

Covenant in the Old Testament and Its Theological Reflections among Igieduma People of Edo State in Nigeria

By

Izevbigie Augustus Eghe

**Department of Theology, Baptist College of Theology Benin City,
Edo State, Nigeria**

Abstract

From both the scriptural and the cultural perspectives, covenant play a significant role in maintaining cordial relationship between parties. Covenant is a solemn promise made binding by an oath which may be either verbal or in symbolic forms. In recent times in our society, it has become an alarming issue that people make promises and break them. This work traced the issue of Covenant from the etymology through the Old Testament, the New Testament, to that of Igieduma people. It is noted that there are areas of consonances and dissonances between the Old Testament and the Igieduma people's perspective of Covenant. However, no permission or allowance is given for a covenant to be broken both in the scripture and the Edo people respectively.

Keywords: Covenant, Theological Reflection, Igieduma people, Culture, Cordial Relations

Introduction

One cannot talk about the people of God in the Old Testament without talking about a covenant relationships. Covenant reveals God's promises. They also define the conditions that every person must meet to receive the blessings of the promises. God's Covenants are the foundation of His divine plan to shape the way all people should think and behave. Covenant was the central belief of the Hebrew people; that is, between YHWH and the Hebrew nation. It is clear therefore that the covenant with which the Old Testament is concerned is that with which the Hebrew people believe that God has entered into with them on Mount Sinai (Campbell 1).

God has a specific goal in mind for which he entered into covenant with the people of Israel. The result of His covenant plan is a divine family of sons and daughters who have developed the same righteous character that was evident in Jesus Christ when He was with mankind as a human being. That character can be created only through an interactive process that takes place between individuals and God. To make it possible for us to build that divine, holy and righteous character, God gives us freedom of choice. By giving us the

liberty to make choices, He allows us to learn by our own experiences that we, with our limited abilities, cannot foresee all of the hurtful consequences that wrong choices produce. Only by relying on God's guidance will we learn how to avoid making bad choices. God's covenants reveal His plan to reverse that dangerous pattern of harmful choices.

The word covenant is defined by Thomson as "an agreement, a contract". The word covenant is a noun meaning a name of something. The word covenant could also function as a transitive verb or intransitive verb, agree, especially by legal covenant/from old French, literally 'agreeing' (191).

This paper aims at unveiling what a covenant is, the peculiarities between the Old and the New Covenants, the relationship that exist between the Old and the New Covenants. The Igieduma people's understanding of covenant and a comparative analysis is made. It should be noted that the Covenant in the Old Testament is the foundation of God's relationship with man. God in Genesis 9:9 said to Noah that "I now establish my covenant with you, and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that was with you: The birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you and every living creature on earth." All other subsequent covenants built on this to fortify God's relationship with man.

Covenant is one major issue in relationship between God as creator and man as his creature. Again, inherent in any covenant is the concept of a lasting commitment to a clearly defined relationship. Generally, a covenant is a long term agreement between two or more parties that formalizes a binding relationship between them. Covenant defines the two parties' essential obligations and commitments to each other. In ancient times, major covenants were ratified and kept alive through symbolic rituals that reflected each party's commitment to, and acceptance of the covenant's binding requirements. However, covenant rituals are not the same as covenant commitments and obligations. Rituals in divine covenants serve primarily as symbolic reminders and are intentionally given only a figurative value. The real value is in the substance of the commitments made! Through the substance of his covenants his divine commitments God binds Himself to perform all of the promises He makes.

In the Old Testament covenant, God defines the basic obligations that He imposes on Himself and, usually, on the other participants. Thus a dominant feature of a covenant is a list of blessings that God promises to give to those who honour the covenant commitments. A divine covenant can be compared to a sacred constitution established to regulate human relationships with God. It is a formal declaration of God's will and

purpose. It typically expresses His deep love for humanity and reveals one or more major aspects of His plan for humanity's salvation.

