthermore, the root word from which the term *feagaiga* is derived, is *feagai*.[8] Pratt and Milner both define *feagai* as people on opposite sides facing each other, and also those who live together peacefully and in harmony.[9]

Given the brief discussion above, we can therefore say, *feagaiga* is an agreement or covenant between two interested parties, who may live peacefully and cordially. This agreement and covenant is fully embodied in the brother-sister *feagaiga*, and also the agreement and covenant between a church parish and their *faifeau*.

1.1.2   Types of *feagaiga*

As mentioned above, the definition of *Feagaiga* was deduced mainly from the existent relationships within the Samoan context which are generally known as *feagaiga*. In this regard, there are basically three main types of traditional *feagaiga*. These are: the *feagaiga tamaitai, feagaiga o matai,* and the *fa'afeagaiga (faifeau).*

The most common *feagaiga* in traditional Samoan culture is the *feagaiga tamaitai* whereby the sister (*tuafafine*), or *tamaitai* (lady) was referred to as the *feagaiga*. The *feagaiga tamaitai* symbolises a special relationship between the brother

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[6] *Faifeau* is the Samoan term for a minister of religion. Other terms used to refer to a church minister is *Auauna a le Atua* which literally means "Servant of God" and *Fa'afeagaiga* which is discussed above. See Fa'atulituli Setu, "The Theological Appreciation of The "Faifeau" In the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa: Is He Christian?" Unpublished BD Thesis, Pacific Theological College, 1986.

[7] *Fa'afeagaiga* literally means 'to be the *feagaiga*'. The slight modification of the term acknowledges the fact that it is no longer used in its original context.

[8] Penelope Schoffel, "The Samoan Concept of *Feagaiga* and its Transformation" in *Tonga and Samoa: Images of Gender and Polity* ed. By Judith Huntsman (Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, 1995), 86.

[9] Pratt, "Feagaiga", 128; Milner, "feagaiga", 8. Also see Schoffel, "The Samoan Concept of *Feagaiga* and its Transformation", 86.

(*tuagane*) and his sister (*tuafafine*); a covenant which is carried forward from previous generations to present and future generations.

1.1.2.1   Sister-Brother *feagaiga*

Afa Afato claims that the origins of this *feagaiga* points to a unique Samoan tradition where the virginity of the sister was the primary reason the brothers valued her.[10] Thus, a sister was kept at a distance by her brother who revered her with respect and loyalty. This is fully embodied in the saying, "*O le tuafafine o le meauliuli o le mata (poo le ioimata) o lona tuagane.*" (The sister is the pupil of the brother's eye). Moreover, the brother is expected to provide *tautua* (service) for his sister. This service by the brother within his *feagaiga* or with his sister can be expressed by another Samoan saying *"E mu mata o le tuagane i lona tuafafine"* (The brother's eyes burn for his sister). That is, the brother's service includes cooking for the sister, protection, and tending to any other chores needed by the sister.[11]

Another understanding of the origin of the *feagaiga tamaitai* refers to the sacred status of the sister. Although the brother is more likely to inherit family titles and to the properties connected to these titles, his decisions are kept in check by his sister who is often referred to as 'sacred' due to the power many believe, she possesses. That is, "The rights of the sister were upheld by the belief that she had the power to curse her brother and his children, bringing sterility, illness or death upon them if her interests and demands were disregarded."[12]

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[10] Afa Falefatu Afato, "Manono: O le Motu o le Feagaiga", Unpublished BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2000, 2.

[11] See Michiko Ete-Lima, "A Theology of the Feagaiga: A Samoan Theology of God" in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 24-31.

[12] Richard P. Gilson, *Samoa 1830-1900: The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970), 34.

According to Malama Meleisea, the brother-sister relationship goes a long way to determine one's identity and place in Samoan society.[13] Pacific historian R.P. Gilson had similar views writing that Samoan families are related through a division based on the original brother-sister relationship in one's genealogy; he describes these divisions as the male (*tama-tane*) and female (*tama-fafine*).[14] This division is carried down through the generations and determines a Samoan's identity as a *tama-tane* or *tama-fafine*.[15] A perfect example of this is described by anthropologist Lowell Holmes, "Let us say that the original title-holder in a particular family had two sons and a daughter. This would mean that, for all time to come, the family would be recognized as composed of two male branches and one female."[16] In other words, the family described here would have two *tama-tane* branches and one *tama-fafine* branch. The descendants of these branches, regardless of gender, will forever be recognized as belonging to these branches. The descendants of the *tama-fafine* branch are considered the *feagaiga* of the family.

1.1.2.2 *Matai* titles - *feagaiga*

Another concept of *feagaiga* is the established relationship between *matai* titles (*feagaiga matai*) or even villages and districts. Every Samoan village has a council called *fono a le nuu*, comprised of chiefs and orators (*matai*). In this council, there is a

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[13] Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the Modern History of Western Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987), 7.

[14] Gilson, *Samoa 1830-1900: The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community*, 35.

[15] Ibid., 34-35; see also Serge Tcherkézoff, "Are the matai 'out of time'? Tradition and Democracy: Contemporary Ambiguities and Historical Transformations of the Concept of Chief" in *Governance in Samoa: Pulegai Samoa* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2000), 128.

