

**REVISITING A THEOLOGY OF
THE *FEAGAIGA* AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
SAMOAN CONTEXT**

A Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of Malua Theological College

In Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Theology

by

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July 2021

ABSTRACT

When the missionaries arrived in Samoa in 1830, the *feagaiga* or covenant was established between Malietoa and John Williams. Such a covenant, though has been altered, still exists today between parishioners and their church minister. However, the cultural roots of the *feagaiga* stem from the brother and sister relationship. Violation of this *feagaiga* carries immense cultural and theological repercussions. This thesis revisits the concept of *feagaiga*, and its various theological implications that are crucial within the Samoan context. Furthermore, it focuses at highlighting the consequences of breaking the *feagaiga*, and the theological implications of upholding it.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis 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: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my late mother Lauiloa Faitala Esau who passed away five years ago. To my wife Susie my pillar and support, thank you for always being there in times of need. To my children; my four boys and two angelic sisters, thank you for putting up with me especially with the long hours of study. You have all been a blessing to me and my life, you have been my encouragement despite my short temper. The least I can do is dedicate this study to all! God bless you all!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis may state my name as the author, but the entire work was the culmination of a concerted effort and support by many individuals and people who truly deserve to be acknowledged. Finding the words to express my gratitude and appreciation has been rather difficult, as I do not think such words in any way, truly represent the feelings of indebtedness to all who have made this thesis possible.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa, who gave me, and my family the opportunity to study at the Malua Theological College for four years. Thank you for continuing to uphold us in your prayers, and the financial support over the last four years. A word of thanks for the *tapuaiga* of our *matua fa'a-le-Agaga*: Rev. Motusaga.Lesa and Tanya Lesa (CCCS *Auala,Savaii*), Rev. Ali.Alapati & Fogalele (CCCS, *Lelepa*), Rev. Lafolafo. & Luisa.Lemoe(CCCS, *Sasaai*), Rev. Elder Amuia & Tiresa Seuala, all Ministers and their *Faletuas* of the *Pulega Itu Asau* . We are forever grateful for your kind words of wisdom and encouragement, your never-ending prayers, and for the numerous times you have reached out to help us financially. *Faafetai tele le alofa, faafetai le agalelei!!*

This thesis owes a lot of its formulation in terms of compilation, re-arrangement of thoughts and editing, and most importantly, the constructive criticism and practical understanding to members of the Theology Department. *Faafetai tele* to the Principal Rev Dr Vaitusi Nofoaiga and the Staff of MTC , who contributed so much during our thesis seminars and the on-going suggestions and critique of this project, right up to the final stages. Your valuable recommendations, thoughts and understanding, made it a lot easier to continue through the writing process. A special word of gratitude is reserved,

and an endless *faafetai tele* to my Supervisor, Susuga Esera.Esera. This thesis is the product of your expertise and endless hours of dedication. *Faafetai* for the manner in which you critiqued and re-arranged my wondering-and-sometimes-lost thoughts, as well as your commitment and dedication shown through your theological insights and perspectives on the thesis topic. It has been a privilege working with you, and learning from you. *Faafetai, Faafetai lava!!!*

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous work and support given by the Library staff. We owe so much of this project to Tina Lalokava Lima, Maria.Samuelu and Fetu To'alima. Thanks for all that you have done; granting us the privilege of library "school hours," faster and easier access to books and journals, and putting up with our frustrations at times. Your willingness to help as "true servants" will be forever remembered!!!

Our stay in Malua was made a whole lot easier and enjoyable, through the moral and spiritual support of our *Au Aiga* (Stowers Family). *Faafetai tele Susuga Clarke* and Fofogaolevai Stowers(Faiaoga)A'oao and Faletuas.

Also a big *faafetai* to my proof reader, Dr Salā Siaosi Carter for your help even that you work as a Lecturer in Australia but you put all your good effort to my task.

Our families and friends deserve our sincere words of *faafetai*, for continuing to hold us in your prayers. To our mothers, Aifai Lusila.Tavita, Fitu Pula Mafiti,Laloifi.Tavita and Leleaga Eric Godinet, we would not have survived without your words of wisdom, the ever-present spirit of encouragement, and for that *alofa fa'a-tinā*. You have continued to nurture us for better future. To my lovely father Matamea Esau.Sakaio and my unforgettable Mom Lauiloa Faitala.Esau *faafetai tele* having that trust and faith in us, to fulfill your dream even though you passed away. To our brothers and sisters and their children, this work was made even easier knowing you were always

there for us, and have sacrificed so much for our academic journey, in Malua. Without your prayers and moral support, we would not have made it this far.

The words that I have expressed to thank the endless help and genuine support granted by so many people towards the completion of this thesis, would not be complete, without acknowledging the most important people in my life, who have shared so much in our journey of faith; my wife Susiefaafetainancy and my kids. This thesis truly belongs to you. You were a part of it, right from the moment we decided to undergo this faith journey, in a place far away from our families and loved ones. I have faltered and lapsed on many occasions, but you pulled me up, reminding me of our calling by God. I am forever grateful to you, for sharing in this journey, as we walked through the good, and the not-so-good times, and sharing the laughter and the joy of being servants of God. For our four years in Malua, and particularly the times I have struggled through the writing process, you have shown me the true meaning of patience and endurance, and for that I am forever grateful. May the glory be all to God, now, and forever!!!!

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List of Abbreviations

CCCS	-	Congregational Christian Church in Samoa
NT	-	New Testament
OT	-	Old Testament

Introduction

In my upbringing within a strict Samoan household, it instilled the importance of the relationship between a brother and sister - known as '*vā-feāloāloa'i a le tuagane ma lona tuafafine*' (relational space between brother and sister). This value of relationship informs and guides how a brother must honour and respect his sister in everyday life, especially in cultural and family traditions. This relationship can be explained in the Samoan context as '*feagaiga*'. The *feagaiga* therefore can be said to be the sacred relationship between the brother and sister, where the brother honors and respects his sister in all aspects of the *faa*-Samoa (Samoan way of life).

Another context in which the term *feagaiga* is notably used today is the relationship between a parish (from hereinafter referred to as *aulotu*) and their church minister or pastor (from hereinafter referred to as *faiife'au*). Since the arrival of Christianity in 1830, the *faiifeau* was bestowed the title *faafeagaiga*. Today, with the many contextual changes and challenges, the brother-sister, as well as the *faiifeau-aulotu feagaiga* relationships perhaps diminished in importance and value. In many cases, we have witnessed this *vā fealoa'i* or relationship between sisters and brothers, as well as *faiifeau* and *aulotu* become broken due to many reasons and difficulties. Not to mention the taxing of the clergy. This has caused uproar in both public and theological opinion, on the essence of the *feagaiga*. These reasons and many more, are the impetus behind this study.