However, the moment a covenant is signed or ratified, it becomes binding on the parties concerned. It could be in varieties like solemn, binding obligations or disagreements involving two or more parties in a relationship. And hence the parties must observe the following: The obligations must be self assumed by the primary party for the benefit of the secondary party. In this case, the covenant will be more of a pledge or a promise. The expected obligation of the primary party was one of fidelity and the attitude of the secondary party was that of acceptance and trust. Once the obligations were imposed on the secondary party, it represented a demand or condition placed upon the obligated party and required obedience.

Furthermore, under normal circumstances, the party imposing the obligations is at the benefiting end, but obedience is also seen as a benefit to the obligated party as well. Conditions and commitments accepted by both or all parties produced a situation of mutual obligation intended to benefit all parties concerned. In all the three phases mentioned above, the gravity and the solemnity of the parties' commitment could be enhanced by verbal declaration, swearing, or the taking of an oath.

Etymology and the Origin of Covenant

One of the most frequent words in the Old Testament is *berit*. The etymology of this word is uncertain according to scholars. However, some scholars are of the opinion that it is from the Akkadian *beritu* meaning "father" or "bound". It is also suggested that it is a derivation from the Egyptians *birita* meaning "treaty". Another important term is *ade* in Aramaic treaty and also testimony. In Akkadian culture, covenant taking is designated *tuppu sa rikilti u sa mamuti* or *tuppu sa riksi sa mamiti* around 2000c B.C. But around 1000 B.C was *ade (tuppu) mamiti* or *ade tamiti*. In Hebrew a popular terminology for covenant making was *carat berit*, meaning literally "to cut a covenant. Another term *lashereth devarim* (the Ten Commandment is connected to covenant. Also, in Arabic *adds 'Ahd, 'uhud* a plural word for covenant this word also means commitment, treaty and promise (Adeogun lecture note). In respect to the origin of covenant, scholars point to the fact that it dates back to the ancient word. Its purpose was to regulate behaviour religious, political or social life of the people. It is also pointed out that covenant did not originate from Israel but the Ancient Near East greatly influenced that of Israel. Mari letters contain frequently references to covenant or covenant making. Ancient texts suggest the use of a young duck or goat for covenant peace (Adeogun).

Old Testaments Perspective of Covenant

Covenant in Israel's history indicates that Yahweh has been Israel's God from the beginning. Israel's election was dominant in her faith and theology. Yahweh's gracious favour toward Israel is evidenced in her deliverance from Egypt. Covenant plays a major role in Israel's election (Adeogun). In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term *berit* often and traditionally is the only term translated as 'covenant' (Mills 177). The Hebrew has an idiom for establishing a covenant which is "to cut a covenant" (Fergusson 173). This is because a covenant is made by sacrifice (e.g. Gen. 15:7-21; Psalm 50:5). In the Old Testament the word 'covenant' has a wide variety of semantic usage signifying in different contexts what it could be. However, in English, covenant is rendered as "promise, pledge, obligation, agreement, contract, pact or treaty" (Mills 177). But Routledge sees covenant as a common feature of life in the ancient near east (ANE) as playing an important part in politics, business and family life, as well as in religion.

Routledge goes further to state that a covenant was not just an agreement or contract, but that it was also a solemn bond established between two or more parties (usually on the basis of a promise or pledge) and as involving a firm commitment to the relationship established by the covenant and to its obligations (159). Making a covenant was a serious matter in the Old Testament era. Covenant usually was accompanied by sacrifice (e.g. Gen. 15:9-10; Jer. 34:13-19) or a covenant meal (e.g. Gen. 26:30; 31:54), or be confirmed by a solemn oath (e.g. Gen.21:31; 26:31; Jos. 9:15; 2 Kg.s 11:4; Neh. 10:28-29), which was regarded as irrevocable (e.g. Jos. 9:15; cf. Num. 30:2; Ezek.17:15-16). *Berit* is applied to treaties between national powers either an alliance between equals (e.g. Gen.14:13; 21:27, 530 or the condition for peace and protection imposed by a greater power upon a lesser (suzerain and vassal kings, e.g. Jos. 9:11; I Sam. 11:1-2; I Kgs. 15:25-20; Ezek 17:13-19). It should be noted that in each case, the relationship involves mutual obligations.

