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THE COVENANT CONCEPT IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Old Testament

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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The Covenant of God with man represents in the Old Testament the closest possible relationship. It is the heart of a movement of God downwards. In its massive sweep across the Old Testament it marks the center of history and religion.

Such a relationship is important. Anything which manifests the grace of God to man is worth studying. But more---anything which answers the cravings of man for security and salvation is to be apprehended. And so we make our study of that relationship from the viewpoint of the Crucified etiam pro nobis as He was foreshadowed in the Old Testament---a relationship which was expressed in terms of a berith.

That relationship was given in an historical setting. It can only be understood in that setting. We have, therefore, devoted what may be considered undue space to make that historical situation clear. Yet from that springboard the present study and additional study can best be made. Further, we have placed an emphasis on the earlier

period of Hebrew covenanting, again perhaps an undue emphasis; yet the later berith can only be understood in terms of the earlier, and in a study of this length something must be sacrificed.

It is found more than three hundred times in the Masoretic Text. The derivation of the word is uncertain. Various roots have been suggested. Gesenius assumed a root brh "to cut" (brh, brith) after the Arabic.¹ The contention that berith is a verbal form from the root brh or brh because of Lev. 26:42 and Jer. 33:20 is doubtful since in most cases berith is construed as a noun rukn with a following positive (e.g. brith also construed it with lo).² Rather, as Davidson points out, the phrase "to cut a covenant" (brith brith) was derived from the usage. The idea of berith and the term brith existed independently of the use employed at its formation in particular instances (cf. brith brith).

1. Wilhelm Gesenius, Thesaurus Philologicus Criticus Linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae, Vol. 1, p. 207. This brith is taken as the brith mentioned in Gen. 14:13 where it is said that his covenant by passing between the pieces of the sacrificed animals.

2. Friedrich Sell, "Der Hebraische Begriff berith" in Theologische Monatsschrift, Theologische Vierteljahrsschrift für bibl. Theol., Vol. III, p. 107.

3. Davidson, "Covenant" in Dictionary of Biblical Studies, p. 207.

ETYMOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY OF THE HEBREW BERITH

The key-word to the entire relationship of the covenant is the Hebrew berith. It is found more than three hundred times in the Massoretic Text. The derivation of the word is uncertain. Various roots have been suggested. Gesenius assumed a root barah "to cut" (cecidit, secuit) after the Arabic.¹ The contention that berith is a verbal form from the root barah or bara' because of Lev. 26:42 and Jer. 33:20 is doubtful since in most cases berith is construed as a nomen regens with a following genitive (Is. 42:6 alone construing it with le).² Rather, as Davidson points out, the phrase "to cut a covenant" (carath berith) was derived from the usage. The idea of berith and the term itself existed independently of the rite employed at its formation in particular instances (cf. Lat. foedus icere).³

1. Guelielmvs Gesenius, Thesaurus Philologicus Criticus Linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae, Vol. I, p. 237f. This derivation is based on the rite mentioned in Gen. 15:17 where El Shaddai ratified His covenant by passing between the pieces of the sacrificial animals.

2. Gottfried Quell, "Der at.liche Begriff Berith" sub "Diatheke" in Kittel, Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, Vol. III, p. 107.

3. A.B. Davidson, "Covenant" in Hasting's A Dictionary of the Bible, p. 509.

An attempt to relate berith to birjah "food" or even to baruth "food" and barah "eat" on the part of Gulkowitsch is rejected by Quell: Hingegen kann fuer berith an keiner einzigen der 286 Stellen, an denen es in der Masora auftritt, die Bedeutung 'Speise' eingesetzt werden, und sie scheint niemals an dem Wort gehaftet zu haben."⁴

Modern scholars seem to be agreed that the Hebrew berith apparently has its origin in the Akkadian or Assyrian baru "bind" "fesseln" and its derivative biritu "fetter" "fettering" "enclosing." It does not quite appear, however, whether the supposed verb from which baru is derived meant "to enclose" or "to bind." "At any rate the word "bond" would approximate more nearly towards expressing the various usages of berith than any other word, for the term is used not only where two parties reciprocally bind themselves, but where one party imposes a bond upon the other, or where a party assumes a bond upon himself."⁵

4. Quell, op. cit., p. 108. Further: "Es ist also keine hinreichende Sicherheit fuer die Annahme gegeben, dasz berith mit derselben Wurzel barah 'essen,' welche birjah und baruth zugrunde liegt, in Zusammenhang steht, sondern die Bedeutung des in birjah steckenden barah bildet das eigentliche Problem der Etymologie." Nor can the circumstances surrounding the covenants recorded in Gen. 26: 26ff. and 31:44ff. be adduced to indicate that eating was essential to a covenant. In the former case the feast or meal provided by Isaac took place the night before the covenant was sworn and formed no part of the covenant ceremonies; in the latter, the two meals were not part of the ceremonies, especially the second meal which was sacrificial. Cf. Davidson, op. cit., p. 510a.

5. Ibid., p. 509b. Cf. also Quell, op. cit., p. 108.

Jastrow apparently follows Gesenius in deriving berith from barah "cut," but finds this unique meaning: "circle" "ring" "chain," to indicate the binding nature of a covenant. This idea is not found in any other source consulted.⁶

In view of this evidence on the etymology of berith Quell's generalization seems to hold: "Die Versuche, die Etymologie dem Verstaendnis des Begriffes nutzbar zu machen, haben weder zu einem einhelligen noch zu einem in vollem Umfang ueberzeugenden Ergebnis fuehren koennen."⁷ While it seems most likely that the key lies in the Akkadian biritu and baru, we must turn to the terminology employed in the establishment of the covenant to ascertain its force in any given passage.

Most frequently (86 times according to Quell) berith is construed with the verb carath "cut."⁸ A berith,

6. Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature, sub berith.

7. Op. cit., p. 107.

8. Ibid., p. 107. In the phrase carath berith, Quell does not regard berith as the object of carath since, he claims, other accusatives are construed with the phrase in such a manner that to regard berith as the object would alter the meaning. Nor does he consider the animals cut up in an offering to be regarded as the object of carath berith because the phrase is so frequently construed with prepositions, Ibid., p. 108. Davidson, on the other hand, insists upon this latter idea: "To make a covenant is usually carath berith, to cut a covenant, i.e., slay victims in forming the agreement," Theology of the Old Testament, p. 239.

therefore, is "cut" with another person or persons (eeh or "im, and also le; more on this below) so that the mutual dealings follow as a result of that berith.¹⁰ It seems, therefore, that the phrase carath berith might carry the conception that individuals or groups or nations are "cut off" from a former relation and enter into a new relation, a berith, a "league" or "covenant."¹¹

Other verbs are used with berith with slightly different connotations, although the resulting berith carries the same full weight as carath berith: thus sim berith (2 Sam. 23:5) "set" or "make a covenant"; heekim berith (Ez. 16:60,62 and esp. in Genesis: ch. 6:18; 9:9, 11; 17:7,19,21; Ex. 6:4) "appoint, establish a covenant"; nathan berith (Gen. 9:12; 17:2; Num. 25:12) "give a covenant"; nishba" berith (Deut. 4:31; 7:12) "swear a covenant"; bo' babberith'eth (2 Chron. 15:12) "enter into a covenant"; avar berith (Deut. 29:11) "pass over a covenant" undoubtedly "pass over into a covenant."¹²

10. Quell, op. cit., p. 108.

11. At times berith is omitted and carath stands alone to indicate the cutting of a covenant. Thus 1 Sam. 22:8: bikrah beni "im ben yisha; also Is. 57:8. Instead of berith once 'annah (Neh. 10:1) and once dabhar (Hag. 2:5) are construed with carath to indicate the establishment of a covenant relationship.

12. William Green discusses the differences between nathan berith and heekim berith over against carath berith in its relationship to the documentary hypothesis, The Unity of the Book of Genesis, pp. 108, 109. His contention that carath berith "is never used in speaking of this covenant with Israel, as of that with Abraham, because the element of perpetuity and inviolability was

Differences in meaning also appear in the use of prepositions used with berith. In the usage of the Pentateuch, the expression carath berith with "im or 'eeth ("with") is used throughout to signify the closing of God's covenant with Israel.¹³ In the later books, however, a usage appears where carath berith is used with the preposition le in a distinctive sense, that is, a greater emphasis is laid upon the initiative of the subject, the one who cuts the covenant. Quell does not permit too much emphasis to be placed on the implications of this construction.¹⁴

Our grammatical constructions, therefore, do not seem to lend themselves to a very valuable insight into the nature of a berith. Two points are significant, though perhaps indefinite. First, the phrase carath berith seems to carry the implication of a person or persons being cut off from a former situation with the result that a new situation develops---a berith, a bond. Second, the use of this

wanting" collapses in the light of Jer. 31:31ff. where carath is used to indicate both the Sinaitic Covenant and The New Covenant, whose main feature is its perpetuity.

³ 13. Gustav Oehler, Old Testament Theology, p. 175. "The Pentateuch uses carath berith with le only in speaking of the covenants of Israel with Canaan and its idols," Ibid., p. 176, note 4.

14. "Doch soll dieser Wechsel (carath berith le) im Ausdruck schwerlich immer zugleich einen solchen im Sinngehalt bedeuten. Er kann ebenswohl auf Bequemlichkeit wie auf juristischen oder dogmatischen Erwagungen der Autoren beruhen, wengleich solche dort vielleicht nicht ganze ausgeschlossen sind, wo von Gott ausgesagt wird, dasz er mit Bezug auf jemand schnitt," op. cit., p. 109.

phrase with le serves to emphasize, at least in part, that the initiative rests with the one who cuts the covenant.

The complete meaning of berith can only be found by studying these particular situations in which a berith is established, by examining the translation of the term in the versions, and through an insight into peculiar phrases which develop around the word.

A glance at peculiar phrases offers some additional insight. One of these is the "covenant of salt" (berith melach). This is a covenant of close relation with "eternal features." The connection between the two concepts "covenant" and "salt" appears in the religious life of Israel where salt was regarded as a necessary ingredient of the daily food and hence of the sacrifices to Jahweh.¹⁵ When men ate together they became friends.¹⁶ Sacrificial meals generally attended covenants, and salt was always present. Since salt is a preservative, it could easily become symbolic of an enduring covenant, even religious covenants.¹⁷

15. Thus Lev. 2:13: "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant (melach berith) to be lacking from thy meat offering; with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt."

16. Cf. the Arab. expressions, "There is salt between us"; "he has eaten of my salt," which means partaking of hospitality which cemented friendship. Quoted in Edward Pollard, "Covenant of salt" in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 729. Also cf. Ezra 4:14: "We are salted with the salt of the palace" (A.V. marginal reading).