At first glimpse, in the *faiifeau-aulotu* relationship, the dilemma where the *feagaiga* is breached can be viewed as dishonouring God; which is also associated to being cursed. Such a perception is conventional and needs to be revisited and revitalised through a cultural and theological exploration of the *feagaiga*. In other words, re-

visiting the theology of the *feagaiga* is to reiterate the importance of the *feagaiga* within the Samoan context, let alone the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa.

This thesis aims to explore the cultural value of the *feagaiga*, as well as its theological essence in relation to the *fai'feau*. Emphasis will be put upon the understanding of breaching the *feagaiga*, and how it is normally associated to ‘curse and blessing’ from a Christian perspective. In such an undertaking, one could ask, what is the theological essence of the *feagaiga*? What does the *feagaiga* mean for a Samoan Christian? How is the Christian perception of curse and blessing associated to the breaching of the *feagaiga*? These questions are central to this research, and will be used as guide to this thesis.

Methodology: The *Feagaiga* Model

Since this project revolves around a contextual issue, as well as the relationship between people, this thesis will adopt the Anthropological model of contextual theology as advocated by Stephen Bevans (2002). According to Bevans this model is understood in two senses. The first is where the cultural identity of the Christian is considered. Secondly, human experience and human person forms the criteria for theological truth for this model; not scriptural expression or any traditional formula (2002, 55). This means that the starting point for doing contextual theology in this model is human experience. Vital within this model is the fact that culture sets the foundation for theological expression.

Bevans has outlined several models in his approach towards illuminating the message of the gospel in one’s context.¹ However, for purposes of this project, the

¹ There are six models of contextual theology as proposed by Stephen Bevans (2002), including Translational, Anthropological, Praxis, Synthetic, Transcendental and Countercultural models.

anthropological model will be utilized, adopting its relevance and resonance for highlighting the aims and focus of this thesis. According to Bevans:

The primary concern of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith. The important thing in this model is that Christianity is about the human person and her or his fulfilment (2002, 54).

The Anthropological model as applied by many scholars including Stephen Bevan's has the understanding that God is manifested in any culture; therefore it adopts the concepts of *inculturation*, *indigenisation* and the *contextualisation*² of the Bible. Hence, the primary concern for this model is the cultural identity of the Christian.

Preservation of cultural identity as Bevans alludes to is important in the *feagaiga* relationship, since such relationship is borne out of the Samoan culture. The model focuses on the identity of Christians within a particular context who seeks to develop their own unique way of articulating their faith. A Christian tends to focus on the use of his or her cultural experience to promote one's Christian identity.

From the above explanation of the Anthropological model by Bevans, I wish to employ the concept '*feagaiga*' in substitute of the term 'anthropological'. The purpose for this change in terms is founded on the grounds that the *feagaiga* concept is more meaningful to me as a Samoan. Inclined towards Bevans' description, the *feagaiga* concept clearly represents the identity of a Samoan Christian. A meeting point between the Gospel and my Samoan culture. An understanding that echoes within Ama'amalele Tofaeono's explanation of culture, as being

the spiritual...character of the community, including the thinking process or the philosophy and psychology of a certain community. It includes their visions, dreams, anticipations, fears[,] and hopes, or the way they conceive and face the ups and downs of life. This means that [the] spiritual and social behaviours of the community are intimately interwoven to foster a specific ethos and a way of life of a society (2000, 28).

² Adapting theology to be relevant to a particular context (Olagunju 2012, 40).

Similarly, Faitala Talapusi alludes to the future of theology in the Pacific, as to “rediscover some of its lost, forgotten or even destroyed tenets of its unique culture, to formulate a faithful response to the unchangeable God that many people acknowledge” (1995, 40).

The *Feagaiga* model therefore seeks to centralize the experience of the Samoan community, in regards to the *feagaiga* concept, as way to understand the relationship between God and the Samoan people. It is the claim of the *feagaiga* model, that realizing the importance of the *feagaiga*, will contribute to our relationship with God, and subsequently contribute to our own human relationships within the Samoan society. The aim here is not to impose on Bevans’ Anthropological model, nor to disregard its importance, but rather to reel the contextual model ‘closer to home’ in terms of interpretation and understanding.

Thesis Outline/Structure

There are three Chapters in this thesis. Chapter One will explain the Samoan cultural and theological understanding of Feagaiga. The feagaiga is fundamental in the relationship between the brother and sister, as well as the faifeau and aulotu. The feagaiga therefore contains both cultural and theological associations. The aim of this chapter is to research and analyse various cultural and theological implications of the feagaiga. Chapter Two will talk about the Christian understanding of Covenants and its relation to curses and blessings, both within Old Testament and theological thought. Finally, Chapter three will provide an analysis of the feagaiga. This final chapter will utilize knowledge and information gained from previous chapters.

Chapter 1

Feagaiga: The Samoan Covenant

Introduction

This chapter will deal mainly with the Samoan cultural understanding of the *feagaiga*. It is divided into four sections. The first section will elaborate the essence of the *feagaiga* within the Samoan context. The second section talks about the brother-sister *feagaiga*. The third section will delve into the *faiifeau*-village *feagaiga*; concluding with the fourth section that discusses the breach of *feagaiga*.

1.1 *Feagaiga* in the Samoan Context

The word *feagaiga* in the Samoan language literally means “covenant³”, and is defined by missionary George Pratt as “an established relationship between different parties” (1911, 139). In academic discourse, *feagaiga* as a concept has exhaustively been used by many in their theological writings.⁴

Covenant in its most basic meaning is an agreement between two persons or parties. In the Samoan culture, *feagaiga* is mainly used in two contexts; the brother-sister and the *faiifeau-aulotu* relationships. The former gives rise to the Samoan expression: “*O le tuafafine o le mea uliuli i le mata o le tuagane.*” (“The sister is the pupil in her brother’s eye.”). The use of this metaphor considers the sensitive and the

³ *Feagaiga* is a noun derived from the verb *feagai*, meaning “be opposite,” “be faced with,” or “agree” (Tapu 1999, 56). The word *feagaiga* is also translated in English as “covenant”, which refers to that which is pledged between two parties. See also Fa’atauva’a Tapuai (1972, 20-23), *A Comparative Study of the Samoan and the Hebrew Concepts of the Covenant*.