An important use of *berit* is in connection with marriage (e.g. Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14) (Hugenberger 163). In marriage, when a husband and wife entered into a covenant relationship which involves total commitment to one another (Gen. 2:24), each accepts the obligations and responsibilities their relationship imposes on them both. The covenant between God and Israel and later his church in the New Testament is likened to the bond between husband and wife (Isa. 54:5; Jer.2:2; 3:14, 20; 31:32; Hos. 2:7, 16; Eph. 5:21-27). Again in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, *diatheke* is the commonest rendering appearing about 270 times for Hebrew *berit* – covenant. This is the commonest Old Testament word for a variety of agreements (Verbrudgge 134).

Types /Forms of Covenant in the Old Testament

There are several types of covenant generally as postulated by some scholars such as (1) Suzerainty: This type of covenant involves a superior and a vassal. (2) Parity: In this type, both parties involved in the covenant are bound by oath. There are two types of parity which are: one with a specific obligation and the other without obligations. (3) Patron: in this, the superior binds himself with promissory oath to seek the good of the lesser party. However, the parity type of covenant is the type which God is practically involved in with the Israelites. In the Old Testament there are several people God established covenants with. These persons were made to champion the cause of YHWH for his people. Among many others, a few of such persons that God made covenants with will be briefly considered. However, the kinds of covenant refer to varieties or media of signing or making agreements or relationships. There are dominant patterns of covenant in the Bible such as:

The Noahic Covenant:

According to Dyrness, the promise God made to Adam and Eve in Gen. 3:15, and thereafter to Cain, protecting him from been killed. The promises made to all of above mentioned individuals have covenant implication embedded in it. However, he noted that the covenant idea did not actually appear before the promises made to Noah by God: "I will establish my covenant with you..." Gen. 6:18. The covenant relationship between God and Noah is that of promissory one initiated by God. Though Dyrness noted "the covenant between God and Noah is not a contract between the two parties", this writer wishes to make clear the fact that, so long there an obligation on the part of Noah, a contract relationship is established (116). The above understanding formed the bedrock of the Old Testament or Old Covenant.

Dyrness portrays God as one who announces his will to Noah, his family and with all the living creatures. This writer quite agree with Dyrness on the fact the covenant made was not to Noah alone but to the entire cosmos. Practically, the element in this Noahic covenant is the rainbow as a symbol of the covenant establishment.

The Abrahamic Covenant:

This refers to the covenant God made with Abraham the father of faith according to the scriptures. Dyrness observed that the covenant God made with Abraham was on the basis of the covenant implication present in the call of Abram to leave his home land. Gen. 15, God made a solemn promise with Abram: "On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram". It also evidenced in Abrahamic covenant God's initiative to relate to man and ultimately to bless man. Although, this form of covenant is promissory, it has in it an

obligation on the part of the individual (117). Commenting on man's responsibility (ies), in other to keep the covenant, Abraham and his descendants must of necessity uphold the covenant. In so doing, all males shall be circumcised. This also indicates the curse therein embedded in the covenant as a result of any disobedience or violation (Dryness 119).

The Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant:

This is practically an obligatory type of covenant which includes cultic and community codex. Dryness pointed out that this covenant was to become the fundamental basis for the nation of Israel. In this covenant, we see a picture of Suzerainty and a Vassal. This covenant requirement and describes its stipulations that should be followed as to ensuring the workability of the covenant. Abrahamic covenant demands obedience to the covenant initiation established by God (Exo. 19:4-5). "You shall not, 'if ...then you will'" **The Davidic Covenant, another promissory covenant which leads to Messianism in late Judaism.**

Paul makes use of all these covenant patterns in the New Testament (Kaylor 9). The covenant with Abraham is decisive in Paul's attempt to show that the Torah itself points to salvation by grace and faith rather than by Torah and works. One of Paul's key quotations is that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). Paul uses the fact that Abraham was uncircumcised when God made a covenant with him to show that Gentiles as well as the Jews can be included.

