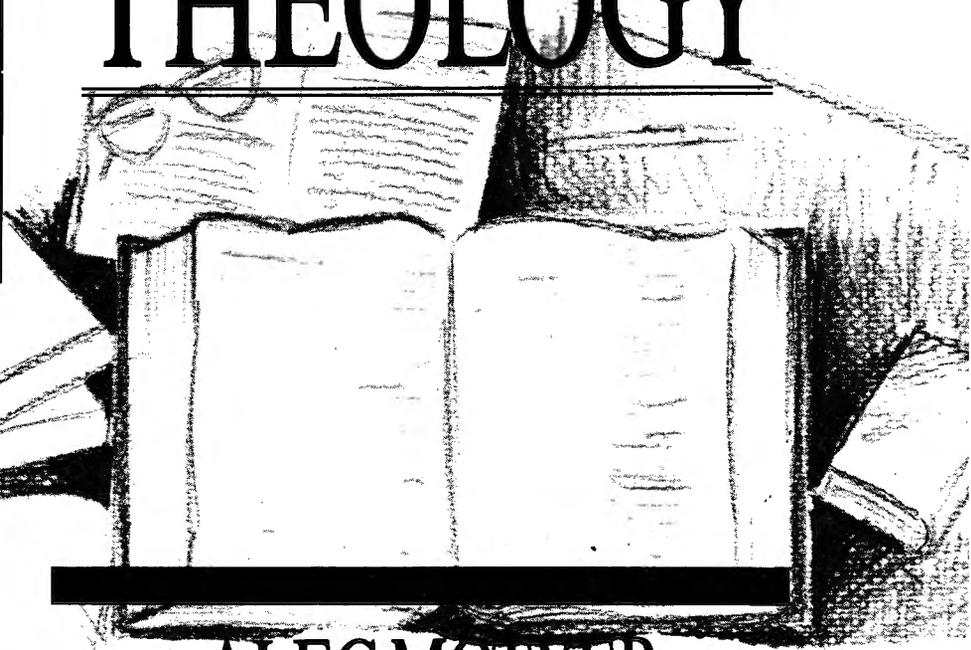


# OLD TESTAMENT COVENANT THEOLOGY

RTSF booklets



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## COVENANT THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

J.A. Motyer

### INTRODUCTION

I intend in my first lecture, under the title 'Covenant and Promise' to look at the narratives of Noah and Abraham, the point at which the covenant of God began to take shape in the Old Testament. In the second, under the title of 'The Normative Covenant' we will consider the Exodus narrative up to the point where the people of God reached Mount Sinai. In the third, we will look at one of those basic schemes of thought that run through the Old Testament; our title will be 'Covenant, Law and Sacrifice'. Our last title will be 'The Covenant Probe': how the doctrine of the covenant in the Old Testament began to reach out to its final expression in the New Testament and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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### COVENANT AND PROMISE

The covenant idea in the Old Testament can be very simply expressed in the words 'God makes and keeps promises' and we discover that in making promises God is moved only by his own nature. He finds circumstances among men, but he finds pressure within his own heart. It is the nature of God that moves him to make his promises, and in keeping the promises which he makes, God acts in his all-sufficient strength. As we shall see in our studies, the word all in the expression 'all-sufficient' needs to be emphasized. God does not take anyone into partnership. He is not only totally able to keep his promises without assistance, but he insists upon so doing.

The covenant idea is that God makes and keeps promises. And as these promises emerge- the idea of covenant comes, in fact, very dramatically and without any forewarning upon our notice in the story of Noah - they are focussed upon the central theme of salvation. The God of the covenant is revealed as God the Saviour. The point of the promises is that he pledges himself to a total work of salvation.

### THE COVENANT PROMISES 1 NOAH

May we then take up as the first part of our study the theme 'The Covenant Promises' and look at them first of all in relation to Noah and secondly in relation to Abraham?

In the case of Noah, the covenant promises, the promises of salvation are, if I may put it this way, considered objectively. The circumstance in which Noah found himself was this: he was a man under threat from an external factor, namely the wrath of God. Following the narrative of the fall in Genesis 3, the theme of chapters 4 and 5 is entirely given to the thought of the prevalence of sin over man and over his world. We see in chapter 4 that sin spreads to the descendants of Adam and that it increases in corruption. We see in chapter 5 that sin reigns, for however these great men who lived in the days before the flood managed to prolong their days to such enormous ages, the one epitaph is written over them all - that they died, so that sin reigns. In chapter 6, in the very mysterious reference with which the chapter begins, we see that sin reaches a cosmic scale of corruption. 'It came to pass, when mankind began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took wives of all of them that they chose. And the LORD said, My spirit shall not strive with man' - or whatever the verb that is there translated 'strive' really means (6 v.l.f.). God saw in this circumstance something to which he was bound to say no. A line was drawn across history.

God said 'No; it will not go any further.' And the substance of the divine meditation in elaboration of his word 'No' was this: 'The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, 'I will destroy man.'

Notice how the word 'man' rings out over and over again in that narrative. Verse 5 is the divine assessment: God saw the wickedness of man; verse 6 is the divine reaction: 'It repented the LORD that he had made man'; verse 7 is the divine resolve: 'I will destroy man'. God is reviewing the totality. This is what he sees, this is what he feels and this is what he purposes to do. And Noah belongs with that lot. Those verses do not say 'God saw the wickedness of every man except Noah'. It does not say 'I will destroy every man except Noah'. Noah belonged in that situation. He was with the rest of the world under the wrath of God. Do you see now what I mean by saying salvation objectively considered? There is this threat coming upon man. Man being what he is, there is that threat coming upon him. Noah is the corrupt man under threat of destruction but promised salvation. The covenant God is the Saviour God, and when he finds man under threat of destruction, there is that about him that prompts him to effect salvation.

I would like to lift that truth out of the narrative and elaborate it in three ways. (i) The judgment of God There is no need to say very much more under this heading. God is the sole sovereign in his own world; he does not have to ask permission to pass judgment. When he sees a universal situation requiring a universal judgment, he says 'I will destroy'. But into that Judgment of God there comes (ii) the mercy of God. 'The LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground, both man and beast and creeping thing and fowl of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD' (6:7-8). So here we see the mercy or grace of God. Your own memory of the Old Testament will tell you that that phrase 'X found grace' occurs more than once in the Old Testament. Unfortunately it is rather wrapped up in different translations in the Revised Standard Version. But if you go to Young's Analytical Concordance and you look up this expression 'X found grace', you will discover it, for example, in situations like David and Mephibosheth. You will find it in Genesis 19, in the case of Lot being rescued from Sodom. You will discover that there is always a common denominator in the situations in which the phrase occurs, and that is that every time the Old Testament says that somebody 'found grace' you have grasped the meaning of the expression by reading it backwards: 'grace found somebody'. That is to say, every time this expression occurs, it focusses attention as far as the human or receiving end is concerned on a meritless situation. If a person testifies 'I have found grace', he is saying 'There is nothing about me that could have prompted or earned or suggested this,' And he thus focusses attention on an inexplicable happening, namely that grace has reached out and has lighted upon this unworthy object. When, therefore, we read in Genesis 6:8 'Noah found grace', the scriptural understanding of that phrase is that 'grace found Noah'. There came into his meritless situation that which he could never, left to himself, have achieved.

Notice how very carefully Genesis safeguards this truth. For after verse 8 there comes one of Genesis' own chapter headings, 'these are the generations of Noah'. This phrase occurs about twelve times in Genesis and it makes a very interesting study in its own right. But it always has this significance, that it draws a line across the narrative. It says, 'so far so good; now look at it this way'. It draws a line across the narrative and then focusses our attention. Consequently, when Noah appears before us in verse 9 as Noah the righteous man, there is a line between that statement and the statement at the end of verse 8 where Noah is, as we have seen, the meritless man, the

man upon whom grace came from God. We are not invited, in fact we are not even permitted by Genesis, to reverse the order of verses 8 and 9. We cannot say 'Now we see why Noah was chosen'; for not only would this be untrue to the way in which Genesis uses its chapter headings, 'These are the generations of', but it would also set Genesis out of context of the rest of Holy Scripture. For Scripture forbids the thought that there is that in any man or woman which explains the electing mercies of God. What we must say when we come to verse 9 is not 'Now we see why Noah was chosen', but 'Now we see that Noah was chosen'. Genesis 9 sets before us the mark of the truly elect, the marks of the man or woman upon whom mercy has come from God. The mercy of God reaches out and takes hold of one amongst the corrupt ones upon the face of the earth. Noah found grace; grace found Noah.

It was to that man that the word 'covenant' was spoken for the first time by God. 'I, behold, I do bring the flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with thee' (Genesis 6: 17,18). The covenant is shorthand for 'my promise of salvation'. 'You know that like the whole of mankind you are involved in a death-bound situation, but into that situation in your case I am feeding an additional and preservative factor, my covenant'. And in the terminology which the Old Testament uses very carefully in connection with the divine covenant, the expression used here is 'I will establish my covenant'; and the inner meaning of the word is 'I will set my covenant in operation', - 'I will make it take action'. If on the one hand the wrath of God is flooding in over a corrupt world, God sets another agency in action 'I will set my covenant in action and that activity, that out-reaching of grace, will lay hold upon you and will keep you while the world is perishing.' Actually it is a very vivid word in verse 18, 'I will make it stand up', as though the covenant were something that was there but inoperative, in suspense, and God brought it into life so that it leaps to its feet. 'I will make it stand', 'I will set it in motion', 'I will make it operative'.

We have noted already in this situation judgement and mercy, and I want you to note (iii) the righteousness of God. God doesn't say to Noah 'My covenant is a divine helicopter which is going to come and lower an escape net for you, to lift you to heaven until I have finished with the earth'. Just looking candidly at the story of Noah, you will remember he was left to endure the flood just like the rest of mankind. What then did the covenant do for Noah when God made it leap to its feet? Why, it wrapped Noah round with the certain circumstance which we call the ark. It wrapped Noah round with the certain circumstance which guaranteed that when the waters of judgement fell upon him, they would fall upon him unto salvation. He was left in the place of judgement, but he was so secured by the covenant, that the very form the judgement took guaranteed his salvation. For after all it is no salvation, not even a pleasure, simply to be in the ark. It is like living in the zoo with your in-laws! There's nothing saving or attractive about the ark as such; it is only designed for one occasion, but on that one occasion, when the judgement of God falls in watery form upon the earth, then it is the supreme blessing. Then, and only then, is the ark salvation. So Noah is not removed from the judgement; he has to endure it, for this covenant-making and covenant-keeping God is the God of the utmost righteousness who remains just. He is not dealing with Noah on the basis of favouritism or special action; he is dealing with Noah on the basis of that which sin merits, and yet he sets himself forth as the Saviour of sins.

The sign. The covenant with Noah is accompanied by a sign, and we must glance briefly at this before we move on to have a look at Abraham. Signs of the covenant come in chapter 9. 11f.: '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 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

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. 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.' The bow is a sign of the covenant which God makes. That is to say, it is intended to express that which is true about God. It is appointed by God - 'I set my bow in the clouds', and it is even appointed in the first instance for God. What an extraordinary thought, but it is clearly here, that in the first instance it is appointed for God. 'I will look upon it so that I may remember.' How wonderful it is, that this Noah narrative focusses all attention upon God. But then God lets man into the secret. He tells man what the bow means. As soon as God lets man into the secret, the sign of the covenant begins to speak to the covenant man concerning the word of God. So whatever the bow means - and God graciously allows us to think in human terms, as though he needed a memento or a reminder - whatever the bow means as towards God, as soon as God lets man into the secret, the bow in the cloud, the sign of the covenant, begins to speak divine promises. Covenant signs declare covenant promises to covenant people, so that when Noah sees the bow in the cloud he says, 'God has promised'. Covenant signs declare covenant promises to covenant people. It is a token and guarantee of the word of God.

