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Covenant, Promise and Expectation in the Bible

Two thorny problems of biblical research are the origin of Old Testamentic eschatological conceptions and *the relation between the Old and the New Testaments*. Both of these problems have something in common with each other, because of the fact that Old Testamentic eschatology has some relation to the New Testament. The Ancient Church of the New Testament obviously tried to show that it is a continuation of the Old Testament *qāhāl*¹ and a realisation of certain Old Testamentic expectations. The important problem for modern scholarship is to try and penetrate and formulate this deep feeling of unity.

Modern terminology like ‘promise and fulfillment’ which is logically applied to the relation of Old and New Testament is inadequate and unsatisfactory. It leads on the one hand to a rigorous search for Christ in the Old Testament with a resultant ignoring of the original meaning and ‘Zeitgeschichte’ of an Old Testament text, or on the other hand it leads to a vague idea without any real proof of its effectiveness. It is indeed true that the term fulfil is a biblical one which is applied to a variety of Old Testament texts in especially the four gospels, the Acts and one instance in James². A close scrutiny of these examples shows that a peculiar kind of understanding of the cited Old Testament text existed which is not at all related to the modern logical idea of promise and fulfillment³. The Ancient Church had their conception of fulfillment which was formed according to their principles of biblical exegesis⁴. Although some overlapping between their conception and the modern one may exist, it is at the heart two quite

¹ For *qāhāl* cf. J. D. W. Kritzinger, *Qēhal Jahwe* (1957).

² G. Dellling, *Theol. Wört.*, 6 (1959), pp. 293–295.

³ Cf. also J. Barr, *Old and New Interpretation* (1966), pp. 113ff.

⁴ We can appreciate their approach much better since the discovery of the Qumrân-scrolls. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumrân Texts* (1960), esp. pp. 7–19, and K. Elliger, *Studien zum Habakuk-Kommentar vom Toten Meer* (1953), pp. 118ff.

different things, because some of the prophetic utterances cited by them as being fulfilled, would never have been detected as such through the modern method. It is totally two different worlds of interpretation. Furthermore, the idea of promise and fulfillment does not take into consideration the unique and new message about Jesus Christ.⁵ There is much more to this unity of Testaments than the automatic fulfillment of Old Testament promises⁶.

To try to understand the unity of Testaments better we want to draw the attention to another approach, viz. to see the relation between the Testaments as expressed by the *covenant-idea*. Furthermore, we want to stress the fact that with the various biblical covenants, promise and the resultant expectation were given as an integral part of them. Although this approach must not be regarded as the golden key with which all the problems of both Testaments can be unlocked, we hope that it can produce some new thoughts on the whole problem. The variety of eschatological expectations prevents us from systematisation under one heading⁷. It might be possible, however, to discover the spark which set this expectation on fire.

1. Background of Covenant, Promise and Expectation.

Since the publication of Walther Eichrodt's 'Theologie des Alten Testaments' which emphasizes the centrality of the covenant in Old Testament conceptions, and the discovery of parallel forms between *Hittite* treaties and *Old Testament* covenants by George Mendenhall, a broad stream of publications were published on these subjects. The greatest majority of scholars accept the new approach although certain scholars with some reservations⁸. It is,

⁵ Cf. W. Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1 (1962), p. 347.

⁶ Cf. the informing discussion of R. Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, 2 (1952), pp. 162ff.

⁷ T. C. Vriezen, *Hoofdpijnen der Theologie van het Oude Testament* (1966), p. 476; for a possible systematization idem, *Prophecy and Eschatology: Vet. Test. Suppl.* 1 (1953), p. 225; cf. also S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament* (1965), passim, esp. p. 3.

⁸ G. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1955); K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular* (1960); D. J. McCarthy, *Covenant in the Old Testament. The Present State of Inquiry: Cath. Bibl. Quart.* 27 (1965), pp. 217-240; F. Nötscher, *Bundesformular und «Amtsschimmel»*:

however, clear that the interpretation of Old Testament covenantal forms and also Old Testament theology have profited from the study of these parallels. We could now grasp the institution of the Old Testament covenant and its obligations much better than earlier.

The point we want to make is that with a treaty between a major and minor partner in Hittite vassal-treaties certain promises were made by the major partner which could have created certain expectations by the minor partner. It is true that the treaty was made to protect the rights of the major partner, but it is also to be noted that it was in the interest of the major partner to protect a submissive loyal kinglet against aggression from outside and to prevent anarchy from inside. A close study of vassal-treaties shows that various promises were made of which the following are the more important:

1. A promise of the great king that the line of the vassal will continue, even forever in certain cases⁹.
2. A promise of protection against enemies in clauses of future relations between the partners¹⁰. Through this promise the major partner used a deterrent against any kind of attack against the vassal¹¹. This is a kind of obvious promise because the prosperity of the country of the great king is closely connected to the prosperity of his protected vassals. As soon as the great king is weakened, his empire falls apart like Egypt in the time of Amenophis IV as reflected in the Amarna-letters.
3. A promise of possession of the country and in some cases with even a detailed geographic description of the borders and main

Bibl. Zeits. 9 (1965), pp. 181ff. (here also modern criticism). Since these publications a rapid flow of literature is observable; cf. also K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (1966), pp. 90ff.