17. Num. 18:19: "All the heave offerings of the

Among other expressions, the majority of which do not add to the significance of berith,¹⁸ the phrase in Jeremiah 33:20 emphasizes the binding nature of a berith: "If ye cannot break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season . . ." The close relationship established through a berith finds expression in the term ba"ale berith "confederates" "allies," or even 'achim, "brethren," Gen. 14:14; 31:54.

The various ancient translations of berith also lend themselves to a keener insight into the nature of the term. Naturally the most important witness should present itself in the Septuagint translation and the New Testament usage. The Septuagint's constant rendering is diatheke "testament" rather than syntheke "covenant," the most prevalent classical term. The classical distinction between diatheke and syntheke was not entirely lost in Hellenistic Greek.¹⁹

holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever; it is a covenant of salt (berith melaq) for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee." David also received his kingdom for ever from Jahweh by a "covenant of salt" (berith melaq), 2 Chron. 13:5.

18. For example, the picturesque phrases: "covenant with death" (Is. 28:15,18), "league (berith) with the stones of the field" (Job 5:23), "covenant with mine eyes" (Job 31:1), covenant with "Leviathan" (Job 41:4), "covenant with the beasts" (Hos. 2:18; Ez. 34:25).

19. Nathaniel Schmidt, "Covenant" in Encyclopaedia Biblica, edited by Cheyne and Black, Vol. I, p. 929.

It was a deliberate choice of the Alexandrian fathers that diatheke was used. The covenant relations of God with Israel depended solely on Jahweh for the maintainance of the regulations and the final realizaiion of the aim of the covenant.²⁰ However, in many cases the covenanting parties were on equal footing, and hence syntheke would have been the better choice.²¹ Why, then, the constant rendering of berith with diatheke? Most likely the Alexandrian translators' conception of berith in its most important usage as a covenant with Jahweh crowded out any considerations to confuse the problem by varying the translation of berith between syntheke and diatheke. Syntheke carried the implication of parties on an equal footing (syn) negotiating a covenant, but all the covenants of God with Israel, without exception (as will be demonstrated below), had their initiative in Jahweh. Diatheke, therefore, was the best rendering of the Hebrew berith. The additional New Testament concept of "testament" or "will" posited in diatheke is not inherent in berith.²²

Strangely enough, Aquila and Symmachus usually, and Theodotion frequently, rendered berith with syntheke. Opin-

20. Oehler, op. cit., p. 175.

21. "Syntheke is used exclusively for a political alliance in 1 and 2 Maccabees," Schmidt, op. cit., p. 929.

22. For a discussion of diatheke in the New Testament theology, particularly from the viewpoint of "testament" and "covenant" cf. Elmer E. Griesse, The Biblical Concept of Diatheke, Bachelor of Divinity Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1943.

ions rendered by scholars seem to convey the idea that the reasons for this rendering did not grow out of a prejudicial mind.²³

Concluding our study of the etymology and terminology of berith we note certain facts, which will develop more clearly as we examine individual covenants and situations. The etymological and terminological evidence is too inconclusive to predicate anything final as to the nature of a covenant, especially its religious implications. The root apparently indicates the binding nature of a covenant; the terminology suggests the close relationship established through the "cutting of a covenant," though the use of le also suggests the placing of the initiative; and the translations suggest very clearly the placing of the initiative into the hands of the one who "cuts" the covenant.

23. "Aquila's preference for syntheke cannot be explained by prejudice; its use by Symmachus was evidently dictated by considerations of style; Theodotian's conservatism did not prevent him from abandoning at times the uniform rendering of the oldest Greek version," Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 928, 929.

COVENANTS IN SECULAR HISTORY

The Old Testament records of divine and human covenants are not unique in themselves. The bond of the covenant was no more peculiar to Israel than Philosophy was to the Greeks. Rather the recorded covenants between men in the Old Testament reflect the general social and religious life of the Semitic world, indeed of the entire world. The anthropomorphic conception of Jahweh entering into a covenant with Israel was another way of God's adapting Himself to the thought patterns and social customs of man.

Secular history, ancient and modern, is replete with accounts of covenants between individuals and nations. Although the alliances and compacts of contemporary political science are not considered covenants, they are a manifestation of the covenant relationship.

Covenanting has always been a form of social behavior.²⁴ Probably the oldest records are found in the fabulous "Book of the Dead" in Egypt.²⁵ A deciphered stele of Rameses IV

24. H. Clay Trumbull in his volume The Blood Covenant has produced a well-documented account of universal blood-covenanting from ancient to modern times.

25. Ibid., pp. 78-82.

of Egypt in the 12th century B.C. gives an apparent reference to blood-covenanting and to its amulet record.²⁶ The Greek Lucian refers to a binding covenanting in his "Toxaris or Friendship" among the Scythians.²⁷ As far back as the fifth century before Christ we find an explicit description of this oriental rite of blood-covenanting in the writings of Herodotus:²⁸

Now the Scythians make covenants in the following manner, with whomsoever they make them. Having poured out wine into a great earthen drinking-bowl, they mingle with it the blood of those cutting covenant, striking the body of each person having a part in it with a small knife, or cutting it slightly with a sword. Thereafter, they dip into the bowl, sword, arrow, axe, and javelin. But while they are doing this, they utter many invokings of curse upon a breach of the covenant; and, afterwards, not only those who make the covenant, but those of their followers who are of the highest rank, drink off the wine mingled with the blood.

The Latin historian Tacitus gives records of a similar rite between the leader of the Ibernians and the King of the Armenians to establish a firm peace between the two nations.²⁹ According to Sallust and Florus,³⁰ Catiline and his fellow conspirators entered into a blood covenant to overthrow the Roman republic. Oehler finds

26. Cf. Piehl, Zeitschrift fuer Aegyptische Sprache, erstes Heft, 1885, p. 16; recorded in Trumbull, op. cit., pp. 83, 84.

27. Opera, p. 545; cf. Trumbull, op. cit., p. 58.

28. Hist., IV, 70, quoted in Trumbull, op. cit., pp. 61, 62. Also cf. Herodotus, op. cit., III, 8.

29. Annales XII, 47; cf. Trumbull, op. cit., p. 60.

30. Historiae, IV, 1, 4; Catilina, cap. XXII; cf. Trumbull, op. cit., p. 60.

rites in Livy, Plutarch, and Homer³¹ in essence similar to that employed by Jahweh in the ratification of His covenant with Abraham, Gen. 15:17.

Covenant-making has been a world-wide custom. Trumbull finds evidences of covenants among the legendary lore of the Norseland peoples, in China, Madagascar, Borneo, Polynesia, and the native races of North and South America.³² Stanley and Livingstone personally entered into many blood-covenants during their journeys through Africa.³³

These covenants recorded in secular history were considered no less binding than those of the sacred historians. Especially is this true of blood-covenanting which was regarded as the closest, holiest, and most indissoluble compact conceivable. "Such a covenant clearly involves an absolute surrender of one's separate self, and an irrevocable merging of one's individual nature into the dual, or the multiplied, personality included in the compact."³⁴

These secular covenants were not devoid of their reli-

31. Livy, I, 24; Plutarch, Quaest. Rom., cap. III; Homer, Iliad, III, 298ff. Cf. Oehler, op. cit., p. 175.

32. Trumbull, op. cit., pp. 39-56.

33. Ibid., pp. 13-15; 18-38.

34. Ibid., p. 204. Dr. J.G. Wetzstein reports on the closely binding nature of a blood-covenant of two trans-Jordan peoples: "The marriage of a man and woman between whom this covenant of blood exists is held to be incest." Sprachliches aus den Zeltlagern der syrischen Wüste, p. 37; quoted in Trumbull, op. cit., p. 10. Also cf. Charles Kent, The Heroes and Crises of Early Hebrew History, p. 190.

gious elements. Oaths calling upon the gods to bring down wrath upon the transgressors of a covenant contract were common practice everywhere. The ancient Semitic neighbors of Israel also thought of themselves as being in a covenant relationship with their gods. Their gods were believed to be bound to them by ties of kinship, which, it was thought, could not be broken. Just as a chieftain might not like the conduct of his tribe, but was still forced to help lest the tribe and he be destroyed, so the national god must rescue his people, whatever their morals, or he would have no worshippers, and so would be no god.³⁵

It is in relation to such an historical background that the covenant concept in Old Testament theology must be considered. The words of Kurtz regarding this relation and independence of sacred covenants are in place:³⁶

A comparison of the religious symbols of the Old Testament with those of ancient heathendom shows that the ground and the starting point of those forms of religion which found their appropriate expressions in symbols was the same in all cases; while the history of civilization proves that, on this point, priority cannot be claimed by the Israelites. But when instituting such an in-

35. George Barton, A History of the Hebrew People, pp. 65, 66. Here Barton finds a significant difference in the worship of Israel: "Yahweh's relation to Israel was, however, different. It was a covenant relation, and, if Israel did not fulfill its part of the bargain, Yahweh would be free to cast them off and choose another people."

36. History of the Old Covenant, Vol. I, p. 235; quoted by Trumbull, op. cit., p. 206.

quiry, we shall also find that the symbols which were transferred from the religions of nature to that of the spirit first passed through the fire of divine purification, from which they issued as the distinctive theology of the Jews; the dross of a pantheistic deification of nature having been consumed.

Old Testament--There between man and man, and these be-
tween God and man. The idea of covenants among men
did find its origin in the Divine. Yet, as we have seen,
covenants between men even in Israel were in keeping with
the general social pattern of the day. Rather, as De-
vidson points out, "It may be argued that the ideas are
derived from the . . . Divine covenants are secondary,
and transferred from covenants among men."²⁷

The covenant takes on varied forms in sacred his-
tory: personal covenants between individuals, interna-
tional alliances or leagues, covenants between visitors and
their respective, and covenants with distinctive reli-
gious purposes and significances.²⁸

The classic example of a personal covenant between
two individuals is that of David and Jonathan, 1 Samuel
18:1-4:

And it came to pass, when he had made an
end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of
Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and
Jonathan loved him as his own soul. . . . Then

27. "Covenant," pp. 212-3, p. 212a.

28. A clear conception of the covenant relation can
only be determined by limiting investigation to those
covenants expressly named as such.