However, there are various ways that covenant is used in the Old Testament some of these ways shall briefly be discussed as follows: The Covenant People; The Ten Commandment; The Book of Covenant; the Ark of the Covenant and the Prophets of the Covenant.

The Covenant People

At Mount Sinai Moses introduced a string of escaped slaves, Hebrew refuges from Egypt, to the God who had made their escape possible. They needed now a God to look after their interests in the future. Yahweh was prepared to adopt them as his people if they would accept him. Unlike the gods of other tribes, Yahweh was not a mere deified ancestor from the past: he was not related to the Hebrew at all. Who were these Hebrews and who were the covenant people? Stories and tradition s point to the fact that before the Israelites went on slavery in Egypt, they were a number of related tribes. Some of the countless nomadic tribes constantly who moved to and fro in the Fertile Crescent between Egypt, Canaan and Mesopotamia were perhaps the Hebrews (Campbell 29).

After the invasion of Canaan under Joshua, the covenant was the main thing that the scattered Hebrew tribes had in common for a very long time. When the Monarchy was established the king became the guardian of the covenant. The unique Hebrew conception of Monarchy was a result of the covenant. Therefore, all the people over whom the king ruled, whether of the twelve tribes or of other subject states, were covenant people with a right to its protection and privileges. For instance, Ruth the Moabite woman married into the tribe of Judah and thus became a member of the covenant people. Again, the Gibeonites entered into a special treaty with Joshua, thus acquiring covenant status (2 Sam. 21:1-14) (30).

The Ten Commandments

The law giving on Mount Sinai marks a highlight in Hebrew's history. The consciousness of a special relationship with God and of a special divine purpose for them is traced by the Hebrews to this lawgiving. This was where God's covenant with the nation of Israel was made. According to Campbell, Moses had just brought a mixed band of slaves out of Egypt. Moses had to spend much time settling disputes (Exodus. 18:13-26). The mixed band had to be shaped into a community, and a community must have some rules guiding them. Moses gathered the people at the foot of Mount Sinai or Horeb to make a solemn covenant between God and people God seems to have a special concern, Moses announced the terms of this solemn contract or covenant (Campbell 31).

The Book of the Covenant

As noted by Campbell, the basic terms of the covenant are considered to be contained in the Ten Commandments. In the description of the covenant ritual (Exodus 24:3-8), there is a mention of a 'book of the covenant'. The whole Jewish Law is known as the laws of Moses, the book of the covenant, together with the Ten Commandment, is the Old collection of laws in the Old Testament. All communities need laws, however simple it might be. Many laws of such people closely resemble one another. These communities had dealings with one another for the purpose of trade, marriage, or restitution after injury and this would lead to agreement between tribes on lines of procedure (34-35).

The Ark of the Covenant

According to Campbell, this kind of covenant was to be a portable shrine and a visible reminder of Yahweh's presence among his people. Its description is in Exodus 25:10-22. It was a chest of acacia wood overlaid with gold and surmounted by two gold cherubim facing each other with wing tips touching. The space between the cherubim is called the mercy seat and it was intended to be a sort of throne for the divine presence. The Ark of the Covenant carried by priests led the Hebrew during their wanderings and during their

invasion of Canaan. It was carried into the river Jordan and remains there until everyone had crossed safely (Joshua 3) (Campbell 35).

The Prophets and Covenant It is noted by some scholars that the idea of a covenant relationship with God would be strongest in the Hebrew people during the time of their wanderings, the making of the covenant being then a recent event. In fact the idea of a covenant grew stronger as time went on. The prophets who were Israel's theologians tried to inculcate an awareness of the covenant relationship, and urged Israel to face up to her responsibility as the covenant people. With the writing prophets came a new development of thought concerning the covenant relationship. In early religious thought a nation's god was one who looks after its interest, especially in time of war. Many prophets expressed the hope that Israel would become the spiritual of the World and that other nations would come to know Israel's God. In this way they could become part of the covenant. This was as the prophets saw it, the divine plan for the chosen people (Campbell 38).