⁹ E.g., in the treaty between Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub, A. Goetze, *Anc. Near East. Texts* (²1955), pp. 203–205, and the text in J. Friedrich, *Staatsverträge des Hatti-Reiches in hethitischer Sprache: Mitt. Vord.-As. Ges.* 31 (1926), pp. 1–48; E. F. Weidner, *Politische Dokumente aus Kleinasien* (1923), pp. 76–79. Cf. especially the treaty between Suppiluliuma and Mattiwaza, Weidner, pp. 27ff.; Goetze, pp. 205–206.

¹⁰ Baltzer (n. 8), pp. 20f.

¹¹ Cf. the treaty between Muwattalis and Alaksandus, J. J. Friedrich, *Staatsverträge: Mitt. Vord.-As. Ges.* (1930), pp. 58–59. 66–67; F. C. Fensham, *Vet. Test.* 13 (1963), pp. 135–137.

part of the country¹². This is a promise of continuation of possession to a particular royal line.

It is to be noted that these promises are explicitly and implicitly present in the blessing-forms at the end of treaties¹³. The blessing is a recapitulation of the different promises which occur in the body of treaty. It is, further, important to note that all these promises are given with a definite condition and that is the fidelity of the vassal to the major partner and the observance of the stipulations of the treaty.

It is true that not all the above-mentioned promises occur in all the Hittite vassal-treaties. The promises were made according to definite needs of the vassal or great king, and also according to the historical relationship of the two partners. If the forbears of a vassal showed particular loyalty to the great king and his forbears, a more favourable promise was made. In cases of disloyalty a more relentless attitude was taken against the vassal.

There are no explicitly stated expectations of the vassal present in any of the treaties, but we must bear in mind that the treaties were composed by the major partner and, thus, we should not insist upon any particular expectation of the vassal. It is obvious, however, that the promises of the major partner would create expectations by the vassal. E.g., a promise of continuation of the royal line would stir up expectations of eternal rule. The same would be true of promises of possession of the country and protection against enemies. One of the major interests of a great king was to keep his vassals loyal to his throne. This was done negatively with the threatening of curses, warnings and reproaches. On the positive side promises were made which gave the vassal hope for a peaceful future under protection of the great king. In this climate expectations prospered.

2. Promise and Expectation in the Covenants of Abraham and Sinai.

The precise relation between the covenant of Abraham (Gen. 15) and the covenant of Sinai is very problematic as is shown by

¹² In the treaty between Tudḫaliya IV and Ulmi-Tessub; cf. for a translation D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (1963), p. 183.

¹³ The best example is the blessing in the treaty between Suppiluliuma and Mattiwaza, cf. Goetze (n. 9), p. 206; Weidner (n. 9), pp. 27ff.

studies from the time of Julius Wellhausen up to the modern solution of Walther Zimmerli¹⁴. We need not go into all details of the traditions and its motives which is ably done by Zimmerli. We take as our startingpoint the final stage of the tradition as it occurs in the Massoretic Text. The ancient tradition of the covenant-forming at Sinai shows some remarkable affinities with the form of Hittite vassal-treaties as Mendenhall and Baltzer have shown and which is thoroughly worked out by Beyerlin¹⁵. E.g. the ancient covenant-making, which is transmitted by different sources, is remarkably well preserved and too many parallels between the vassal-treaties and the covenant-tradition occur to eliminate the Mosaic origin of the greatest part of the tradition¹⁶. In the final form as it occurs in the Old Testament the tradition connects the covenant of Abraham with that of Sinai. A close scrutiny of the parts in which the covenant of Abraham is prominent shows that the following promises occur:

1. A promise of possession of the Holy Land (Gen. 15:7, 18; 17:7)¹⁷.
2. A promise of fertility and thus many descendants (Gen. 15:5, 17:4-6).
3. A promise of continuation of the relationship between the Lord and Abraham (Gen. 17:7)¹⁸.

The narratives in connection with the early history of Israel show that these promises are often emphasized. E.g. one of the important points in the description of the history of Israel in Egypt is to prove that the covenantal promise of a fertile nation has been accomplished. The very first chapter of Exodus draws the attention to the fact that these descendants of Abraham

¹⁴ Cf. W. Zimmerli, *Gottes Offenbarung. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, = *Theologische Bücherei* 19 (1963), pp. 205-216 (= *Sinaibund und Abrahambund: Theol. Zeits.* 16, 1960, pp. 268-280); R. Clements, *Abraham and David* (1961).

