

Has the Old Covenant Been Revoked?

By Robert J. Siscoe

In this article, we will consider the question of whether or not the Old Covenant has been revoked. In order to clear up the ambiguity that has clouded this issue during recent decades, we will distinguish between two different old covenants: one that God made with Abraham (the Promise), and another that God made with Moses (the Law). We will also distinguish between “Israel according to the flesh” (1 Cor. 10:18), and what St. Paul calls “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). At the end, we will examine a troubling rise in what can only be described as a diabolical form of anti-Semitism being promoted by high ranking prelates in Rome.

We will begin by distinguishing between two Old Covenants: an immutable Covenant that was fulfilled and never revoked, and a temporary Covenant that was fulfilled and then rendered null.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The first covenant we will discuss is the Covenant God made with Abraham. This Covenant contains a temporal promise and a spiritual promise.

Temporal Promise

The temporal promise was that God would give to the descendants of Abraham the land of Canaan (Genesis 15:18). The Old Testament records this promise descending from Abraham to his son Isaac (Gen 17:21), and then from Isaac to his son Jacob, and finally through Jacob to all of his posterity (Gen. 28:3-4).

Later in the book of Genesis, we see that Jacob’s name is changed to Israel (Gen. 35:10). This is why the Jews, who are the descendants of Jacob/Israel, are referred to as “the children of Israel”, or simply as “Israel”, or, as St. Paul calls them, “Israel according to the flesh” (1 Cor. 10:18).

The temporal promise God made to Abraham was fulfilled: “And the Lord God gave to Israel all the land that he had sworn to give to their fathers: and they possessed it and dwelt in it” (Josue 21:41).

Spiritual Promise

Unlike the temporal promise, which was given to Abraham’s natural descendants alone, the spiritual promise applied to all the nations of the earth. When Abraham showed his willingness to sacrifice his own son in obedience to God (prefiguring the sacrifice of God’s own Son on the cross), God said to him: “By my own self I have sworn, saith the Lord: because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only begotten son for my sake: I will bless thee... *And in thy*

seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16-18). In this passage we see that, according to this spiritual promise, “all the nations of the earth” would be blessed by Abraham’s seed.

But what is this *seed* God is referring to? Is it a reference to all of the natural descendants of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob? In other words, is this *seed* that will bless the earth the children of Israel collectively? If so, why did he say "seed" (singular) and not "seeds" (plural)? Or was God referring to a particular seed that would be born from the children of Israel? We find the answer to this question in the divinely inspired words of St. Paul to the Galatians, in which the Apostle explains that the *seed* God was referring to was Christ: "To Abraham were the promises made and to his seed. He saith not, 'and to his seeds', as of many: but as of one, 'and to thy seed', which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

Jesus is not only the natural seed of Abraham, as are all the other children of Israel: He is also the seed of God – God Incarnate – who would save His people from their sins. Jesus, the King and Savior of mankind, is the literal fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham. St. Paul explains that those who are baptized in Christ become one with Christ, and heirs according to the Promise. He wrote:

“For you are all children of God by faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek... For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ’s, then you are the seed of Abraham, heirs according to the Promise” (Galatians 3:26-29).

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Promise God made to Abraham, and all who are members of His mystical body are heirs according to that Promise. Therefore, the Covenant God made with Abraham was never revoked, but rather fulfilled in Christ.

The Mosaic Covenant

Between the time God made the Covenant Abraham and its fulfillment in Christ almost two thousand years later, God established a separate temporary Covenant with the children of Israel. This is the Covenant God established with Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19-24) four hundred and thirty years after the Covenant with Abraham (Galatians 3:17). The Mosaic Covenant, which is often referred to simply as *the Law*, is what the term “Old Covenant” traditionally refers to. The purpose of this Covenant was to signify and prefigure Christ, the Promised One, and the New Testament He would establish. It also served as a temporary “schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:23-25) until God’s Promise to Abraham was fulfilled. St. Paul explains:

“To Abraham were the promises made... Now this I say, that the testament which was confirmed by God, the [Mosaic] law which was made after four hundred and thirty years, doth not disannul, to make the Promise of no effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise. But God gave it to Abraham by promise. Why then was the law? It was set because of transgressions, until the seed should come, to whom He made the Promise... (Galatians 3:16-19).