## 2 ABRAHAM

In the narrative of Noah, as we have seen, God was the sole agent. He did all. Now the Abraham narrative underscores that theme, sometimes called in a rather highfaluting way 'monergism', the sole activity of God. Nothing else is possible, and nothing else is tolerable than that God shall do all in making and implementing his promises.

Thus the story of Abraham focusses upon his childlessness. He starts out as the man who is unable to contribute, saying at the beginning of chapter 15 'I go childless'. The story proceeds by telling us that he is disallowed from making any contribution, for he goes about, according to the law of the land of the time and prompted by Sarah, to take a second wife and to have a child whom she will recognize as her child, namely Ishmael; but God simply disallows it. He will not permit Abraham to contribute to the fulfilling of the divine promises. And when God has given Abraham thirteen years to cool his heels, he steps in and fulfils his own promise in his own way. He simply will not be helped. He doesn't come in and say 'Ha, Abraham, I see you've had a son - how thoughtful of you'. He simply disallows the whole procedure and proceeds along his own lines to fulfil his promise. So first of all Abraham is unable to contribute; secondly he is disallowed from making any contribution, and thirdly, when he does seem to make contribution - for as the narrative proceeds, he and Sarah have a child, by the ordinary processes which God has ordained - the narrative is very careful to tell us that he does so totally by the enabling of God.

Now this is the theological ground work of a perfectly wonderful story of a childless marriage. The book of Genesis is like so much of the rest of Scripture. It reminds me of what Leon Morris says on, I think, the first page of the introduction to his commentary on John, that it is safe enough for a child to paddle in and deep enough for an elephant to swim in! We have read these stories in Genesis from early childhood; we have loved and revelled in them. But the more they are read the deeper they are. And here is the theological ground work for a simple story about a childless man to whom children were promised.

Notice now the difference between the stories of Noah and Abraham:

Noah was under an external threat from the wrath of God, but Abraham was under threat from his own disability. Here is an internal factor. Man is in no position to contribute or co-operate. Be very careful of that word 'co-operate', if you are trying to think biblically. So often we use this as though it meant a correct biblical idea, namely 'obey'. But when people obey they do not co-operate with God, they take the servant's place, they do what they are told. There is no 'co' in the operation. For 'co' speaks of equality, of this person working alongside that person, and the story of Abraham disallows the whole notion of human co-operation with God in the fulfilment of divine promises. Man is in no position to contribute or to co-operate; the covenant points to a salvation which is all of God, in its internal workings within the subject as well as in the great objective factor of safeguarding the elect from the wrath of God.

Now the narrative as we have it focusses attention on at least the following three central points. (i) The work of God in election 'He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.' (Gen.15:6) Abraham comes to this tremendous moment of trusting the divine promises. Here is the essence of the situation of justification by faith. Paul opens it out in Romans 4:18. If you read there Scripture's own commentary on Scripture, you will see that Abraham looked candidly at the total hopelessness of the human situation and he looked candidly upon the gracious divine promise and he said 'I will stand there and not there!' He took his stand upon the promises of God. That is justification by faith and that is what is found here in verse 6. But notice what God says to him in verse 7; he says 'I am the LORD that brought the out of Ur of the Chaldees to give thee this land to inherit it.' Now Abraham, says God, 'Please don't think that your faith purchases anything or has any purchasing power in heaven. Don't think that by believing you have climbed into a position by your own merits or deservings. Let me take your story back to where it began. I brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees.' The first movement was God's movement. The first choice was God's choice. The first impulse was God's impulse. Now the story doesn't elaborate the truth beyond that point, but it does insist on the priority and the primacy of the work of God. It was because God brought Abraham out and brought him all that journey and to this place; it was because God was working in his life, that Abraham came to the point of failure and so to his faith commitment.

So there is God's work in election. There is also (ii) his work in obligation. The narrative in chapter 15 continues in verse 9, 'Take me an heifer of three years old.....' You know that Abraham was called upon to set up a very elaborate sacrificial situation. He was to take a variety of animals, great and small, and having slain them to divide their carcasses, as we learn from the narrative, so as to leave a pathway between the slaughtered bodies of the animals. Notice two things: (a) the sacrifice was organised at the divine behest, 'Take for me'. God is the mover in providing this sacrifice. Literally translated, verse 9 says Take for me, take because I tell you to take, take because I want it so. Sacrifice is not a technique whereby man twists the arm of God; sacrifice is a provision that God makes for certain people in certain situations. God is the mover in sacrifice. The narrative in verse 10 very carefully repeats the two words and he took 'for him'; Abraham did what he was told. (b) The second thing I want you to notice is that in this ceremony which now centres upon these slaughtered animals, God is the sole agent. Just as earlier on and for another purpose he anaesthetised Adam, now he applies a divine anaesthetic to Abraham to put him out of action, so that he can be no more than an observer of what God is doing. 'A deep sleep fell upon Abraham.' (v.12) he is immobilised, because God is going to be the sole agent, the solely active one in this situation. And when Abraham was so immobilised, 'it came to pass, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a furnace that smoked and flashed passed between these pieces. We learn from Jeremiah 34 what was passing between the pieces meant; it meant the taking of an oath (Jeremiah 34:18). And there

is a side-light thrown upon it in 1 Samuel 11: 7; when Saul wished to lay the people of Israel under an obligation to come and help the men of Jabeshgilead, he sent the severed pieces of an animal round all the tribes, and the severed pieces spoke in terms of a curse - 'So shall it be done to the man and unto his beasts if he refuses to come out after Saul'. To pass between the severed pieces was the taking of a very vivid and terrible oath: 'So may it be done to me if this oath is broken.' And God alone passes between the severed pieces. Not only does Abraham not pass, but he is disallowed from passing. He is visited by a deep sleep, a divine comatose condition, while God takes upon himself the total obligation of the covenant. So verse 18 goes on: 'In that day the LORD made a covenant.' What day? The day of the sacrifice. 'In that day', which would live in the Abraham calendar as the day of the sacrifice, God made a covenant. How did he make it? By taking the total obligation upon himself. The narrative, like the narrative right through Genesis, doesn't stop to spell out details, but look back through the Bible and ask yourself what that commitment of himself by God meant. It meant that God was saying, 'If this covenant is broken I will take the obligation for it.' So there in Genesis 15 in implication is the day of Calvary, when he became a curse for us.

(iii) God's work in regeneration The third stress in the story of Abraham is the stress on regeneration, God's work in making Abram into Abraham, in making the man into the new man. And this comes in chapter 17, when Abram was ninety years old and nine, and Ishmael incidentally was thirteen; so Abraham had, as I say, thirteen years to cool his heels to wait to see what God would do - thirteen years in which no further children had been born, thirteen further years of demonstrations of his helplessness. And then at that point the LORD appeared to Abraham and said 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.' And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying 'As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations' and - before Abraham was able to say who, what, why or how? - 'neither shall thy name be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee.' So God comes in regenerating power to make the man into the new man, to make Abram what he was not before - Abraham - to give him capacities which he did not possess before, to make the childless man a father on a colossal scale. So when the child will be born, they will say that, 'this is what God has done.' And this promise God now proceeds to wrap up in a covenant sign, the sign of circumcision.

In Genesis 17, the narrative falls into two parts, and the word 'covenant' occurs in each part. The covenant is first of all defined in a series of promises. As the promises come out, they are like this: first of all, personal: 'My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee.' (v.5) The promises are made personally 'to thee', to the man Abraham. Secondly, the promises are made in domestic terms: - 'I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.' (v.6) The nature of the family of Abraham is declared. Thirdly, the promise is declared in spiritual terms, 'I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generation for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.' (v.7). The spiritual dimension of the covenant is seen in God pledging himself to Abraham and his descendants as the one who will be their God. And fourthly, the promises are made in territorial terms; 'I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger.' (v.8) And then it reverts at the end to the central and most important feature of the covenant promise, 'And I will be their God.' So the covenant in those verses is defined in terms of promises. God promises this, this and this; he goes on oath to these four effects. Now when you come to verses 9ff you find this: 'God said unto Abraham, As for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. This is my covenant,

which ye shall keep, between me and thee and thy seed after thee; every male among you shall be circumcised.' So on one hand the covenant is a series of promises, on the other it is circumcision. Circumcision is therefore the visible expression of the promises of God, so that when Abraham henceforth looks upon the mark of circumcision in his body - just as earlier Noah looked at the bow in the clouds - the visibility of the things seen declares to him the promises of God and the status which he had in relation to these promises. Every time Abraham therefore observed the mark of circumcision in his own body, he would declare 'I am the man to whom God has made promises'; for God can only define his covenant in terms of circumcision if circumcision is intended to be what the covenant is, i.e. God going on oath to chosen people. Covenant signs declare covenant promises to covenant people.

### THE COVENANT MEN

We've been looking at covenant promises as they emerge in the stories of Noah and Abraham. I want you to think with me very briefly now about these covenant men themselves. As these men are displayed in the stories about them, there are again three focal points: election, purpose and law. Concerning

(i) Election - it's hardly necessary to say anything further. They were what they were because God chose them to be so. Noah was the man immersed in the world's corruption until grace found Noah. Abraham was the man to whom God said 'I brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees'. What happened to Noah and Abraham happened by divine decision. They came under an elective purpose of God, and especially in the case of Noah we see that that elective purpose of God was a purpose of mercy; grace found Noah.

(ii) The purposes of God In each case the covenant man stands in a mediatorial position to others. If you will take this clue and go back especially to the stories of Noah, you will discover this sort of sequence over and over again - 'My covenant which I make between you and all flesh.' And when Noah is to gather his family and the animals into the ark, it is specified more than once, they are in the ark with you. They are not there in their own right; but only in a derived right. They come under benefits because you have come into covenant.

Now the same truth emerges as we read from Noah to Abraham. It comes out in a typical Genesis way. Immediately before Abraham, you have the story of the building of the tower of Babel, the third of the great acts of divine wrath in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Man had discovered a new technology. We read - 'Go to, let us make brick... because they had brick for stone and slime for mortar.' Man was no longer dependent upon the rocks that he found lying around; he could now be his own architect and builder. He could make his own building blocks and stick them together. And he immediately saw in this the solution to an internal and social problem. 'Let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach the heaven and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered.' The fear of scattering was there and now the solution against it was there. Man will be the solution to his own problems, and God says 'No you won't'. Always through the Bible when man chooses to be his own saviour God rights it in one of those divine negatives, 'No you won't'. And albeit that man thought that his tower was reaching the heavens, the Lord found himself under necessity to come down to see what it was all about, and God scattered them upon the face of the earth. The story of man immediately before Abraham ends on that note of scattering, as though God had forgotten to be merciful. Unlike the earlier narratives of divine wrath, the fall and the flood, which had mercy written into the heart of it, there is no mercy in the story of Babel. But what immediately follows it? 'These are the generations of Shem'. (Gen. 11:10) You say, 'Genesis is back doing what it loves to do, another chapter of beget, begets and begottens'. Well, yes, Genesis does love it, but why? It goes back over how many years we don't know, right back to the fresh beginning with Noah and his son Shem; and the line of Shem is traced through a multitude of people of whom we have no other knowledge. They cast their lives on the face of the earth without causing a ripple upon history, - we would not know them except they are written here. Why are their names here? Because God never gives up, and right back at the time of

the fresh beginning God remained faithfully at work until he could bring to birth a man named Terah whose son would be Abram, to whom he would say, 'In you all the families of the earth will find their blessing.' Abraham comes before us as the man for whom the world will be blessed. Covenant men are mediatorial men.

And then (iii) the covenant man is a man under the law of God. Noah had no sooner stepped out of the ark than God declared his law to him. Genesis chapter 9:1 describes how 'God blessed Noah and his sons, and he said to them, Be fruitful and multiply'; then God goes on to lay down the law concerning man's food and concerning the sacredness of human life. 'Flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, you shall not eat. Surely your blood, the blood of your lives will I require'. (v.4) He brings Noah under the law of God.