[16] Lowell D. Holmes and Ellen Rhoads Holmes, *Samoan Village: Then and Now* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), 30.

distinct relationship between chiefs (*alii*) and their orators (*tulafale*). The *tulafale* carries out his *tautua* (service to the chief) in terms of *lauga* (Samoan oratory speech) to honour his *alii* during special occasions such as *saofai* (bestowment of new *matai* titles), where whole districts and even *matai* from outside the district (*malousu*) participate. For example, in Salua, Manono, there is a saying *"o Taupau ma Mulipola e polapuipui e Auapaau."* Auapaau's duties as the *tulafale* was to serve Taupau and Mulipola (the high chiefs).[17]

1.1.2.3 Church Parish and *Faifeau* as *Fa'afeagaiga*

The term *fa'afeagaiga* in the Samoan tradition is given to the *faifeau* or the church minister. In the Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS) context, once the ordained minister has established a relationship with any congregation or village, he is honoured and respected by members of the congregation or village as their *faifeau*.[18] In other words, a *faifeau* is someone who is ordained to look after the congregation. A significant part of this relationship is for the congregation to accept the *faifeau* as their *feagaiga*. Setefano Logovii clearly highlights that the arrival of Christianity through the London Missionary Society saw the eventual transition of the usage of *feagaiga* "from cultural concept to an ecclesial reality."[19]

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[17] For example, Auapaau acts as a mouthpiece and mediator on behalf of the two chiefs especially with regards to village matters.

[18] Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS) also known as the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) originally founded by LMS missionaries. It was traditionally called Lotu Taiti (due to the knowledge that the European missionaries came with Tahitian teachers) or Lotu LMS after the London Missionary Society. Later on it was also known as the Lotu Samoa. In 1962, when it became independent from the LMS in London, the name changed to EFKS or CCCS in English. The EFKS is one of the mainline churches and the largest denomination in Samoa. The other two mainline churches are The Samoan Methodist Church and The Roman Catholic church.

[19] Setefano Logovii, "O le Faafeagaiga- The Sacred One of God" Unpublished BTh Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2011, 6.

1.2   Tolufale *le Feagaiga*- Tolufale's appointment as *feagaiga* by Pili

1.2.1   The legend of Pili: A Tradition[20]

> *Pili was the son of Tagaloalagi and Sinaleana.[21] While Pili was in Savaii, Tava'etele one of the famous farmers from the Western side of Upolu came to Savaii looking for taro patches (tiapula). He collected a huge number of tiapula, approximately ten thousand.   However, Tava'etele was not able to bring this huge amount of taro batches to Upolu. Pili then came forward to help him. He later worked at Tava'etele's plantation to plant the whole lot from Savaii covering the size of the island which was later called the Aana district. Tava'etele, extremely satisfied with Pili's service then offered his daughter Sina to be Pili's wife as a reward.[22]*
>
> *Pili and his wife Sina had four sons; the twins, Tua and Saga were the oldest, they were named after the turtles caught by Pili from his fishing expedition. The third son was named Tuamasaga because he was born after the twins.[23] The youngest was Tolufale, named after three houses (tolufale)[24] where his mother Sina ran during her labour period. The third house she ran into was where she gave birth to him.[25]*
>
> *As soon as Pili knew that his days were limited he then divided the land of Upolu, Manono and Apolima amongst his four sons, each of them was given a portion to be his residence. These appointments are called tofiga (inheritance or appointment) and are most particular to land settlement allotment. Tua was given the 'oso to tiapula (planting stick) and his land portion was to the eastern side of Upolu, his district called Atua. Ana was given the 'tao' and 'uatogi' (spear and club) his district was called A'ana. Saga was given the 'fue and to'oto'o' (orator's fly-whisk and staff) and his settlement was the central of Upolu recently called Tuamasaga; he inhabited the western part of Upolu. Lastly, Tolufale the youngest was designated to live at Manono, and his district was known as 'Aiga i le Tai'[26] (home in the sea). He did not receive any tools or weapons but was given the title feagaiga.[27]In this capacity, he became a sacred covenant for his three brothers. He is their peace advocator in times of disagreements.*

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[20] For other versions of the Pili legend see C. Stenbel, A. Kramer and Brother Herman,eds., *Tala o le Vavau:Myths, Legends and Custom of Old Samoa* (Auckland: Pasifika Press, 2010),13-15; Mafua Sealiitu Andrew Su'a, *O le Sefa o le Vaopuanea (vaega 1): Samoan Cosmogony and Oral history* (Apia: Le Papa i Galagala, 2012), 55; Lafai Sauoaiga, *O le Mavaega i le Tai* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 2000), 44. According to some Samoan traditions, Manono's significance in Samoan history was because of Pili and his sons.

[21] Siaosi Tana, "Vaevaega faalemalo ma nuu taua i Upolu," *in O Samoa Anamua,* ed. Semisi Ma'ia'i and Fanaafi Ma'ia'i (Wellington: Witcombe and Tombs Limited, 1962), 179.

[22] Ibid.

[23] *Tua* means after or back. *Masaga* means twins. *Tuamasaga* literally means "after the twins."

[24] *Tolu* means three (number 3) and *fale* means house. Tolufale literally means 'three houses".

[25] Siaosi Tana, "Vaevaega faalemalo ma nuu taua i Upolu", 179. In other versions of the same story, Pili is also known as Tuiaana Pili, a paramount chief. See references in note 15 above.

[26] *Aiga i le Tai* includes both the Manono Island and Apolima Island.

[27] Su'a, *O le Sefa o le Vaopuanea*, 55.

Afato emphasises the importance of the items given to each son because they signified their various duties. Tua was to cultivate the land for food. Ana was appointed to become a warrior, while Saga to be an orator. As there were no daughters, Tolufale's duties included supervising and overseeing his brothers; he also acted as mediator and peacekeeper between his brothers when and if they quarrelled. Pili also advised his older sons to serve and look after their younger brother as a *feagaiga* amongst themselves.[28]

According to tradition, Tolufale's appointment as *feagaiga* was vital because, on a national level, it has made the Island of Manono (and Apolima) the *feagaiga* as well. That is, the other districts are now required to serve Manono as their *feagaiga*. Furthermore, the significance of Pili's appointment of his sons has become very important to Samoa holistically. Atua has the most fertile land for agriculture; Tuamasaga always provides an orator whenever Samoans come together; Aana is also known for their brave warriors, and Tolufale is recognized as the *feagaiga* of all other districts.