OLD TESTAMENT RECORDS OF HUMAN COVENANTS

There are two classes of covenants mentioned in the Old Testament---those between men and men, and those between God and men. The idea of human convenanting did not find its origin in the Divine, but, as we have seen, covenants between men even in Israel were in keeping with the general social pattern of the day. Rather, as Davidson points out, "it may be assumed that the ideas associated with the . . . divine covenants are secondary, and transferred from covenants among men."³⁷

The covenant takes on varied forms in sacred history: personal covenants between individuals, international alliances or leagues, compacts between victors and their vanquished, and covenants with distinctive religious purposes and significances.³⁸

The classic example of a personal covenant between two individuals is that of David and Jonathan, 1 Samuel 18:1-4:

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. . . Then

37. "Covenant," op. cit., p. 510a.

38. A clear conception of the covenant relation can only be determined by limiting investigation to those covenants expressly termed as such.

Jonathan and David made a covenant (carath berith), because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

The motivation for the covenant was a deep-seated love which spontaneously broke forth into the covenant. It was an acknowledgment and confirmation of their mutual feelings. As an outward manifestation Jonathan presented the personal gifts to David, to whom his soul was now fused. So closely were these two united that Jonathan could oppose the evil intentions of his father Saul out of his love for David, ch. 20:8, 9. David signified his respect for this covenant even after the death of Jonathan, when he invited and maintained Jonathan's son Mephibosheth at his table, 2 Sam. 9:5-13.

The covenant between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:43-55) not only brought together two persons who had been at odds but also united two families. Jacob had aroused the ire of Laban because of his unannounced departure and because Rachel had secretly stolen the household idols, v. 34. The initiative in this transaction was assumed by Laban who finally realized that he was dealing with his own flesh and blood, vv. 43, 44. A cairn was raised by Laban (or both) to be a witness, and apparently also a boundary mark. The terms of the covenant were that neither party should overstep this boundary to do harm to the

other. Moreover, Jacob was bound not to "afflict" Laban's daughters nor to take other wives. The religious element is very strong. No human witnesses are mentioned, but Laban appealed to the "God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, and the God of their father" to witness and to judge any violation of the covenant, vv. 51, 53.³⁹ Jacob, however swore "by the fear of his father Isaac," that is, the One whom Isaac feared with a holy fear, the God of Abraham, El Shaddai; cf. v. 42. Another religious factor was the sacrifice of Jacob, v. 54. So closely were these two parties bound that the ratifying covenant meal was between brethren ('achim), v. 55.

The covenant idea also extended into the realm of international dealings. As early as the time of Abraham we have records of a formal covenant made between Abraham and Abimelech, King of Philistia (Gen. 21:22-34). The proposal came from Abimelech who recognized that Abraham was one blessed by God, v. 22. The terms were strictly political: "Swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son," v. 23. This involved a non-aggression pact along with trade concessions in connection with the use of the wells dug by Abraham. This treaty was attended

³⁹. Laban apparently had a polytheistic conception of God; note the plural jishpetu, v. 53. Keil: Laban stellt "nach seiner polytheistischen Anschauung den Gott Abrahams auf gleiche Linie mit dem Gotte Nahors und The-rah's," Biblischer Commentar ueber die Buecher Mose's, Erster Band: Genesis und Exodus, p. 216.

with gifts on the part of Abraham (sheep and oxen). An almost identical covenant was cut by Abimelech with Isaac, Gen. 26:26-33. The only additional rite in connection with this covenant was the meal or feast provided by Isaac the night before the covenant, vv. 30f.⁴⁰

Other political covenants are alluded to by the sacred writers: the proposed covenant between the Ammonites and the men of Jabesh,⁴¹ the pact between Ahab and Benhadad whereby the cities stolen from Asa would be returned to Ahab, 1 Kings 20:34;⁴² and the alliance of Israel with Assyria, Hosea 12:1. The binding nature of such alliances upon Israel is illustrated in the dealings of Jerusalem with the King of Babylon, Ez. 17:13ff. Babylon had left Jerusalem as a vassal state, restricting any negotiations with other powers. This contract Jerusalem broke by sending ambassadors to Egypt. Because Jerusalem had thus broken the oath of the covenant, the Lord through Ezekiel announced the coming death of Jerusalem's king in

40. It is significant that all three human covenants recorded in Genesis were marked by the naming of the places of the covenanting: Jacob calling the place Mizpah, Abraham calling it Beersheba, and Isaac Shebah.

41. 1 Sam. 11:1ff. Faced with the prospect of defeat at the hands of Ammon, the men of Jabesh-Gilead were willing to become vassals of Ammon in exchange for their lives. This the Ammonites were willing to grant under the condition of putting out the right eyes of the city's inhabitants; the eventual rescue of the city was effected through Saul.

42. For entering into this covenant with one whom the Lord had appointed for punishment, Jahweh through His prophet proclaimed the impending death of Ahab, v. 42.

Babylon, v. 16. Jahweh regarded the breaking of the oath made in His name a direct violation of His name.

Even though the men of Israel had been duped into the covenant with the Gibeonites, still they respected that covenant and did not exterminate the people, Josh. 9. For breaking the brotherly covenant with Israel and selling captives to its traditional enemy Edom, Amos announced the doom of Jahweh upon Tyre, Amos 1:9-10.

Three covenants between the national leaders and the people are directed towards the re-instatement of the Divine Covenant with the people. The first is that of Joshua with the people, Josh. 24:14-25. This covenant is a solemn bond laid by Joshua on the people, or rather assumed by the people at his suggestion that they would "serve Jahweh their God." Joshua had already announced his own resolution to serve: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Jahweh)," 24:15. To this confession the people assented, and therefore Joshua covenanted (carath berith) with Israel to abide by the divine covenant made through Moses, v. 25. As a witness for this renewal, Joshua erected a stone memorial under "an oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord."

The second religious human covenant was that of Josiah with his people, 2 Kings 23:1-3:

And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the

Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their ears all the words of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

It is rather doubtful that Josiah's covenant was made with the Lord and not with the people, for the construction is wajjikroth eth habberith liphnee Jahweh, "to the face of Jahweh," or "before Jahweh," but not "with Jahweh."⁴³ Strictly speaking, we can hardly say that this covenant was even made with the people, although the people afterwards entered into the covenant, v. 3.⁴⁴ This covenant was an engagement or bond assumed by Josiah and differs little in idea from that of a vow.⁴⁵ He pledged himself to abide by the terms of the covenant which the Lord had made with Israel at Sinai.

Zedekiah's covenant with the people of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 34) revolved around one section of the Sinaitic Covenant, the usage of Hebrew servants, Lev. 25:39-46. Zedekiah had persuaded the people to place themselves un-

43. Cp. the section on "Etymology and Terminology," pp. 6,7.

44. Davidson, "Covenant," op. cit., p. 510b.

45. This sense is even clearer when Hezekiah says, "It is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel," 2 Chron. 29:10; cf. Ezra 10:3.

der this provision, but they soon turned and again enslaved the Hebrew servants. For this violation of the oath and covenant Jahweh announced the wrath of God upon the people, Jer. 34:20:⁴⁶

I will give them into the hands of their enemies, and into the hands of them that seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beast of the earth.

An examination of all these human covenants in sacred history admits several observations regarding the conception of the Jewish mind with respect to the covenant idea. The bond between David and Jonathan emphasized rather strongly the emotional, the spontaneousness which at times surrounds covenant-making. The berith was often a juridical proceeding, and the relation between the two parties was a legal one: Thus the compacts of Abraham and Abimelech, Jacob and Laban, and others, where the terms were strictly defined. A berith was the common form of an international agreement. It was something which not only Jahweh but the people themselves regarded as binding, as for example Israel's treatment of the Gibeonites. It was something, which at times

46. The statements that these three covenants between the national leaders and the people should be interpreted to indicate the three leaders as mediators (cp. 2 Kings 11:17) involves several small difficulties: If these were divine covenants mediated through individuals, the initiative would rest with Jahweh; the construction in the covenant of Josiah (liphnee) has no parallel in covenanting (but cf. Judg. 1:1 bejahweh); and in two instances the leaders pledged themselves before approaching the people.

was not only an obligation or engagement mutually agreed upon, but also something imposed by one party on another (Joshua, Zedekiah), or assumed by a person himself (Josiah).

Finally, it was a religious act of the highest order. The covenants were ordinarily ratified by an oath (shevu-ah); it was this oath which distinguished the covenant from ordinary contracts or agreements.⁴⁷ The calling upon Jahweh as a witness, the sacrificial offerings and the curse invoked by each party on himself in case of violation added to the religious implications of the covenant.

The covenant among men in the Old Testament, then, was in harmony with the social life of the entire Semitic world. It was the highest token of friendship and love an individual or nation could offer; it was the most sacred thing conceivable. It was as though God Himself were in a relation to them.

And into that mind and conception God did move. It was to this pattern of thought and values—the most effective method of coming to grips with the Semitic manner of thinking—that Jahweh adapted Himself. And out of that movement of God into history came the grand covenants of the Old Testament, all signifying the grace of God ready to be poured out on the world through Him who became the Mediator of the Eternal Covenant.

47. Cf. Davidson, "Covenant" op. cit., p. 510b on covenant as a 'synonym' for "oath" in some instances.

THE NOACHIAN COVENANT

The covenant with Noah marked the first in a series of gracious dispensations of God towards the "new" world. It came at a crucial time in human history—at a time when all was desolate, when the fate of humanity rested in eight persons. The promise of this gracious act was given to Noah before he entered the ark, Gen. 6:18:⁴⁸

Behold, with thee will I establish my covenant (hagimothi berithi eth); and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

48. It is doubtful that this citation could refer to a covenant other than that mentioned in ch. 9:9ff. The possibility that this was a guaranty of preservation in the impending flood (Thus Franz Delitzsch, Commentar ueber die Genesis, p. 251) is not very likely, since nothing more of this covenant is mentioned in this connection, and it would seem strange that a covenant would be made without specific mention of terms. The suggestion that this refers to some covenant previously made with Noah has nothing to commend it. Cf. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, on Gen. 6:18. We need not follow Luther on this, though in a wider sense he is correct: "Aber meiner Meinung nach redet er vom geistlichen Bunde oder von der Verheissung des Samens, welcher der Schlange Kopf zertreten sollte. . . Dem Noah aber versichert Gott diesen Bund also, dasz er gewiszlich schlieszt und dafuer haelt, Christus werde aus seinem Geschlechte geboren werden und werde Gottin seinem so grossen Zorn dennoch ein Haeuflein zur Mehrung der Kirche bleiben lassen," "Auslegung des ersten Buch Mose," Luthers Saemmtliche Schriften, St. Louiser Ausgabe, Vol. I, pp. 158, 519.