¹⁵ Cf. note 8 and W. Beyerlin, *Herkunft und Geschichte der ältesten Sinaitraditionen* (1961).

¹⁶ Cf. G. Mendenhall, *Biblical History in Transition: The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (1961), pp. 41f., for the possible antiquity of the covenant-idea; cf. also W. Eichrodt, *Bund und Gesetz: Gottes Wort und Gottes Land* (1965), pp. 36ff.

¹⁷ Cf. J. Wijngaards, *Vazal van Jahwe* (1965), pp. 146-150; L. A. Snijders, *Oud Test. Stud.* 12 (1958), p. 267.

¹⁸ Cf. also Zimmerli (n. 14), p. 212.

became so numerous that they were dangerous to the Egyptians (Ex. 1:7-9). The same is true of the promise of continuation of relationship. The narrative, from Abraham on, tends to show how the Lord took an interest in the affairs of Abraham's descendants. It is an encounter of the loyalty of a major partner of a treaty with the loyalty and submissiveness of the minor partner. The best manner to describe the interest of the Lord in his people is by the idea of remembering them. After a long time and a murderous oppression the Lord paid attention to their call for help (Ex. 1:23-24). It is to be noted that this attention is directly connected to the covenant with the Patriarchs. In the eyes of the narrator the promise of a continual relationship is also accomplished although not fully accomplished like the promise of many descendants. The continuation of relationship is the heart of the covenant and is built out from the past into the present and is furthermore, promised for the future.

The only promise which is not accomplished is that of the possession of the Holy Land. The rôle played by this promise e.g. in the final narrative of Exodus is continually emphasized (e.g. Ex. 3:17, 6:7 etc.). The impression is created that this promise is one of the main causes of the institution of the covenant at Sinai. The reinstitution of the covenant at Sinai, after it was broken (Ex. 32), was solely done because of the oath of the covenant of Abraham (Ex. 33:1). The oath of the Sinai-covenant was broken, but the oath of the covenant of Abraham still holds good. This may refer, in the eyes of the narrator, to a concept of superiority of the covenant of grace (the covenant of Abraham) over the covenant of stipulations (the covenant of Sinai).

A comparison of the main promises of the covenant of Abraham with those of the Hittite treaties shows a few interesting parallels. The most obvious one is the promise of possession of the country. It is, however, to be borne in mind that in case of the Hittite treaties the vassal already possessed the country while in the covenant of Abraham the narrative implies a promise of future possession of the country. We may call the Hittite promise realistic and the Hebrew one idealistic.¹⁹ A very important similarity is the circumscription of the boundaries of the country. In this case

¹⁹ Cf. Y. Kaufmann, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine* (1953), pp. 54ff.

Gen. 15: 18–20 is most informing which gives borders which is only realised in the time of David and Solomon²⁰. In the Hittite treaties a continuation of relationship between the partners is connected with the definite condition of loyalty by the vassal. Although such a loyalty by Abraham and his seed might be understood, it is nowhere stated in Gen. 15 or 17. Nowhere in the Hittite treaties a promise of many descendants to a vassal is made, but a blessing in the form of a wish that a certain person may be fertile is most likely to be taken as a reversed form of a curse in which infertility and obliteration of the seed of a person are mentioned²¹. By and large it is clear that the kind of promises made in the covenant of Abraham is not at all alien to those made in Hittite vassal-treaties. We must keep in mind that these kinds of promises, as is superfluously shown in Hittite vassal-treaties, are adapted to special circumstances in which the treaty or covenant was formed. Minor differences are, thus, to be expected. This might mean that on the one hand the core of the narratives in Gen. 15 and 17 is very old, or on the other hand that the form of these promises survived many centuries and was still in use in the time of the compiler of Genesis. It is difficult to decide for either the one or the other, but this kind of phenomenon should issue a word of caution against the acceptance of a too late date for the covenant of Abraham²².

As we have already mentioned, the final author of Exodus directly connects the covenant of Abraham with that of Sinai. He regards the covenant of Sinai in a certain sense as a continuation of that of Abraham (cf. especially Ex. 33:1). In the whole description of the history of Israel up to the forming of the covenant at Sinai the author proves that certain promises of the covenant of Abraham have been realised. What is left, is the heart of the covenant, viz. the continual relationship between the Lord and his people²³, and the promise of possession of the Holy Land. It is exactly to the latter unaccomplished promise that the covenant

²⁰ For a Hittite example cf. note 12.

²¹ Cf. e.g. F. C. Fensham, *Zeits. atl. Wiss.* 75 (1963), pp. 158ff.

²² Cf. G. von Rad, *A. T. Deutsch* 2–3 (1952), p. 159, for the age of Gen. 15.