1.3   Analysis of Tolufale *le Feagaiga*

In the preceding discussion, there are some important aspects that become apparent in the appointment of Tolufale as *feagaiga*. Tolufale was only given the title of *feagaiga* along with a particular district (*Aiga i le Tai*) to be his residence, but he was not given any tools or weapons to symbolise his duties and roles like those of his other siblings. However, the title *feagaiga* was associated with its own roles and responsibilities. Tolufale's role as *feagaiga* included being a mediator and peacemaker

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[28] Afato, "Manono o le Motu o le Feagaiga", 9.

between his brothers. That is, he mediated and acted as a peacemaker to mend any disagreements which arose between his brothers. His brothers, on the other hand, understood exactly what this role meant and that is why they had deep respect for their *feagaiga*. Moreover, in this role, the *feagaiga* made Tolufale sacred. On a national level, the chiefs and orators of the other districts (Aana, Tuamasaga and Atua) continue to respect this relationship with the island of Manono because of the sacredness of the *feagaiga*. In maintaining this sacred and important relationship, other districts perform the appropriate *tautua* (service) to Manono/Apolima.

These elements of Tolufale the *feagaiga,* such as his sacredness, role of mediator and peacemaker, as well as being provided the appropriate *tautua* as the *feagaiga*, are also important aspects of the sister-brother *feagaiga*. The sister as the sacred one, is the peacemaker and mediator between her brothers and even in the *aiga* (family) as a whole. In this capacity, the brother(s) and the rest of the family are required to provide the *tautua* to the *feagaiga*. Therefore, Tolufale *le feagaiga* has incorporated some of these important aspects of the sister-brother *feagaiga*.

The sacredness, mutual respect, and the role of mouthpiece are aspects of the *feagaiga* between the *alii* (chief) and the *tulafale* (orator) which are all evident in the Tolufale *le feagaiga* as well. The *alii*, believed to be connected to the supreme god *Tagaloa* possesses some sort of supernatural powers, and this is why they are the sacred party of this *feagaiga*. Orators, conscious of the status of the chiefs provide the appropriate service, especially with regard to other *matais* of the village and the district. Therefore, the duties of the orators include maintaining peace and acting as mouthpiece of the *alii* to relay their will to the village council.

With regards to the *feagaiga* between the church and their *faifeau*, the *faifeau* is the sacred party of the covenant. The church parish provides the appropriate *tautua* to

maintain the effectiveness of the covenant. Similarly, the *faifeau* or *fa'afeagaiga* now is the mediator, peacemaker, and mouthpiece (of God) in this covenant. In light of these aspects, the Tolufale *le Feagaiga* certainly shares all of these aspects of the *fa'afeagaiga*.

1.4   Summary

The discussion in this chapter of the concept *feagaiga* reveals some important aspects that will be appropriated to the reading of the biblical text later on in the thesis. *Feagaiga* is a covenant and agreement between two parties. These two parties are unequal in terms of status. One is sacred, revered, in high esteem, almost divine and the other is secular in the sense of service within the worldly realm or sphere. Regardless of this unequal status, the term *feagaiga* still acknowledges the importance of facing each other in a peaceful and respectful manner. On one hand, there is the sacred whose role is as a mediator, peacemaker, and the mouthpiece for the *feagaiga*. On the other hand, there is the secular side that provides the *tautua* to maintain the honour of the *feagaiga*. This *tautua* includes protection, providing, and serving the *feagaiga*'s daily need.

One other aspect of *feagaiga* that is highlighted by Tolufale's appointment is his gender and role. Tolufale is a male, but his role is feminine in the sense that he was appointed as the *feagaiga* between his siblings. Traditionally, females are *feagaiga*, however, in this appointment, the gender is less significant and the role becomes the most important. The *faifeau* as *feagaiga* also highlights this same point, where the gender is not really important compared to the performance of the *feagaiga* roles.

Chapter 2

COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the concept of covenant in the Old Testament. The discussion will be in two main parts. Part one will give a general overview of the covenant concept. The Hebrew term ברית (*berit*) which is commonly translated into English as covenant will then be explored, especially its different nuances reflected in the Old Testament.[1] This exploration will hopefully provide a wider understanding of the concept of covenant. In turn, this understanding may help to further our knowledge of God's dealing with his people.

In Part Two, the focus will then be narrowed down to a specific text, Exodus 19:3-6. The historical investigation of the above text will begin with a general overview of the Book of Exodus. Special focus on the selected text and especially the meaning of covenant as it is used in the text will follow. Questions such as the purpose of the covenant, the parties involved, roles of each party, and so forth will guide this part of the exploration. Hopefully, after this investigation, a deeper understanding of *berit* or covenant, a message and theology of the text become apparent.

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[29] BDB, 186.

2.1   Covenant in the Old Testament

2.1.1   A General Overview

In the Pentateuch, there are three major covenants that are commonly known. These are the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, and the Sinai covenant (also known as the Mosaic covenant).[2] Apart from the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant and Sinai covenant are subjects of frequent discussions among scholars. However, the interest of this thesis is primarily the Sinai covenant specifically the one in Exodus 19:3-6.[3] The other two covenants may be referred to when they impact on the following discussion.

Covenant is basically defined as "an agreement enacted between two parties."[4] In such an agreement, one or both parties agree in a promise or promises under oath to carry out or refrain from certain actions laid down in the agreement. These actions or stipulations could be in the present or in the future. With regards to the relationship between Israel and their God, covenant is one of the major metaphors used to describe this relationship.[5]

In the study of the covenant concept in the Old Testament, comparison studies with neighbouring nations of the Ancient Near East (ANE) dominates because covenant

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[2] Other covenants in the Old Testament include the Adamic covenant, Davidic covenant and so forth. For a good and brief discussion of the above covenants in the Old Testament see Scott Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004)" *CBR* 3.2 (2005), 263-292, especially 273-278. Also see Teresa Stanek, "Exodus-Covenant: Historical Events as Myth about Origins" in Athaliah Brenner and Frank H. Polak (eds) *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 106-125, especially 117.