⁴ See Latu Latai (2015), *Changing Covenants in Samoa? From Brothers and Sisters to Husbands and Wives*. See also Olive Samuelu (2010, 62-72), *Salvation in Church Offering? Towards a Theology of Giving in the Context of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa*. See also Roina Faatauva’a (1991), *Ordination of Women: A Critical Study of the Present Status of Women in Samoa with Reference to the Methodist Church in Samoa*. See also Tutoatasi Toalima (2019), *Feagaiga and Taxation: A Historical Critique of the Debate between the CCCS and the Samoan Government Concerning Taxation of Church Ministers*. See also Michiko Kyoto Ete-Lima (2003), *A Theology of the Feagaiga: A Samoan Theology of God*.

vulnerable nature of the pupil which is protected and covered immediately when in danger of any external intrusion. Likewise, the sister is immediately protected by her brother when she is in harm's way. The brother attends to her and ensures she is cared for and protected (Latai 2015, 94).⁵

Sometimes, the brother takes this protector role to extremes especially when he suspects any advances of a sexual nature towards his sister by a suitor. Maureen Fepuleai explains this protective role of the brother is based on his "loyalty, offering the sister safety and well-being in her life (2016, 18-19). The boyfriend usually gets beaten up for the slightest attempt to romance and woo the sister. Occasionally, this creates a discord between the brother and his sister during which the brother - most of the time - gets the support of the parents, and, therefore, usually prevails.

In his article 'Changing Covenants in Samoa? From Brothers and Sisters to Husbands and Wives?', Latai provides a glimpse into the historical usage of the term '*feagaiga*' in the Samoan context, which provides initial understanding on the latter application of the *feagaiga*. He states that,

the missionary George Pratt, who published the first Samoan dictionary in 1862, claims that the word *feagaiga* refers to an established relationship between different parties such as those between brothers and sisters and their children, and between chiefs and *tulafale* 'orators'. Furthermore, he stated that the term is adopted generally to mean an agreement or a covenant. Yet, in the early period soon after the arrival of missionaries in 1830, the word *feagaiga* was already widely used by missionaries to refer to covenants in the Bible (2015, 93).

Latai therefore provides clarity on the significance of the *feagaiga* within the Samoan context, which is also traced back to the initial arrival of the Christian mission. An important point to note is that Latai alludes to the *feagaiga* as having a connection to

⁵ *Feagaiga* can also be used to denote relationships between the *matai alii* (high chief) and *tulafale* (orator). However, we will only focus on the *feagaiga* within the family setting. That is, the brother and sister *feagaiga*.

the Bible. This means that the term itself undeniably portrays a theological essence whenever it is used to refer to any kind of agreement or relationship.

The word *feagaiga* stems from the word *feagai*, which means to be opposite to each other. Latai further claims that “to be opposite in this sense does not denote a state of oppositional conflict but rather of persons or parties being of reciprocal and mutual status and valuation” (2015, 93). This means that the *feagaiga* portrays a sense where the two parties involved relate to each other in a mutual and inclusive manner.

Tafale Fuiava (2003, 214) also alludes to the *feagaiga* relationship as inter-generational. The notion of *feagaiga* according to Fuiava originates from within the family setting, and is inherited and passed on through generations, to be upheld by the children. Protection and its benefits between the parties are inter-generational. However, the consequences of breaching the *feagaiga* are also embedded within a similar family relationship. The next subsection will explore the significance of the *feagaiga* as implemented within the family; in particular, is the brother and sister relationship.

1.2 *Feagaiga*: A Brother and Sister Covenant

In Samoan ideology, *feagaiga* is both ‘status’ and ‘covenant’ (Efi 2009, 106). In both realms, *feagaiga* is an inheritance. As status, it points to a *tuagane*’s (brother’s) *tuafafine* (sister). As covenant, it refers to the sacred relationship between sister and brother. Hence, Efi further solidifies the notion that the *feagaiga* carries immense cultural importance that vitalises the relationship between the brother and his sister.

As the parent-child relation sets norms between leaders and people, *vā-feāloāloa*’i (relationship) of brother and sister sets the norms between male and female relationships within the Samoan society. Therefore, in the *faa*-Samoa, the sister (*tuafafine*) bears the authorities of *feagaiga* within her family. *Feagaiga* was founded on the principle that women have the gift of producing and nurturing life (Efi 2009,

109). With the authorities and status of *feagaiga*, *vā-feāloāloa*’i between brother and sister also denotes a *tapu* (taboo).

The claim by Efi which depicts *feagaiga* both as a representation of status and covenant brings out the ‘sacredness’ of the *feagaiga* relationship. That is, a brother’s obligations are based on the Samoan belief that the sister as *feagaiga* is a *tamasā* or ‘sacred offspring’. In ancient Samoan theology, sisters were regarded as vessels of divinity with powers to attract the supernatural. The brother therefore is required to serve and care for his sister as long as he lives. There are several sayings in the Samoan language that bear out this service or *tautua*: “*O le ioimata i le mata o le tuagane lona tuafafine*” (The sister is the pupil of the eye of the brother); and “*E mu mata o le tama i lona tuafafine*” (The brother’s face burns for his sister). These sayings speak of the respect shown in this *feagaiga* relationship where sisters are given privileged treatment.

This means that all of the brother’s services given to the sister must be agreeable to her, for it is generally believed that the sister has the power to curse him if she is not pleased. Sisters as sacred beings were therefore highly revered and feared. According to Samoan belief, to ignore the wishes of the *tamasā* would lead to misfortune, sickness, or death of a family member (Latai 2015, 94.). This means that the *tamasā* is a holy and divine vessel with the power to bring forth life.

For the brother, it could mean barrenness or infertility. In ancient Samoa, sisters as *feagaiga* were also regarded as spiritual mediators who held priestly roles within the family. They shared this role with the family chief (Le-Tagaloa 2003, 12). As the Samoan legend describe that:

A couple named Fatu and ’Ele’ele who were created by Samoa’s progenitor Tagaloalagi and who had ten sons and a daughter. Before death, Fatu enforced gender boundaries, advising his sons that their *tuafafine* would be made *tama sa* (sacred child) and that they should ‘burn their faces’ in fear of being cursed (Muaiava 2015, 74).

Furthermore, Muaiava describes *feagaiga* as being a ‘special relationship’ or ‘contract/agreement’ founded on mutual and reciprocated values of *tapu* (taboo), *fa’aaloalo* (respect), and *va-tapuia* (sacredness), that promotes peace and harmony between the *feagaiga* and her *tuagane* (2015, 74). According to Lalomilo Kamu, the *feagaiga* relationship can only be fully protected and practiced when both the brother and sister mutually commit to one’s cultural obligation (Kamu 1996, 37).