²³ The expression of this relation with “I am the Lord, your God” and “You are my people” is newly discussed by R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel* (1963).

of Sinai is connected by the narrator. From this promise a whole cluster of expectations originated of which the coveted fertility of the promised land is an important one. It becomes more and more clear that the tradition of the fertility of Palestine is very old²⁴. This is another warning against the view that this kind of tradition is late and idealistic.

The best setting for such an expectation should be in the desert where the crop is jealously coveted. It is to be expected that around the idea of a promised land various traditions and additions to them, should have developed. The mass of material is so closely knitted and so interwoven that it is almost impossible to solve the puzzle and to separate the different traditions from each other. The tradition of the covenant of Sinai is not at all transmitted as a unit but we have to hunt for fragments here and there. It is even true that in recent research certain remnants of covenantal forms are discovered where it was the least expected²⁵. It seems, however, that in the fragmentary form transmitted to us, the following more important promises accompanied the covenant:

1. Possession of the Holy Land (e.g. Ex. 33:1-3). This promise connects the covenants of Abraham and Sinai.
2. Conquering of enemies (e.g. Ex. 23:22 ff.; 33:2; 34:11 etc.).
3. Continuation of relationship between the Lord and his people (Ex. 34:10). In this case the relationship is dependent on the conditions of the covenant. Israel must listen to the voice of the Lord (Ex. 23:22) or else be punished²⁶.

According to the final tradition of the Old Testament the only new aspect of the promises of Sinai over against that of Abraham is the conquering of foreign nations. This is indeed logical, because

²⁴ Cf. G. Fohrer, *Überlieferung und Geschichte des Exodus* (1964), p. 37, and F. C. Fensham, *An Ancient Tradition of the Fertility of Palestine*: *Pal. Expl. Quart.* 66 (1966), pp. 166f.

²⁵ W. L. Moran, *The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy*: *Cath. Bibl. Quart.* 25 (1963), pp. 77-87; N. Lohfink: *ibid.*, p. 417; H. B. Huffmon, *The Treaty Background of Hebrew yādaʿ*: *Bull. Am. Sch. Or. Res.* 181 (1966), pp. 1f.; T. C. Vriezen, *Bubers Auslegung des Liebesgebotes Lev. 19:18b*: *Theol. Zeits.* 22 (1966), pp. 1-11.

²⁶ On the expression "Listen to the voice of the Lord" A. K. Fenz, *Auf Jahwes Stimme hören* (1964), and for a parallel usage in the Sēfire-treaty Fensham (n. 11), p. 139 note 1.

a promise of the conquering of foreign nations is out of place in the narratives of Abraham, but as a prelude to the conquest of Palestine very much in place in the traditions of the Pentateuch from Exodus on²⁷. It is important to note that the promise of conquering of enemies is closely related to Hittite promise of protection against enemies in vassal-treaties. At another place we have drawn the attention to this relation and it has shown that even the formula is exactly the same (especially Ex. 23:22)²⁸.

Although it might have been implied, it is nowhere stated that the minor partner in the covenant of Abraham must keep to certain conditions. In the covenant of Sinai this fact is emphasized. From the vassal-treaties and other treaty material from the ancient Near East it is clear that the agreement is accompanied by extensive stipulations and obligations to be held by the minor partner²⁹. Every blessing is accompanied by a condition and that is fidelity to the major partner. The idea of stipulations accompanying the covenant was built out in the Pentateuch, through many centuries, into a corpus of legal obligations. The startingpoint of the core of it, however, is to be placed far back into the history of Israel, even to the time of Moses³⁰.

Some scholars are of the opinion that in Jos. 24 the real historical background of the covenant of Sinai occurs. The conquering tribes from the desert and those tribes which were already in possession of the country for a long time decided to make a covenant accepting Yahweh as God and each other as brothers of the covenant³¹. Taking into consideration its final form, however, and its relation to covenantal descriptions in the Pentateuch, it seems as if this chapter gives a description of a renewal of covenant. It is quite

²⁷ It is to be noted that in spite of the enumeration of peoples in Gen. 15:19–21 not a word of war or expulsion is mentioned.

²⁸ Cf. Fensham (n. 11), p. 133–143.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. McCarthy (n. 12), p. 32ff.

³⁰ Cf. A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 1 (1953), pp. 302ff.