Our Lord lived under the old Law, obeyed its precepts and fulfilled its types, and rendered it null by his death, “fastening it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). He then establishing the New Testament in His Blood, for the remission of sin (Mt. 26:28), replacing the Mosaic Law with “the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). (1) St. Paul wrote: “And therefore is He [Christ] the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of His death... they that are called may receive the Promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15).

In *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, we read: “On the Cross, Christ consummated the building of the Church. The Old Covenant ceased and the New Covenant sealed with the blood of Christ began” (p. 292).

The establishment of the New Covenant was predicted by Jeremiah, who said: “Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel... not according to the covenant I made with their fathers” (Jeremiah 31:31). Commenting on this prophecy, St. Paul explains: “now in saying a new [Covenant], he hath made the former old” (Hebrews 8:13).

In *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Pope Pius XII confirms that by the death of Christ the Old Law was rendered null:

“And first of all, by the death of our Redeemer, the New Testament took the place of the Old Law *which had been abolished*; then the Law of Christ together with its mysteries, enactments, institutions, and sacred rites was ratified for the whole world in the blood of Jesus Christ. For, while our Divine Savior was preaching in a restricted area - He was not sent but to the sheep that were lost of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:24) - the Law and the Gospel were together in force; but on the gibbet of his death Jesus *made void the Law* with its decrees (Eph. 2:15), fastened the handwriting of the Old Testament to the Cross (Col. 2:14), establishing the New Testament in His blood shed for the whole human race (Mt 26:28). ‘To such an extent, then,’ says St. Leo the Great, speaking of the Cross of our Lord, ‘was there effected a transfer from the Law to the Gospel, from the Synagogue to the Church, from many sacrifices to one Victim, that, as our Lord expired, that mystical veil which shut off the innermost part of the temple and its sacred secret was rent violently from top to bottom’.” (Mystici Corporis Christi, #29)

There is a fascinating fact recorded in the Jewish Talmud, of all places, which confirms that the old Law was rendered null with the death of Christ on the Cross. I will quote the Jewish convert, Roy Schoeman, who explained it in an interview he gave in December of 2003.

“Most Christians are aware of the many ways in which the Old Testament supports Christianity's claims that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, but few are familiar with the passages in the Talmud — a strictly Jewish "scripture" based on oral tradition and written down several centuries after the death of Jesus — which do the same thing. I discuss about a half dozen of these passages in my book. Probably my favorite is the "Miracle of the Scarlet Thread". Shortly put, the Talmud recounts that when the Temple stood in Jerusalem, the sins of the Jewish people were taken away each year on one day, Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, when the High Priest would enter

the Holy of Holies with a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people for the preceding year. Each year, a scarlet thread was affixed to the entry to the Holy of Holies, and miraculously, when the sacrifice within was accepted, the thread would turn white as a sign that the sins had been forgiven. Well, the Talmud recounts that, for no clearly identifiable reason, the miracle ceased to take place about 40 years before the destruction of the Temple. In other words, after about 30 A.D. the thread never again was turned white! We know, as Christians, that that was precisely when the Temple sacrifices lost their efficacy — at the moment of the Crucifixion, about 30 A.D., when, as a sign of the fact, the curtain in the Temple was rent in two (Matthew 27:51).”