[3] The Noahic covenant and Abrahamic covenant are commonly understood as unilateral but the Sinai covenant is bilateral. Although some scholars still argue that the former covenants still expect the people or Israelites to adhere to some stipulations of these covenants. See Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments, 274.

[4] George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, "Covenant" *in ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1179. Also see R.A.K and J.R, "Covenant" in *WBD* (Massachusetts: Hendriksen Publishers, 2000), 386.

[5] D. R. Hillers, 'Covenant' in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 288.

or treaties are not peculiar to Israel. Besides a number of comparable agreements, treaties, and covenants established in the ANE, agreements in the form of international treaties appear to be the most relevant in understanding covenant (especially the Sinai covenant) in the Old Testament.[6] One such treaty which is usually compared to covenant in the Old Testament is known as the Suzerainty Treaty. This treaty is an agreement between a suzerain (stronger nation) and a vassal (a lesser nation).

Given the above discussion, the exploration will now endeavour to discuss the word *berit* which is the most common term used in the Old Testament to refer to the concept of covenant.

2.1.2   ברית (*berit*) in the Old Testament: A Brief Survey

In the Old Testament, the common word that usually means covenant or agreement, which binds individuals, groups, kings, nations, and gods is *berit*. In this regard, the following is a brief survey of these nuances and their usage within the Old Testament.

The etymology of the Hebrew word ברית (*berit*), which is used most often to express the idea of a covenant, is unclear. Scholars have suggested the word originally meant variously "shackle," "bond," or "cut," but came to refer to any form of binding agreement sworn before witnessing gods.[7] It was assumed that the gods would reward those who kept the agreement and punish those who did not.

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[6] See Mendenhall and Herion, "Covenant", 1715-1747.

[7] Ibid., 115.

In their entry in the Anchor Bible Dictionary entry 'covenant', Mendenhall and Herion allude to six nuances of the term *berit* in the Old Testament. Following is a brief description of these nuances.

2.1.2.1 ברית as a contract.

Contracts are usually written, but may also be spoken or understood. A relationship under contract is indicated by an offer, and the way that the offer is accepted. One such application of *berit* as a contract is seen in Genesis 31:44. In this text, Jacob and Laban have an agreement and this agreement is better understood as a contract.

2.1.2.2 ברית as an alliance.

In this sense, *berit* could also be referred to as an alliance of friendship. In such cases, alliance is understood as a formal agreement or treaty between two or more nations to unite for specific purposes.[8] Moreover, it is also a merging of efforts or interests by persons, families, states, or organisations. An example of this nuance of *berit* is the alliance between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18:3.

2.1.2.3 ברית as a treaty.[9]

This use can be seen as a treaty between kings, as in the case with Solomon and Hiram of Tyre in 1 Kings 5, or with Ahab and Benhadad of Syria in 1 Kings 20:34. In such treaties, there exist two main types. *(1) a treaty of equals in which the two partners*

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[8] G. E. Mendenhall, 'Covenant' *in New Bible Dictionary 3rd ed.* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 234.

[9] Ibid.

are called the 'brothers'(2) a treaty of unequal parties.[10] This latter treaty is commonly known in the ANE as a suzerain-vassal treaty. This treaty is mainly between a great king (conqueror) and a minor king.[11]

2.1.2.4 ברית **as a peace pact**[12]

This nuance of *berit* is not as common as the others. However, it describes the peace pact made by Abraham with a whole tribe of Amorites in Genesis 14:13.

2.1.2.5 ברית **as a bond of marriage.**

Like establishing a peace pact between parties, *berit* as a bond of marriage, compared to the uses above, and is not as common. Still, it describes a bond of marriage like the one between Jezebel and Ahab. Other examples are found in Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14.

2.1.2.6 ברית **as covenant (between God and Israel)**

This last nuance is the most common use and understanding of *berit* in the Old Testament. Since *berit* is a term so rich that it captures the heart of Israel's religious beliefs; that is, the people are bound to an unbreakable covenant union with their God. Furthermore, God has made known his love and his mercy to them. He has given them commandments to guide their daily life and as a result, the people owe him worship, fidelity, and obedience. This special relationship is embodied in the covenant-bond between God and Israel.

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] R.A.K and J.R, "Covenant", 386.

2.2   Exegetical Study of Exodus 19:3-6

2.2.1   Introduction

The Book of Exodus is generally understood mainly in terms of its initial story of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. However, it could also be seen as a climax of the book, Israel's entry into service to a new lord, Yahweh, as a cultic community centred on the wilderness tabernacle (Exodus 19-40). Thus, Exodus is not just a story of leaving the hard life in Egypt. Instead, it is basically a journey from painful service to Pharaoh to life-giving service to Yahweh.

This service towards God is maintained through the covenant. In other words, according to this part of the exodus story (Exodus 19-40), fulfilling of the covenant should also be reflected in the cultic life of the people.

Given the above, the interest primarily lies on the meaning of covenant in Exodus 19:3-6, and what it means to be a priestly nation. The following exegetical study will hopefully further enlighten the above meanings.