³¹ Cf. M. Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (1966); *Geschichte Israels*, pp. 86ff.; Baltzer (n. 8), pp. 29ff.; Smend (n. 23), pp. 15ff.; Vriezen (n. 7), *Hoofdlijnen*, pp. 381f.; W. F. Albright, *History, Archaeology and Christian Humanism* (1964), p. 30. Cf. also for an exhaustive discussion J. L'Hour, *L'alliance de Sichem*: *Rev. bibl.* 69 (1962), pp. 5–36. 161–184. 350–358.

probable that groups, which had associated themselves with the conquering tribes, were taken into the covenant at Shechem, but not as a covenant for the first time instituted. It is true that in the historical introduction of Jos. 24 not a word is mentioned of the covenant at Sinai, but on the other hand the whole description is a proof that the promise of a conquering of the Holy Land has been accomplished. In the historical descriptions of Hittite vassal-treaties reference to a previous treaty is not a necessary part. Furthermore, the promise of a conquering of foreign nations is likewise attained. In other words, two important promises of the covenant of Sinai have been realised, viz., the conquering of enemies and possession of the Promised Land. At this stage where the materialistic promises were accomplished, a renewal of the covenant with the emphasis on the remaining promise, viz., the continual relation with the Lord, was a necessity. From now on the whole history of the Former Prophets were interpreted in light of this relation.

3. *The Covenant with David (2 Sam. 7).*

As we have argued elsewhere, the covenant of David is not to be taken as quite a new covenant without connection to or in opposition against the covenant of Sinai³². It should be regarded as complementary to the ancient covenant. The situation has changed radically with the enthronement of David and his successors. The king is now placed in the centre of responsibility. There exists no longer a loose federation of tribes with now and then a Judge to save them from foreign enemies. A state developed with the integration of the tribes into a civil organisation and service especially since the time of Solomon³³. In these circumstances a new promise originated, viz., the promise of an eternal throne for David and his line. It is important to note that the promise of an eternal throne is accompanied by a historical recapitulation of

³² Cf. F. C. Fensham, *Studies on the Books of Hosea and Amos* (1964/65), pp. 36f., against L. Rost, *Sinaibund und Davidsbund: Theol. Lit. Zeit.* 00 (1947), pp. 128ff.; cf. also A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Sinaibund und Davidsbund: Vet. Test.* 10 (1960), pp. 335–341, and also M. Sekine, *Davidsbund und Sinaibund bei Jeremia: ibid* 9 (1959), pp. 47–57.

³³ Cf. especially J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (1960), pp. 198ff.

the great acts of God in the personal history of David and in the history of Israel. This is also a typical phenomenon in Hittite vassal-treaties where the acts of the great king, toward the vassal personally and toward his country, are enumerated³⁴. As we have already pointed out, the promise of an eternal throne occurs also as part and parcel of some of the vassal-treaties³⁵. Taking this in consideration, it is clear that every one of the typical promises in Hittite vassal-treaties could be paralleled by biblical promises in covenantal contexts. This shows that the covenant-idea pervades the most important part of Old Testament thought³⁶.

There are three possibilities for the development of the idea of eternal rule by the David line. In the first place it could have developed at an early stage, during a time when the great success of Davidic rule created optimistic expectations of the future. This could have happened either in the time of David as the tradition claims or in the time of Solomon (cf. 1 Ki. 3)³⁷. In the second place it could have developed at a later stage when Judaeans were subservient to other countries. It might have been a kind of booster to the low morale of their subjects. In the third place it could have developed in the times of Josiah when new expectations were created by the fall of the Assyrian empire. This would mean that a deuteronomistic hand has added this particular promise. The former view seems to be preferable because of the clear claim by the tradition and the logic behind it, viz., that an eternal throne could only be expected in a time of strong rule.³⁸ Modern scholarship is rapidly moving in the direction of an appreciation of the ancient gist of this tradition³⁹. We may add

³⁴ Cf. e.g. in the historical part of the treaty between Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub: Friedrich (n. 9), pp. 1-48; Goetze (n. 9), pp. 203ff.

³⁵ In the translation of Goetze (n. 9), p. 206, it reads: "May you, Mattiwaza, your sons and your sons' sons (descended) from your daughter of the Great King of the Hatti land, and (you), the Hurrians exercise kingship forever." Cf. also McCarthy (n. 12), pp. 33f.

³⁶ Cf. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (21957).

³⁷ Cf. a forthcoming paper read at The Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies 1965.

³⁸ Cf. also Eichrodt (n. 5), p. 29; Vriezen (n. 7), *Hoofdpijnen*, p. 483; Bright (n. 33), p. 204.

³⁹ Cf. G. von Rad, *Theologie des A. T.*, 1 (19. .), p. 48, and literature cited there. R. A. Carlson accentuates the deuteronomistic influence, *David, the chosen King* (1964), pp. 123ff.

that the parallel with the Hittite vassal-treaties points in the same direction.

It is exactly this ancient tradition of eternal rule by the Davidic line which created numerous problems in Israelite religious life. This promise gave rise to expectations which are observable in the cult where the king is hailed as sitting on an eternal throne (e.g., Ps. 21:5; 110 etc.)⁴⁰. Exactly this situation created a problem, because the promise of an eternal throne was subjected to a condition implying loyalty to Yahweh and keeping up the living relation with him. It became a question of tension between formalistic religion without living contact and force on the one hand and a continual living submissiveness to the will of God expressed in love to Him and to the neighbour on the other hand. The covenantal promise of an eternal throne created a feeling of self-confidence and complacency which blurred the continual responsibility of Israel to the Lord.