All through the terrible days in the ark Noah and his family could anticipate this impending dispensation of divine grace. Thus God entered into the first of the recorded covenants, Gen. 9:9-17:

And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you (meehim eth berithi eth), and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token ('oth) of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

Thus the second age of the world began "with the new form taken by revelation in presenting itself as God's covenant with man, and . . . as a covenant with the world, in which God gives to creation a pledge of its preservation."⁴⁹ The initiative in this covenant rests completely in the hands of Elohim—hence we have the emphatic 'ani, "as for me"; God establishes this covenant and fixes the terms and con-

49. Oehler, op. cit., p. 56

ditions. "He in sovereign freedom binds Himself."⁵⁰ Nothing outside of God prompted this gracious disposition. Since this is a token of grace, we might have expected it to be ascribed to Jahweh, but the author properly ascribes the action to the mighty Creator (Elohim) who establishes permanent conditions for all His creatures.⁵¹

This covenant is unique in that it is the only berith which directly includes all mankind, in fact, all creation. No less than six times we have this relation expressed in universal terms, embracing mankind and living creatures. This fulness of expression is to be accounted for, as Luther rightly contends, by the fact that Noah and those with him must have "lived in great trembling, fear, and sorrow, and so it was absolutely necessary to repeat and reimpress continually one set form of speech."⁵² The terms of the compact are comprehended in the statement: "neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth." This was a promise that never again will God permit His wrath to consume creation through a

⁵⁰ Leupold, op. cit., p. 56.

⁵¹ Thus Oehler: "All universally cosmical actions of God going out towards the heathen as well as towards Israel in the creation and preservation of the world is traced to El and Elohim," op. cit., p. 98. And Delitzsch: "Elohim ist der Gott, welcher die Natur schafft dass sie ist, und erhaelt dass sie besteht," op. cit., p. 381 on Gen. 17:1.

⁵² Quoted in Leupold, op. cit., p. 337.

flood.⁵³

Two provisions serve to make this an unbreakable covenant: first, no conditions are placed on man for the maintenance of the covenant; and second, this is a berith "olam and ledhoroth "olam (v. 16, 12), an everlasting covenant, to generations of eternity. Evidently the duration of this covenant is not absolute, as is indicated by the ledhoroth "olam; this covenant is to hold as long as the earth stands. Orelli looks upon this term as a synonym for "oth kol jemees ha'aretz (ch. 8:22). He comments:⁵⁴

A time is meant of which no end is visible. No temporal limit of this covenant relation enters into view; which certainly does not mean that an end of this state is absolutely out of the question. The possibility of its duration being unlimited in a merely relative degree is even suggested by the last expression ("oth kol jemees ha'aretz); and with this the usage of "olam is reconcilable, inasmuch as no positive limit of duration is within sight.

The covenant stands by the grace of God. Nothing that man can do or fail to do will in any way invalidate its

53. Patrick Fairbairn has no evidence for calling this an "express repeal of the curse originally laid upon the ground for the sin of Adam," even though he appeals to ch. 8:21. He qualifies this statement by adding that it is "to be understood relatively, not as indicating a total repeal of the evil, but only a mitigation of it;" his additional statements, based on this supposition, that the earth "had now assumed a new position" and that it "had become hallowed in His sight, and was in a condition to receive tokens of the divine favor, which had formerly been withheld from it" lie in the realm of the speculative. Cf. Typology of Scripture, Vol. I, p. 280.

54. C. von Orelli, The Old Testament Prophecy of the Consummation of God's Kingdom, translated from the German by Rev. J.S.Banks, p. 95.

provisions. The discussion runs beside the point when it asks whether vv. 1-7 (in which eating of blood and murder are forbidden) does not set down provisions to which man must obligate himself if he would enjoy the terms of the covenant. A new order of life is enjoined in these commands, but the berith is not conditioned on obedience to these precepts. This is a covenant of grace, in which God binds Himself by promise.⁵⁵

This gracious disposition Elohim then signed with His rainbow, His 'oth. By its very form and nature this holds out an assurance of God's mercy that He will perpetually check the floods of deserved wrath from destroying the earth, and will continue to manifest his grace and goodness. The significance of this sign has best been described by Delitzsch:⁵⁶

The bow is indeed a phenomenon that may be accounted for by its natural laws; but the laws of nature are truly the appointment of God, and it is just in its conformity to natural law that the rainbow is a pledge that the order of nature shall

⁵ 55. Thus Leupold, op. cit., pp. 336-7 and Orelli, op. cit., pp. 94-5. This is contrary to E. W. Hengstenberg: "That which is here designated as a covenant is not the promise per se, that in the future the course of nature should, on the whole, remain undisturbed, but in so far only, as it imposes upon those who receive it, the obligation to glorify, by their walk, the Lord of the order of nature. In part, this obligation is afterwards outwardly fixed in the commandments concerning murder, eating of blood, etc.," Christology of the Old Testament translated by Theo. Meyer, Vol. II, p. 431.

56. We quote from the English translation: A New Commentary on Genesis, trans. by Sophia Taylor, on ch. 9:8-17, page 288f. Unless otherwise noted, succeeding references include both the original and translation.

continue. And is there not to every law of nature a background pointing to the mysteries of the Divine nature and will? The label of the rainbow is sufficiently legible. Shining upon a dark ground which just before broke forth in lightning, it represents the victory of the light of love over the fiery darkness of wrath. Originating from the effect of the sun upon a dark cloud, it typifies the willingness of the heavenly to pervade the earthly. Stretched between heaven and earth, it is as a bond of peace between both, and, spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the Divine mercy.

Thus the second age of the world had its beginning in the closest possible connection with God—a berith—a promise which was as sure as God. It had its beginning in the heart of God; its pledge was a ray of hope to the few survivors; its maintenance rested on the faithfulness of God, and "God's faithfulness in maintaining the provisions of this covenant is a pledge of His faithfulness in the order of salvation."⁵⁷

⁶ 57. Oehler, *op. cit.*, p. 56. Cf. Is. 54:9: "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I also sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." Also cf. Jer. 33:20,25.

THE PATRIARCHAL COVENANT

Up to this point God had given only a general Messianic promise. Only the Semitic third of the human family was chosen to carry out this promise, Gen. 10:26, 27; and this was indefinite. But with Abraham and his posterity a portion of mankind was marked off to be the recipients and bearers of additional divine grace. With the calling of Abraham out of Haran, with his separation from the polytheistic Chaldees, Jahweh entered into a covenant which was to be the brightest hopes during all Old Testament times.

In the Patriarchal Covenant, as with the Noachian one, the Lord adapted Himself to the folkways of men in assuring them His grace. The initiative in this act of love is again in the hands of the Divine. There is, strictly speaking, no proper entering of the covenant here, for God grants and confirms a promise to Abraham; there is no negotiation on the part of the two parties. Hence it is that God alone passes between the divided carcasses in the ratification.⁵⁸ The God who enters into this covenant

58. Keil gives this account of the one-sided trans-

relation does not manifest Himself as Elohim, as He did with Noah, but as El Shaddai, God-Almighty, the God who manifests Himself in special deeds of power, subduing nature to the purposes of His kingdom, making childless Abraham the father of many nations.⁵⁹

The covenant recorded in Gen. 15 and 17 contains essentially the same thing as the Lord's promises to Abraham in ch. 12:1-3,7; 13:14-17. Considered in the abstract, the covenanting is unnecessary. God's Word to Abraham remained as sure and definite without any definite guarantee through a covenant. But in order to give Abraham a greater personal assurance, to give him all the support possible to his faith which would undergo many trials, God adapted Himself to human means to make him doubly sure.

action: "Obgleich naemlich ein Bund stets ein gegenseitiges Verhaeltnis zweier Personen zu einander begruendet, so steht in dem Bunde, den Gott mit einem Mensch schliesst, der Mensch nicht Gott ebenbuertig, sondern Gott gruendet das Verhaeltnis der Gemeinschaft durch seine Verheissung und seine gnadenreiche Herablassung zu dem Menschen, wobei dieser zunaechst nur empfangend ist und erst durch den Empfang von Gnadenguetern zur Erfuellung der aus dem Bunde fuer ihn fliessenden Obliegenheiten befahigt und verpflichtet wird," op. cit., p. 151 on Gen. 15:17.

59. Cf. Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25. On Gen. 17:1 Delitzsch had forcibly written: "The covenant with the patriarchs (was made) in the name of El Shaddai, for it is by its nature the subdual of corrupted and perishable nature and the foundation of the marvellous work of grace. . . The times of the patriarchs are the period of El Shaddai. Their characteristic is the violence done to the natural to make it subserve the purposes of salvation," New Commentary, Vol. II, p. 32. Cf. Oehler, op. cit., p. 91. Cp. page 27 above, especially note 51.

Hence we have the promises repeated and expanded in covenant form in chapter 15.

Chapter 17 is not a mere repetition of the covenant of chapter 15, nor is it another covenant with the patriarch. Fourteen years had elapsed since the covenanting,⁶⁰ and now El Shaddai appeared to seal that covenant with a sign and to give promises for the immediate realization of the covenant blessings; the one covenant promised certain blessings, the other the realization of these blessings when their appointed time had come. God was now assuring Abraham that the time had come to let the promised blessings begin to take place. That meant a son for Abraham, a son through Sarah, the mother of nations, ch. 17: 16. This course of events was to bolster and strengthen Abraham's faith in the divine promises. The sign of circumcision was to be an abiding mark of God's covenant with him. Hence the confirmation of the covenant in ch. 17 is neither superfluous nor repetitive; the promises were to be realized immediately, and a sign was to be given.⁶¹

The contents of the promises fall into three parts:

60. Delitzsch, op. cit., on Gen. 17:1.

61. The terminology employed in the confirmation of the covenant in chapter 17 indicates that no new covenant has been made: 17:2—nathan berith: "cannot here mean to 'set up a covenant,' but rather to put into force or to make operative the one that is in force," Leupold, op. cit., p. 514. Ch. 17:7—wahaqimothi eth berithi: Here used in the Hiphil; may mean to "make a covenant" or to "uphold a covenant," depending on the connection. Here the latter must be meant. Ibid., p. 517.

the grant of Canaan, the innumerable posterity, and the spiritual blessings.⁶²

1. Unto Abraham and his posterity is given the possession of Canaan "adh "olam, Gen. 13:14. Although Abraham was to become the possessor of the land only through his seed, yet such possession was none the less real. Israel did not come into possession till the days of Joshua, but from the very beginning that land was theirs by divine right. And throughout the entire Old Testament the divine promises are connected with this land, at times spiritually, but most often physically. Oehler comments:⁶³

Even prophecy knows no fulfillment of the divine promise, in which this old promise of eternal possession of the Holy Land does not come true. Here, I am convinced, is a fundamental error of Hengstenberg's spiritualizing interpretations that this is fixed as an essential and enduring feature of the divine promise. However we may judge of this matter from the standpoint of the New Testament—I do not enter on this dispute—from the standpoint of the Old Testament it must be maintained that from the beginning of the foundation of the covenant people to the close, the fulfillment of the promise and the completion of the divine kingdom attaches to the holy land of Canaan.