2.2.2   Exodus 19:3-6: An Exegesis

2.2.2.1   Dating and Background

Exodus 19 narrates the arrival of the Israelites at Mount Sinai. It is this Sinai context that all events take place in the rest of the Book of Exodus. The consensus of scholars today accepts the post exilic period as the most probable date of Exo. 19: 3-6. This is supported by three main arguments. These are, "(i) the vocabulary is close to the Deuteronomic or Deuteronomistic style in more than one place, but the differences indicate rather a late date; (2) some expressions also recall the priestly texts; (3) finally, the subjects dealt with are found in some late prophetic texts, especially second and

third Isaiah."[13]   Therefore, if Exodus 19:3-6 takes its inspiration from these three

currents it is simpler to suppose that it comes after them. Given these widely accepted

arguments, we could say that "Exo. 19:3-6 is not exactly a Deuteronomic text. It also

bears traces of late priestly elements that are found, for instance, in the Law of Holiness

and it has undergone the influence of post-exilic prophetic activity."[14] In a similar view,

Terence E. Fretheim states, "Exodus 19 is a highly complex chapter, almost certainly a

composite, to which all the major pentateuchal sources have made a contribution."[15]

If we accept the above line of argument about the dating of Exodus 19:3-16 then

the covenant and the command to be a priestly nation most probably are directed to the

returning exiles or the *golah* community and the rebuilding of the post-exilic

community.[16] It is this historical context that the following exegesis will follow.

2.2.2.2   Exegesis

Exodus 19:3
*Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus
you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites:*[17]

In this verse, the essence of the covenant idea is clearly expressed. God has now

identified Israel as his chosen people. Israel now enters into a special and unique

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[13] Jean-Louis Ska, "Exodus 19:3-6 and the Identity of Post-exilic Israel" in *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 142. The traditional view about Exodus 19:3-9 is that it belongs to the J source. In this regard, the date of the text is commonly assumed to be during the monarchical times. Also, other commentators attributed this text to the Deuteronomic source (D).

[14] Ibid., 143.

[15] Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 208.

[16] Ska, "Exodus 19:3-6 and the Identity of Post-exilic Israel", 164.

[17] All the biblical texts in this part are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

relationship with God but this bond imposes obligations and responsibilities. There are conditions that have been used in order to strengthen this covenant.[18]

Exodus 19:4

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

God reminds the Israelites of how he dealt with the Egyptians and how he was able to protect and nurtured them throughout their journey to his dwelling place, God's mountain. The recalling of how God punished the Egyptians and liberate his people should be a living memory and reminder to the Israelites of how powerful their God is. This reminder now serves as an introduction to the demand that God is about to make on Israel. A demand embodied by the covenant and God's will for Israel to become a holy people.

The image of God as mother eagle recalls Deut. 32:10-12.

> ***10*** *He sustained him in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste; he shielded him, cared for him, guarded him as the apple of his eye.**11** As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions,**12** the LORD alone guided him; no foreign god was with him.*

The image of a caring parent follows the inevitable fact that it is God alone that Israel would find solace from years of slavery in Egypt. It is a wonderful and gracious image of God "as a mother who cares for her young during that time when they are especially vulnerable."[19] The image also reflects "growth and maturation, a time of

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[18] Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: the traditional Hebrew text with JPS translation/ Commentary* 1[st]ed (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 103

[19] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 210.

testing, as the mother eagle seeks to help her young learn to fly for themselves."[20]   In this verse, God reaffirms to the Israelites his role not only in their liberation, but in their nurturing and protection. In other words, the eagle which is Yahweh is "a nurturing, protective agent who carries, feeds and protects."[21] Furthermore, this symbolic image of God highlights his control and his primary concern for the safety of the Israelites. [22] Given the historical context above, the *golah* community is reminded of God's miraculous deeds in the past and how secure and safe God's protection was. In this light, they now need to stay steadfast and faithful to God in order to enjoy the same experience.

Exodus 19:5

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,

The covenant (*berit*) concept has now been introduced to the people. Although this covenant is introduced in the Sinai context, some scholars argue that this covenant also alludes to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17.[23] In this regard, the covenant seems to refer not only to the laws in the following chapters of Exodus which include the Decalogue in chapter 20, but perhaps more than that. The fact that this covenant

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Leander E. Keck, Thomas G. Long and David L. Petersen (eds), *The Book of Exodus NIB* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 834.

[22] Sarna, *Exodus,* 101- 102.

[23] For scholars who hold this view see footnote 66 of Jean-Louis Ska, "Exodus 19:3-6 and the Identity of Post-exilic Israel", 154.

shares similar traits with Leviticus 26, which is a H text, perhaps reaffirms another aspect which is different from keeping the laws.[24] We will discuss this further below.

The conditional conjunction 'if' which begins the promise clearly indicates a significant clause of the promise. Israel must fulfil the following conditions: *"obey my voice and keep my covenant"*. Absolute obedience is a significant condition of the covenant. Furthermore, Yahweh expresses the special status of the people of Israel in terms of election, the special choice of Israel among the whole population of the world.

The universal sovereignty of God is very significant in late biblical writings, especially during the post-exilic period.[25] The affirmation of God's ownership of the whole earth, *the whole earth is mine*, implies his sovereignty over all the people of the earth. It is a hopeful message for the returning exiles that are still under foreign imperial power.[26] That is, even though they are under foreign rule, everyone and everything, including their imperial overlords, are under God's control.

Exodus 19:6

but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

This verse attracts a lot of interest since it resembles priestly language but it is acknowledged as a Deuteronomic text. However, as already mentioned above, the current consensus accepts the text as a post priestly text which is more a crossroad of

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[24] H stands for Holiness texts which are commonly known to be a later development of the priestly tradition (P). For a discussion of the similarity of Leviticus 26 and Exodus 19:5 see Ska, "Exodus 19:3-6 and the Identity of Post-exilic Israel", 154.

[25] This is evident in P and H writings as well as late prophetic books such as Second and Third Isaiah.

[26] Cf Leviticus 25:23. Here God confirms that the land is his, and everyone are just temporary residents living on it.

both the Deteuronomic and priestly traditions. And this is an indicator of the historical context of the text which is during the post exilic period.