The Council of Florence teaches that not only is the Old Law null and void, but those who seek to be justified by it sin mortally:

“[The Holy Roman Church] firmly believes, professes and teaches that the legal prescriptions of the Old Testament or the Mosaic law, which are divided into ceremonies, holy sacrifices and sacraments, because they were instituted to signify something in the future, although they were adequate for the divine cult of that age, once our Lord Jesus Christ who was signified by them had come, came to an end and the sacraments of the new Testament had their beginning. Whoever, after the Passion, places his hope in the legal prescriptions and submits himself to them as necessary for salvation and as if faith in Christ without them could not save, *sins mortally*. It does not deny that from Christ's passion until the promulgation of the Gospel they could have been retained, provided they were in no way believed to be necessary for salvation. But it asserts that after the promulgation of the gospel they cannot be observed without loss of eternal salvation” (Cantate Domino).

Pope Benedict XIV taught the same: “the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law were abrogated by the coming of Christ and... they can no longer be observed without sin after the promulgation of the Gospel” (Ex Quo Primum #61).

St. Thomas explains *why* it is a mortal sin to practice the Old Law:

Question: Whether since Christ's Passion the legal ceremonies can be observed without committing mortal sin?

I answer that, *All ceremonies are professions of faith*, in which the interior worship of God consists. Now man can make profession of his inward faith, by deeds as well as by words: and in either profession, if he make a false declaration, he sins mortally. Now, though our faith in Christ is the same as that of the fathers of old; yet, since they came before Christ, whereas we come after Him, the same faith is expressed in different words, by us and by them. For by them was it said: ‘Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,’ where the verbs are in the future tense: whereas we express the same by means of verbs in the past tense, and say that she ‘conceived and bore.’ In like manner the ceremonies of the Old Law betokened Christ as having yet to be born and to suffer: whereas our sacraments signify Him as already born and having suffered. *Consequently, just as it would be a mortal sin now for anyone, in making a profession of faith, to say that Christ is yet to be born, which the fathers of old said devoutly and truthfully; so too it would be a mortal sin now to observe those ceremonies which the fathers of old fulfilled with devotion and fidelity”* (I II, Q 103, A 4).

This teaching of St. Thomas explains why Catholics should not take part in a Seder Meal, which constitutes active participation in a false religious ceremony, and therefore is equivalent to a false profession of faith.

Two Covenants prefigured by Isaac and Ismael

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul speaks of an interesting allegory in the pages of the Old Testament, which prefigures the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant in Christ. Before considering what he wrote, let us recall the people from the Old Testament that are used in this allegory.

Before Abraham's wife Sarah bore his son, Isaac, the Patriarch had another son named Ismael with the slave girl Agar (Gen. 16:15). God promised Abraham that He would give him a son (Genesis 15:4); but due to his old age and the apparent sterility of his wife Sarah, she convinced him to marry the slave girl Agar in the hope that she would bear him a son. After Ismael was born to the slave girl, Sarah conceived Isaac who was the fulfillment of God's promise (Gen. 21:1-2). After the birth of the promised one, Isaac, Sarah said to Abraham: "cast out this bond woman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son Isaac" (Gen. 21:10).

Now, in the letter to the Galatians, God explains, through the pen of St. Paul, that these two children prefigure the two Covenants. In the allegory, Isaac (the child of the promise) prefigures the New Covenant in Christ, which includes those who have been baptized in Christ and are members of his mystical body. Ismael (the child of the slave girl) prefigures the unbelieving Jews "according to the flesh" who reject Christ and instead seek to be justified by the Old Law. St. Paul wrote:

"Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, have you not read the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bond woman [Ismael], and the other by a free woman [Isaac]. But he who was of the bond woman, was born *according to the flesh*: but he of the free woman, was *by promise*. Which things are said by an allegory. For these are the two testaments. The one from Mount Sina [the Mosaic Law], engendering unto bondage, which is Agar: ... Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he, that was born according to the flesh, persecuted him that was after the spirit, so also it is now. But what saith the Scriptures? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman'. So then, brethren, we are not the children of the bondwoman, but of the free: by the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free" (Galatians 4: 21-31).

The unbelieving Jews who cling to the slavery of the Old Law are compared analogously to Ismael, the child of the slave girl; while the faithful Jews (those who accepted Christ), along with the believing Gentiles, are compared to Isaac – the child of the promise.