Elements in a Binding Covenant

Once a covenant is signed or ratified, it becomes binding on the parties concerned. It could be in varieties like solemn, binding obligations or disagreements involving two or more parties in a relationship. And hence the parties must observe the following:

The obligations must be self assumed by the primary party for the benefit of the secondary party. In this case, the covenant will be more of a pledge or a promise. The expected obligation of the primary party was one of fidelity and the attitude of the secondary party was that of acceptance and trust.

Once the obligations were imposed on the secondary party, it represented a demand or condition placed upon the obligated party and required obedience. Under normal circumstances, the party imposing the obligations is at the benefiting end, but obedience is also seen as a benefit to the obligated party as well.

Under normal circumstance conditions and commitments accepted by both or all parties produced a situation of mutual obligation intended to benefit all parties concerned. In all the three cases mentioned above, the gravity and the solemnity of the parties' commitment could be enhanced by verbal declaration, swearing, or the taking of an oath.

New Testament Perspective of Covenant

In the New Testament Greek Bible, the word 'covenant' is called *diatheke*. The term *diatheke* is said to have occurred from Donacritus and Aritotle (135). The term *diatheke* comes to

denote a sense of a will or Testament. Zondervan says that the term is “not thought to be derived from the act *diathemi*, distribute, allocate, regulate, but only from the mid *diathemai*, control persons and things and especially disposed by will (so private legal documents among the papyri (135).

The term *diatheke* therefore, denotes an irrevocable decision which cannot be cancelled by anyone. When Paul discusses the relation between the promise and the law in Galatians 3:15ff, he introduces an illustration from ordinary human experience and compares the promise of God to Abraham with the *diatheke* of a man, i.e. ‘a will.’ The many legal terms used in the passage make it clear that he is here using the word *diatheke* in the sense of Hellenistic law (Hugenburger 129). A pre-requisite of its effectiveness before the law is the death of the disposer. Hence *diatheke* which is a will or Testament must be distinguished from an ordinary agreement or promise known as *syntheke* in Greek.

Verbrudge noted that the New Covenant and the Kingdom of God do correlate. The two depict the fact that God is involved in either way since God was seen to have associated himself in the establishment of the Old Covenant by calling the Israelites ‘my people’ (Hafemann 225-253). He will obviously be involved in the establishment of the New Covenant being the upgraded version of the existing covenant. It is also difficult to understand early Israel in any other way than as a tribal league, or confederation formed in covenant with Yahweh and under the rule of Yahweh (Bright 35).

Relationships between the Old and the New Covenant

In this section, the relationship between the Old and the New Covenants is considered from the point of comparison of the two covenants. A primary distinction between the Old and New Covenants is in where God’s law is written (Jeremiah 31:31-34; and Ezekiel 36:26-28), not in whether it continues to define His will. Under the New Covenant the spirit or intent of the law is to be inscribed in the hearts of those who are converted by receiving the Holy Spirit. The new focus is on heartfelt repentance that leads to forgiveness of sin through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament, Sinai Covenant involved rituals and sacrifices which could only remind the people of their guilt and their need for redemption. The Old Testament covenant could not cancel the guilt of the people or blot out their sins: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Under the New Covenant, however, Jesus Christ’s sacrifice blots out permanently the sins of those who repent and cancels their guilt (John 1:29; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5). Significantly, the New Covenant first had to be offered to the same people who had received the Sinai Covenant,

the physical descendants of Abraham. All of the apostles, including Paul, honoured this requirement. Scripture shows that Paul, when visiting various cities, went to the Jews first, then to the gentiles (Acts 13:45-46; Romans 1:16).

It is clear in Hebrew 7, that under the Sinai Covenant, the high priest was a physical human being from the tribe of Levi, serving in the physical tabernacle or temple until his death. Jesus, however, born of the tribe of Judah, is now our eternal High Priest, serving in heaven with direct access to God the Father. "The point being made here is that we have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man". Unlike the high priest under the Old Covenant, Jesus Christ as High Priest can personally assist every individual called by God. "They will all know me," He says, "from the least of them to the greatest", verse 11. This huge advantage of the New Covenant was not available under the Sinai Covenant with only a physical high priest.