1.3 The *Faifeau* and *Aulotu Feagaiga*

The *faifeau* and *aulotu feagaiga* is the covenant made between the parish and their minister.⁶ As stated earlier, the *faifeau*, then, is bestowed the title *faafeagaiga*. The term *fa’afeagaiga* in the Samoan language is a composition of two words – *fa’a*, which is a causative prefix meaning “to cause or to make”, “to mark a comparison”, and “nearness” (Pratt 1911, 76). Since *feagaiga* is commonly considered to mean ‘covenant’, then *faafeagaiga* in its literal sense can refer to someone who ‘causes or brings about the covenant’, ‘compared to the covenant’, and/or ‘close to the covenant’. This is in-line with Aiono Le-Tagaloa’s assertion that the “*faafeagaiga* is to be like the covenant” (1992, 124).⁷ In other words, the *faifeau* is the embodiment of the *feagaiga*.

Paulo Koria utters this cultural representation of the *faifeau*, who notes that:

The Samoan word for minister or minister of a church is *faafeagaiga*. Literally it means ‘covenant’ or ‘to be a covenant’. So, to a Samoan, a minister is the embodiment of the covenant between God and people. He is God’s ambassador, agent, emissary, intermediary and representative on earth (1999, 10).

Being a representative of God conveys a sense of ‘divinized authority’ held by the *faifeau*. In Samoan occasions such as *maliu* (funerals), *saofa’i* (chief title bestowments)

⁶ In the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS), the pastor is chosen by the parishioners through a ballot. However, in the Methodist Church of Samoa, the pastor is assigned by the elders of the Methodist General Conference.

⁷ See also Samuelu (2010, 62).

and so forth, the village or even parish members revere the *faiifeau* in such a respectful and honoured way. During such cultural occasions, the *faiifeau* is often referred to as the ‘*tamā faale-Agaga*’ or ‘Spiritual Father’, ‘*auauna a le Atua*’ or ‘servant of God’. As Olive Samuelu asserts,

The Symbolic roles assumed by the *faiifeau* and given strong affirmation by the parishioners, demonstrates the kind of theological perspectives that people hold in relation to the *faiifeau* and the village. The role of the *faiifeau* is literally being divinized...in the sense that his presence at any of these cultural events equates to the presence of God, in the eyes of his parishioners (2010, 29).

Undeniably, from the above understanding, where the *feagaiga* equates the *faiifeau* as the presence of God, the issue of idolatry and syncretism may be in question. However, the foundational understanding is not the *faiifeau* as ‘equal to God’ but a ‘representative of God’. Speaking on the notion of church giving and offering, Samuelu further stresses that:

People give to the *faiifeau* as the deified *feagaiga tau i le lagi*, or “covenant that relates to heaven”. In other words, the offerings that are made to the *feagaiga tau i le lagi* literally equates to offerings made to God (2010, 71).

Furthermore, the manner of high respect given to the *faiifeau* is not bound within the EFKS alone, but is also inter-denominational. Speaking from a Methodist context, Lalomilo Kamu also regards the Samoan Methodist minister as the *Tausi Matagaluega*. He mentions that in the Methodist Church, the pastor is appointed by the Conference. In other denominations the Pastor’s nomination is initiated by the local congregation (Kamu 1996, 37). Despite the denominational differences, Kamu believes that the Pastor is the representative and the symbol of the covenant between God and the village. Thus, *feagaiga* to Kamu is not bound by denominational divergences. In other words, the *faiifeau* being ascribed by the term *faafeagaiga* is common within the whole of the Samoan society.

1.4 Breaking of the *Feagaiga*

Like all *tapu* (taboos), there are repercussions of its violation. *Feagaiga* as well holds significant consequences when broken. Obviously, the vitality one considers the *feagaiga* also gives credit upon its value and preservation. Perhaps by now, this value and importance of the *feagaiga* has been made apparent. In recollection, the *feagaiga* represents the sacred bond between the brother and sister. A relationship that traces its roots back to ancient Samoan legends, and are upheld through the *faa*-Samoa. In the *faiifeau-aulotu* relationship, the *feagaiga*, to a certain extent, becomes divinised. This means that the status, responsibilities, and sacredness of the sister, becomes transposed unto the *faiifeau*—the *faafeagaiga*. Similarly, the *aulotu* takes on the roles of the brother, to protect, and uphold the *feagaiga*.

Therefore, considering the essence of the brother and sister, as well as the *faiifeau* and *aulotu feagaiga*, violating the *feagaiga* carries severe consequences in the Samoan culture. To reiterate, the sister as the *tamasā* could bless or curse her brother and his future family, if she is not satisfied. Yet the inviolability (impersonal supernatural power) of *feagaiga* in these relationships, for instance, has decreased dramatically. This has been due to the adoption of *feagaiga* by the Church and reverence placed on the *faiifeau-aulotu feagaiga* by the Samoan society (Muaiava 2017, 32). In other words, breaking of the *faiifeau-aulotu feagaiga* today, no longer carries the stark cultural repercussions it once had. Yet, it still echoes in ‘backdoor’ whispering.

1.5 Summary

In summary, this chapter has touched upon the importance of the *feagaiga* in the Samoan context. The brother and sister *feagaiga*, which was the initial relationship where the *feagaiga* concept was applied, though has diminished in social recognition,

still carries great importance in the *faa*-Samoa. It is through this initial *feagaiga* that the *faifeau* has gained the title *faafeagaiga*. Interestingly, there seems to be a sacred *tapu* that is deemed not to be broken in such a covenantal relationship. There is also the undeniable connection between breaking of the *tapu*, and ‘curse and blessing’. In the next chapter, we shall discuss the Christian view of curse and blessing in association with Biblical and theological references on covenants.

Chapter 2

Covenant, Curse and Blessing: A Theological and Old Testament View

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the Christian understanding and perception of curse and blessing as attested by the Old Testament. This will be carried out using a theological exploration of Biblical texts that highlight aspects of *feagaiga*. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss in general, the understanding of covenants in the Bible. The second section will explore the Old Testament on the impacts of breaking the covenant; while the third section will focus on the breaking of the covenant in the Old Testament.¹ However, before we delve into the consequences of covenantal establishment and violation, an understanding of the essence of covenants in the Bible is important. This will be discussed in the following section.

2.1 Covenant in the Bible

In the Bible, ‘covenant’ can be understood as a central Biblical metaphor that speaks about the relationship between God and his people. Such a relationship echoes in the Anchor Bible Dictionary’s definition of ‘covenant’, as “an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance” (Mendenhall and Herion 1992, 1715). Inferred in the above definition, Biblical covenants are not limited to the relationship between God and his people, but also include relationships between certain

¹ Particular focus will be given on covenants, and breaking of covenants in the OT. The intention here does not at all disregard the New Testament theology, but rather to highlight God’s relationship with his people as explained in the OT.

individuals as well. For the purpose of this thesis, we shall focus on the covenantal relationship between God and human individuals within the Bible.