The significance of "olam in connection with Canaan will be discussed below.

2. The promise of the innumerable posterity came to Abraham repeatedly in God's revelations to him. Even while

62. Gen. 12:2f., 7; 13:14f.; 15:1f.; 17:1f.; 18:18; 22:16-18.

63. Op. cit., p. 62, note 3.

in Haran, before the grant of Canaan, this grand promise came, 12:2. His seed was not merely to be a small clan among many, but rather his was to become a prominent nation, as the stars of the heavens. Except in the case of Noah's sons, the prospect of becoming the ancestor of a multitude of nations (gojjim) is almost without precedent.⁶⁴ The future nations descended from Abraham were to produce out of their own midst their own heads, worthy to be called kings (melakim), Gen. 17:14. This was guaranteed to Abraham by the change of his name from Abhram to Abraham, the father of a multitude, Gen. 17:4.⁶⁵ This promise of the innumerable posterity was again repeated to Isaac (Gen. 26:24) and to Jacob (28:14) through whom the promise began to realize itself.

The confirmation of this promise came with the Lord's promise of a child to Sarai whose name was changed to Sarah, a "princess."⁶⁶ It was through her in a manner contrary to nature that El Shaddai was to effect His promises.

3. It was in the spiritual promises of the covenant that Abraham personally found his greatest hope and in which his seed after him rejoiced. The spiritual blessings which

64. Leupold, op. cit., on Gen. 17:4, page 516.

65. Abhram designates an "exalted father"; abraham designates the father of a raham, of a "rushing," i.e. a "noisy multitude." Cf. Delitzsch, op. cit., on Gen. 17:4.

66. Sarai (Sari) the "warlike," from sarah, "to struggle, to fight," with the old feminine suffix. Sarah, the "princess," the fem. of sar, "prince." Ibid., on Gen. 17:15.

Abraham immediately realized from the heart of the entire Old Testament. This is the connecting link between the Protevangelium and the coming of God's Son in the flesh: "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed," 12:3; 18:18. Everything for him revolved around the promise inherent in his "Seed." Hence he "complained" to the Lord: "Behold, to me thou hast given no seed," 15:3. The greatest comfort of ch. 17 for Abraham was the fact that the promise concerning the "Seed" would find its fulfillment through Sarah. It was Abraham's attitude and faith in these promises that caused the holy writer to record of him: "And Abraham believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness," 15:6. The covenant promises of God were met on Abraham's side by faith which "does not look at the course of nature, but holds fast to God's Word of promise (cp. Rom. 4:18; Heb. 11:8-19) and endures victoriously the severest test in his willingness to offer the son of the promise."⁶⁷ It was because of the promised Seed that Jahweh could say to Abraham: "I will be a God to thee," 17:7. This indicates that He would fulfill those obligations to which He pledged Himself by becoming a party to a covenant. Everything which Abraham could expect of God through this covenant would be realized. God can give no greater promise that He will be a God to

⁶⁷ Oehler, op. cit., p. 61.

men.

The implications of the patriarch's faith has best been described by Delitzsch:⁶⁸

We are not merely told that Abram believed the testimony of Him who promised, but that He relied in or upon Him. Jahweh reckoned it, this faith, to him as righteousness. . . No external legal work whatever, but faith justified Abram before God, while as yet uncircumcised—a prechristian Scripture testimony that not in the way of the law, but in the way of the promise which brings about salvation, does man attain to a righteousness valid before God, and that this righteousness, far from being self-effected, is as to its foundation a righteousness offered in Christ. The promise, too, here made to Abram, has truly Christ for its object; the faith in which he receives it, is faith in the promised seed, and Jahweh, in whom Abram believingly rests, is God the Redeemer.

One of the difficulties with the Patriarchal Covenant is its duration. The clearest word is that of ch. 17:7, 8:

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generation for an everlasting covenant (libhrith "olam), to be a God unto thee, and to the seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession (la'achuzzath "olam); and I will be their God.

Only by doing violence to the context in which the promises concerning the "eternal" possession of Canaan are mentioned can there be any spiritualizing and allegorizing of the meaning of Canaan. God's promise to Abraham

69. New Commentary on Gen. 15:6.

was the grant of physical Canaan with all its mountains, rivers, and plains.⁷⁰ History is the best commentary on how this promise is meant. When the Jews definitely rejected the Blessed Seed, Christ, and thus placed themselves outside of the covenant relation, they also lost possession of the land of Canaan. The attitude of the people was to determine whether this was to be a blessing or a cursing. "Unfaithful Israel, just because the covenant remains steadfast, will lose its land."⁷¹ "olam does not have the meaning of "eternity" as the Authorized Version nor "for all time" as Meek⁷² but "hidden time." This expression carries into the hidden future.⁷³ Hence the phrase in its context clearly expresses the thought that

70. Cf. Gen. 13:14: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever ("adh olam).

71. Orelli, op. cit., p. 11.

72. J. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed The Complete Bible---An American Translation, Pentateuch translated by Theophile J. Meek.

73. Gesenius considers its root "alam "die verborgen, heimlichen"; hence "olam: "die verborgene, unbekante Zeit," Handwoerterbuch ueber das Alte Testament, bearbeitet von Dr. Frants Buhl, Dreizehnte Auflage. Thus also Leupold: "olam may on occasion actually signify eternity. At times it does not reach beyond the limits of a lifetime," op. cit., on Gen. 17:7, page 518. Cp. discussion on page 28 above on "olam in connection with the Noachic Covenant.

This translation of "olam also provides whatever corrective is necessary for the extravagant opinions that Canaan is the inalienable possession Israel, perhaps into the Millenium. Furthermore, is it legitimate to insist on the future possession of Canaan by Israel while at the same time rejecting the perpetual observance of circumcision?

the divine promise is no momentary one, but one which as far as God's part in the covenant is concerned has no terminus. History shows that its termination was affected by the response it met in man. Regarding the duration of these promises, Keil sums up:⁷⁴

Alles was an dieser Institution localen und beschraenkten Charakter hat, was nur auf das leibliche Israel und das irdische Canaan passt, wird nur so lange Bestand haben, als Abrahams Same sich nicht zur Menge von Voelkern vermehrt haben wird.

Thus these divine blessings sealed through a covenant offered Abraham spiritual benefits which on God's part were to reach on toward eternity.

God not only adapted Himself to the human idea of a covenant but went further and adapted Himself to a human method of ratifying that covenant. This ratification of Jahweh the writer records in Gen. 15:9, 10, 17:

And He said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another; but the birds divided he not. . . And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

Thus God condescended to let this covenant be made after the fashion of covenants made in those days.⁷⁵ The animals

74. Op. cit., on Gen. 17, page 158f.

75. Cf. above under "Secular Covenants" p. 12f. Also cp. Leupold, op. cit., p. 480. Delitzsch reports that it

divided for the ratification were the five clean sacrificial animals of the Mosaic ritual; even the leaving of the turtledove and the pigeon undivided was in conformity with it, Lev. 1:17.

The smoking furnace and the flaming torch represented Jahweh passing between the halves of the victims, thus concluding the covenant. This mode of representing Him is not inconsistent nor inappropriate for designating the Divine Presence.⁷⁶ The passing of Jahweh between the pieces was an act of condescension similar to His swearing by Himself, or by His life, or still more anthropomorphically, by His soul.⁷⁷ It was His method of giving Abraham the greater assurance his faith would need when confronted with the many trials which lay before him.

was the custom among the Chaldeans to inaugurate their covenants by passing torch in hand between the divided carcasses of the animals, thus imprecating upon themselves like death with these animals in case they transgressed the covenant; op. cit. on Gen. 15:18.

76. Cp. the appearance at Horeb in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2), at Mount Sinai as a consuming fire (Ex. 19:18), throughout the wilderness journeying in a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21). The "smoking firepot and flaming torch" were the most frequent forms in which fire appeared to the nomads in the days of Abraham; cf. Leupold, op. cit., on Gen. 15:17, page 487.

77. Cf. Gen. 22:16; Deut. 32:4; Amos 6:8; Jer. 51:14. Keil and Oehler, contrary to Delitzsch, Leupold, Davidson and others, reject this interpretation. Oehler states that this denotes the union of the two contracting parties by Jahweh, op. cit., p. 175. Keil regards it thus: "Der Durchgang versinnlicht Abram die Herablassung des Herrn zu seinem Samen in der Furchtbaren Glorie seiner Majestaet als Richter seiner Feinde," op. cit., on Gen. 15:17, p. 151.

This entire procedure has a typical meaning. The divided beasts represent Israel; the birds of prey (v. 11) who would have devoured them are the enemy nations; the fire passing between the carcasses represents the abiding presence of Jahweh among the people.⁷⁸

To indicate that he is a party to this covenant Abraham was to adopt the rite of circumcision, Gen. 17: 9f. So closely is circumcision tied to the covenant, that it is called a covenant, 17:10.⁷⁹

Delitzsch with abundant evidence has demonstrated that circumcision has been a world-wide custom, finding traces of it among the Egyptians, Ethiopians, African tribes, American Indians, Yucatan, Mexicans, South Sea Islanders and others.⁸⁰ Rejecting the contentions that the origin of all circumcision can be traced back to its divine sanction for Abraham, he concludes that the case is analogous to that of the sacrifice. As sacrifice arose from the feeling of the need for atonement, so circumcision arose from the feeling of the impurity of human nature. Hence Jahweh sanctified for the promised seed a prevalent custom.

Circumcision represented, first of all, the putting

78. Thus Leupold, op. cit., p. 488 and Delitzsch, op. cit., on Gen. 15:17.

79. "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised." The word berith is here used by metonymy for "covenant-sign."

80. Op. cit., introductory remarks to Gen. 17.

away of evil, a kind of purification. It suggests the relation in which those stand who have placed themselves in covenant with God, namely the putting away the foreskin of their hearts, Jer. 4:4, no longer being stiff-necked, Deut. 10:16, and loving the Lord God with heart and soul, Deut. 30:6.

Secondly, it is to show that God approves of generation despite the sinful corruption of man, and that He purposes to use it in the work of redemption. This rite is tied up with the Messianic hope:⁸¹

For if it indicates the purification of life at its source, it in the last analysis points forward to Him through whom all such purification is to be achieved, who is Himself also to be born by a woman, but is to be He in whom for the first time that which circumcision prefigures will be actually realized.