Jesus, although divine and immortal, can still personally identify with our weaknesses and problems because of what He experienced as a human being: "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:17-18, NIV). As High Priest, Jesus is willing and eager to help Christians in their struggles to overcome sin. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

However, the Old Testament is a collection of documents which tells us about the covenant which God made with the people of Israel, the unique administration of law, order, and worship under which the newly born nation of Israel had been organized as a theocracy (Spurgeon 1908), while Campbell says it is the record of God's dealings with the people of Israel under the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant (13).

The meaning and significance of the Old and New as frequently used in the Scriptures must be determined by the character and relationship of these two covenants (Campbell 13). In Christendom, there is the belief that all that the prophets of the Old Testament have pointed out is the coming of the Messiah of Israel, and that Jesus was indeed the Messiah awaited by all Jews (Charelsworth 39). The Old Covenant contains the promises and the New Covenant explains the fulfilment.

The New Testament brought about the fulfilment of all that are said in the Old Testament. The author of Luke-Acts, for example, has Jesus' ministry begins in Nazareth and in the synagogue Jesus stands up to read the Scripture (Scroll) from Isaiah 61 and he started by saying "Today, this scripture is fulfilled to your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Earlier, when Jesus was presented in the Temple as a baby for dedication, one of the priests by name Simeon blessed the name of God for making him live up to this time and said, "My eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:30). In like manner when Paul begins his major work as depicted in Romans, he spells out the fact that Jesus Christ is God's good news which God promised before hand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures (Rom 1:2) (39).

Brown quotes Kummel, G. W. *Introduction to the New Testament* 1966, as saying that the covenant concepts stand in its relationship to the law, the promises, and the people of God (Brown 371). In the Old Testament, a curse and a blessing played parts, so also are the two found in the New Covenant (I Cor. 11:27-32; cf. 12:3). Verbruggle says, "Not long after this entire Christian writings like the Didache were moulded by the theology of the Lord's Supper and show the structure of the covenant ritual" (135). In the book of Hebrews the word *diatheke* is mentioned 17 times since the high priestly office of Christ is the prevailing conception of Hebrews' Christology. It expresses the New Covenant in a cultic setting which reflects the author's intense concern for 'purification, sanctification, perfection' and also sacrifice, atonement and blood (Kummel 277).

In the Hebrew narrative, the New Covenant is regarded as the better covenant to the existing one (Heb. 7:22), which expresses the idea of superiority, its guarantor and mediator is Christ (Heb.8:6; 12:24) through his death for the redemption of the sins from the Old Covenant (Heb. 9:5). It is against this blemish that the background of the prophetic ministry is embedded (Jer. 31:31-34). By the very promise of the New Covenant the older one is rendered obsolete by God Himself (Heb.8:13). In Christ we can see the right typology of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is founded on better promises (8:6; 9:15), but like the Old Covenant, it is a covenant in blood (10:29; 12:24; 13:20). In the New Covenant, the one offering the sacrifice is giving himself as the object of the sacrifice, the high priest (9:13ff; 10:12ff). Hence, the death of Christ is important because as said earlier, a covenant or a will is not effective under the law until when the testator dies (9:16). Krummercher says, "Jesus is the true high priest, the true king, the true bread of life, the true vine, the true mediator, the very truth itself. That the old was true but the new is more truth in a more enduring and realistic and satisfying sense" (44). There is also salvation in Christ which means peace, joy, and praise (Horton 178) and Jesus Christ is the subject of the New Testament.

Covenant among Igieduma People of Edo State in Nigeria

The description of Igieduma people and their understanding of covenant relationship are the issues to be considered here. This is because one cannot be talking of a people' belief without first addressing the people themselves.