Interestingly, covenants where God interacts with humanity are seldom expressed in the New Testament, but more frequent in the Old Testament. Articulated in the OT with the use of the Hebrew term 'בְּרִית' (berith), covenants also represent an oath individuals partake with God (Mendenhall 1962, 716). Examples of such covenants are the 'Abrahamic covenant', the 'Mosaic covenant', and the 'Davidic covenant', to name only but a few. These covenants are Biblical landmarks of God's relationship with his people.

Within such covenants contains an array of different situations that classifies each covenant according to certain characteristics.² Despite the various complexities, what is revealed in God's interaction with humanity is "God's faithfulness in acts of judgement and mercy in the covenant with the people of Israel and in the history of Jesus" (Migliore 1994, 58). An important aspect of covenants, between God and his people, is their situatedness within the Biblical contexts. However, does this mean that Biblical covenants cannot be understood outside of their specific contexts?

Speaking on the timeless application of the Bible seventy years ago, one theologian claimed that the Bible "[a]sks no favours, it caters to no whim, it even invites criticism and abuse; yet the fact remains, it is without question the Book of Books, yesterday, today, and forever" (Aull 1950, 391). This means that if we speak of Biblical covenants, there are bound to be important implications for us today. Jürgen Moltmann speaks of this futuristic element of God's covenant, as the 'promise of God' (1967, 102-106). Moltmann defines the 'promise of God' as a "declaration which announces the coming of a reality that does not yet exist" (1967, 103).

² For a detailed explanation of Old Testament covenants, see G. E. Mendenhall (1962, 715-717). See also Victor H. Matthews (1997).

Explaining the essence of Biblical covenants and its theological implications for us today, Moltmann utters:

God in his freedom binds himself to be faithful to the promise he has given; and if this covenant extends to a future in which fulfilments are to ensue, then it cannot be regarded as a historical fact, but is to be understood as a historic event which points itself to the future that is announced (1967, 121).

Moltmann is implying that God's promise for his people is God's faithfulness in his relationship with humanity. This means that the covenant God has with his people, as attested to by the Bible, implies God's relational closeness to humanity, revealed both in the Biblical world, just as it should be understood in this day and age.

Yet, Gods' covenantal relationship with humanity goes hand-in-hand with the consequences of violating this covenant. The next section will discuss the consequences of breaking the covenant, as well as the blessings of keeping it. That is, curse and blessing.

Subsequently, from the above Biblical definition, we can see similarities between the Samoan understanding of feagaiga and the Biblical concept of covenant. That is, Biblical covenants and the feagaiga represent a sacred relationship between two parties. Evidently in the Samoan Bible, 'covenant' is translated as feagaiga. Latai traces the historical connection between the covenant and feagaiga as follows:

In the LMS missionary magazine, O le Sulu Samoa, which was first published in 1839 entirely in the Samoan language, the term [feagaiga] was used to refer, for example, to the covenants in the Old Testament between Jehovah and the people of Israel, between Jehovah and Abraham, and other patriarchs of the Old Testament. These Biblical covenants were considered sacred and involved certain promises, taboos, and obligations, to which both parties must adhere (2015, 93).

Latai alludes to the alignment of the Samoan feagaiga concept and the Biblical covenant. Even though the feagaiga was long practiced before the arrival of Christianity, perhaps its usage in the Samoan Bible as translation of the Biblical covenant was meant to be. Therefore, the essence between the Biblical understanding of covenant and the Samoan feagaiga is inevitably linked (this will be explained extensively in Chapter 3).

2.2 Curse and Blessing

Curse and blessing in the Bible is a world in which divine powers are believed to influence, directly and indirectly, the life and destiny of nations and individuals (Crüsemann 1992, 67). A curse can be defined as the expression of a wish that evil may befall another, while blessing is the expression by which the wholeness of the religious community, or certain individuals are safeguarded or strengthened, and evil forces controlled or destroyed (Gevirtz 1962, 749).

A curse therefore can be a profane oath; a curse word, an evil that has been invoked upon one, the cause of evil, misfortune, trouble, or something accursed. Curse, blaspheme, swear are often interchangeable in the sense of using profane language. However, curse is the general word for the heartfelt invoking or angry calling down of evil on another. A blessing on the other hand, involves protection, and gaining happiness in life. In the Bible, blessings are attained through obedience, and the keeping of the covenant with God.

2.3 Breaking of the Covenant in the Old Testament

When the Bible mentions a covenant, it's referring to a strong, solemn agreement between two parties. However, Biblical covenants are very different from the kinds of agreements we make nowadays. Covenants make two into one. That is, when two

parties make a covenant in the Bible, they are joined together and identified with each other. They may exchange coats (1 Sam. 18:3–4), have a commemorative meal (Ex. 24:11), and erect a long-lasting memorial to their promise (Gen. 31:46). At every covenant's core, there is a change in relationship (Kent, Kissling, and Turner 2010, 48). In other words, covenants are meant to be kept and established.

Hence, covenants involve promises. Covenants do not just happen at random; the agreement usually includes some kind of practical application. Sometimes it means not harming one another (Gen. 31:50), or even protecting one another (1 Sam. 20). Sometimes it means agreeing not to obliterate a weaker people group (Josh. 9:15). In some cases, it can have everlasting consequences. Therefore, covenants are to be kept in order for people to exist in mutual relationship. A breach in the covenant means disorder within society, and inevitably a curse from God.

Covenants are spiritually charged and are taken seriously, and for good reason: two people are joining together based on little more than their words. They trust a divine being to hold them accountable, which means they have an oath to a higher or spiritual realm. Therefore, breaking this covenant means violating the relationship established with God. Just as covenant keeping results in blessings to the obedient, so too covenant breaking results in curses upon the Israelites for their unfaithfulness. “The covenant with its stipulations opens up the possibility of transgression and sin, with the consequences of judgment and punishment” (Stott 1982, 241).