It is in connection with this promise made to the patriarchs that Hebrew and Jewish history revolves. It was through their connection with father Abraham as spiritual descendants that the Old and New Testament saints have enjoyed the fruits of the divine promises. The Gentiles under the old dispensation could only enjoy those same blessings by accepting the obligations which Jahweh had placed upon His people; Gentiles could only become sons of Jahweh by becoming sons of Abraham.

⁸¹. Leupold, op. cit., on Gen. 17:10, p. 521. Cp. Delitzsch, op. cit., Introductory remarks to ch. 17.

Hence it is that in the Old Testament God is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Ex. 3:6, 15; 1 Kings 18:36; Ps. 47:10. Hence David in his Psalm of thanksgiving exhorted the people to be mindful of the covenant which the Lord God had made with their forefathers, 1 Chron. 16. Thus also Zecharias sang his song of praise to the Lord for fulfilling the Patriarchal Covenant, Luke 1:72. It was to this covenant that men of God appealed when they confessed their sins, Jer. 14:21. It was because of this covenant that the Lord delayed the destruction of Israel in the days of Jehoahaz, 2 Kings 13:23.

Thus by adapting Himself to and sanctifying two human customs—covenant and circumcision—the Lord announced to His chosen people with ever clearer revelations the nature of His plan to crush the head of the serpent through a more definite seed: that of Abraham, in whom all the nations have been blessed.

THE SINAITIC COVENANT

Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. 82)

This description of the preliminaries to the formal establishment of the Sinaitic Covenant embraces the entire concept of this new and binding relationship between Jahweh and the seed of Abraham. The immediate basis for this covenant was Israel's redemption by the Lord from Egypt. The fact that Jahweh had brought Israel out of the house of bondage is made the foundation for the obligations assumed by the people in the Sinaitic covenant.⁸³ The Exodus, highlighted by its Passover

82. Ex. 18:3-8. On the covenanting cf. also Ex. 24:34; Lev. 26; Deut. 4.

83. Because of this fact Hengstenberg is correct when

meal, was always regarded as the birthday of the nation. Hence out of the obligation of the people towards Jahweh, there came the selection of the people in a formal manner at Sinai.⁸⁴

but behind this immediate basis there lies as the 2 underlying cause the act of divine election. The motive to the formation of this covenant on Jahweh's part was His love. This was a free act of God, an act of divine love, and "necessary only as far as God had bound Himself by His oath,—that is, as a proof of His truth and His faithfulness,—but in no way dependent on man's heart."⁸⁵ The beginning of the manifestation of love, that which prompted it all, was the covenant made with the patriarchs; this Jahweh renewed after the Exodus, Ex. 6:2-6. Thus Jahweh kept Israel also in this covenant.⁸⁶

The divine election of the people is expressed in various forms: Jahweh as Father of His people, Israel as His first-born son, Israel His property out of all the nations of the earth, Israel the holy, priestly, kingly

he states that the Sinaitic Covenant "existed, in substance, from the moment that the Lord led Israel out of Egypt. By apostasizing from the Lord, the people would have broken the covenant, even if it had not been solemnly confirmed on Sinai," op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 429-31.

84. Cf. Ex. 20:2 where the fact of Israel's deliverance from Egypt introduces the Decalogue.

85. Davidson, Theology, p. 176. "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because . . ." Deut. 7:7.

86. Cf. Deut. 7:8f.; 8:17; 9:4-6, 27-29.

people.⁸⁷

The meanings of the divine fatherhood is not physical, as though Jahweh were called Father because He has bestowed natural life, nor is it military, as though He were the war-God, but rather the relationship is ethical. The covenant established a relationship on the basis of love and communion with God. Israel was to be Jahweh's "peculiar treasure," literally, "a people for possession."⁸⁸ Of all the nations of the earth, which were Jahweh's , Ex. 19:5, God elected Israel alone as the chosen people, and thus became the father of Israel. In contrast to Pharaoh's first-born son, Israel "is my son, even my first born," says Jahweh, Ex. 4:22. This adoption on the part of the Lord made it impossible for the people later to say that it was on account of their own righteousness that the Lord had driven nations out of Canaan, Deut. 9:5. The Lord established an ethical relationship with Israel which grew out of a divine election.⁸⁹

87. Oehler, op. cit., pp. 177-79.

88. Ex. 19:5. segullah: "property" or "possession." Gesenius: "Eigenthum," Woerterbuch, sub segullah. Cf. LXX laos periousios; "in the segullah lies the idea of precious property which one has selected for himself, which one has set aside," Oehler, op. cit., p. 181, note 3. Cp. Deut. 7:6; 14:2.

89. This relationship was unique in the Semitic world. The gods of other nations were regarded as being in kinship with their tribes, inescapably tied to them. They had to rescue their people regardless of their morals. Israel's relation to Jahweh as an ethical one was of such a nature that Jahweh could cast off the people if they did not

The Sinaitic Covenant like the Noachian and Patriarchian had its initiative in the heart of God. Its object was a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation," Ex. 19:6. Israel as the elect nation of God is not merely a communion of priests under King Jahweh,⁹⁰ but the phrase mamleketh kohanim signifies more specifically a "kinghood of priests," expressing both the priestly and kingly dignity of the people. Israel through the covenant received, in part, those glorious gifts which the New Testament Christians possess in the universal priesthood. The nation was to be in a mediatorial position towards all nations, and through it the kingdom of God was to be manifested in Christ Jesus.⁹¹

As a "holy nation" (goi qadshosh) Israel is a people separate from all others, not only in terms of the covenant, but also in terms of the concept qadshosh.⁹² Posi-

maintain the ethical ideals. Cf. Barton, op. cit., p. 66. Also cf. section on "Secular Covenants," p. 15.

This theocratic exclusiveness of Israel as the chosen of God was not absolutely exclusive. Non-Israelitish elements also came with Israel up out of Egypt (Ex. 12:38; cp. Lev. 24:10; Num. 11:4). Every heathen dwelling in the land as a stranger could become a son of the covenant through circumcision, Ex. 12:48 (except Canaanites, Moabites, and Ammonites, cf. Deut. 23:4ff.). Also cp. Gen. 17:12, 23. Oehler op. cit., p. 180.

90. Thus Oehler, op. cit., p. 179.

91. Keil: "Das Objekt des Koenigthums und Priesterthums Israels sind die Voelker der Erde aus welchen Jehova sich Israel zum kostbaren Eigenthume erwaeht hat," op. cit., on Ex. 19:6, p. 445. Cf. LXX: Basileion hierateuma.

92. Lev. 20:24, 26: "I am the Lord, your God, which

tively, the concept "holy nation" conveys the idea of admission or introduction into a new relationship, an ethical one, with Jahweh.

The making of the Sinaitic Covenant, therefore, lay in the election of God. In a free act of love He had chosen Israel from all the nations of the world to be His first-born, to have for Himself a kingdom of priests.

To consider this covenant only under the aspect of a "law-covenant" is to minimize its scope. Not only was its foundation resting upon the Patriarchal Covenant, but features of that covenant were incorporated into the Sinaitic, without the Patriarchal losing its peculiar aspects. The Sinaitic laws of ritual are full of forgiveness of sins. The mercy-seat of the Ark of the Covenant which contained all the visible tokens of the Covenant is the most evangelical feature in Old Testament Theology. All these things were to be shadows of things to come.⁹³

have separated you from other people. . . And ye shall be holy unto me; for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine." For a discussion of the etymology and meaning of qadhosh cf. Paul Stanko, Holiness of God in Ezekiel, Bachelor of Divinity Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946.

93. Cf. R.C.H. Lenski, Interpretation of Hebrews, p. 272. This is contrary to the view of Peters who characterizes the Old Covenant as one "by the law and by the law alone. . . The Old Covenant remains a covenant of the law, a Gesetzesbund, a ministration of death and condemnation," op. cit., p. 274. The Gospel promises Peters finds in the Patriarchal Covenant.

The New relation was to be one between the people and Jahweh. It is important to remember that the covenant was made with the people as a whole, not with individuals. The people shared in the benefits of this covenant only because of their relation to Israel as the chosen people. The nation was elect to be a "kingdom of priests" and an "holy nation," etc.⁹⁴ Hence we find the conscious feeling of the people as a unit, a subject with Jahweh as God. Therefore Jahweh charged Israel as a nation with breaking the covenant because of the sin of Achan, Josh. 7:11. Individuals received the benefits because of their relation to the nation, and the people suffer because of the sins of the individuals.

This Divine-human relationship which came into being through this covenant, a relationship which had its inception in the love of Jahweh, was to be met on the part of the people by a reflected love. This love was to manifest itself through the people's obedience to the Law. The Law of the Covenant formed the essential feature of the new relationship; it was not the only feature, but it cer-

94. Thus Oehler, op. cit., p. 179; Lenski, op. cit., p. 273; Davidson, Theology, p. 241. Contrary to the ideas of Eduard Koenig, Theologie des Alten Testaments, p. 103f. We must beware, however, of pressing the national idea to the exclusion of the individual participation. Individuals were conscious of a personal relation to Jahweh. It is only extravagance to say that Jahweh had no relation to individuals. Cp. the history of the patriarchs, Esau, David, etc. Cf. Davidson, loc. cit., p. 244.

tainly was the most emphasized one. It contained moral, ceremonial and civil statutes. No distinction appears between these statutes, Lev. 19:18, 19. All are regarded as necessary parts of the covenant relationship. Regardless of whether Israel transgressed a part of the moral law or part of the ceremonial law, the covenant was regarded as being broken.⁹⁵ The scope of the people's obligations in the law has as its fundamental principles: "Be ye holy, for I am holy," Lev. 11:44f.; 19:2, and "Sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am the Lord, your God," Lev. 20:7. The idea of consecration to the holy God is to be stamped upon Israel in the whole field of divine-human and inter-human relationships; hence the scope of the law extended into ceremonial and civil spheres.

The giving of the law was in keeping with the conception of the covenant-idea. The purpose of the law was to give the people Jahweh's standard for holiness, that they might be righteous. It was given to promote holiness and righteousness⁹⁶ that the nation as the elect of God should be separate from paganism and dedicated to Jahweh.

95. The covenant could be broken primarily through idolatry: Deut. 4:23; 17:2, 3; 29:25; 29:26; and many others; but also through general disobedience, Josh. 7:11, 15; and through a violation of the ceremonial law, Jer. 34:13f.

96. These terms are here used in their original sense of something separated for divine purposes and dedicated to divine uses.

The Sinaitic Covenant has the stamp of uniqueness in Divine covenanting because it contains both blessings and cursings. This was the one covenant which in the terms recorded placed obligations on the people. Its nature was such that it could be broken by men. Though no termination of this covenant was indicated in its inception and though it was like other Divine covenants a berith "olam,⁹⁷ still because it was dependent upon human beings it was conditional. The nation by its reactions to it could break the covenant and place itself outside of the covenant relationship; through the keeping of the covenant Israel could enjoy the blessings which Jahweh attached to it.