Igieduma is a small community in Edo land of Edo State in Nigeria. The name Edo land is applied to an ethnic group occupying a part of the towns and cities of Nigeria (Ojehomon 6). They are one of the popular ethnic groups in the Mid-West Nigeria. Igieduma is in Uhunwode Local Government Area of Edo State of Nigeria. It is situated between Erua from the ends of Benin City and Ehor toward Ekpoma Auchi road. Igieduma is a Christian community and harbour different religious groups including African Traditional Religion (ATR). In respect to their concept of covenant, the Igieduma people do not have a different understanding from the generality of the Edo people. In other words, what pertains to the Edo people generally affects the Igieduma people. Therefore, the concept of covenant of Igieduma people particularly applies to the generality of the Edo people.

Concept of covenant among Igieduma People

The Igieduma people have an understanding of covenant relationship. In Igieduma community, covenant is called *ile*. The word *ile* implies taking an oath to or not to do something for or against someone else. The word *ile* in Igieduma's understanding is not too different from swearing. When the Igieduma person is calling for covenant relationship, they say "*nati ile*", that is, to cut a covenant.

Types of covenant among the Edo people

There are kinds or types of covenant in Igieduma community which cannot be fully enumerated in this paper. However, the following are few of the types of covenants among Edo people: (1) *Ile Agbatanagbe* (2) *Ile Egbe* (3) *Ile Azor* Among the Igieduma people, *Ile Agbatanagbe* is the type of covenant in which one of the two parties involved promises to do something for the other individual or promises not to do something against the others in a covenant relationship. This type of covenant is usually between two or more people depending on the issue demanding such an action. *Ile Egbe* is the kind of covenant that is made in respect to marriage. This kind of covenant is usually between two family with the interest of marrying from a family or been married into a family. Actually, the two families serve as witnesses to the commitment from the two individuals intending to come together as husband and wife. It is covenant indicating commitment to one another either as a couple or as families. The third type of covenant is more like a sacrifice made by one of the parties who may have bridged the contract of the marriage particularly the woman. It is

referred to as *Ile Ozor* which is done to appeals the gods and at the same time re-established the relationship of the union's commitment.

Consequences of breaking a Covenant

The consequence of an individual breaking a relationship is enormous among the Igieduma people understanding of covenant. The consequences range from a truncation of relationship to loss of benefits from the guilty party. **For instance, the covenant** established between a man and a woman can be used to buttress this phase of covenant relationship. It must be noted that the covenant relationship is not just between the man and the woman alone, it is between every member of the both families, or communities (if in the instance the couple come from different communities). Most importantly, it is between the man, woman and the gods.

This commitment demands faithfulness from all the parties involved in the relationship. In the instance that one of the parties' bridges the covenant contract, he or she will have to be subjected to the performing of the sacrifice called *Ile Ozor* is the sacrifice of cleansing and to reunite the couple in their covenant relationship.

A Comparative Analysis of Covenant in the Old Testament and Among Igieduma People

By way of comparison, there are areas where Igieduma people's covenant are similar and areas where they are also different. The section shall consider the areas of differences and areas of consonance.

Areas of Consonance /Harmonies:

The Old Testament and the Igieduma concept of covenant have some things in common. Therefore, the similarities in both covenants shall be considered as follows. In both covenants there is an act of promise that is involved. The level of the promise is not the issue for this session. In the Old Testament covenant God promised that he will be the God of the chosen people, and these chosen people are chosen by him not on sentiments, but because the people have accepted him as their Lord and personal Saviour (2 Cor. 6:16-18; Heb.8:10; Rev.21:23) (Lillback 173ff). In the same vein, the Igieduma concept of covenant involves a level of promise.