Following the close of the Pentateuch, much of the Old Testament reads like an account of those who broke covenant with God, worshipping idols and committing other acts of sin against God; but not only during the period after the close of Deuteronomy. Indeed, in the Adamic covenant, God declared to Adam that if he violated his command regarding the tree of knowledge of good and evil he would fall

under the curse of death. In Gods statement to Adam about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil “there is a promise of punishment for disobedience—death, most fully understood to mean death in an extensive sense, physical, spiritual, and eternal death and separation from God” (Mendenhall and Herion 1992, 1726). Once Adam and Eve had broken the covenant, God declared a series of curses against man and his environment (Gen. 3:14-19). Though God had formerly pronounced a sentence of death for sin, Adam and Eve were spared physical death as God slayed an animal on their behalf, satisfying the penalty of immediate physical death (Gen. 3:21). The breaking of the Adamic covenant can therefore be explained as Adam not knowing his place amongst the creation.

In the Mosaic covenant, “Moses had commenced warning the people that their breaking of the older covenant could serve only to bring about terror and disaster (Lev. 26:15,16): ‘the vengeance of the covenant’ (v.25), or ‘the curses of the covenant’ (Deut. 29:21; cf. Isa. 24:5, Jer. 11:8). Indeed, almost the entire 800 year course of Israel’s existence as an independent nation in Canaan was marked by God’s continuous and increasingly severe judgments (Mendenhall and Herion 1992, 1726).

It is under the administration of the Mosaic covenant that we see the greatest example of the price for covenant breaking. Following a long history of covenant offenses God finally rolled out his judgment upon Israel and Judah. The writer of 2 Kings uses what can be described as covenant language and references to justify God’s actions against the northern kingdom. “Now this came about because the sons of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods” (2 Kings 17:7).

God's covenant with David also contained a curses provision, though certainly not as well defined as the previous covenants. The punishment provision in the covenant with David foresaw the disobedience of David's son and consisted of a simple, "When he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men" (2 Sam. 7:14).

Just as the theme of covenant faithfulness seems to include blessings of multiplication, so also the curses seem to carry a theme of exile or death—the very opposite of multiplication. Breaking the Adamic covenant resulted in exile from the garden (Gen. 3:23-24). The punishment in the Noahdic covenant was death (Gen. 9:5-6); but death might also be defined as a form of exile—exile from life. The breaching of the Mosaic covenant also brought about a sense of exile. That is, Moses was not to enter the Promised Land. Similarly, the breaking of the Davidic covenant also had consequences for King David.

In summary, covenants between God and the well-known characters of the OT as discussed above, were established with an oath and a promise of fulfilment. However, breaking these covenants brought about severe calamities upon these individuals. However, was it God's intention for them to suffer? Understanding the intentions of the covenants will give clarity on this question. If God is a God that fulfils his promises, then covenants are made so that this fulfilment is accomplished. This means that the ultimate intentions of Gods' covenantal relationships within the Old Testament, is to bring about a good relationship with his people. Israel was to obey God, while God blesses them. Therefore, importance is given to the purpose of the covenant to solidify a good relationship with God.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has explored the understanding and implications of covenant within the Old Testament. We have discussed the definitions of covenants, as well as blessings and curses. Where emphasis is put upon the purpose in which covenants are made. That is, so that a meaningful and mutual relationship is established between God and humanity. Such relationship involves obedience to God. In the next Chapter, we shall discuss how this relationship with God should be understood by analysing the *feagaiiga* concept.

Chapter 3

A Theological Analysis of the *Feagaiga*

Introduction

This third and final chapter will focus on the analysis of the *feagaiga* concept. The chapter consists of two sections. The first section will discuss the theological significance of the *feagaiga*, while the second section will discuss the *feagaiga* as character formation. The Old Testament views on the importance of the ‘covenant’ concept will also be utilised within this chapter.

3.1 Theological Significance of Feagaiga

To reiterate the task of the *feagaiga* model, it is the vitalizing of the Samoan understanding of *feagaiga* in order to formulate our own understanding of our relationship with God and with each other in society. From the aforementioned descriptions of the *feagaiga*, both within the brother-sister and the *faiifeau-aulotu* spheres, we are now able to formulate a theological significance of the *feagaiga* concept.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the sister as the *feagaiga* plays the role of decision maker, and spiritual mediator. She is responsible for blessing, and cursing of the brother. In traditional Samoan understanding, the sister was feared and revered because of her status and role as the *feagaiga*. However, is cursing and blessing the ultimate purpose of the *feagaiga*? According to Michiko Ete-Lima, understanding the importance of *feagaiga* brings about “order, peace, and harmony within the family” (2003, 25).

Yet, the undeniable fact is that there are consequences of keeping and breaching of the *feagaiga*. However, the main question is, in my view, is not so much about breaking or keeping the *feagaiga*, but should be about hoping for a unified, stable, and better society. Ete-Lima implies such a view in her theological claim that:

The personhood of God is made explicit in the *feagaiga* as both the brother and the sister. This relational concept of God allows one to embrace the unique feminine and masculine attributes of God. This due recognition allows us to experience the warmth of God's brotherly care and the greatness of Her sisterly presence (2003, 29).

Ete-Lima is personifying God to highlight the importance of mutual relationship within the family. God can be a brother in a sense where he protects and guides us and he is always here to watch over us. God can also be the sister who makes decisions for our betterment and we shall adore and give Him all the praises that God should be glorified with. In other words, keeping the *feagaiga* can be equated as keeping a mutual relationship with God. We have also seen this in the covenants selected prominent individuals from the Old Testament had with God.

In the *faiifeau-aulotu feagaiga*, the Samoan worldview depicts the *faiifeau* as the spiritual mediator, or the *sui vaaia* (visible heir) of God. Lalomilo Kamu also claims that the *faiifeau* is a Prophet who preaches the Gospel of Christ and be the prophetic voice among his people. He maintains the work and discipline of the Church in the congregation. He also provides for a pastoral care of the people (1996, 139).

Latai also utters that the transposition of the roles and status of the *feagaiga* from the sister onto the pastor was highly appropriate and successful. The pastor became like a sister to the village, especially in taking care of the people's spiritual needs. He became a spiritual mediator, peacemaker, and redeemer, keeping the good relations among members and families within the village. Like sisters in their covenantal relationship with their brothers, the pastor assumed these serious responsibilities. In

return, the village privileged him with respect and provided for his physical needs (Latai 2015, 96).

Therefore, within the family and *aulotu* realms, what could be the essence of the *feagaiga*? Is it about fearing the sister, or about heightening the respect of the *faiifeau*? Based on the Biblical arguments of Chapter 2, the covenant is purposed for Israel to be obedient to God, through keeping the law and commandments; as well as the importance of the Samoan *feagaiga* to bring about stability and unity within the Society, we can see a glimpse of what should be highlighted in the *feagaiga* in the Samoan context.