Now in his dealings with Abraham and especially at the moment of circumcision, we see with clarity that the covenant man is obedient man. And these are two linked ideas - the divine covenant coming from God to man and the response of obedience arising from man to God. In the case of Noah the covenant sign was one that God put there; this is part of the emphasis of the Noah story of the covenant. It is all God and everything; conspires to show you that God is the sole agent, so that it is God who hangs up this great warrior bow in the clouds to signify that enmity is over. But when it comes to Abraham God says, 'Now Abraham, the sign of the covenant, the sign that I am giving promises to you, is circumcision. You do it.' The Lord does not come down in the guise of a surgeon to perform this operation. He casts Abraham into the role of being his own surgeon and the family surgeon. 'You do it,' At the very moment when the promises light upon a man, he is turned into an obedient man. At the very moment when God gives him the promises, the obligations will be arising, and those two things cannot be sundered. As soon as Abraham marks his body with knife of circumcision, he glories in the promises and he is summoned to obedience. Circumcision does not symbolize obedience. It does not symbolize response. It symbolizes promises, it summons obedience. But at the one moment those two things come together. And Abraham cannot look at the mark of circumcision and glory in the promises without at the same time being reminded over and over again of his commitment to obey God - 'Walk before me and be thou perfect'. Therefore the law of God is written into the heart of the covenant idea.

## 2. THE NORMATIVE COVENANT

Introduction The covenant theme taken up in the book of Exodus.

The book of Exodus confronts us as a continuation of the covenant story. We are not doing any violence to the order of the narratives of Holy Scripture when we move on from Noah and Abraham to Moses and the Passover and the Exodus and Mount Sinai. This is how Exodus itself presents itself to us. For the whole action of the book of Exodus begins at this moment which is recorded for us in chapter 2:23: 'And it came to pass in the course of those many days, that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried and their appeal for help came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And God saw the children of Israel and God took knowledge of them.' People were the object of the genocidal impulse of Pharaoh, and there the matter would have rested except that God remembered his covenant. The story of the book of Exodus is the continuation of the covenant theme.

Do you remember how Moses met initial setbacks when he came to Egypt with the message of God's deliverance? (There are very good reasons why he failed which you will discover if you read the story attentively, but I am not going to go into them now.) Moses knew even in those early days how to deal with discouragement: he brought it into the presence of God. At the end of chapter 5 we read, 'Moses returned unto the LORD' (v.22); out of all his failure and of

his discouragement he 'returned unto the LORD', and the Lord renewed Moses' vision by a reiteration of the divine purpose. He said a great word 'now' to Moses: 'Now shalt thou see' (6:1); and before this discouraged man's gaze he set out again the purposes that he, the Lord, had in mind. And this is how he said them to Moses: 'And God spoke unto Moses and said unto him, I am Yahweh and I showed myself unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, in the character of God Almighty, but as to my name Yahweh, I did not reveal myself to them. And I have also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan the land of their sojourning, wherein they sojourned. And moreover I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgment: and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and ye shall know that I am Yahweh thy God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I lifted up my hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it you for an inheritance: I am Yahweh.' (6:1-8)

Do you hear the covenant notes ringing through that passage? Not only do we find the word 'covenant' appearing, telling us by its very presence that we are running along the same grain of narrative which we studied in the persons of Noah and Abraham, but also the main covenant ideas, the great covenant promise itself stated here in its normative form - 'I will take thee to me for a people and I will be to you a God.' God had said to Abraham that he would be a God to him and to his descendants after him and had promised him the inheritance of the land and many other things besides. That promise is taken up here, and the action which is now going to take place is a direct continuation of that which God had already done under the heading of his covenant with the fathers.

Even more significant than the actual occurrence of the word 'covenant' is the situation in which the book of Exodus is set. I have already mentioned the genocidal impulses of Pharaoh. This is the content of chapter 1: the king of the world, Pharaoh, had determined on the utter destruction of this people. Little did he know that he was in this way challenging the promise that God had made to Abraham, in other words the most fundamental reality about the people of Israel. For at the beginning of God's dealings with Abram as he then was in chapter 12, there was the promise of the preservation of Abram and his descendants. God said 'I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse.' Pharaoh, therefore, all unwitting was setting himself up to challenge the covenant. When his covenant was challenged God rose to defend it. Therefore both its vocabulary and also its own chosen setting proclaim to us that the book of Exodus is the continuation of the covenant narrative.

Sacrifice and law in the stories of Noah and Abraham.

I will ask you to cast your mind back and perhaps to look up one or two references in God's covenant dealing with Noah and Abram and Abraham, in order that we may in a preliminary way justify the title for this second study, 'the normative covenant', the covenant reaching its normative form. Now in the case of Noah in Genesis 8 and 9, the basic idea that we saw was that God makes and keeps promises and that those promises home in on the idea of salvation. God pledges himself to save sinners; and so he does. When he brings in his own wrathful judgment upon a corrupt world he wraps Noah round with a garment of salvation, and Noah is carried over by the waters of judgment into the new world. And we discover then in the continuation of the narrative that there are two features upon which the narrative focusses some attention.

First there is the feature of sacrifice. This occurs at the end of chapter 8: 18 - 'Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his son's wives with him every beast, every creeping thing, every fowl, and whatsoever moved upon the earth, after their families, went forth out of the ark.' The first action of

Noah after the flood after his exit from the ark is to offer burnt offerings, consecration offerings, to the Lord. So there right in the heart of the covenant narrative is the fact of sacrifice. The narrative does not at that point stop to say what the relationship of sacrifice is to the covenant, nor does it stop to explain how sacrifice works. It simply records that the covenant man offered a burnt offering to God. And immediately following that, God comes to Noah with a declaration of his law, saying to him in so many words: Since you are a covenant man, I hereby make regulations to govern your life. I have redeemed you, I have brought you through the dire experience of judgment now. This is the way you are to live. And he sets before Noah a brief pattern of life for the covenant man, and that is in chapter 9, verses 1 to 7. All this is embraced by the covenanting narrative. For if you look in chapter 8, God is still dealing with Noah in covenant terms 'I, behold I, establish my covenant with you; I put my covenant to work. I make it stand up. I set it in motion.' Therefore alongside - let us be as vague as that - the covenant idea of God making and keeping promises, there are these two ideas in association: sacrifice and law. But the Noahic narrative does not knit them in any precise way into the idea of the covenant itself.

Moving along now to the covenant which God made with Abraham, you will remember exactly these two things: sacrifice and obligation, or sacrifice and law. The first time that God drew near in covenant with Abram was in chapter 15, and we noticed in the story earlier the significance of verse 18: 'In that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram', that is to say in the day that God went on oath by means of a specified sacrifice. So the idea of sacrifice is no longer lying in some sort of loose, undefined relationship to the idea of the covenant, but has been brought into the very heart of God's covenant dealings. On that day the sacrifice was offered and God went on oath by marching between the severed carcasses. Sacrifice now belongs to the heart of the covenant though we are not told what it means. In the same way we noted earlier how the very nature of the sign of circumcision by its nature committed Abraham to a life of obedience. Circumcision was the first act of the obedient man, and it is interesting to note that chapter 17, in which circumcision becomes the sign of the covenant, begins on a note of law: 'He said unto him: I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect.' (v.1) So law is brought into the heart of the covenant. In chapter 17, may I again remind you, God defines his covenant in a series of four promises and then wraps his covenant up in an applicatory sign, so that the promises are applied by the sign to appointed individuals. But those appointed individuals, by the very nature of the sign in Abraham's case and by the nature of the context in which the sign is set, are people committed to walking before God and to being perfect. Law is brought into the heart of God's covenant dealings. But it isn't a very informative law, is it - 'Walk before me and be thou perfect'? It tells Abraham a lot and yet it tells him very little. It tells him the magnitude of God's requirement: no moment of life is exempt from the word 'walk', no action or thought of life is exempt from the word 'perfect'. But what constitutes an obedient walk and a perfect life, this he has not told us. So while law comes into the centre of God's covenant dealings, what the law is is nowhere declared. You see the way the theme is nonetheless developing from Noah to Abraham. The whole circle of the covenant concept is coming clearer and more focussed.

### Exodus 1 - 12

Now when we come to God's covenant dealings with Moses, and with Israel in Egypt and in that sequence of events which includes both Passover and Mount Sinai, (i) sacrifice is seen to be at the heart of covenant and is explained; (ii) law is seen to be at the heart of the covenant and is elaborated, so that in this Exodus covenant document you have the perfection of God's covenant dealings with his people. You have the covenant in its normative form. The promises remain constant and the other constituents are brought into their appropriate places and are given their full statement, their full explanation and their full elaboration.

## 1. The revelation of God in word and deed

Now I want to divide our consideration of Exodus 1 - 12 under two headings; the first is the revelation of God in word and deed. May I say how advisedly I put them in that order: word and deed? Exodus 1 - 12 is a source document on the nature of God's self revelation. When it has declared how God has revealed himself it is open to anyone to say 'I see that it declares that, but I don't believe it.' It is not open to anybody to say 'I see that it declares that, but I think it should be otherwise.' A source document declares with authority. And Exodus 1 - 12 is a source document on the nature of the revelation.

How does God reveal himself? Now the current emphasis in Old Testament studies is on the God who acts. Revelation is by the acts of God; G.E. Wright has written a book under that title, God Who Acts. But the idea itself is considerably older than contemporary Old Testament theologians, and one of the most striking statements of this view that God reveals himself by what he does is to be found in William Temple's book Nature, Man and God. Temple puts it in this way: 'There are no revealed truths; there are only truths of revelation.' The matter couldn't be put more crisply than that, though perhaps it might have been put a little more intelligibly, so let me tell you what he meant. 'There are no revealed truths': that is to say, God does not commit himself to propositions. 'There are only truths of revelation': that is to say, truths which arise from correct thinking about what God has done. God does not commit himself to propositions; he acts, and people - very often chosen and especially endowed people - contemplate those acts and say 'I see what God is doing, I see what God is like', and revelation comes by correct thinking about the acts of God. I won't bother to go on to explain at length how this view reflects on the nature of Holy Scripture, as this must be obvious to you; but in a word, Holy Scripture becomes the first of a potentially long chain of attempts to interpret the acts of God, and we can cut past Moses and freshly for ourselves contemplate the Exodus, perhaps arriving at a new interpretation.

Now I simply want to point out to you that that is not what Exodus 1 - 12 asserts happened, and you can make what you like out of the disparity between the narrative in Exodus and the assertions of current Old Testament theologians. Far be it from me to draw invidious comparisons! Exodus 1 - 12 insists that the word of God comes first and the deed of God follows, and that revelation is not contained in a word which arises by interpretation from a deed. Revelation consists rather in a word which is subsequently confirmed by a deed; and the words and deeds of God fit together in this snug system of confirmatory revelation whereby God commits himself verbally to what he proposes to do, and then confirms that as a veracious word from God by doing precisely what he said he would do. This is what happens in these opening chapters of Exodus. Moses is not an interpreter after the event; Moses is a man made wise before the event. And I would like to share with you the truths very briefly which God made known to Moses. (a) He stated to Moses that he was the God of the fathers and the God of the covenant, and that what he was proposing to do was in pursuance of that which he had already done. (b) Before anything else, God reveals himself as the God of holiness (Ex.3:5). It is interesting to note that this is in fact the first time in the Bible that holiness is directly ascribed to God. Although it's impossible for us as Bible-reading believers to read the Book of Genesis without calling God the Holy One, Genesis never does, and it is not until the event of the burning bush as we call it that holiness is directly associated with the Divine Presence. (c) God informs Moses that he purposes to bring his people out from Egypt. 'I know their sorrows and I am come down to deliver.' (3:7-8) (d) He makes Moses aware of Israel's position as God's adopted son. He informs him of the great truth of adoption. 'Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, my firstborn.' (4:21,22) Moses goes into Egypt with that awareness of the status of the people before God. (e) Moses is made aware of the actual course that events will take. 'When thou goest back to Pharaoh see that thou do before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in thine hand.' (4:21) The first experience of Moses in Egypt will be an experience of performing divinely authorised wonders in which there will be no salvation; for the narrative goes on, 'I will

hardened his heart and he will not let my people go.' So Moses is told that there is going to be an initial period in which the wondrous acts of God will only provoke an increasing opposition on the part of Pharaoh and the Egyptians; but matters will come to a head in a contest between the firstborn. 'I have said unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me; and thou hast refused to let him go: behold I will slay thy son, thy firstborn.' (v.23) The whole sequence of events is in principle stated there before Moses - the mighty deeds of God which provoke increasing opposition and the climatic deed in which it is either Pharaoh's firstborn or God's firstborn. Moses is made aware of at least that before he goes into the land of Egypt, and all that is brought to confirmatory certainty when it is fulfilled by the subsequent actions of God.