In both the Old Testament and Igieduma covenants have the idea of redemption to its falling victims. However, the redemption in both covenants is of different degrees. As noted in the Old Testament covenant, God establishes covenant with the people of Israel in order to guide them from that which not benefit them. This is because the people have

not the capacity to on their own determine and hold on to what is good and better for their own lives. For the above reason stated, God has to call the people to a covenant relationship. In Igieduma concept of covenant, the idea of guidance so as not to do what is wrong is involved. The idea of Igieduma and the Old Testament covenant are preventive in nature. Prevention from failure and prevention from wrongdoing are evidenced in both covenants. Both covenants have acts of witnesses to serve as an observer to the parties involved. These witnesses involve both the divine and the human beings. These witnesses are called to testify to their testimony to each or one another. These witnesses become the custodians of pledged made in the covenant relationship.

The covenant in the Old Testament and the Igieduma covenant demands faithfulness from the individuals engaged in the relationships. This is due to the fact that the bridge of the covenant by any of the party members attract penalty either in the form of loss of benefits or a truncation of the once established relationship. The act of faithfulness in both covenant relationships peace co-existence, understanding of one another and the display of integrity are evidenced.

Areas of Differences /Disharmonies:

The areas where the Old Testament and Igieduma people' covenant differ may be seen from the following perspective. It has been noted above that both covenant are redemptive. However, the primary concern for the Igieduma people' covenant is for the immediate situation while that of the Old Testament is for eternal purpose.

The Old Testament and Igieduma people' covenant have the idea of witnessing. But the witness in the Igieduma people' covenant is with a human being even though they appeal to a divine being while the Old Testament covenant has to do with the divine and the human beings (Israelites). God is the initiator of the Old Testament covenant. While the Igieduma people' covenant is as result of the circumstances that demand such a covenant.

In the instance that there is a breaking of the covenant by any of parties, there is always a price to pay. However, when the offender realises his or her fault and needs reconciliation he or she has a responsibility to carry out. In the Old Testament form of covenant, what is needed is repentance of the faulty party while that of the Igieduma people' demands an act of sacrifice particularly that of marriage relationship.

Conclusion

This work as considered the one of the themes of the Old Testament theology which is covenant. This paper dealt with the forms and types of covenant in the Old Testament, the New Testament understanding and the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. This writer presented Igieduma people's form of covenant and the comparative

of both forms of covenants. From the understanding of the study of concept of covenant relationship, it is of great importance to know, that there is the needed to keep to the covenant we make.

References

- Bright, David John. *Covenant and Promise*. London: SCM Press, 1977.
- Brown, Collins, Ed. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 1975.
- Campbell, Roderick. *Israel and the New Covenant*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1954.
- Campbell, D.B.J. *The Old Testament for modern readers*. Georgia: John Knox Press, 1972.
- Charlesworth, James H. *The Old and the New Testaments*. Valley Forge: Trinity International, 1993.
- Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Hafemann, Paul. *Mapping Uniting in Diversity*. Grand Rapids/Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. et al. *New Dictionary of theology*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988.
- Hinson, David F. *Theology of the Old Testament*. London: SPCK, 1976.
- Horton, David Gene, Ed. *The Portable Seminary*. Minnesota: Bethany House, 2006.
- Hugenberger, Gordon P. *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Studies Library*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 168.
- Kaylor, R. David. *Paul's Covent Community I Romans*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988.
- Kittel, Gerhard, Ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964.
- Krummercher, F W. *Suffering Saviour*. Philadelphia: Moody Ed., 1950.
- Kummel, W G. *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1966.
- Lillback, P. A. "Covenant." *New Dictionary of Theology*. England: InterVarsity Press, 1988.
- Mills, Watson E., Gen. Ed. *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*. Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990.
- Routledge, Robin. *Old Testament Theology*. England: Appolos, 2008.
- Spurgeon, C. H. "Sermons on Psalm 40:6-8." *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*. Vol. 37, 1908, 249.
- Thomson, Della. *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary*. London: Dovelng Kindersley, 1998.
- Verbrugge, Verlyn D. *New International Dictionary of Theology of the New Testament*. Zondervan, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000.

- Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
Zondervan Reference Software. Nidnft.covenant.ginaventee.mediator.
- Campbell, D.B.J. *The Old Testament for Modern Readers*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1972.
- Adeogun E.O. *Lecture Notes on Old Testament Themes*. Ogbomoso: Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008.