The notion of being a *priestly kingdom and a holy nation* highlights the emphasis of the Holiness Code. In H texts, holiness now includes the whole congregation as well as the whole land (Leviticus 19:2; 20:7 etc). The earlier P materials only reiterate the holiness of the priests and the sanctuary.[27] Furthermore, Leviticus texts "actually mention election as the foundation of the requirements of holiness: Lev 20:26; 22:33; 11:45.[28]

So given this close relationship with H, the covenant proposed by Yahweh seems to have a twofold condition. On one hand, the laws must be strictly adhered. On the other hand, the covenant has a ritual and cultic obligation. In that regard, the people have to be holy since this is one of God's stipulations in maintaining the effectiveness of the covenant. That is, rituals and cultic obligations must also be strictly carried out in order for the people to be holy. Moreover, to maintain their holiness, God now expects his people to be a priestly kingdom.

Apart from many opinions regarding the interpretation of the phrase *kingdom of priests*, Ska convincingly proposed that the term basically means "kingdom ruled by priests."[29] Furthermore, based on this understanding of a kingdom ruled by priests, Ska, in my opinion is correct in arguing that this phrase is best understood in light of the second temple period.[30] This is during the Persian period where Israel is not a sovereign nation. Therefore, Israel's identity could only be derived "from its religious

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[27] Ska, "Exodus 19:3-6 and the Identity of Post-exilic Israel", 156.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ska, "Exodus 19:3-6 and the Identity of Post-exilic Israel", 149.

[30] Ibid.

and cultic institutions, as suggested especially by the law of Holiness."[31] In Durham's words, "Israel was supposed to be a kingdom run not by politicians depending upon strength and responsibility but by priest depending on faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling nation."[32] Israel becomes a nation to be set apart from all other nations highlights the purpose of being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people. The Israelites are to be the mediators of divine grace by serving as God's priests to the nation.[33]

2.3 Summary

Covenant in the Old Testament is a wide and complex concept. This is seen in its several nuances discussed above. Even in our limited scope where we explored only the Sinai covenant, it still is a difficult task. However, some conclusions could still be drawn from our preceding exploration. Firstly, the term ברית (*berit*) is the most common word that describes covenant. This word also has different nuances and it reflects the richness of its meanings. With regards to the covenant between God and Israel, most nuances of *berit* discussed above could be seen in certain degrees in God's covenant with his people. However, the suzerainty treaty seems to be more relevant in explaining the covenant between God and his people. The agreement is between unequal parties and the two parties have different obligations to fulfil in order to maintain the covenant, and also to be effective.

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[31] Ibid.

[32] John I. Durham, *Exodus WBC vol 3* (Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 263.

[33] Phillip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Illinois: Good News Publisher, 2005), 499.

The historical investigation of Exodus 19:3-6 raises significant points that further illuminate the understanding of covenant. Given the post exilic context of the text, the covenant requires the people to fulfil a twofold condition. The people must maintain obedience to the law and also stay faithful in their ritual and cultic obligations. This twofold obligation stems from the intertwining of the Deuteronomic and priestly (H) tradition in the latter part of Israel's history. In other words, the proposed historical context helps in understanding the covenant and God's command for the people to become a kingdom of priests.

Chapter 3

A SAMOAN CONTEXTUAL READING OF EXODUS 19:3-6

Introduction

The discussion of this chapter is threefold. It will begin with a comparative study of Covenant in the Old Testament and *Feagaiga* in the Samoan context. Secondly, an analysis of the comparative study will follow. Finally, the outcome of the above comparison and analysis will form the basis of a Samoan contextual reading of Exodus 19:3-6. In other words, the comparison and analysis of the findings in Chapters 1 and 2 form the core of this chapter.

The comparative study will look at similarities and differences of the two contexts. In the comparison it will look at the parties involved, roles of each party, meaning and purpose of the covenant. An analysis of these differences and similarities will follow. The final part is an attempt to re-read the biblical text, Exodus 19:3-6, from the Samoan context using the understanding of the *feagaiga* concept discussed in Chapter 1 and the term *berit* in Chapter 2. It is one of the main assumptions of the thesis that a Samoan reading and understanding of a biblical text will help a Samoan reader to gain a meaningful understanding of the bible. For a specific aim, the Samoan reading of Exodus 19:3-6 in light of the *feagaiga* will enhance the understanding of the covenant between God and Israel. Further and hopefully the Samoan reader will achieve a deeper understanding of his or her own covenantal relationship with God.

3.1 Comparative Study: The Sinai covenant and *Feagaiga*

3.1.1   Parties Involved

The general definition of covenant implies that two or more people are involved in an agreement or covenant.[1]   In the survey of the Old Testament, covenant or the Hebrew word *berit* represents a covenant or agreement between individuals, an individual and a group of people, and between nations. With regards to God and his people, it reflects a covenant between an individual and a group of people or a nation.

The Samoan context also gives a similar scenario. A *feagaiga* between parties may involve an individual and another individual, an individual and a group of people (for example, an extended family, a village, or a parish). It may also happen between a group of people and another group (for example, between two villages, a group of *matais* (chiefs)). These scenarios are reflected in *feagaiga tamaitai, feagaiga matai,* or Tolufale *feagaiga*.[2] It is also important to note here that *feagaiga* may also refer to a party involved in the agreement (for example, to a sister, a female, an orator, or a church minister).

The covenant between God and Israel is an example of unequal partners in an agreement. The Samoan *feagaiga* on the other hand is commonly seen as equal partners; their roles are different but both parties need each other in order to maintain the effectiveness of the *feagaiga* relationship. Unlike the Sinai covenant, it is God's sovereign prerogative that maintains the covenant. Although one would argue that the (Sinai) covenant is a bilateral one where the part of the people is also significant in maintaining the covenantal relationship.