The divine blessings resting upon the nation for keeping the covenant are expressed in Lev. 26:3-13. Rich physical blessings are guaranteed: fertility of the soil, victory over their enemies, peace, etc. But these are only outward manifestations of a richer blessing, vv. 12, 13:

And I will set my tabernacle among you; and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

All that is expressed in the idea of being in communion

97. Cf. Lev. 24:8 where by metonymy the shewbread is designated as a berith "olam and 31:16 where the keeping of the Sabbath ledhorotham berith "olam (again by metonymy—pars pro toto) is exhorted upon the people.

with God, everything that can be pressed out of the term "I will be your God" is attached to keeping of the covenant relationship.

On the other hand, the result of breaking the covenant on the part of the people is the withdrawing of these blessings and the substitution of physical and spiritual curses, Lev. 26:13-39. These curses have their outward appearances in shortening of life, childlessness, scarcity, war, pestilence, destruction of the people as a nation and slavery to others. The nature of the curse consists in the repudiation of the people by Jahweh, their utter rejection, punishment for their sins, and all that is implied in the phrase: "I will set my face against you."

To this covenant proposal the people replied through Moses: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," Ex. 19:8. Therefore the people received instructions for purification on the day when the Lord in His terrible majesty audibly gave them the law. This covenant was ratified on the part of the people through the sprinkling of blood, Ex. 24. The Sinaitic Covenant was a blood covenant, this blood being for the remission of sins. After the reading of the law and the people's response to it, Moses sprinkled them with blood, symbolic of the blood of Christ for the remission of sins. Hence in the very act of ratification the concept of forgiveness is prominent.

Immediately after this inauguration ceremony, Moses

Aaron, Nadab and Abihu with seventy elders went up into the mountain where they saw God and were commensals before Him—an adaptation of human ratification to divine covenanting.

As a visible token and basis of the covenant Jahweh prepared and delivered to Moses the two tables of stone containing the ten commandments, the heart of the Law. So intimately were these tables connected with the covenant that they were called the "tables of the covenant," Deut. 9:15. The tables were to be placed into a special place—the Ark of the Covenant.

This term is significant. Though but a material object with its material contents it represented to Israel the compact with Jahweh. It and its contents were the most sacred authorized tokens of their relation to the covenant-Jahweh. The mercy-seat adorning it was the place where Jahweh particularly manifested Himself in His gracious presence to the people. To it the high priest could come on the Day of Atonement. Because of God's presence a mysterious and supernatural power was attached to the ark, as the men of Bethshemesh discovered, 1 Sam. 5. Historically the Ark enjoyed a unique place in the early Hebrew life, Num. 10:33; Josh. 3; Josh. 6; 1 Sam. 4; 2 Sam. 15.⁹⁸

98. Fleming Jones gives a concise summary of the radical views concerning the nature of this ark; he lists two main views: 1) that it was a sacred box containing a stone fetish (Meyer); or a "bull-image of Yahweh and an image of his consort Anatyahu (Gressmann)"; or an "oracle-lot" (Arnold); or a sacred stone or stones (Oesterley

Thus by these external acts and gifts of covenanting the entrance of the people into communion with the holy God was sealed. Israel from this time forward was the privileged people of God. Thus the Psalmist could rejoice and trust in the covenant and its blessings:

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. . . The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them His covenant. . . Have respect to thy covenant. Ps. 25:10, 14; 74:20.

The Covenant of Jahweh found its fulfillment in the "body of Christ" of which it was but a shadow. Once that fulfillment was attained, no longer did the Lord press His covenant of Sinai upon His elect—no longer Israel—but the Church. The Old Covenant with all its rules and regulations has faded. Martin Luther emphasized this point very clearly in his sermon Eine Unter-richtung wie sich die Christen in Mosen schicken sollen (1525):⁹⁹

Das Gesetz Mosis geht die Juden an, welches uns forthin nicht mehr bindet. Denn das Gesetz ist allein dem Volk Israel gegeben, und Israel hat es angenommen fuer sich und seine Nachkommen, und die Heiden sind hie ausgeschlossen; wiewohl die Heiden auch etliche Gesetze gemein haben mit den Juden, als, dasz ein Gott sei, dasz niemand beleidige, dasz man nicht ehebreche noch stehle, und dergleichen andere mehr; welches alles ist ihnen natuer-

and Robinson). 2) an empty throne of God (Meinhold, Dibelius, and Eichrodt), Personalities of the Old Testament, p. 35, note 12.

99. Op. cit., St.L., III, 6f.

lich in das Herz geschrieben, und haben's nicht vom Himmel herab gehoert, wie die Juden. Wir wollen Mosen nicht fuer einen Regenten oder Gesetzgeber mehr haben, ja, Gott will es auch selber nicht haben. Moses ist ein Mittler und ein Gesetzgeber gewesen des juedischen Volks allein, denen hat er das Gesetz gegeben. Man musz also den Rottengeistern das Maul stopfen, die da sagen: Also spricht Moses, da steht's im Mose geschrieben, und dergleichen. So sprich du: Moses geht uns nicht an. . . Moses ist todt, sein Regiment ist aus gewesen, da Christus kam; er dient weiter hieher nicht. . . Das aber Moses die Heiden nicht binde, mag man aus dem Text zwingen im andern Buch Mosis, Cap. 20:2, da Gott selber spricht: "Ich bin der Herr dein Gott, der ich dich aus Egyptenland, aus dem Diensthause, gefuehrt habe." Aus dem Text haben wir klar, dasz uns die zehn Gebote nicht angehebt; denn er hat uns je nicht aus Egypten gefuehrt, sondern allein die Juden. . . Mosen wollen wir halten fuer einen Lehrer, aber fuer unsern Gesetzgeber wollen wir ihn nicht halten, es sei denn, dasz er gleichstimme mit dem Neuen Testament, und dem natuerlichen Gesetze.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

For a thousand years the Patriarchal Covenant with its promises of a "seed" in whom "all the nations of the earth would be blessed" stood as the greatest hope of the people of God. The time had now come to designate more exactly the nature and ancestry of that seed. This Jahweh did through His Covenant with David. The entire stream of the prophecies of the King Messiah finds its source in the Davidic Covenant.

David after the cessation of his war years had the godly desire to build a temple for Jahweh, especially when he contrasted the luxurious palace he had erected with the temporary tent-like tabernacle for the ark of the Lord. But in God's plan another was to have the privilege of building that temple. However, to David who could not build the house of God came God's promise to build a house for David, 2 Sam. 7:12ff.:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his king-

dom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I have taken it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever.

The Sinaitic Covenant represents the last of the divine covenants which were formally entered upon and ratified. Both the Davidic and the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 were promises with no physical signs attached, no adaptations to human ways of making covenants other than the idea of the binding nature of a covenant. The blessings of Jahweh on Israel were so apparent in David's time that there was no need for any sign of surety for future blessings.

The provisions of the Davidic Covenant include the following:

1. David is to have a son (Solomon) who will build the temple of Jahweh.
2. The throne of His kingdom shall be established for ever (adh "olam).
3. Regardless of any iniquity committed against Jahweh the covenant will be realized.
4. David's house and kingdom shall be established for ever (adh "olam).¹⁰⁰

¹⁵ 100. In addition to the volumes already cited on the covenants, cf. James Boyd "The Davidic Covenant: the Oracle," "Echoes of the Covenant with David," and "The Da-

The surety of this covenant is indicated in three references; the first is Ps. 89:3, 35:

I have made a covenant with my chosen; I have sworn unto David my servant. . . . Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.

Double surety is thus given to this covenant in the fact that it is a Word of God and that it is stamped with His oath. The second reference is Is. 55:3:

I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

Eternal and sure qualities attach themselves to this covenant because it is a "covenant of salt," 2 Chron. 13:5.¹⁰¹

The interpretation of the Davidic Covenant can only be made on the basis of the historical unfolding of the covenant and the clarifying statements of the prophets and the New Testament writers. Two series of promises were made in the covenant: (1) those concerning the reign and rule of David's descendants as kings of Israel and (2) those concerning the establishment of David's house and throne for ever. This distinction becomes apparent through v. 16.

The first is a promise to keep intact the position of

vidic Dynasty" in Princeton Theological Review, Vol. 25, 1927; and also John F. Walvoord, "The Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant" in Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 102, 1945.

101. For a discussion of the "covenant of salt" cp. p. 8 above.

David's descendants as kings of Israel. This phase of the covenant is only minor, for the commentary of the remainder of the Old Testament on this covenant has no allusions to it. It is a physical blessing accompanying the heart of the covenant. Solomon's throne is to be his seed's for a long but indefinite time, "adh "olam.

The heart of the promise is that David is to be the father of the royal part of the Patriarchal seed. This covenant for the first time connects the consummation of God's plan with a King. His house and His kingdom is to be established for ever, "adh "olam, which by the nature of the case designates time without end, not merely indefinite time.¹⁰²

Numerous references and additions to this covenant appear in subsequent Old Testament revelations.¹⁰³ We shall confine our attention to those of greatest importance.

Hosea 1:11 and 3:5 point to an individual of the house of David and place the returning to Jahweh along

102. Psalm 89:37f. shows that "olam must be taken in its strict sense: "It (the covenant) shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven." Also cp. Luke 1:32.

103. Amos 9:11; Hos. 1:11; 3:4, 5; Micah 5:21; Is. 7:14f.; 9:6f.; 11:1-10; Ezek. 34:23:-25; 37:21-28; 1 Kings 5:5; 2:4; 6:12; 8:15-20; 9:4, 5; 11:31-39; 2 Chron. 13:5; 7:18; 21:7; Ps. 132:11; Psalm 89 rings with one praise after another to Jahweh for the bestowal of this covenant.

side of returning and seeking "David their King."¹⁰⁴

Is. 7:14 indicates that the glory of David is to be revealed through a virgin. The name "Immanuel" stamps this King with divine origin. Thus the Davidic Covenant becomes more individualized and glorified. This was the sign given to the house of David as requested by Ahaz. Is. 9:6, 7 indicates that through a child the kingdom of David shall be established and upheld. By His super-human wisdom, might and eternal divinity He will rule Israel.