(f) Moses is made aware that God is a God who purposes redemption. In Exodus 6 when the people are in Egypt and things look at their blackest God commits himself to redeem (Ex. 6:6). This is the first time that the verb 'to redeem' is used in the Bible in what afterwards became its normative sense; indeed it is only used once at all in the book of Genesis.

(g) But chief among all the things which God revealed to Moses before sending him into Egypt was the significance of his own name Yahweh. - 'I am Yahweh.'

It must be a commonplace to you that the name 'Yahweh', which appears in some Bibles as 'Jehovah' and in most Bibles as 'LORD', is related to the Hebrew verb 'to be'. But I think you will find it helpful just to understand a little bit about the significance of the verb 'to be' in Hebrew. Right through the Old Testament there is a phrase which must be very familiar to you. It occurs over and over again in the prophets, 'The word of the Lord came to...' Now in Hebrew that is: 'The word of the Lord was to ...' The verb used is the verb 'to be', not a verb of motion but a verb of realistic experience. 'The word of God became a living reality to ...' Now allow your mind to dwell on that, so that you can savour the meaning of the verb 'to be' in Hebrew. It means living reality, living presence, not just some bare abstract idea of existence as compared with non-existence. And when God focusses attention upon this divine name, 'I am Yahweh', he is saying, 'I am the God of living presence with my people'. And then when opens out to Moses a theology and a sequence of events, what he is saying is this: 'This theology and this sequence of events may be taken as defining what I do in my living presence when I come to be among my people. I take them to be my adopted children. I work for them in terms of redemption. I overthrow and destroy their bows and bring them out from the iron furnace of Egypt. I set in motion a series of events and I superintend them; I determine what will be the reaction to each event as it occurs, and I bring them to their appointed climax. I am the God whose living presence controls and governs all these things.' So even the hardening of their own heart is ascribed to the action of that same God who guarantees his living presence to his people. Just as the New Testament God revealed his final name to be the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the work of Jesus and pre-eminently in the work of Calvary and the Resurrection, so in the Old Testament God gives the paramount revelation of himself at that moment in Egypt when the blood of the lamb is shed. Then they know what the meaning is of this God whose name proclaims his living presence with his people, 'I am the God who is with you to redeem you and to overthrow your enemies.' So much then under our first heading, 'the revelation of God in word and deed'.

2. The redemptive activity of God in confirmation of his word We noted briefly and perhaps all too quickly in the propositional revelation which God gave to Moses how he adopted his people and pledged himself to redeem them by breaking the power of Egypt and bringing them out from that power and into their own land.

Now we look at the redemptive activity of God in confirmation of that word to Moses.

Things happened in Egypt exactly as God said they would happen; that is to say Moses goes to Pharaoh and begins to perform the wonders which God commanded him

to perform. The reaction of Pharaoh was as God said it would be; that is to say, this series of plagues, which turned out to be nine in all, effected no salvation. All they achieved was to increase the bondage. They did not ameliorate the situation; they worsened the situation until things reached the climax where Pharaoh broke off diplomatic negotiations with Moses. And they reached that very dramatic moment in Exodus 10:28, where Pharaoh dons himself with all his imperial majesty and says to Moses, 'Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in the day thou seest my face thou shalt die.' And he got remarkably small change from Moses who replied promptly, 'You have spoken well.' and the careful narrator draws a line across the narrative at this point (11 v.10): 'And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land' - as though to say to us, 'You see, it happened precisely as God said it would happen.' So Moses is made aware that the moment of climax has come; it comes at the beginning of chapter 11, the contest of the firstborn, God's firstborn or Pharaoh's firstborn. But the contest of the firstborn, contrary to anything which has hitherto been told to us, is set in the context of the Passover.

Two questions:

Why the plagues and why the Passover?

Let us ask two questions. First of all: Why the plagues? Before anything has happened, God says to Moses, 'You know they won't do any good, they won't accomplish anything, because along with the plagues I am going to harden Pharaoh's heart; but when the contest of the firstborn comes, that'll be it.' Why the plagues? Why does God bring the Egyptians through this long, drawn-out series of calamities? If it is the contest of the firstborn that is going to bring home the bacon, well why the large frogs, lice flies and all the others? I suggest to you the answer is this: because God is giving us here an object lesson, a full spelling out of the fact that he ever mingles forbearance with his judgment. He doesn't spring catastrophic judgment upon people. He approaches them with gentler, less disastrous judgment. He allows the cock to crow in their ears, if perchance they would hear the crowing of the cock and would heed the word of God. And when that fails, well he'll try again. And in all he will try nine times, so that when the judgment comes it has been established beyond doubt that here is a people set in its opposition to God and unwilling to hear his word. He will only bring in judgment when forbearance has been exhausted.

So far so good. But if in fact it is the last judgment, the contest of the firstborn, that is going to bring the people of God out from the land of Egypt, why the Passover? If this tenth plague is the plague which settles the issue, why the Passover? And the answer to that question is this: because when the wrath of God is applied in its essential reality, no one is safe. There were two nations in the land of Egypt, but they were both resistant to the word of God; and if God comes in in judgment none will escape, unless God makes some prior decision which will guarantee the safety of those whom he has chosen to save. And therefore, it is in the mercy of the covenant-keeping God that he says, 'These are the people to whom I have made promises. Now if my promises are real I must make provision for them which will guarantee that they will inherit promises and not inherit judgment.' And the provision which God made was the Passover lamb and its blood, and the smearing of the blood, and the safe sheltering of the people in the place where the blood has been shed.

Don't you see that this is the same God who dealt in a parallel way with Noah? 'Here', said God, 'is a man to whom I have made promises of mercy. Therefore I will wrap him round with a circumstance, which will guarantee that, when the blow falls, it will fall upon him unto salvation.' So he wraps his people round with the blood of the lamb. Now how did that work out in the land of Egypt?

I want to set before you the five key words in which the theology of the story of the Passover may be expressed, for remember that we are trying to trace the theological grain in the narrative.

(a) Propitiation. The chosen setting for the Passover is a setting of divine judgment, a setting of the wrath of God. This is a true covenant setting, for this was the setting of God's dealings with Noah. God purposes to come wrathfully into the land of Egypt. He says so in chapter 12 verse 12: 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and I will smite...'. God is coming in in judgment. And any Israelite who was abroad that night, having failed to heed the Passover regulations, is implicated; the fact that he is an Israelite does not exempt him. The teaching of verse 23 makes that clear: 'For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood upon the lintel and on the two side posts the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses.' So apart from the Passover blood, the destroyer would enter. All alike are under the wrath of God that night. Nevertheless it says in that key verse 13, 'The blood shall be to you a token upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over'. Not 'when I see you', but 'when I see the blood, I will pass over.' The blood is a token to me that you are there; but it is 'when I see the blood that I will pass over'. Putting the matter bluntly, there is something about the blood which changes God. The God who comes in in wrath looks upon that household with absolute satisfaction. There is nothing there to move him to wrath any more, and he passes by. That is the truth which is safeguarded by the word 'propitiation', that which appeases divine wrath. There is something about that blood which appeases the wrath of God, so that wrath is no longer operative against that household. No other word but 'propitiation' will do. There is no reference in this narrative to any subjective state of the people of God, and therefore words like 'expiation', which signify the wiping away of sin in the heart of man, will not suffice. For the narrative takes no notice of subjective factors in the people of God. It simply says, 'God is coming in his wrath; when he sees the blood he passes by in peace.' It is therefore the blood of propitiation.

(b) Security or salvation. As long as the people remain where the blood has been shed, they are secure. Verse 22 reads, 'Ye shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood in the bason; and none of you shall go out of the door of this house.' There is no safety except there; there, there is safety (v.23). 'When he sees the blood the Lord will pass over and will not suffer the destroyer to enter. The people of God are secure from destruction while they shelter in the place where the blood has been shed. So the blood has a manward movement. God-ward it works propitiation, manward security.

(c) Substitution. Is there any clue in the narrative as to why the blood has such amazing efficacy that it can propitiate a wrathful God and that it can secure a people who well merit that wrath? What is the inner secret of the efficaciousness of the blood of the lamb? We can see the answer to this most clearly if we remind ourselves that the judgment of God was in terms of death. He came in to slay, and the judgment of God was going to take a token but dreadful form in the death of the firstborn of the family. The judgment of God was in terms of death; but a death had taken place in every Israelite's house already. The narrative is perhaps more truthful than the narrator intended when he says in verse 30: 'There was not a house where there was not one dead' - in every Egyptian household the death of a firstborn, in every Israelite household the death of the lamb. In every house there was a corpse - in the Egyptian house the corpse of the firstborn, in the Israelite house the corpse of the lamb which had been reverently carried into the house. We cannot resist the word substitution; for there was a death in every house, and in the houses of Israel it was the lamb that had died. The narrative rubs our noses in the exact equivalence of that lamb to the people of God. See verse 3: 'In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses; a lamb for a household: and if the

household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbour next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man's appetite ye shall make your count for the lamb.' This is not just a broad equivalence - a lamb for a household; no, they must count heads and then stomachs. Count the number of people and then say how much they will eat, so that the lamb represents exactly the number and the needs of the people of God. And the narrative caters for human fallibility in this matter, in case they may over-estimate; it says 'If anything remains till the morning, burn it with fire', for there is to be no other use or significance for this lamb than that it has represented the number and needs of the people of God. That was the lamb that died; that was the precious blood under which they had sheltered, the lamb that was exact in its measurement to the measurement of the number and needs of the people of God. If that's not substitution, then you must be very hard to please! But you may be mathematically inclined, and you may say 'Ah, but in the houses of Egypt none died but the firstborn son; and therefore if the lamb had not been offered, none would have died but the firstborn son in the houses of Israel; therefore at most the lamb substituted for the firstborn sons'. But have you forgotten that when God committed himself to propositional revelation to Moses, he said, 'Thus shall thou say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, my firstborn'? The lamb is equivalent to the firstborn of God.

We have two more words in the Passover narrative, which I would like to share with you.

(d) Deliverance, or accomplished redemption. The death of the lamb did not make redemption possible for the people of God; it made redemption actual and inevitable. Redemption was accomplished by the death of the lamb. You may put the matter this way without any shaping of the narrative: before the lamb died they could not go; after the lamb died they could not stay. We read that the Egyptians were urgent upon them to make them leave. The death of the lamb effected redemption. That is why, incidentally, through the remainder of the Old Testament the focus of attention is often on the Red Sea and what happened there rather than upon the Passover lamb in Egypt, because it was the event of the Red Sea that sealed finally that which God had done in the land of Egypt. God manoeuvred his people into a corner, the sea on one side and the Egyptians on the other, and there was that great word which Holy Scripture always speaks to people who have not yet entered into the fulness of redemption: 'Stand still and see the salvation of God.' And the waters opened before them and they went through; the Egyptians trying to follow were drowned; and they saw the Egyptians dead on the sea shore. 'Then they believed God' (Exodus 14). Then they knew for certain that they were redeemed from the land of Egypt and that their bondage was finished and done with; the redemption had been accomplished and applied.