The Israel of God

Israel, during the Old Testament, prefigured the Catholic Church in the New Testament. The Jewish religion, which was the true religion at the time of Christ, ceased to be the true religion when its hierarchy rejected Christ. On this point, Msgr. Fenton wrote:

“The rejection of this message constituted an abandonment of the Faith itself. By manifesting this rejection of the Faith, the Jewish religious unit fell from its position as the company of the chosen people. It was no longer God’s *ecclesia* [Church], His supernatural kingdom on earth.”

The book of Romans explains that the unbelieving Jews have been cut off from the house of Israel, and the believing Gentiles grafted in (11:17-21) – “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and co-partners of his Promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6). After the death and resurrection of Christ and the promulgation of the Gospel, true spiritual Israel consists of both Jews and Gentiles who have true Faith in Christ and are members of His mystical body, as St. Paul teaches:

“Know ye therefore, that they who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham? And the scriptures, foreseeing that God justifieth the Gentiles by faith, told unto Abraham before: ‘In thee shall all nations be blessed’. Therefore they that are of faith, shall be blessed with faithful Abraham. ... Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law... That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus: that we may receive the Promise of the Spirit by faith... There is neither Jew nor Greek... For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ’s, then are you heirs according to the Promise” (Galatians 3).

Today, the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles together embody, what St. Paul calls, “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

Diabolical Disorientation

This brings us to our last point. There is, today, what can only be described as a diabolical form of anti-Semitism being promoted by high ranking prelates in Rome, which is masked under the cloak of opposing anti-Semitism.

Due to a heretical “interpretation” of Vatican II (which conflicts with 2000 years of Catholic teaching), and because Vatican II failed to restate the central truth that the Old Covenant is superceded by the New, many misguided prelates are doing all they can to stifle any missionary efforts to convert the unbelieving Jews to Christ, thereby hindering them from becoming heirs according to the Promise and partakers of eternal life. These same men are going further still by claiming that the Jews can be saved by the Mosaic Covenant, which, as we have seen, is not only null and void, but constitutes a mortal sin when practiced. Not to mention the fact that the sacrificial rites of the Mosaic Law, by which the Jews had their sins forgiven, have not been offered since 70AD when the Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple.

While we cannot judge the intentions or motives of these churchmen, there is no question that their words and actions toward the Jews constitute, in their effect, the worst form of anti-

Semitism, since they serve as a positive obstacle to the Jews accepting Christ as their Messiah. When we consider that all Jews who die outside of the Catholic Church “will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels” (2), we can grasp the truly diabolical nature of this form of anti-Semitism.

Cardinal Lombardi recently said “Anti-Semitism *in all its forms* is a non-Christian act and the Catholic Church must fight this phenomenon with all her strength”.

Therefore, let us do our part to oppose these misguided churchmen who claim that the Old Covenant “was never revoked by God”, and who do all they can to stifle missionary activity targeting the Jews for conversion thereby hindering them from inheriting eternal life; for as our Lord told the unbelieving Jews of His day: “If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins” (John 8:24).

We can begin now to oppose this form of anti-Semitism by including, as an intention in our daily Rosary, the conversion of the unbelieving Jews. May this small act of true charity on our part serve to counter the effects of the diabolical disorientation that has come over these misguided churchmen.

Let us end with the prayer of Pope Pius XI for the conversion of the Jews: “Turn Thine eyes of mercy towards the children of that race, once Thy chosen people: of old they called down upon themselves the Blood of the Savior; may it now descend upon them a laver of redemption and of life”. Amen

Footnote:

1. S.T. I-II, Q 106

2. [The Most Holy Roman Church] “firmly believes, professes and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, heretics, and schismatics can ever be partakers of eternal life, but that they are to go into the eternal fire ‘which was prepared for the devil and his angels,’ (Mt. 25:41) unless before death they are joined with Her” (Council of Florence, Cantate Domini).