Against an attitude of complacency and purposeful deviation from prescribed norms, the prophetic message was pronounced. The latest study of prophetic curses shows that they were pronounced against a breach of covenant⁴¹. The influence of covenantal ideas on the prophets is more and more realised in modern research⁴². Walter Beyerlin shows that in the case of Micah the Woe-prophecies and other prophetic reproaches are directed against the transgression of ancient stipulations of the covenant and to my mind the same phenomenon occurs in Hosea, Amos and Isaiah⁴³. Some of the prophets give a description of a lawsuit between the Lord and his people as a result of the rupture of alliance, a phenomenon which occurs also in ancient Near Eastern

⁴⁰ Cf. for the Psalms and covenant A. Weiser, *Glaube und Geschichte im Alten Testament* (1961), pp. 314ff.; F. C. Fensham, *Ps. 21, A Covenant-Song?*: *Zeits. atl. Wiss.* 77 (1965), pp. 193–202.

⁴¹ Cf. Fensham, *Zeits. atl. Wiss.* 75 (1963), pp. 155–175, and especially D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (1964), *passim*; also H. Wildberger, *Jesajas Geschichtsverständnis: Vet. Test. Suppl.* 9 (1962), pp. 106ff.; W. Zimmerli, *Das Gesetz im Alten Testament: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1963), pp. 270ff.

⁴² Cf. e.g. R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (1965), especially his important conclusions pp. 119–129, and also McCarthy (n. 8), p. 232.

⁴³ Cf. W. Beyerlin, *Die Kulttraditionen Israels in der Verkündigung des Propheten Micha* (1959).

documents⁴⁴. After such a lawsuit the imminent doom is vividly described. The earlier literary prophets were well aware of the covenantal idea and threatened infidelity in their times with, *inter alia*, typical treaty-curses which would operate after a breach of the covenant. Prophets just before and during the exile accentuated this attitude, and here we may call special attention to Jeremiah. It is clear that the promise and expectation of an eternal Davidic line created difficult problems especially during the exile. With the exile of Jehoiachin to Babylon in 597 B.C. and with the final overthrowing of the Babylonian satellite Zedekiah the hope of an eternal throne was severely shocked⁴⁵. In these circumstances a re-interpretation of the Davidic promise was given by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The Judaeans were not able to keep the stipulations of the covenant and, thus, not able to fulfil the conditions of the covenant. A curse overtook them. What about the Davidic promise?⁴⁶ Jeremiah solved the problem by referring to a future new covenant which is quite different from the broken Sinai-covenant (Jer. 31:31–32). A new king will arise who will succeed where his predecessors have failed (Jer. 23:5–8). Ezekiel mentions a David *redivivus* who will rule over his people as shepherd and who will receive a covenant of peace (Ez. 34:24–25). It is understandable that in such disappointing times the future hope of Israel was severed from the Davidic promise and, by other prophets, bound to something else⁴⁷.

4. *The New Covenant of Christ.*

Since the severe shock of the Babylonian exile and the struggle of the Jewish nation to regain a foothold in Palestine, their horizons have widened. They experienced new civilizations like those of Babylon, Persia, and Greece. All kinds of influences were

⁴⁴ Cf. esp. H. B. Huffmon, *The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets*: Journ. Bibl. Lit. 78 (1959), pp. 282–295. For Near Eastern material J. Harvey, *Le rîb-Pattern*, *requisitoire prophétique sur la rupture de l'alliance*: Bibl. 43 (1962), pp. 172–196, and the forthcoming paper of Fensham in the *Volterra-Festschrift*.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bright (n. 33), pp. 310ff.

⁴⁶ Cf. K. Baltzer, *Das Ende des Staates Juda und die Messias-Frage*: *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen* (1961), pp. 33–43. ⁴⁷ Cf. notes 48–50.

felt which shaped their conceptions. These conceptions on the one hand, and the problem of the eternal Davidic throne on the other, gave rise to a great variety of eschatological expectations⁴⁸. As a result of the disappointment in the failure of the Davidic line, in certain circles the expectations of the future were detached from this promise and projected in another direction, e.g., in the direction of apocalyptic imagery.⁴⁹ It is, however, true that the promise of an eternal throne and the resultant Messianic expectations never died down. It might be that at certain times these expectations were pushed back a little, but every time, by an impulse from without or within, it flared up again. The Messianic expectations were no longer built on a slender base of national views, but widened out to the idea of world domination⁵⁰.