This means that the *feagaiga* as a model, is the hope to bring about harmony within a family. Such harmony is embodied by the love and respect reciprocated within the family, advocated by the *feagaiga*. Therefore, this portrays one of the theological essences of *feagaiga*, as a means of ‘togetherness’ or ‘unifying’ the family and subsequently the community.

Within the *aulotu* setting, *feagaiga* should be about hope for an *aulotu* and *faiifeau* relationship that is built upon mutual love and respect. This means that within the Samoan context, the *feagaiga* can be the representation of the faithful practices of the people. It is how one articulates one's faith in accordance with one's cultural identity. The ideal purpose of such faith is to ‘hope’ for a community that expresses Christian values, and at the same time embody those values within their cultural identity.

3.1.1 *Feagaiga*: A Theology of Hope

In his *Theology of Hope*, Jürgen Moltmann (1967) demonstrates on Christian aspects of ‘Faith’ and ‘Hope’. He claims that these are two inner properties of a human being that are interrelated when we think about the doctrines and principles that are taught and learned by the Christians. It is mentioned that one cannot be possible without

the presence of the other. It is more like hope is interdependent on faith and vice versa. “Hope is therefore the inseparable companion of Faith” (Moltmann 1967, 18).

People believe in the reality of things and especially from what they had experienced in the past, and thus determine the future of things. Unfortunately, being a Christian simply looks at having a strong faith in things that we heard of and taught of about God and with Jesus’ promises that He made. Hence, being hopeful will always help to keep the people believing and giving encouragement to the people to still hold on to Christianity. In Moltmann’s words, “faith believes God to be true, hope awaits the time when this truth shall be manifested...It is through faith that man finds the path of true life, but it is only hope that keeps him on the path” (1967, 20). This quote by Moltmann explicates the essence of these two aspects of life where faith should be firm and hope will make it through. It is applicable to us in a way that we should always have faith in things that we do for God and the Ministry and keep on hoping and believing that one day we will experience the reality of Jesus’ promises.

Aligning myself with Moltmann, the *feagaiga* can be viewed as being the impetus behind the faithful practices of the Samoan people, hoping for a better community. Within the brother-sister relationship, it is the hope for love, unity, and respect to become embedded within the values of the family. Within the *faifeau-aulotu* relationship, it can be the hope for a mutual and faithful commitment towards the ministry and work of the church. Therefore, hope here is applied both to the *faafeagaiga* and the *aulotu*.

Furthermore, Moltmann alludes to faith and hope as ‘Character Formation’. That is, formation of ones’ character to walk on a ‘Christian’ path, with the hope to keep on that path. This means that even though the *feagaiga* represents an unseen or intangible

sacred relationship, there is also a human role to be played in order for the *feagaiga* to be upheld.

3.2 *Feagaiga* as Character Formation

In his '*Su'esu'e Manogi*', Tui Atua devotes a whole chapter to discuss the four harmonies that hold the balance of peace for Samoa. The 'four harmonies' are: harmony with the cosmos; harmony with the environment; harmony with one's fellow human beings; and harmony with one's self. As argued by Tui Atua, when all four harmonies come together peace is achieved (Suaalii-Sauni et al. 2009, 104). He further maintains that "[t]he achievement of balance and the recognition of equivalence and complementarity is core to the Samoan equation of peace and are recorded through the continued existence in Samoan society of *tapu* (taboo) and *feagaiga* (sacred covenants) relations" (105). *Tapu* and *feagaiga* are two practices of indigenous Samoa still being practice today in 21st century Samoa.

From a woman's perspective, Roina Faatauva (1991) also touches upon the *feagaiga* concept, as means to approach the issue of 'women ordination'. Faatauva speaks of the Samoan society, and how it is governed, with its foundations being laid down from ancient times. These foundations vary though through different districts and villages throughout Samoa. However, regardless of their differences, it is common through all of Samoa that the Samoan community or village contexts are divided into two groupings, namely the village of men and the village of women. With it, both groups in their own respect contribute to the wellbeing and the maintenance of the Samoan village. In this respect, the village of women is given high prestige and honour because of its role and place in the *faa*-Samoa (Faatauva 1991, 1-4).

Furthermore, Faatauva states that women play an important role in the economic development of village affairs. This is so because of the Samoan concept of the

feagaiga, covenant between the brother and sister, where the brother acts as his sister's keeper, protecting her always. This concept extends further with the sister having the authority to curse or disown her brother at her will. Thus, because of the *feagaiga*, women in the Samoan village life are given the utmost respect and first priority and are sought to by the family members for final decision making.

Therefore, it can be said that both Efi and Faatauva'a are alluding to the importance of *feagaiga* in formulating a structured society. In other words, ensuring the *feagaiga* is upheld reforms society through character formation. At this stage of the thesis, we can already navigate the similarities of the covenant as expressed through the Biblical discussion, as well as the Samoan *feagaiga*. Character formation this thesis alludes to can then be viewed as how one embodies values of one's culture, so that one can hope to walk in the path of Christian teachings. In other words, the *feagaiga* and its associated aspects are to be taken into consideration. In the next section, we shall discuss the *feagaiga* in light of Tui Atua's analysis of the 'harmonies' in the Samoan context.

3.2.1 *Feagaiga* between Humans and God

As emphasized by Tui Atua Efi, harmony between the divine and the temporal is achieved by privileging the balance. In other words, when the human recognizes its equivalence with all of creation, humans, therefore, knows their limitations and he/she does not exceed beyond that *Vā* with their creator, who is the progenitor of all creation. Put differently, it is to keep the *feagaiga* with God.

The *Vā* between Humanity and god is sacred (Tapu). It is often acknowledged by the Samoan people as *Vā-tapu'ia* (sacred relation). Efi defines *tapu* as "to be forbidden" and "a recognition of the sacred connections between all things" (2009, 386). *Tapu*, Efi continues, recognizes the sacred connection of all things and everything in the creation.

In comprehending these definitions, *tapu* is the sign of a relationship within creation that holds a twofold sense being both negative and positive. The latter recognizes and respects the interconnectedness of all things and the former forbids and prohibits certain things between relations of a *Tagata* (person) and the creation. Therefore, *tapu* is a sacred essence that underpins our relation with all things, with the gods, the cosmos, environment, other people and even the self (Efi 2009, 175).

In summary, the *vā* or *the* in-between humanity and God is sacred; because of this sacred relation, humans, therefore, do not see themselves above creation but part of creation. The analysis highlights that the relation between humans and God is maintained through self-recognition of our equivalence with creation. Perhaps another way to see it is when humans recognize their equivalence with creation. They are, simultaneously, acknowledging their sacred relations with God.