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[1] Mendenhall and Herion, "Covenant", 1179. Also see R.A.K and J.R, "Covenant", 386.

3.1.2   Roles

As already mentioned above, a party in a Samaon *feagaiga* can also be called a *feagaiga.* In cases such as this, the *feagaiga* has specific roles compared to the other party or parties. In the *feagaiga tamaitai*, especially between a sister and brother, the sister represents the sacred party while the brother the secular party. This arrangement is also seen in the appointment of Tolufale as *feagaiga*. The role of the *feagaiga* here is specific. The *feagaiga* acts as a mediator, *pae and auli* or peacemaker, and source of blessings and/or curses. The secular parties (brothers) are to serve and protect the *feagaiga*. The parties involved, both the sacred and secular parties, must show mutual respect between them. The *feagaiga* between the church minister and the parish members also involves the roles as those between the sister and brother.

The covenant between God and Israel is mostly understood in light of a suzerainty treaty. That is, between a suzerain (a stronger side) and a vassal (weak side).[3] In this case, the role of God differs greatly from that of Israel. God is the stronger party so he dictates all the conditions of the covenant. Israel's role is best summarised in the phrase "listen and obey". Israel's role is also defined in terms such as faithfulness and commitment. In light of the exegetical work of Exodus 19:3-6, Israel's role also involves performing of worship and cultic obligations. God on the other hand, is to provide protection and security, and also blessings and in unfortunate circumstances, curses upon the people.

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[2] See discussion in Chapter 1, 6-10.

[3] See Mendenhall and Herion, "Covenant", 1716-1727.

3.1.3   Purpose and Meaning

In the Samoan context, *feagaiga* as a person, provides a balance in a family and community, in terms of decision making, source of peace *i.e* reaffirming family unity. That is, the *feagaiga*, usually a female, makes sure the environment amongst siblings remains peaceful and enjoyable. Selection of a successor to a *matai* title, for example, usually is a time of major disagreements between family members. The main reason is that most members want to be the successor. It is in times like this that the *feagaiga*'s role becomes very important. She is expected to be the peacemaker and mediator. She must not take sides but does her best to maintain the respect between family members. If she does her role well all the family members will respect what she says. This respect would be reaffirmed in the *tautua* or service rendered by the siblings and family members towards the *feagaiga*. The purpose and meaning of *feagaiga* perhaps is played out clearly in her roles and responsibilities. Similar expectations are on the *feagaiga* in the village council and national level. They are mouthpieces for peace and security.

The covenant between God and Israel serves several purposes. It represents the special place Israel has in God's plan. The covenant and all its stipulations set out by God are part of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. The people are expected to honour these stipulations in order to maintain the covenant. Maintaining the covenant means blessings and prosperity for the people, disobedience and dishonouring the covenant also bring unfavourable consequences.

3.1.4   Analysis: Similarities and Differences

It is clear from the preceding section that the two contexts are not identical. However, *Feagaiga* and (Sinai) Covenant do share some similarities. The relationship

between the sacred and secular exists in both contexts. Both covenants expect each party to honour their part and roles in order to maintain the good relationship and blessings offered through the covenant. The opposite attracts unfavourable consequences in both contexts.

The purpose and meaning of both covenants are similar as well. They both prioritise a peaceful and prosperous relationship. Both parties must perform their roles to sustain the good relationship within the covenant, especially the sacred one. The sacred party must emphasise their role as peacekeeper and mediator in order to maintain the covenant especially in cases where the secular side failed to honour its part of the covenant through disobedience and faithlessness.

Another important aspect of this covenantal relationship is service or *tautua*. This part is done by the secular party in both contexts. However, the performance of this service or *tautua* differs in the two contexts. The *tautua* or service in the Sinai covenant depends on the obedience to the law together with the faithful fulfilment of all obligations pertaining to the cult. The *feagaiga* on the other hand, does not have written laws on how to perform their *tautua*; for instance, the Tolufale *feagaiga* acts according to traditions and culture. When the whole of Samoa congregates, orators and high chiefs acknowledge the *feagaiga* status of Manono through their orators and chiefs.

In the *feagaiga* tradition, the sister has the right to take and demand material goods from her siblings. Moreover, she has the same right to *matai* titles of the family like her brothers do. However, her brothers have less or no power to reject any requests of the *feagaiga*. Since failure to give the appropriate *tautua* through providing for the *feagaiga* may end in curses upon them and their children.[4]

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[4] See the discussion above on Chapter 1, 7.

One significant difference between the two contexts is the ability of the *feagaiga* to face her brothers when performing her role as peacemaker and mediator. Unlike the sacred in the Sinai covenant where no one can see him face to face and live. But *feagai* or facing each other physically is one effective way in the Samoan culture to solve and ease tensions between people. For example, the *feagaiga matai* strongly advocates face to face dialogue to deal with issues within the local and national context, known as soalaupule.

3.2   A Samoan contextual reading of Exodus 19: 3- 6

The exegesis in Chapter 2 above provides us with an interpretation of Exodus 19:3-6. The selected text informs us about God's decision to elect Israel as his chosen people. This election as special people also comes with a condition. Israel has to obey and listen to God through keeping the law. Furthermore, there is also another obligation that Israel must fulfil in order to fully acknowledge their covenantal relationship with God. This is accepting God's command for Israel to be a kingdom of priests and become a holy nation. The exegetical investigation above shows that this command is similar to H texts in Leviticus. Therefore, it is most probable that Exodus 19:6 is influenced by H. In accepting this line of thought, the historical context of this Exodus text points to the post exilic period. Taking this as a point of departure for interpretation, the command "to become a priestly kingdom and a holy nation," basically adds another stipulation for the *golah* community to keep, in order to live as God's covenantal people or God's 'treasured possession.' In other words, Israel in addition to keeping the Deuteronomic law must also perform all their priestly cultic obligations.