(e) Pilgrimage The Passover was the supper to be eaten as a breakfast. Exodus 12:11 reads: 'Thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S Passover.' Why do we eat it in haste? Because it is the Lord's Passover, because there is that about it which demands that you eat it as those who are already committed to pilgrimage. You can't eat the Lord's Passover and live in Egypt. You can only eat the Lord's Passover if you have made a free commitment to go walking with God in pilgrimage out of this place wherever he shall lead you. So the Passover begins to be the fulfilment of the word which God spoke to Abraham, 'Walk before me and be thou perfect'. There has to be the walk with God. The people who went into safety through that door plastered with the blood of the lamb came out through the same bloodstained door into pilgrimage. The blood which ushered them into safety ushered them out to walk with God, and they had to eat it as those who were committed to that pilgrimage endeavour.

Sinai the destination of the covenant people

We have been tracing the covenant narrative of the Old Testament from the first time that the word occurs in God's dealings with Noah, through Abraham to the normative establishment of the covenant through Moses with Israel at the Exodus time. And we noted that those who ate the Passover were committed to pilgrimage. They had no option but to go walking with God. The destination of that walk was Mount Sinai; covenant people were brought to the covenant place.

I would like to share two references straightaway to show you that the sequence of narratives which centre on Mount Sinai can be embraced under the term 'covenant'. God's first word to his people when they arrived at the mountain, 'You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself.' (Ex.19:4) There is God's assertion that the covenant promise of Exodus 6:6 has been kept. Then the text continues: 'Now therefore if you will obey my voice in deed and keep my covenant....' You see, he begins to speak to them straightaway as the covenant God addressing the covenant people in covenant terms. The end of the Sinai sequence is in chapter 24: 'And Moses took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath spoken will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant.....' (verse 7) The whole Sinai sequence of narratives is bracketed around with these two assertions that what happens here happens in pursuance of God's covenant dealings with his people.

We might have been inclined to think Mount Sinai was purely incidental. After all, were not the people bound for the land of Canaan, was not that their destination? It's worth giving just a moment's consideration to the fact that, though God was going to lead his people into the land of Canaan in fulfilment of his promise, Mount Sinai was in fact the primary destination towards which they were aiming when they left the land of Egypt.

Look back at a few references: in Exodus 3:12 God speaks to the uncertain and hesitant Moses, 'But I will be with thee; and this shall be the token to thee that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.' To Moses the arrival at Mount Sinai and the worship of God there was the crown upon the whole enterprise. When that happened it would be to him a divine token that God had engineered the whole enterprise. Mount Sinai was for Moses the crown of the Exodus. Again in 3:18, when Moses is sent to open diplomatic negotiations with Pharaoh: 'Thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us: and now let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God.' This great sacrifice that would be offered was the primary destination of the people when they left the land of Egypt. Thirdly, look at chapter 13 verse 17, 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them....' There is the affirmation of divine leadership in the Exodus march. It is elaborated in verse 21: 'The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might go by day and by night: the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night; departed not from before the people.' The journey was a journey under manifest divine leadership. It is a wonderful study in divine providence to read the narratives of Exodus 13 - 18, for they are narratives of almost unbroken difficulty; but the difficulties were no indication that God had forgotten his people. For was not the fiery pillar going before them? Were they cornered between the sea and the Egyptians? Who put them there? God had. Did they lack water? Who brought them there? God did. Did they lack food? Who put them in that situation? God did. For the cloudy, fiery pillar walked before them all the time; it was a march which God was engineering. And we read in 13:17, 'God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, though that was near, for God said Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt; but God led the

people about...' God managed this march out of his own perfect design for the people and he led them on course to Mount Sinai.

### The place of law in the life of God's people

What does that mean for us as we seek to study these narratives as a covenant document? It means this: that the word of God to a redeemed people is a word of law. We are enabled by this simple observation of a sequence of events to get in biblical perspective the place of law in the life of the people of God. God brought them to Mount Sinai that he might declare his law to them. In the Old Testament, therefore, the law is not a ladder whereby the unsaved seek in vain to climb into the presence of God. The law is a divinely given pattern of life for those who have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. These folk, who had rested underneath the sheltering blood and who were committed thereby to pilgrimage, discovered that the immediate objective of their pilgrimage was the place where they might hear God speak his word of law and of commandment. The law is a pattern of life which God sets before and upon a redeemed people. This is the place of law in the Old Testament. Is it not the place of law in the New Testament? Ought we not therefore as believers increasingly to forget the blank page between Malachi and Matthew and to read the Bible as one book proclaiming one message?

How did God set this law before the people? We see that it is the pattern of life for the redeemed. Look at one reference chosen almost at random out of many, but one I think which makes the answer to that question clear. Leviticus 19 is somewhat of a hotchpotch of a chapter; it is a place into which are gathered many diverse aspects of the law of God, for the law of God spoken through Moses was a comprehensive law, covering every aspect of his people's life. Notice first of all the point at which this chapter begins. 'Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.' (v.2) The purpose of the law was to make God's people like God himself. Now notice the echo that runs right through this chapter: at the end of verse 3: 'I am the LORD your God'; verse 10: 'I am the LORD your God'; verse 12 at the end of the verse: 'I am the LORD'; verse 14: 'I am the LORD', and so on right through the chapter. As God declares his law in summary form here to people, he reminds them over and over again that these commandments are not arbitrary: they could no more be otherwise than God himself could be otherwise. The law is that it is because God is who he is. The law comes out as a reflection of the divine nature and its design is to make God's people into the same image. Here then is an elaboration, an extension, of the idea that the law is a pattern of life for the redeemed. It's not just a pattern, but the perfect pattern of life for the redeemed, because it is the pattern which shows them how they are to live in the likeness of their God.

I put it this way for you. There are two images of God on earth: there is the image of God in man, and there is the image of God in the law of God. Now draw the proper biblical deduction from that. If a man is to manifest the image of God in which he has been made and to live a normative and truly human life, then he must deliberately pattern his life upon the law of God, because that law is the verbal statement of what God is like. The law is what it is because God is who he is, in order that man may become what he is. And that is the central place that Mount Sinai has in the covenant and in the total covenant document which is the Holy Scriptures.

### Approaching the unapproachable God through the blood of the covenant

Now we return to Exodus 19. Mount Sinai spoke with a yes and a no to the people of God. The whole Exodus narrative is between two brackets. The first bracket is found in chapter 3 in the incident of the burning bush: 'Moses said, I will turn aside and see this great sight why the bush is not burnt: And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the bush and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I, and he said, Draw not nigh hither' (3:3,4). Now when they came to Mount Sinai they found the burning bush on a large scale, for it was the whole of Mount Sinai that was aflame and smoking. And Mount Sinai was altogether shrouded in smoke, because the LORD descended upon

it in fire,' (Ex.19:18) What wonderful continuity of symbolism there is in the Bible! Abraham saw it in tiny form - the furnace that smoked and flashed; Moses saw it in a private preview - the flame of fire in the midst of the bush; and here it is in its awesome reality with the whole mountain flaming and smoking up into heaven. The people of God also knew it in daily experience as they walked behind the cloudy, fiery pillar. Continuity of symbolism binds the narratives together.

But while God came down to be amongst his people, there is the same ambivalence that there is in Exodus 3. 'Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God' (Ex.19:17). But 'Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou didst charge us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it' (v.23) and 'Let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD.' (v.24) In Exodus 3 God called Moses, and when Moses responded God said, 'Don't come'; in Exodus 19 Moses brings out the people by divine invitation to meet God, and God says, 'Don't let them come near'. So there is a yes and a no at Mount Sinai. There is a yes, 'Come and meet God', and there is a no, 'You cannot meet God'. Mount Sinai speaks with a double voice. It speaks of a people who are brought near, and it speaks of a mountain with a fence round it whereby they cannot come near.

This situation is solved in the covenant ceremony, and we must consider Exodus 24 vs.4-8. 'And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath spoken will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you on the basis of all these words.' A yes and a no is what we find in Exodus 19: 'I have brought you to myself, but don't come near me.' But now see the situation which emerges in Exodus 24. First of all we have the symbol of covenant reality: 'Moses rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel' (v.4). It is a symbol, but it is a clear symbol; and Moses goes about to explain it to us. The twelve pillars are the twelve tribes who are gathered round the altar. The covenant promise has been kept; God has brought his people to himself, and there he is in the midst of his gathered people. The covenant has been fulfilled, and there it is in symbolic reality.

But how is this reality to work out, if there is the yes and the no at Mount Sinai? If God is saying 'Yes come to me, no don't come to me', if God in his covenant mercies is drawing people to himself, but in his ineffable holiness is repelling people from himself, how is this covenant symbol to become a reality? Look at what verses 5 & 6 say about the blood of the covenant Godward: 'And he sent young men of the chosen of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it into basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.' In the symbol God is present as the altar; he is symbolised as one who is present in the midst of his people in terms of sacrifice and blood. And Moses lives out that symbolism now by taking half of the blood and making it exercise its influence Godward, sprinkling it on the altar, reaching back to the Passover blood. The Passover blood, as we saw in our last study, exercised its primary influence towards God in propitiation; the holy God was turned from the wrath which was proper to him, and there was peace between him and the people who were beneath the sheltering blood. And I guess this is why the sacrifices specified here are burnt offerings and peace offerings, two thirds of the Levitical system. The missing sacrifice was the sin offering, the offering which paramountly made peace between sinners and a holy God; I offer you the suggestion that what Moses is doing here is bringing into full expression that which was first expressed in the Passover sacrifice in the land of Egypt. There peace was established with a holy God; all that is necessary now in order to present the blood of the covenant is to bring that to its fullness by the offering

of burnt offerings and peace offerings.

The blood moves first Godward in propitiation, but then, secondly, manward. 'And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people: and they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people.' (vs. 7 & 8). On what people did he sprinkle it? At what precise moment did that sprinkling of blood occur? At the moment when they committed themselves to a life of obedience. First comes the commitment to obedience according to the Lord God, 'All that the LORD has said we will do, and we will be obedient', then the sprinkling of the blood manward. And what does that mean? It means that just as the blood of the covenant on the one hand establishes the relationship of peace with God by propitiation, so on the other hand the blood of the covenant maintains the relationship of peace with God for a people who are committed to walk in obedience. God knows that the people are professing beyond their strength: 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' 'They have well said in what they have said. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would...keep all my commandments always.' (Deut. 5:28ff) But they are professing beyond their ability. 'Very well', says God, 'I will make a provision for them.' The same blood which has made peace with God will keep peace with God. As they walk in the way of obedience, the blood is available for a people committed to obey. As they stumble and fall, so the covenant blood will be available for them.

Note two things quickly by way of comment on that situation:

(i) The nature of Old Testament religion Old Testament religion is a complex of grace, law and grace. Let your mind go back over what we have seen together in Exodus; we have seen the grace that brought them out of the land of Egypt, the law that was spoken to them because they were redeemed people and the grace that was made available for them as they committed themselves to a life of obedience. Notice how this solves thorny problems which have been raised by Old Testament specialists, e.g. the supposition that there was a battle in Israel between those who thought that religion was purely a matter of the cult and the sacrifices and those who thought that religion was purely a matter of ethical observance. It cannot be so because the Sinaitic Mosaic ground work of Old Testament religion is the binding together of grace, law and grace, the binding together of the commitment to obedience and the blood of sacrifice. Naturally when the prophets found that sacrifices were getting out of place, they countered that by reasserting the priorities for the people of God. The prior call was to holiness and within that context the blood of sacrifice makes provision for the lapses of the people. It is round this point that the totality of Old Testament religion finds its unity.