In regards of *feagaiga* as a means to bring about hope for a better society, Efi's description of humanity's *Vā* with God portrays a great deal of this hope. What is noteworthy is the recognition of the sacredness of such a relationship. Realising the sacredness of God will allow humanity to know their existence amongst creation, thus harmony could be achieved. As we have discussed in the Adamic covenant, Adams' fall came about because he failed to realise his place within creation.

According to Efi's argument, the sacredness of the human-God relationship is for humanity to understand its place amongst creation. In other words, knowing our place in creation emphasises 'humility'. This means that within the Samoan society, our respect and honour given to God, through the *feagaiga*, can only be achieved through humility. That is, it is only through humbling ourselves that will solidify our *feagaiga* with God.

3.2.2 *Feagaiga* between Humans.

The *vā* between fellow humans is a communal relation as Efi suggests; many of the cultural customs and traditional emphasise are established and sustained from *vā* in this context. *Vā* in the Samoan social context can therefore be described as an agent of the Samoan culture that sustains the communal relationships of the *faa*-Samoa (Samoan way of life). The *vā* can be said to be synonymous with the *feagaiga*.

From life experience growing up in my family, *vā-feāloāloa'i* is the beating heart that holds together and sustain the *faa*-Samoa. It dictates how a Samoan should interact and relate with one another. Within this space (*vā*) in-between and face-to-face (*feāloāloa'i*) exists the acceptable and proper behaviours, the knowledge of language for communications, and so much more of the Samoan way of life. Thus, *vā-feāloāloa'i* sets the norms of society within the Samoan culture.

In relation to the *feagaiga*, it can be said that keeping the *feagaiga* is to understand the *vā-feāloāloa'i* within the Samoan context. Within the brother and sister relationship, it is realising the *vā-feāloāloa'i* between them. In the *aulotu* context, it is the *vā-feāloāloa'i* between the *faiḡeau* and the *aulotu*. Without recognising this *vā-feāloāloa'i*, the *feagaiga* would be impossible. Hence, a hope for a faithful society will never be achieved.

In recollection of the above discussion, character formation is achieved in the Samoan society through upholding values of the Samoan culture. One of these values is discussed above using the *vā-feāloāloa'i* concept. It is through knowing our *vā-feāloāloa'i* with God, that emphasises the need to humble ourselves. It is also recognising the same *vā-feāloāloa'i* that ensures good relations amongst people. Thus, character formation this thesis alludes to is through humility and respecting the *vā-*

feāloāloa'i. Keeping the *feagaiga* with the hope to walk a Christian path is through emphasising these values of character formation.

3.3 Summary

In summary, in this chapter, we have theologically analysed the essence of the *feagaiga*, as a hope for a better family relationship, and subsequently a better Christian society. We have also discussed the achievement of such a society through character formation that is founded on consideration of the Samoan understanding of *vā-feāloāloa'i*. Keeping the *feagaiga* in this sense is not so much in fear of curses, or in anticipation of the blessing that is to come, but rather being hopeful for a better society. As we have discussed, this can be achieved through humility and keeping good relations with each other. The final section of this thesis will conclude the thesis, and suggest important themes as a way forward for the Samoan Christian society.

Conclusion

Feagaiga is about relationships. In the Samoan context, it underscores the relationship between brother and sister within the family setting, and also represents the essence of the *faiifeau-aulotu* relationship. In Chapter 1, we have looked at *feagaiga* in the Samoan cultural context (brother-sister and *faiifeau-aulotu* relationships). We assessed the various forms or meanings of *feagaiga* and their significance to maintaining stability and harmony in families and society. This covenant relationship shows that it can be a continuous source of blessing. But if the covenant ends or the promise is broken, it can become a curse.

In chapter 2 we looked at the theology revolving around the concepts of ‘blessing’ and ‘curse,’ as outlined in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, we saw that to anticipate blessings of a covenant relies on the principle of adherence and obedience. For covenants between men, this adherence is realized through mutual cooperation and respect. For covenants between men and God, it is realized through obedience, manifested by way of serving and worshipping God. In both cases, the blessings are reversed and curses entail, when these relationships are not upheld. We explored in particular the curses, or implied curses, in the Adamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. However, we have highlighted the true intentions of covenantal relationship in the Old Testament—establishing good relations with God.

In Chapter 3 we weaved together our findings from Chapters 1 (the *feagaiga* concept) and 2 (Biblical definition of ‘blessings’ and ‘curses’). We found that what *feagaiga* concept bestows and punishes, in a way that is paralleled by the covenantal framework depicted in the Old Testament. For both ‘covenants’, one party assumes the role of divinity, the other a complementary role.

The bond of *feagaiga* tells us of the sacredness of the relationship that has detailed taboos, norms, behaviours, and expectations. However, the real essence of keeping the *feagaiga* as revealed in Chapter 3, is the establishment of ‘hope’ for the community. That is, hope to better ourselves in our relationship with God, and with others. Within the family, it is the hope in creating a mutual relationship founded on love and reciprocity.

Furthermore, the *feagaiga* is about hope to establish a *fai-feau-aulotu feagaiga* that is founded on both parties showing humility. As emphasised by Moltmann, it is through hope that strengthens our faith. This means that *feagaiga* should be understood as not so much the fear of curses from violation, or the anticipation of the forthcoming blessings, but rather the hope for good relationships. *Feagaiga* gives hope for a better Christian community.

Finally, for a Samoan Christian, *feagaiga* is the hope for a better society founded on humility. It should be understood as a prophetic call for our Samoan society to build hope for a better future, informed by our faith in God. This will further strengthen our faithful practices, and understanding of God. We cannot deny the repercussions connected to *feagaiga*. Therefore, this thesis claims that curses and blessing should be understood as a way for us to adhere to our *feagaiga* with God and other human beings. Perhaps, this understanding of *feagaiga* as a sign of hope, will contribute to providing hope for any kind of Samoan *feagaiga*. Thus, a way forward for further studies on the Samoan concept of *feagaiga*.

Glossary

Āiga	-	Family (nucleus or extended); relatives.
aganuu	-	laws and customs of the village or district; the customary way of life
alofa	-	love; strong affection; good feeling towards
Atua	-	God; deity
faaloalo	-	respect
faaleagaga	-	spiritual
faasinomaga	-	identity
faife'au	-	Church Minister/Pastor
feagai	-	to face; sit opposite to
feagaiga	-	an established and sacred relationship between different parties, as between brothers and sisters and pastor and parish
Tamasā	-	sacred offspring
tapu	-	sacred; forbidden
tuafafine	-	sister
tuagane	-	brother
Vā	-	Space; divide
Vā fealoa'i	-	relational space
Vā tapuia	-	sacred space

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