In light of the above discussion regarding *feagaiga*, together with the analysis of the differences and similarities in Chapter 2, a Samoan contextual reading of Exodus 19:3-6 is therefore possible.

For the *golah* community, the command to obey God's voice and keep his covenant is a call to re-examine their relationship with God after the crisis of exile. Obeying and keeping (v.3) are two commands that imply the keeping of the Deuteronomic law. Furthermore, the part where God commands them to become a holy nation (v.6) implies a priestly perspective (H), regarding the importance of performing cultic obligations in re-creating the post exilic community.

The first aspect that warrants a *feagaiga* reading of Exodus 19:3-6 is the fact that covenant (*berit*) in verse 5 is translated in the Samoan Bible as *feagaiga*. So for a Samoan reader, understanding this verse should start from his or her knowledge of *feagaiga*. *Feagaiga* is both the person and the agreement between two or more parties. From a *feagaiga* perspective, the command "to obey and listen and keep the *feagaiga*," is a call to act on the already known traditions about the *feagaiga* between a sister and brother, a church minister and a parish, or an orator chief (*tulafale*) to a high chief (*alii*). In these *feagaiga*, there are three important details that are significant in understanding the command and covenant in the selected text. These are *tautua* (service), *feagai* (face to face), and *pae ma le auli* (roles of *feagaiga* such as mediator and peacemaker).

The command in Exodus 19:3-6 could be understood in light of the above three aspects of *feagaiga*, as a call to *tautua*. In this regard, *tautua* means protecting and serving. For a Samoan, it is his or her duty to serve the sacred, whether it is God or the *faifeau*. It is his or her duty to protect things that are holy, things that relate to the church. These include the *fa'afeagaiga*, church properties, the name of the church and

so forth. *Tautua* in the Samoan sense requires commitment and loyalty, faithfulness and honesty. It also includes sacrifices and offering.

Secondly, a Samoan understands the passage in terms of *feagai*. *Feagai* (meeting face to face) also means in direct dialogue, no mystery or secrets of what must be done implies respect (*fa'aaloalo*) and truthfulness. That is, everything must be shared in the open. It also implies courage to face ones problems without hiding and backstabbing.

Finally, a Samoan understands the passage in terms of *pae ma le auli* (mediation and peacemaker) ensure peace, harmony and unity. In other words, keeping the covenant means keeping the peace. All problems need to be ironed out in order to maintain peace and prosperity within the community.

So to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, for a Samoan reader, all of the above obligations must be fulfilled. In other words, to keep the *feagaiga* intact, a person or people must fulfil and perform his or her *tautua* to God, to the church, to the *faifeau*, to one another with utmost respect, faithfulness, honesty, and humility. Also, he or she must be respectful (*fa'aaloalo*), courageous to face problems in the open. To be a holy nation, the people must be willing to promote peace and prosperity.

Conclusion

This work set out to re-read Exodus 19:3-6 from a Samoan context in light of the *feagaiga* concept. In using the Samoan understanding of *feagaiga* and important aspects of the concept such as *tautua* (service), *feagai* (meeting face to face), and *pae ma le auli* (roles such as mediation and peacekeeper) we were able to enrich our understanding of God's covenant with his people Israel. The meaning and keeping of the covenant through obedience to the Deuteronomic law has now been enriched from a Samoan perspective such as *tautua.* That is, *tautua* not only incorporates obedience, but it also includes service and protection. The *feagai* aspect also encourages mutual respect and trustworthiness between parties of a *feagaiga*. The role of *pae ma le auli* maintains cooperation and peace within both parties of a covenant.

Given these additional aspects from a Samoan perspective, covenant or *berit* is now seen in a different light especially from a Samoan reader. Moreover, a Samoan understanding of being holy also incorporates the aforementioned in their understanding. Besides accepting God's law as taught by the bible as a relevant aspect of being holy, a Samoan also acknowledges his or her *tautua*, *fa'aaloalo*, and role as peacemaker (*pae ma le auli*) as significant and necessary aspects of their quest to become holy and part of God's holy nation.

In assigning an historical context for Exodus 19:3-6 as post exilic, it provided a deeper understanding and interpretation of the text. That is, the combination of several traditions in the selected text shares similarities with the contextual reading. Although there is a vast difference between the biblical context and our Samoan context, in terms of time and culture, the result of this research reaffirms the significance of our Samoan culture and traditions. In other words, the appropriation of Samoan concepts to biblical

interpretation is important in enriching the understanding of biblical texts for Samoan readers.

With regards to covenant and *berit*, in my opinion, the term *feagaiga* truly reflects their meaning and purpose. But I also believe it offers much more as clearly seen in the above Samoan reading of Exodus 19:3-6.

Glossary

Aiga i le Tai	family in the sea
alii	chief
fa'afeagaiga	church minister
fa'aaloalo	respect
faifeau	pastor
feagai	people on opposite sides facing each other, and also those who live together peacefully and in harmony
feagaiga	covenant
feagaiga o matai	chief covenant
feagaiga tamaitai	female covenant / sister covenant
fono a le nuu	village council
lauga	oratory speech
malousu	village guests
matai	chief
oso to tiapula	planting stick
pae ma le auli	mediator / peacemaker
saofai	bestowment of new chief title
tama-fafine	descendents of the sister in the original brother-sister relationship of a family's genealogy

tamaitai	woman / lady
tama-tane	descendents of the brother in the original brother-sister relationship of a family's genealogy
tao ma le uatogi	spear and club
tautua	service
tiapula	taro patches
fue ma le to'oto'o	orators fly whisk and staff
tuafafafine	sister
tuagane	brother
tulafale	orator
tofiga	inheritance or appointment

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