(ii) The unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament, 1 John 2:1,2 reads 'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.' People of God under the new covenant have no permission to sin; they are summoned to a life of holiness; 'All that the LORD has said we will do and be obedient.' 'But if any man sin we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins'; God has made a provision whereby those who are committed to obedience may, in spite of their disobedience, still be kept at peace with God and maintained in the covenant relationship. Is it not so that the whole of the Bible speaks with one voice?

We have tried to see the place of law in the life of the people of God. The law is not a standard set before unbelievers whereby they may struggle and strive to get to heaven; it is the pattern of life given to those who have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb, given to them that they may be like their God. There is an interesting point to observe in Exodus 19 and 20: when God begins to declare his law to his people, he says 'I am the LORD who brought you... out of the house of bondage.' The law that God gives is not a bondage; it is a life for free men. They are out of bondage, and God's law will keep them out of bondage. They will live the life of free men in the pattern of their God. We saw secondly how Mount Sinai posed a great tension between God's welcome of his people and the impossibility of sinners coming into the presence of a holy God.

This tension was solved by blood,- the blood moving Godward in propitiation, the blood moving manward in preservation maintaining the people of God in the fellowship of God.

### The efficacy of the blood

Now we move on to take up the thought of the efficacy of the blood. I would like you to notice first of all the sequence of events which binds the book of Exodus and the book of Leviticus together. The second half of the book of Exodus is concerned with the plans for the tabernacle and the setting up of the tabernacle. Let us look first of all at chapter 29:44, 'I will sanctify the tent of meeting, and the altar: Aaron also and his sons will I sanctify, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God.' The tabernacle is central to God's covenant dealings with his people. This is the covenant promise - that they should be my people and I will be their God - and the tabernacle is the visible focus of the covenant - 'I will dwell among the children of Israel, and be their God. They shall know that I am the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, in order that I might dwell among them.' God's tabernacle is the climax of redemption; he brought them out of Egypt for this very purpose that he might dwell among them. Don't weary over all those tedious details to do with the tabernacle; they are describing to you the climax of God's redemptive covenant programme for his people. The second half of the book of Exodus is integral to the Exodus story and must not be separated from it.

Well then, with what anticipation the people must have looked forward to the setting up of the tabernacle! This was the climax, this was the covenant in operation, God's coming to live at no. 10 - his tent amongst all the other tents, God in the midst of his people. Consider the situation at the end of Exodus: 'Then the cloud covered the tents of meeting and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle' (40:34). God had taken up residence in the midst of his people. But in v. 35 we read: 'And Moses was not able to enter...' So here again is the same tension; God is present but is not available; he is next door but not a neighbour. Moses was not able to enter.

How is this situation resolved? Look at Leviticus 1:1 'The LORD called unto Moses, and spoke unto him out of the tent of meeting, saying 'Speak unto the children of Israel and say 'When any man offers an oblation unto the LORD...' Now let me put that literally for you: 'Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when any man brings near that which is brought near'. The glory banishes, but the sacrifices unite; the people cannot enter, but they can come near. This is the place of the sacrificial code in the life of the people of God; the sacrifices are designed to maintain a redeemed people in close knit fellowship with their God.

The sacrifices are not available to the unconverted. If a man joined the people of God under the old covenant, he signalled that joining by circumcision and Passover. He had come in on the ground level of the covenant, and then he could offer the sacrifices. He had to participate in that which is the model of the one sacrifice for sins for ever. The Passover is that model, because it is an Egypt sacrifice. The Passover can only be sacrificed in Egypt, because it is designed to get the people out of Egypt. Once they are out it can only be remembered; it cannot be repeated. Therefore the Passover is the model of the one sacrifice for sins for ever. It is the model of Calvary, and if a man joins himself to the people of God he must come in at that point; then the other sacrifices become available to him. They are to maintain the redeemed in fellowship with God, just as the blood of Jesus Christ his Son keeps on cleansing us from all sin. Just as that one sacrifice at Calvary is endlessly efficacious to maintain us in fellowship with God, so under the old covenant the blood of the covenant which was offered normatively in Egypt is endlessly available in terms of the Levitical sacrifices to maintain the redeemed people in fellowship with God. 'A man brings near that which is brought near.' There in one sentence is the whole meaning of the Levitical sacrificial code in its threefold division of

burnt offerings, peace offerings and sin offerings.

We must now concentrate in brief on two features of those sacrifices, though it is beneficial to dwell on them in detail when you have opportunity. The sacrificial system was a complex one with three categories of sacrifice; burnt offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings. But running through its complexity and common to all its categories, there were two features. Every time they happened, no matter what sacrifice was brought, the offerer had to lay his hand upon the head of his offering and there had to be a certain ceremonial to deal with the blood that was shed when the animal was killed. Now let me add a couple of sentences by way of illumination concerning each of those.

(a) The laying on of hands

It is mentioned for example in Leviticus 1:4, 'He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering', and you will find a similar reference for each of the other types of offering in Leviticus 3:2 and 4:4. Now for an illustration of this, look first of all in the book of Numbers 8:11-16. Verse 11 reads 'And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for a wave offering, separating them from among the children of Israel that they may be to do the service of the Lord.' Verse 16 reads: 'For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel, instead of all that openeth the womb, even the firstborn of all the children of Israel...' Notice the phrase 'instead of'. The Levites were taken in substitution for the people to do in their place the service of the Lord. How was the relationship symbolised? 'Thou shalt present the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall lay their hands upon the Levites' (v.10). The laying on of hands appointed the Levites to stand in a certain relationship to the people who performed the laying on of hands; they were appointed to stand in their place to fulfil certain functions on their behalf. Look now at Leviticus 16:21-22: 'Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat.' What does the laying on of hands now signify? It signifies the transference of sin and guilt. Bring these two thoughts back illustratively to the symbolism of the laying on of hands in the Levitical sacrifices. What was the offerer doing when he laid his hands upon the head of the animal? He was appointing one to stand in his place, and where necessary he was off-loading on to the animal all his iniquities, transgressions and sins as in the case of the sin offering. The symbolism of the laying on of hands is the symbolism of the appointment of a substitute

(b) The meaning of blood.

The key verse here is Leviticus 17:11. It is one of the few verses in the Old Testament which set out to explain the efficacy of the sacrifices. 'The life of the flesh is the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement by reason of the life.' According to this verse, what is the meaning of the blood? What is the efficacy?

May I say two things: (i) the significance of the blood must be consistent with the function of the blood: it must have a meaning consistent with what it is intended to do. Now the function of the blood is stated here: 'I have given it to you... to make atonement.' The sacrifices are not a human expedient; they are a divine provision. The blood must have a meaning that enables it to fulfil the function of making atonement.

What does the making of atonement mean? If you want the work done for you you will find it Dr. Leon Morris' book The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross. If you want to do the work for yourself, you can do it by means of Young's Analytical Concordance. Look up the verb 'to make atonement' and the noun 'atonement'. The noun, which is of course the first cousin to the verb - in fact it is more correct to say that the verb in this case is a first cousin to the noun - has the consistent meaning of 'paying a ransom price', 'making a payment that is appropriate to discharge a certain indebtedness'. The verb 'to make atonement' means the making of such a payment. So the blood makes a payment; it envisages

indebtedness and it discharges a debt. May I remark that the basic literal meaning of the verb is to hide? Allow the Passover to be your illustration: the people hid beneath the blood. But it is not consistent with the divine nature to sweep sin under the carpet and hide it merely out of sight. That is not a dealing with sin; that is a conniving with sin. And so when God hides his sinful people out of sight, he hides them by means of a payment that is satisfactory to discharge their indebtedness. On Passover night the wages of sin was death; and so the payment which will discharge their indebtedness is the payment of a life laid down in death, exactly as the Passover lamb was the dead one in each Israelite household on Passover night. So the efficacy of that death is prolonged by means of the threefold system of sacrifices. The meaning of the blood must be consistent with the function it is to perform, and if it is to perform the paying of a debt, then the blood can only be significant of a life terminated; it can only mean that death has taken place.

(ii) The life of the flesh is laid down as an equivalent payment for the debt incurred by sin. The life of the flesh is in the blood. The life of the flesh is life as we know it, here and now. It means life as constituted in this bodily existence, life as we possess it in this world, the life that is common to man and beast and all flesh. When the blood is shed, that life is terminated and laid down as a payment for sin. The last phrase of Leviticus 17:11 fits ideally into that interpretation; literally translated the phrase is: 'For the blood makes atonement by the life'. 'By the life' is exactly the same expression as that found in Deut. 19:21, when Moses announces the fundamental legal precept for all time: 'Thine eyes shall not pity, life shall go for life'. It is a preposition (in Hebrew) of exact equivalence and one that is used in commercial transactions as well as in legal transactions - the exact equivalent of one thing for another or of its price or its value or its payment. We ought therefore to translate the latter part of Leviticus 17:11: 'The blood makes atonement at the expense of the life', the life being laid down as the price or debt incurred by the sinner before God. Thus the sacrifices are a divine provision to maintain a redeemed people in fellowship with their God; but they do so by prolonging amongst the people of God the virtues and the meaning of the initial sacrifice, where life went for life and on the basis of substitution God was propitiated and God's people were made secure.

#### 4. THE COVENANT TO COME

Within the Old Testament there is an envisaged perfection of the covenant. Jeremiah was the man who used the expression 'the new covenant' (Jer. 31:31), but the idea of the new covenant is much more widespread than the expression; and while Jeremiah used the words, he was by no means the only one to speak of the thing. The root of the idea of an envisaged perfection of the covenant was planted by Moses. It is planted in what is, at first sight, very unpromising ground, and you will realise why I say that when I tell you that the first main heading of this study is:

##### 1. THE VENGEANCE OR CURSE OF THE COVENANT

This is spoken of in two main passages in the Pentateuch. The first one is Leviticus 26. The passage begins in verse 14, where Moses alludes to the possibility that at the human end the covenant may be broken. He speaks in verses 14 and 15 of the people failing to do all these commandments, 'rejecting my statutes, abhorring my judgments and breaking my covenant'. Now when that situation arises and the people of God reject the covenant precepts, then this is the situation which emerges: 'I will bring a sword upon you which will execute the vengeance of the covenant' (v.25). That is to say, on man's side, there is not a repudiation of the covenant, but an act of vengeance within the covenant. The vengeance is not alien to the covenant, nor does it nullify it; rather it belongs to it.

The heart of the problem which brings about this situation is described to us in verse 41: 'The people have walked contrary to God, and he responds, 'I also walked contrary unto them, and brought them into the land of their enemies: if then their uncircumcised heart be humbled....' There is the problem - their heart is uncircumcised. That is to say, in some way which I don't think the Old Testament or the New Testament specifies at any point, the promises of God have not got through the place that matters.

But in this situation where the vengeance of the covenant is in operation because of the uncircumcised heart, God has by no means abandoned his purposes or come to the end of his resources. Verse 42 reads: 'Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob; and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember, and I will remember the land.' God remembers his covenant. 'I will not reject them. Neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant' (v. 44-45). They may break the covenant; but he won't, 'for I am the LORD their God.' In other words, he meant what he said, when he said 'this is my name for ever, this is how I am to be remembered to all generations' (Ex.3:15); Yahweh is the name of the covenant God. That name doesn't change, and therefore the covenant is for ever secure at his end.