Before the discovery of the *Qumrân*-literature it was indeed difficult to ascertain, with the few sources at our disposal like Josephus and Philo, what kind of Messianic expectations occurred in Palestine outside the description of the New Testament. Although *Qumrân* gives us a onesided description of the expectations of a sect, this material is indeed welcome to augment our lack of knowledge. *Qumrân* shows two important things for our study: in the first place that the covenant-idea was very much alive in the time of Christ and Paul⁵¹; in the second place that Messianic expectations prospered⁵², although in a special kind of guise, in *Qumrân* where they implied a priestly Messiah and a Davidic Messiah. In fact the sect believed that the Jeremianic expectation of the new covenant was realised in their sojourn in the desert. They believed that they were like the ancient Israelites before the conquest of Palestine⁵³. Their covenant, however, was closely

⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. Vriezen, *Hoofddlijnen* (n. 7), pp. 492f.

⁴⁹ This may be compared with Vriezen's classification in *Prophecy and Eschatology* (n. 7), p. 225.

⁵⁰ This process already started in Old Testament times, cf. Eichrodt (n. 5), pp. 329f.

⁵¹ Cf. Baltzer (n. 8), pp. 103–127, and especially Annie Jaubert, *La notion d'alliance dans le Judaïsme* (1963). The more important covenant-conception occurs in the Damascus-Documents and in IQS III, 13–IV, 26.

⁵² Cf. for a detailed discussion A. S. van der Woude, *Die messianischen Vorstellungen der Gemeinde von Qumran* (1957), *passim*.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judea* (1959), pp. 116ff.

bound to rigorous stipulations like the covenant of Sinai, which is quite opposite to the conceptions of Early Christianity⁵⁴. A close scrutiny of the doctrine and life of this sect shows that two kinds of expectations of the future were kept alive, viz., the Messianic expectations and the expectation of conquering enemies⁵⁵. In the latter case it is meant as a real victory over all people who are not members of the sect and also a victory over evil forces⁵⁶. Important for our study is the fact that a Jewish sect in the time of Christ believed that they were the heirs of a new covenant, and that amongst them two kinds of expectations occurred which are closely related to covenantal expectations in the Old Testament.

With this knowledge as background we can appreciate much better the covenant-conception and its promises and expectations in the New Testament. Several scholars from different schools of thought realise the value of Old Testamentic covenantal conceptions for New Testamentic studies. Some of them regard the covenant-idea as one of the most important links between the Testaments⁵⁷. Although it is indeed an important link, it is very difficult to explain. The continuation of the ancient covenant-idea was claimed, but its radical change or even destruction on certain points, implying a new conception of the force of the stipulations, was initiated by the teaching of Jesus and Paul. It seems to be a continuation, but at the same time a new creation. In regard to the incorporation of stipulations in the covenant, the Qumrân-sect was much more true to tradition than Christianity.

⁵⁴ Cf. the useful discussion of D. Flusser, *The Dead Sea Sect and Pre-Pauline Christianity: Scripta Hierosolymitana*, 4 (1965), 236–242, p. 241.

⁵⁵ For the first cf. note 52 and for the second Y. Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness* (1962); cf. also the *Damascus-Documents*, C. Rabin *The Zadokite Documents* (1958), p. 42.

⁵⁶ This conception is not very much different from the Old Testamentic interpretation of Israelite history where a victory over an enemy means a victory over their gods. This is a fairly common phenomenon in the ancient Near East and can be best paralleled by conceptions in the Moabite-inscription, lines 14–18: H. Donner-W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 1 (1964), pp. 33ff.; translation and commentary 2 (1964), pp. 168ff.

⁵⁷ Cf. the illuminating discussion of Eichrodt (n. 5), p. 344; R. Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, 2 (1952), pp. 171–179; O. Cullmann, *Heil als Geschichte* (1965), p. 239; P. Stuhlmacher, *Glauben und Verstehen bei Paulus: Ev. Theol.* 26 (1966), p. 348; H. Ridderbos, *Paulus* (1966), pp. 235ff.

It is not always easy to penetrate into the meaning of the variety of conceptions about the new covenant in Early Christianity⁵⁸. It is clear, however, that according to the tradition on the Lord's Supper, the uniqueness of the Christian covenant is to be ascribed to the death of Christ. We have tried at another place to show that the idea of meal and sacrifice at the Lord's Supper is a very ancient one with covenants and treaties, and can be traced back well into the Second Millennium B.C.⁵⁹. At still another place we have tried to show that the death of Christ on the cross may be regarded as a curse which was applied to him as a result of the breach of the covenant by the people. This is substantiated by the message of Paul in Gal. 3:10-14 which is concluded by: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written: Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.'⁶⁰ It seems as if the idea of a new covenant instituted by Christ, and the annulment of the punishment by taking the curse of the old covenant on him, pervades the whole New Testament. If we accept this, the background of the difficult Pauline terminology in connection with reconciliation with God may be explained in the light of the covenantal idea.