Micah 5:2 clarifies the covenant more by naming the birthplace of the "king of David." It also indicates the nature of that Person: His "going forth" shall be of a double character: " a going forth out of Bethlehem because of the Davidic family, and a going forth out of His eternal pre-existence because Divine."¹⁰⁵

The companion passages Jer. 32:5, 6 and 33:15-26 hold out the promise of the cessation of the days of temporal chastisement with the realization of God's changeless purpose in spite of men's faithlessness. Emphasis rests upon the connection of the King Messiah with the house of

104. Note that the prophecies were spoken by Hosea, a man of the north; when he gives the pre-eminence to the house of Judah, it means that the tradition of a permanent Davidic supremacy over Israel was an heritage of the entire nation. Cf. Boyd, "Ezechiel," op. cit., p. 589.

105. Ibid., p. 591.

David, of which He is a Branch. The sureness of this promise is as sure as the succession of day and night.

Under the figure of a shepherd Ezekiel (34:23-25) proclaims that Jahweh will feed His sheep by His servant, "even His servant David," who will be a prince among the sheep. Again we note the princely nature of the Messiah, through whom a covenant of peace will be inaugurated.

It is apparent from these passages and others that the reign of the King Messiah is a spiritual one and that this reign is even now in progress at the right hand of God and in His Church. The subjects most certainly are not to be Israel after the flesh. The Davidic Covenant has reached its fulfillment in toto in Christ. Nothing in the covenant nor its commentary passages indicates any idea of a millennial reign. There is nothing yet to be fulfilled.¹⁰⁶

The glory of this Covenant, the most glorious in the entire Old Testament, is indicated in God's own commentary through the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation,

106. Contrary to Walvoord, whose arguments follow four lines of thought: (a) that the Davidic Covenant requires a literal fulfillment; (b) that the idea of a partial fulfillment does not hinder the literal fulfillment of all the covenant; (c) that this interpretation is in harmony with other covenant purposes of God; and (d) that the New Testament separates the present period of Gentile blessing from Israel's future glory. Op. cit.

Luke 1:32 (R.S.V.):

He will be great, and will be called the Son
of the Most High;
and the Lord God will give to him the throne
of his father David,
and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever;
and of his kingdom there will be no end.

THE NEW COVENANT

The granting of the Davidic Covenant brought with it the guarantee of blessings for the true sons of Abraham. It promised them a King Messiah whose kingdom would be without end. Coupled with this covenant, God's prophets announced a New Covenant for those who would heed the word of the King Messiah. That Covenant was to supersede the "obsolete" Mosaic Covenant with its legalistic code, its external qualities, and its nationalistic character. The announcement of this covenant broke like a ray of hope on the faithful remnant, Jeremiah 31:31ff.:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the

Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

This prophecy came at a critical time in Israel's history. The national constitution was breaking up. The old order was changing. The world was collapsing about God's people, and utter ruin at the hands of Babylon was imminent. Pfeiffer sets this background for the prophecy:¹⁰⁷

Jeremiah seems to have discovered, in the moment when the world was crumbling about him, that it is always darkest just before dawn. In the ruin of his people, which he had visualized in advance as a nightmare of death, silence, darkness, and chaos, he recognized the birth pangs of new and better order—a religion "in spirit and in truth" which he, more than any other man up to his time (Pfeiffer obviously excludes II Isaiah) had foreshadowed in agony of soul and in flashes of blissful illumination.

Jeremiah is the first one to speak of the new covenant, the berith chadasha, translated by the LXX with diatheke kainē.¹⁰⁸ We cannot here think of a formal transaction such as the covenant made on Sinai. But rather in this case we think of a relation which lies en-

¹⁰⁷ 107. Robert H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 517. Pfeiffer's approach makes the new religion the product of Jeremiah's fertile mind.

¹⁰⁸ 108. The New Testament follows this terminology with one exception, Heb. 12:24, where we find the translation diatheke nea. Peters makes the distinction that kainē refers to newness in quality and nea to newness in time, op. cit., p. 270.

tirely in the hands of God and His Spirit who offers the benefits of the covenant and who creates the spiritual powers to receive its blessings.

These blessings are expressed in terms of contrast to another covenant—that which the writer calls "old" and which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls "obsolete;" (R.S.V.) Heb. 8:13. The Old Covenant was that which was made "in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," Jer. 31:32. It would be a serious error to think that the New Covenant is placed in opposition to that given to Abraham.¹⁰⁹ As stated above,¹¹⁰ the Patriarchal Covenant was the connecting link between the Protevangelium and the coming of God Incarnate, a covenant which could hardly become "obsolete" until fulfilled. The "old" covenant referred to is, according to the commentary of Hebrews, the Sinaitic Covenant with its many laws and ordinances, Heb. 9.

The contrast suggested by Jeremiah does not lie in the fact that Jeremiah 31 gives a more perfect revelation of the law, or that the Sinaitic Covenant was obsolete in respect to Divine wishes. Nor does the distinction lie in the fact that the Old Covenant was only law and the New

109. Peters is incorrect when he infers that Hengstenberg refers the Old Covenant to the Patriarchal Covenant under the name of Sinaitic. What Hengstenberg has in mind has been referred to on p. 44, note 83.

110. Cp. Patriarchal Covenant, p. 35f.

Covenant only Gospel. As has been pointed out above,¹¹¹ the Sinaitic Covenant was full of Gospel, full of Levitical sacrifices to remove sins. In its New Covenant form the Gospel today still binds us to live a holy life.¹¹²

The New Covenant is contrasted with the Old chiefly in two respects: its internal and its individualistic character. The Sinaitic Covenant was concerned pre-eminently (though not entirely) with external acts and rites. The book of the Law is replete with regulations for every phase of an outward life toward God and toward others. A heavy emphasis rests on various sacrifices. Under the New Covenant, however, the law is to be written in the heart of man. It will be a relation without ceremonial, ritual, civil and formal laws. No longer will the law hedge in one particular nation, shutting¹¹ off from others. The Law will become a rule, an aid to guide and express our will to do God's will.¹¹³ This is consistent with the theme of Jeremiah, e.g., ch. 7:21f. "The necessary condition for the true and lasting bestowal of an outward salvation is the bestowal of an internal salvation."¹¹⁴

The second difference lies in the fact that the Old

111. Cp. Sinaitic Covenant, p. 48.

112. The fault of the Jews under the Old Covenant was their hardness of heart; hence they did not keep the law. Cp. Acts 7:51-53; Matt. 23:13-39; Heb. 3:8. Cf. Lenski, op. cit., p. 267 on Heb. 8:9.

113. Ibid., p. 269.

114. Hengstenberg, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 433.

Covenant was given to a nation. The New Covenant is not intended for a nation. Everything that was national, temporal and preparatory about the Old had now become obsolete. This covenant is for all men, no matter in what nation they may be found. It is for all who by contrition and faith enter into and remain in this covenant. Thus while the world was crumbling about the nation, the prophet held out to the faithful remnant the prospect of a personal covenant with Jahweh. This is guaranteed in the statement that this covenant is for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah." The spiritual character of this phrase is borne out in the fact that the lost ten tribes of Israel were swept into exile, losing their identity through amalgamation with the Gentiles. "Right here is the universality of the new testament (Covenant). Lost among the Gentiles and turned Gentile, the Gospel goes out to all nations, bringing the new testament (covenant) in Christ to all."¹¹⁵

Another superior mark of the New Covenant is the fact of the directness of the knowledge of God:

They shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them.

¹¹⁵. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 265. Contrary to Hengstenberg: "Scripture knows nothing of a covenant with the Gentiles. According to the view of the Old, as well as of the New Testament, the Gentiles are received into the communion of the Covenant with Israel," *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 222-23.

Revelation in the Old Testament was incomplete and clothed in much figurative language. Constantly the people had to be warned and encouraged by the prophets of God. Everything was put in terms of the future. Under the New Covenant men would be confronted with the fact of the Incarnation and the Atonement of Christ stated in historical terms. To know Him is to know God. Thus the Deus absconditus has more and more become the Deus Revelatus through the Deus Incarnatus, to use some of Luther's terms.

That this is the correct interpretation is apparent from the next phrase:

For I will forgive their iniquity,
and I will remember their sin no more.

Through the fact of the Atonement of the Deus Incarnatus men receive forgiveness of their sins under the New Covenant. No conditions are attached to this blessing. It is intimately tied in with the fact of knowing God who can be known only in terms of Christ Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant through the forgiveness of sins.

Through these blessings Jahweh will re-establish that relation which existed between God and man at creation. It will be that relation in which Jahweh "will be their God" with all that this implies, and "they will be my people" with all its attendant blessings.

Jeremiah does not stand alone as the proclaimer of

the New Covenant. Ezekiel, too, proclaims to the suffering remnant in exile the prospect of the New and everlasting Covenant with Jahweh, ch. 16:60f.; 20:37; 34:25; 37:26f. The New Covenant also forms an essential part of the Epistle to the Hebrews, ch. 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6.

It is in terms of the New Covenant that the New Testament Church functions. Its task is to bring the fact of the atonement to the hearts of men that they, too, might know God and be His people, that they, too, may enjoy the forgiveness of their sins, that they, too, may be in fellowship with God and live a life in Him.

CONCLUSION

Looking back over more than 2000 years of sacred history, the Christian reader is struck with the recurring theme of God's covenanting with men. Reaching down out of heaven God came to grips with the basic problems of mankind, promised it alleviation, and endorsed that promise with the granting of covenants.

At each critical period of Old Testament History Jahweh showered His mercy in a covenant relationship. After the flood, which the survivors must have viewed with tremblings and fears, God relieved their anxieties with the Noachian Covenant. When God's call took Abraham away from His home and family and carried him on unknown paths, Jahweh was there with His covenant of grace. When Israel left the civilization of Egypt to return to hostile Canaan via a dreary wilderness, The Lord cut a covenant through which He bound the people to Himself and promised them protection and love. At the beginning of the monarchial state under David, Jahweh promised greater spiritual glories for His people.

With the world crumbling about them, and with the bleakness of captivity imminent, God broke through again with a covenant to the remnant, the New and Eternal Covenant.

Each instance of divine covenanting was the product of a Divine impulse. Nowhere do we find man bargaining with God for a covenant. The motion was always downward to get at man's needs, to set him on his feet again. Each covenant evidenced additional grace of God to men until the time of the New Covenant when in the outpouring of the Spirit Divine grace became an overwhelming flood.

And into the center of all covenants Jahweh placed the promises of Life in Christ. Each covenant included all the glories of the previous along with additional glories until the time of Isaiah when the Lord promised the gift of His Son as "a covenant of the people for the light of the Gentiles," Is. 42:6. Here the Servant of Jahweh is called the Personal and Embodied Covenant, because in His appearance the covenant made with the people was to find its full truth. He is not merely the Mediator of a covenant as Moses, but as the Personal Covenant He is the way to the closest possible connection with God—an Eternal Covenant.

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