Now look at the other passages in which this theme of envisaged future divine covenant action is brought before us. Look at Deuteronomy 29:12: 'That thou shouldst enter into the covenant of the LORD thy God and into his curse.' The Revised Version says 'into his oath', but the Hebrew says 'into his curse'. The covenant is described as a curse. The expression is very striking, but clearly the implication emerges that it is a curse in the sense that, when at the human end the covenant is violated, a system of cursing goes into operation within the covenant. It is not contrary to it, not in breach of it, to nullify it, but it is within its working organisation, so that the covenant can be called directly in Deuteronomy 29:12 'his curse', the curse which he utters. Again look in verse 21; 'The LORD shall separate him (that is the disobedient man) unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant' - not the curses which nullify the covenant, not the curses which operate against it, but the curses which are embraced within it. Verse 27 refers to the curse within the covenant document: 'Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curse that is written in this book'.

Now what does God do in that situation? Chapter 30 tells us: 'And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, that then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity'. (Vs. 1-3), 'The LORD thy God will gather thee' (v.4). 'The LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed.' (v.5) 'The LORD thy God will circumcise thy heart.' (v.6) The defect which was noticed in Leviticus is remedied in Deuteronomy. The Lord envisages a covenant action which will reach into the heart where the failure took place, an action which will remedy that wherein the defect was discerned and bring his people into a new place of covenant blessing.

Let me pass a series of remarks very quickly upon the idea of the vengeance or curse of the covenant.

- (i) It is often asserted that Amos achieved notoriety and became the first prophet whose messages were written down because he had the daring to predict the termination of the covenant relationship. Amos did not preach the termination of the covenant relationship; he preached the onset of the vengeance of the covenant. The Old Testament takes itself seriously.
- (ii) The point of failure which prompts the onset of the curses of the covenant is the failure in the heart of man, the uncircumcised heart. That is where the remedy needs to be applied.
- (iii) The curses of the covenant were built in to the historical life of the people of God. Deuteronomy 27 commands that, when the people enter the land

which God promises them, they shall identify two mountains in the land - two established, immovable features of the landscape - with respectively the blessings and the curses of the covenant. They are to identify Mount Gerizim with the blessings and Mount Ebal with the cursings. Notice they do not identify those mountains respectively with obedience and disobedience; they identify them with the rewards of obedience and disobedience, blessings and cursings, so that they live with these perpetual immovable reminders that the covenant God will thus act towards his people. These mountains represent the covenant: it is itself immovable, but it can without changing its nature act towards the people of God to bring blessing or to bring vengeance. It was, of course, of this that Amos was speaking. I want you to notice that there's a most beautiful touch in Deuteronomy 27 and Joshua 8 when the ordinances concerning Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim are laid down: Mount Ebal is identified with cursing, but is on Mount Ebal that the altar is to be built. That is to say, God enters into this situation where the curses of the covenant operate; and that reaches right back to the institution of the covenant with Abraham when it was God alone who marched between the severed carcasses and thereby took upon himself the total obligation of the broken covenant. So the altar is built not on Mount Gerizim in the place of blessing, but upon Mount Ebal in the place of cursing, for that is the place into which the covenant God will eventually enter, as Paul tells us in Galatians 3:13. There was a failure, and when Moses discovered the point of failure he envisaged the future perfection.

## 2. THE FAILURE OF THE COVENANT INSTITUTIONS

We may place that clue for a moment and for the second element in our study take up the theme of the failure of the covenant institutions. I would like to suggest that right throughout the story of the covenant it was at the point of failure that hope was prompted. I want to mention two things briefly and dwell in more detail on the third.

(a) The Covenant Priesthood Within the main covenant of God, there was a particular covenant which God made with the priesthood. It is mentioned to us in Numbers 25:10. Because of the courageous action of Phineas, who identified himself with God and who was, as the text says, 'jealous with my jealousy', he received from God a covenant - 'Behold I will give him my covenant of peace; and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood' (v.12). Within the main covenant ordinance the priesthood was in receipt of a special covenant.

When you trace this through, you find a history of failure. The priests allowed their priestly privilege to be corrupted into a superstitious ritualism, and therefore they came under the prophetic flail. There are a series of remarkable passages not only in the pre-exilic prophets in which the priesthood comes under the prophetic flail for becoming a superstitious ordinance cultivating a merely ritualistic and *ex opere operato* approach to God. But that wasn't their only failure. Malachi at the very end of the prophetic movement looks at the priesthood in his day - the priests, incidentally, who are supposed to have been high-minded enough to have produced the P document - and he finds them very far from the priesthood that God intended. See particularly 2:5-7: 'My covenant with him was of life and peace; and I gave them to him as something to reverence, and he feared me, and stood in awe of my name. The law of truth was in his mouth; deviation was not found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth.' The priest was to be amongst the people of God as a teacher of the instruction of God, the law - 'for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But ye are turned aside out of the way.' The priests had not only corrupted their God-given ritual into a superstition, but they had abandoned and corrupted their office of teacher. The covenant institution of priesthood was a failure.

(b) The Covenant Institution of the Tabernacle (or later as it became, the temple). This symbolised the perfect indwelling of God amongst his people guaranteeing their security. This is the message which Zechariah brings in

chapter 2 of his prophecy. A young man runs out with a measuring rod to measure the ruins of Jerusalem. He wants to determine the future by the measurements of the past. He wants to limit the coming Glory to the glory of David and Solomon. He wants the security of a wall around the people of God. And the reply of Zechariah is that there is a coming glory which would outshine and outmeasure anything that has gone before, and that there is no need of a wall, because God himself is dwelling in the midst of his people. In 2:5 he says, 'I will be the glory in the midst of her'. In verse 10, 'I will dwell in the midst of thee', and in verse 11, 'I will dwell in the midst of thee', and because of that divine indwelling there is no need of a wall. 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited as unwallled villages'. (v.4)

But yet both the tabernacle and the temple were destroyed. There is need of a greater indwelling of God. For somehow or other - here is a topic on which I believe Scripture does not make the thing plain to us - there is a perfection which was yet to be and which was not realised in the old institutions, else they could not have fallen. Of course part of the reason that they fell was that the people corrupted them. Jeremiah tells us in 7:11 that they had made the house of God into a den of robbers. A den of robbers is a place to which an ungodly, dishonest, immoral person runs for safety and from which he comes utterly unchanged. He goes to a port of reformation and he comes from it unreformed to get on with his nefarious deeds. And they thought that the house of God could be used without reference to moral reformation. So in the failure of temple and tabernacle we have a dove-tailing of two points of failure - failure of the institution and failure in the corruption of the human heart. There is need of a fuller, more complete and more operative indwelling of God; and there is need of a reformation in the heart of man, whereby he will see and respect the holiness of the divine indweller.

Nevertheless, the vision of the perfect tabernacle, of the perfect temple, was never lost, and it shines out so clearly, for example in the teaching of Micah: 'Zion for your sake shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest. But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established' (3:12-4:1)... The vision was never lost, even though the glory had not yet been fully and properly realised.

### (c) The Covenant Institution of Monarchy

#### (i) Two views of monarchy in the Old Testament?

Before we deal with monarchy as a covenant institution and see what was made of it and what was hoped for it in the Old Testament, we must spend a little time grinding at the mill; that is to say, we must look at the literature in which the account of the founding of the monarchy is given.

The literature is in the opening chapters of 1 Samuel, and I probably needn't remind you that according to the majority view at the moment this literature is full of 'tensions', repetitions, parallels and differing points of view' (cf. Fohrer's Introduction to the Old Testament), so that there are two views of monarchy in these chapters. The first view of monarchy, which is in 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16, is that the monarchy was set up by command of Yahweh and with Samuel's wholehearted co-operation. The other view is that there was popular pressure for a king, which Samuel resisted and which was not wholly according to the mind of God; for he said concerning it, 'It is not you they have rejected, but me.' (1 Sam. 8 v.10: 17-27)

Now the supposition is made that this second hostile view - sometimes called the theocratic view, because the direct rule of God over his people is felt to be the ideal which should never have been abandoned - is 'later historically, dubious and showing evidence of dogmatic prejudice' (cf. Fohrer again). Now the one thing Fohrer and indeed nobody else tells us is what later period gave rise to this view and where else we will find evidence of such a view being held amongst the people of God; for, if the Old Testament is clear about anything, it is clear

that from its inception onwards the institution of monarchy in Judah was never questioned and was never opposed. Individual kings came under criticism, but the institution itself never seems to have gathered any vocal body of opposition. There is no period known to us either at the beginning of the monarchy or throughout its history which could have given rise - as far as we are made aware - to this hostile view.

Secondly, it is not as easy as is sometimes supposed to disentangle and to hold apart the two accounts of the institution of monarchy. To give you but one example of that: 1 Samuel 10:22 is well within the favourable account of monarchy, and we read concerning Saul that that exceptionally tall young man was also very bashful - 'They asked of the LORD further, Is there yet a man to come hither? And the LORD answered, Behold he hath hid himself among the stuff.' That is to say Saul had gone off; he had propped up three or four portmanteaus and kit bags and had sat down in the middle of them, hiding himself among the baggage. Now why would he do that? In the favourable view of monarchy Saul has no reason to suppose that the choice is going to fall upon him, unless he knows that somebody has rigged the ballot. There is nothing previously in the favourable view to make one think that the choice is going to fall upon Saul. We need the evidence of chapter 10:1 which falls in the other view and which explains that Saul had been previously privately anointed by Samuel, and it is only if that belongs with the other account that the two things together make sense.

The explanation I want to suggest to you, then, is this: that the ambivalence within these accounts, that the monarchy is both approved of and disapproved of, is entirely within the mind of Samuel himself. It doesn't represent a popular view at that time, nor any sort of commonly held view at a later time, but simply the reaction of the elderly, prejudiced, conservative, disappointed Samuel. He made a sad reaction but a reaction that is not at all hard to understand.

But Samuel also made a godly reaction, for in 8:7, when he brings his grief to God, God says, 'They have not rejected thee, but me have they rejected'. What does that mean? In what sense is God rejected? Those who espouse what they call a theocratic view fail to analyse the biblical concept of theocracy. In the Bible theocracy is not to be set in contrast to human leadership. Judges is pre-eminently the theocratic period; but within the Old Testament Judges is notable for the enormous and colourful leaders who grew up with the people of God. The theocracy left the leadership in the hands of God only in this sense, that it all depended upon the Lord himself to take action to provide a leader for his people at the moment of crisis. And the attitude of the people in that situation was to be one of looking directly to God: 'We are in this pickle, O Lord; will you act now in your capacity as King of Israel by raising up a leader for us?' In asking for monarchy they only departed from that principle - the departure was a failure of sin - by desiring the perpetuation of a human leader under the kingship of God; so that at any moment within the institution of monarchy there would be a built-in guarantee that the leader would be there.

And now I can only promise you at this point that if you will take that as a clue and read 1 Samuel 1-12, you will find no further need of the concept of two accounts of the monarchy. The ambivalence is entirely the old man's reaction which was partly selfish, partly sour, partly good and partly godly, but within the one man's mind. But Samuel, being the godly man he was, once he had received the direction from God could wholeheartedly identify himself with that which God was now ready to do.

#### (ii) The motivations of the monarchy

Now we look at the motivations of the monarchy. As we read these narratives the first motivation for monarchy was dissatisfaction. The Book of Judges is a great piece of evidence here. The last chapters of the Book of Judges focus around the phrase, 'There was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes.' The author of the Book of Judges was a monarchic enthusiast: monarchy will solve all. The phrase occurs in 17:6, 18:1 and 19:1. In 17:6 it

has a religious context; the man Micah is setting up his house of God. In 18:1 it has a political context; there is unrest amongst the tribes of the people of God and the tribe of Dan is on the warpath. In 19:1 it was a moral context in that fearful story of the Levite and his concubine. It has a religious, political and moral context and our monarchic enthusiast says each time, 'Well what can you expect? It stands to reason; there was no king over Israel. How do you expect religion to be kept right? How do you expect politics to be kept in order? How do you expect morals to be good when you've got no king?' (We must date the Book of Judges either immediately before the monarchy or in the early honeymoon days of monarchy. For there is no later period of monarchic opposition which would give rise to this rhapsodic tract.) The monarchy was seen as the solution of all the people's ills. And yet the monarchy was a failure. The early kings made some attempt of succeeding on one or other of these levels, but none of them succeeded on all three. If therefore it is right to follow the clue and say that failure gives rise to hope, then the hope of the ideal king is as near as doesn't matter co-terminous with the origin of monarchy itself.