What then is to be regarded as the promises and resultant expectations in the new covenant of Christ? The *locus classicus* of the institution of the new covenant, Mark. 14:12-26, has in verse 25 an important promise which sounds a little enigmatic⁶¹. It seems to imply that the death of Christ would not be the end, but that soon Christ will drink wine in the kingdom of God. It is not the place here to go into smaller detail of different opinions about the meaning of the kingdom of God in this text.⁶² It is,

⁵⁸ E.g., the conception of the new covenant concerning the Lord's Supper in the Synoptics and Paul: Mark. 14:12-26 and par., 1 Cor. 11:17-34, and also the unique conception in Hebr. which shows affinity with certain conceptions in Qumrân; Flusser (n. 54), pp. 236-242.

⁵⁹ Cf. F. C. Fensham, *Die Offer en Maaltyd by die vorming van die Verbond in Ou en Nuwe Testament: Tydskr. vir Geestesw.* 5 (1965), pp. 77-85.

⁶⁰ Cf. a forthcoming paper in *Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap van Suid-Afrika* (1966).

⁶¹ A discussion with reference to the word "new" in E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (1951), pp. 304f.

⁶² On the kingdom of God and the Lord's Supper H. Ridderbos, *De Komst van het Koninkrijk* (1950), pp. 337ff.

however, quite probably to be taken in its full eschatological force, in the same meaning as the eschatology of Judaism.⁶³ Salvation is part and parcel of eschatology. The fact that there is a continuation of life for Christ after his death, according to Mark 14:25, clearly refers to his resurrection and draws the line of salvation through from the cross to resurrection. This, it seems to me, is to be regarded as the focal point of the covenantal promise and probably the basis of Christian eschatological expectations. Faith in the resurrection became the new hope of Christianity, as is clearly pointed out by Jürgen Moltmann.⁶⁴ The promise forms the basis of expectation and the expectation in turn forms the basis of hope and faith. From the basis of faith in the resurrection sprang all kinds of eschatological material, some of them rooted in the Old Testament and re-interpreted, others rooted in later Jewish conceptions, and some beliefs are very difficult to trace back. Around the core, viz., the cross as symbol of the new covenant and the resurrection pointing to a living Christ as hope for the future, the whole New Testament was built up. We may propose the development of the New Testament around the covenant as follows: We have the historical prologue of the description of the acts and words of Christ, then the centre of the message, viz., the forming of the new covenant at the cross, and finally the result, viz., the expansion of Christianity through the propagation of the expectations created by the resurrection.

5. Conclusions.

If we take the covenant-idea as central in the historical development and religious conceptions of ancient Israel, we may expect that the promises, incorporated in the covenant, instigated new hopes amongst the Israelites. The realisation of certain promises was followed by other promises until only the promises of the eternal Davidic line and the relationship with God survived. These promises stirred up new hope at various stages of Israelite and Jewish history until the time of Christ when he was regarded by his followers

⁶³ D. Rössler, *Gesetz und Geschichte* (1962), pp. 60ff.

⁶⁴ J. Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (31966).

as the realisation of these promises. This realisation could, however, never be explained along logical lines. In fact, the protest of Jesus against the political expectations of his time is the best illustration of the fact that the promises were realised, but not in the same manner as were logically expected by people in his time. This should be a warning against any modern attempt to interpret Old Testament promises with the aid of formal logic in hunting through the New Testament for a place where they might be fulfilled. Only the New Testament itself can unveil to us the mystery of fulfillment. The problem of the relation between the Testaments is better understood if we regard the New Testament as the final stage of covenant-making between God and his people. The new covenant, however, is connected to the old with all the unrealised expectations which were developed around certain covenantal promises, either in concord with these promises or in opposition to a false interpretation of them. At the end only the hope is left which is created by the covenant. Even the realised hope of the old covenant could be of abiding value, because this hope was continually bound up with the relation to God and his promises. A relation of hope could never run dry even if it is turned away in another broader stream. In the broad stream you will always discover something of the former stream. This may seem an easy solution for our problem, but at the same time we must draw attention to the infinite difficulty we have with the uniqueness of the new covenant. One can never draw a straight line from the old to the new covenant. It must always be broken. It is even true that the line between the different Old Testament covenants was broken. The covenant of Sinai was not a complete realisation of the covenant of Abraham, nor the Davidic covenant of the Sinai-covenant. Concerning the new covenant it is true that the *skandalon* of the cross and the new hope of Christianity cut across good Jewish tradition, and are not to be taken as part of the logical traditional expectation of the Jewish people. The new covenant is indeed new. It is new in the forming of the covenant and in its hope. There may be one logical line left to draw, that is, we may discover a progressive newness in the new promises and their unique realisation.

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