The second motivation for monarchy was insecurity. 'The people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us and fight our battles.' (1 Sam. 8:19-20) Samuel himself speaks the cutting words, 'When ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said to me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us,' (1 Sam. 12:12) And he throws that in contrast to the faithfulness of God who had raised up Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah, and he is not ashamed to mention himself, 'me also', because he had been a victor over the Philistines at Ebenezer. (V.11) There was the faithlessness: 'You saw Nahash the king of the Ammonites, and suddenly insecurity took hold of you and instead of looking to God to raise a leader you said to me, Make us a king.'

Now in 9:16, the third motivation for monarchy: 'Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man out of the land of Benjamin, and you are to anoint him to be prince over my people Israel, and he shall save my people Israel out of the land of the Philistines, because I have looked upon my people, because their cry has come unto me.'

The third motivation for monarchy was divine mercy towards a distraught people. In Exodus 2:25 and 3:7-9 there is a most remarkable parallelism of phrasing: the Lord looked upon his people in Egypt and heard their cry and the Lord said, 'I know their sorrows and I am come down to deliver them.' Monarchy is a covenant reaction of the same merciful God. When the initial form of the theocracy (=the Judges) had done its work, God brought in as an act of mercy towards sinner, a new theocratic form within the covenant which he purposed to bless and to use.

That new theocratic form, the monarchy, reached its climax in 2 Samuel 7 when the Lord entered into his everlasting covenant with the house of David. How dramatic this passage is! It fulfils all canons of prophecy and there is no need in the world to take this passage out of its context in the history of David and to suppose that it is later writing. It fulfils absolutely the current liberal canons of prophecy and prediction. David said, 'I will build a house for the LORD.' Of course he had learned that from Deuteronomy 12. (He wasn't supposed to have read Deuteronomy, because as you know it wasn't found until the time of Josiah! But the candid observer would think that David had read Deuteronomy 12.) He wanted to build a house for the Lord, and the Lord so wonderfully and meekly turned the thing over: 'David, I am going to build a house for you.' How beautifully done; God promises an everlasting house. This is the origin of Isaiah's great expression, 'the sure mercies of David' which he uses in 55:3 with reference to the status and function of the servant of the Lord, the recipient of the sure mercies of David. You find the groundwork of that here in 2 Samuel 7. But the climax of it was this - and this seems to me to be the point at which monarchic expectations began to take their characteristic form - that God said, 'I will be his father and he shall be my

son'. (2 Sam. 7:14) What a dramatic thing to say, that the son of David should be the son of God! You see at once where it is going to end: the son of David who is the Son of God. There it is, written into the heart of this particularized form of the divine covenant which God made with his beloved David: 'I will be his father, and he will be my son'.

It is the Psalms that open this up. In that wonderful coronation ode, Psalm 2, we read: 'The LORD said to me, Thou art my son. This day have I begotten thee.' There is the Davidic king climbing onto his throne, receiving the crown of Yahweh upon his head: 'Today have I begotten thee'. In that context you can see what 'begotten' means: 'taken you to be as if you were my son'. Another psalm, Psalm 72, gives expression at length to the glory and expectation inherent in this idea.

So you see the cluster of expectations which centred round the king who would be the son of David and the son of Yahweh. Don't let the greatness of them alarm you. Remember that the Lord constituted Israel to be his people by overthrowing the forces of the world. He destroyed Egypt in order to bring out Israel. Don't be alarmed therefore that, when they looked at this Yahweh-king upon his throne, reigning there at Yahweh's right hand, they saw him implicitly as monarch of the whole earth. Their faith would not allow them to see less, for he reigns as the covenant monarch by virtue of the covenant God who overthrew the nations in order to bring his people into this kingdom, tiny as it is at this point. May I call your attention in the New Bible Dictionary to the article on Messiah, as there you will find a paragraph which brings together all the strands of reference to the Messianic king in the Psalms. And yet the monarchy was a failure. David had failed morally, Solomon had failed politically, Rehoboam had failed religiously: the kingdom was sundered, and a schismatic religion took hold of the North. The monarchy didn't bring the people that religious, political and moral security which the rhapsodic author of Judges thought it would. It failed; but yet the vision remained, the vision of a righteous king who would be son of David and son of Yahweh. All through the years of failure they were greeting each new occupant of the Davidic throne with Psalm 2: 'You are my son; this day have I begotten you', and they were saying under their breath 'Oh would that you were!' From our examination of the failure of the covenant institutions, we move on to our last main section.

### 3. THE VISION OF COVENANT PERFECTION

Here we can do very little but look up some verses together. But I would like to set before you four suggested categories, in which your own study of the Old Testament can take you forward under this heading of 'the perfection of the covenant that is yet to be.'

#### (a) The Perfection of Monarchy in the Person of the Divine David

I say to you without any hesitation at all the two words 'divine David'. It seems to me to be a great misunderstanding of the Old Testament which tries to re-translate the crux in Psalm 45, the royal wedding Psalm. That royal wedding Psalm reads in verse 6, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.' So the Davidic king was addressed on his wedding day, 'thy throne O God.' It goes on to say in verse 7, 'Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, who is thy God, has anointed thee.' The Old Testament is taking account of a concept which it cannot wholly organise. If it takes seriously the covenant promise, 'He shall be my son', then it must address its king as God. But since he is manifestly not God, it must safeguard the concept and live in a conscious tension, by making it clear in the immediately following verse that God is his God also. The Old Testament does not and cannot resolve that tension, but it never loses its grip on the divine Messiah. See Isaiah 9:6-7: the child who is to be born is the prince with the fourfold name; his name shall be called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God'. In chapter 10 verse 21 Isaiah uses that identical expression of Yahweh himself; the translation 'Mighty God' cannot be resisted at that point, and we ought not under dogmatic pressure of prejudice to alter the translation here. We must learn to take the Bible seriously and to

work out its problems in its terms and not ours. The passage that makes it clear that he is to sit upon the throne of David and therefore to be the promised son of David asserts that he is the Mighty God.

Look next at Jeremiah 23:5&6 where David is again the subject. 'Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch.' The word 'branch' in these contexts has a family tree connotation. We don't think it's odd to speak of a family tree; we ought not therefore to think it odd to call a person a branch. It is a way of saying 'that which springs out from something else', and the branch springs out of David; he has a veritable human Davidic ancestry. 'He will reign as King and deal wisely, and execute judgment... In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name by which he shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness.' The same hint comes in Isaiah 11: 'There shall come a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots.' (There's a different Hebrew word for branch here, but the significance is the same. It should have been a different translation.) That is to say, out of the line of David there will come this perfect King on whom the spirit of God will rest in fulness. Notice an odd thing in Isaiah 11: the branch springs out of the stock of Jesse in verse 1, but in verse 10 he is called the root of Jesse. Whereas by the way of family tree he springs out of Jesse's line, in reality Jesse exists for the purposes of the branch. The branch comes before the tree. He is the root from which Jesse comes - the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star. To follow up this theme, 'the perfection of the monarchy in the divine David', bring in all those great references that there are in the Psalms.

(b) The Perfection of Priestly Ministry in the Lord's Servant

We turn here to Isaiah 53. May I introduce you briefly to the relationship between chapters 53 and 54? Take the topics in chapter 54 as they arise: 'Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate.' (54:1) The topic is children without travail, children who have been born by some other means than human. How have such children come to birth? The answer is in chapter 53: 'he shall see his seed' (v.10). 'He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied' (v.11). Out of the work of the servant there come these children born not by natural agency. Then look at chapter 54:10: 'Neither shall my covenant of peace totter or shake'; the covenant of peace is the second theme in chapter 54. Where does it arise from? From the fact that the chastisement which brought peace to us was laid upon him and by his stripes we are healed (53:5). Once more chapter 54 describes that which emerges out of chapter 53. The third element in chapter 54 is righteousness; it is mentioned in verse 14, 'In righteousness shalt thou be established', and again in verse 17 at the end of the verse, 'This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness comes from me'. It is not a righteousness of their own; it is a righteousness which comes to them from God. What is the root of that righteousness? See chapter 53:11; 'He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant provide righteousness for many'. Excuse a little bit of personal translation, but that is what it means. 'By his knowledge shall my servant, the righteous one, provide righteousness for many.' Here is the doctrine of imputed righteousness in the Old Testament coming out of this priestly work of substitution, when he takes upon himself our iniquities, transgressions and sins, when he is wounded for our transgressions. May I tell you that the word 'for' in verse 5 'he was wounded for our transgressions' describes an effect that arises out of a cause? 'He was wounded out of our transgressions', he was wounded because of our transgressions'. All the transgression was on my side and all the penalty was on his side. This is the priestly work of the servant of God doing that which the lamb did in Egypt, standing in for the people of God. And out of that there comes an imputed righteousness, children who are born without human agency, a covenant of peace. Who is this servant? 'He is the arm of Yahweh' (v.1). That is to say he is Yahweh himself come to take personal action. Compare chapter 52:10: 'The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all nations.' God has rolled up

his sleeve. When the servant comes as the arm of Yahweh, he comes as God with his sleeves rolled up, himself to perform this tremendous work of substitution and priestly offering whereby the people of God supernaturally born inherit a covenant of peace and are established in righteousness. This brings us to our third point.

(c) The Perfection of Regeneration by a Final Dealing with Sin

Moses saw that the covenant failure had to do with the heart of man, and Isaiah in the passage just referred to spoke of people being established in righteousness. But it fell to Jeremiah to be the one to spell this point out in the fullest Old Testament detail; he does so in his new covenant passage, Jeremiah 31:31: '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 broke.' There's the failure, 'they broke'. Though I was a husband to them, the failure was not on my side but on their side. What does God do when man cannot rise to the height of obligation? Does he lower the obligation? No. He lifts up the man, and this is what Jeremiah says: 'But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days...I will put my laws in their inward parts, and on their heart will I write it.' What did Moses say? 'Your heart was uncircumcised.' What did he promise? God will circumcise your heart. What did it mean? God will come and he will so transform that human heart that in its per nature it becomes a replica of the law of God, so that obedience and not disobedience becomes the natural life of God's people. That's regeneration - the gift of a new nature by the work and act of God. Jeremiah knits his great prophecy of the regenerate people in the new covenant into what Isaiah has told, because he makes it all to arise from a final dealing with sin. 'For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: because I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.' (v.34f) When God forgets it, then it is finished; this is the final dealing with sin.

(d) The Perfection of Divine Indwelling Secured by Princely Mediation

This is the covenant vision of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel takes up the failure of the tabernacle and says that God is going to set that right.

'Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them.' (Ezk. 37:26) He latches on to what Isaiah predicted, 'It shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people! The covenant promise is fulfilled in terms of an envisaged perfect indwelling of God in the midst of his people.

The temple passage in Ezekiel chapters 40-48 is a spelling out at length of the reality and the security and the blessings that ensue when God perfectly tabernacles in the midst of his people. 'All the people of the land shall give unto this oblation for the prince in Israel. And it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the drink offerings, in the feasts and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel.' (45:16-17) It all depends upon the activity of this prince who is manifestly also a priest and upon his mediation - the prince's portion surrounds the dwelling place of God and the people's portion surrounds the portion of the prince. As perpetual mediator, he perpetually secures for the people of God the benefits of the burnt offering, the peace offering and the sin offering, the virtues of the blood of the covenant. By the princely mediation the dwelling place of God is with his people, and they inherit the benefits and blessings of that which was long envisaged but not previously accomplished, that the people of God should become the temple of the Holy Ghost.



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